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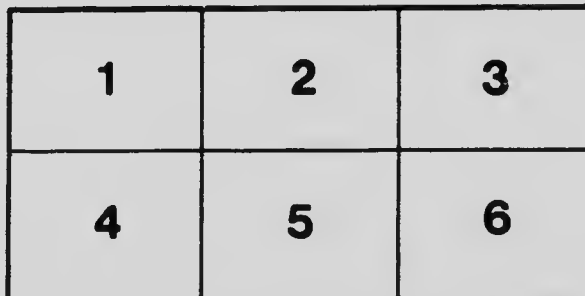
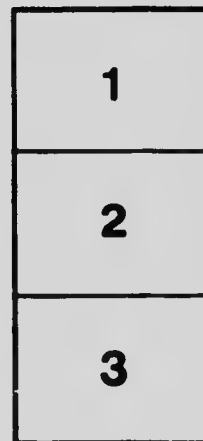
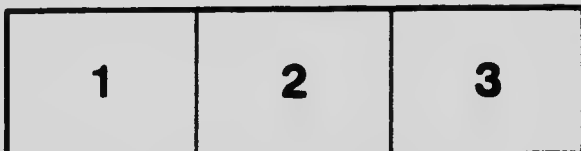
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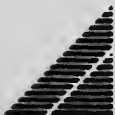
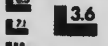
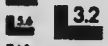
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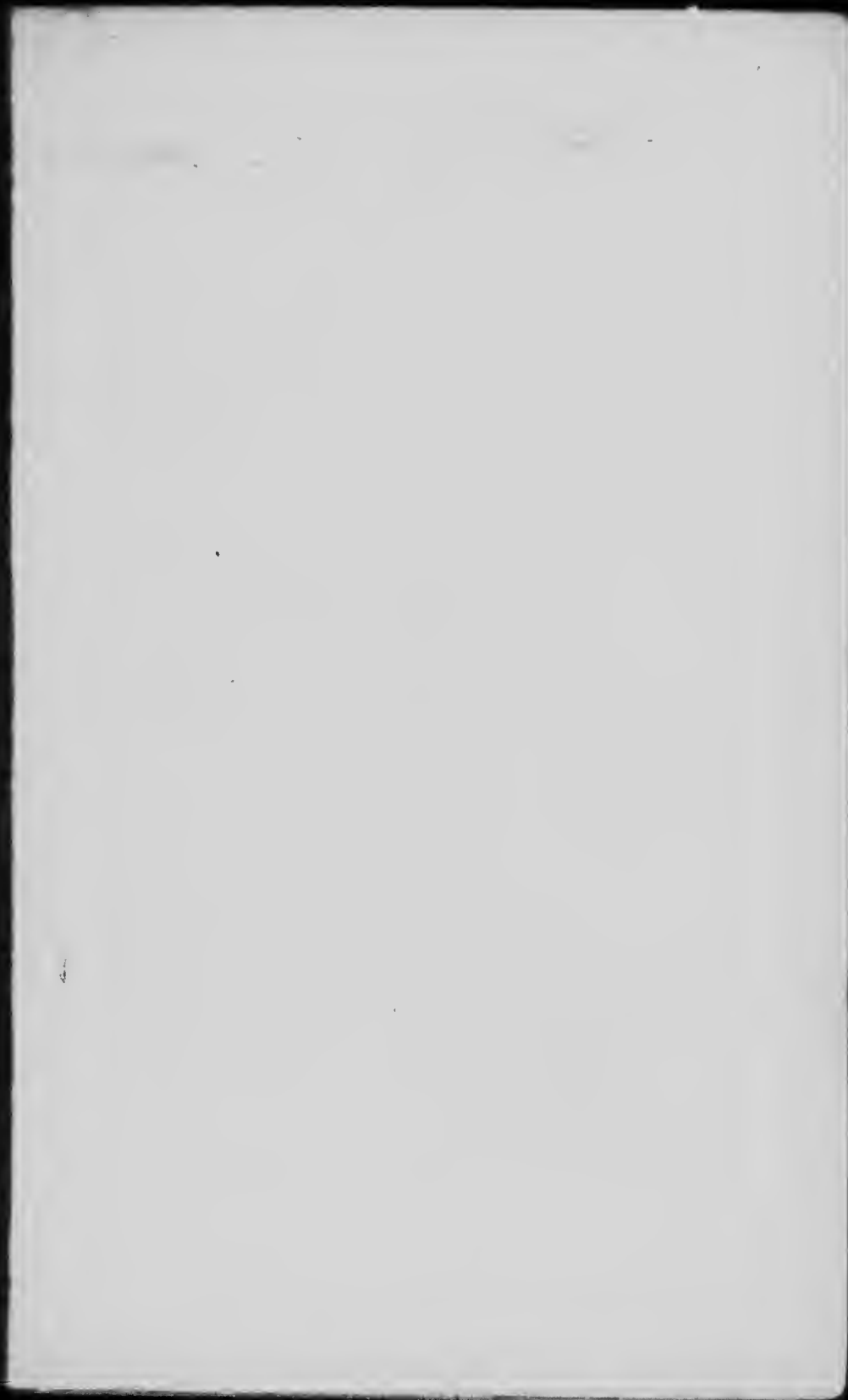
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THE EARLY HISTORY OF
JACOB STAHL

THE EARLY HISTORY OF JACOB STAHL

BY
J. D. BERESFORD

"I would beget this larger faith in thee,
That nought we do or suffer is in vain."

ARTHUR SCOTT CRAVEN :

The Last of the English, Act IV.

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SEVEN DAY BOOK

JACOB STAHL

BOOK I

HESTER

CHAPTER I

TEMPERAMENT AND FORTUITIES

1.

THE first link in the chain was obviously forged by temperament. Either Mrs. Stahl or Nancy Freeman, who filled many offices in the Stahl household, none of them satisfactorily, neglected to replace the lid of the flour-tub. Similar and greater acts of neglect had been committed in the past, and no penalty exacted, but on this occasion a fortuitous mouse intruded into the flour-tub and made history. Of this mouse nothing more is known. Doubtless it was a well-meaning creature enough. Indeed, we only know that it was a mouse at all, from circumstantial evidence. It came and went, left a musky trace of its passage, and vanished.

Mrs. Stahl had an Irish temperament, chiefly evidenced in a habit of procrastination and a reposeful trust in miracles. The procrastinating habit may have been responsible for the absence of a lid from the flour-tub, certainly it was responsible for the presence of Nancy Freeman. Mrs. Stahl had thought, and said, that she must "really look out for another girl," and it is possible that she would have braced herself to the effect had it not been for that other factor in her temperament—her sweet faith in the impossible. However inefficient Nancy proved herself, Mrs. Stahl always hoped that she would do better to-morrow or next week. Mrs. Stahl maintained her happiness by such illusions as these. She had an imagination

and directed it in her service ; she pictured a reformed Nancy, and the picture became real to her. She told herself stories of a perfected Nancy, and believed them. "Why don't you sack the girl?" Hermann Stahl would ask when he came home for the week-end, and found disorder. "Oh, she's been so much better lately," would be the reply, and Mrs. Stahl believed that Nancy really had been better.

Not but what Nancy was a willing girl enough, but she was empty-headed and more than a little vain. For her vanity she had some justification. She was admired by several ambitious young Camberwell tradesmen, beginning life behind the counter or on the seat of a delivery cart. Also, she was admired and flattered by the penny postman, a widower of some standing and a man possessed of much curious information. On Sunday afternoons Nancy wore a chignon and hoops ; she was before her time as a servant type, one of the pioneers of the "better-dressed-than-mistress" order. With so many affairs on hand it is easy to understand that Nancy had little time for her duties in the Stahl household.

It was on a windy morning early in October that Mrs. Stahl crossed the trail of the historical mouse. She made the discovery at a time when she should have made her pastry, but she, nevertheless, wasted a few more precious minutes in waiting for a miracle. She sniffed the flour-tub wistfully, and added ocular to olfactory evidence, but though the evidence was presented time after time in a precisely similar manner, she returned to her examination on each occasion with a reinspired hope that she might have been mistaken. At last, in despair, she summoned Nancy.

Nancy was "doing" the front bedroom, her chief instrument a duster which required frequent flourishings out of the front window. After each flourish Nancy rested and watched the passers-by. It was an interesting occupation, and she was resentful, almost indignant, when she heard the summons of her mistress. "Drat yer, what's it now?" was her comment, spoken to an imaginary audience, and she lingered regretfully at the window until she heard the sound of footsteps coming upstairs.

"I want ye just to come downstairs a minut," said Mrs. Stahl, coaxingly.

"Yesm," replied Nancy. "I was just shaking out the duster. Did you call befor'm?" Nancy's conception of a respectful form of address was the addition of an occasional "m" to her words.

"Now just smell that!" said Mrs. Stahl, when the pair arrived in the kitchen, and she pushed the flour-tub towards Nancy and waited eagerly for the verdict. After all, she might have been mistaken. Nancy sniffed.

"Well I never!" she said, and her glance at the cupboard under the dresser, and the instinctive twitch she gave to her petticoats, raised the alarm of "Mouse!" as clearly as any spoken words.

"What d'ye think's been at it?" asked Mrs. Stahl, searching for a last gleam of hope.

"Why, micem!"

Mrs. Stahl sighed. "I was afraid so," she said. "Now ye'll just have to run round to Beeton's like a good girl, and fetch me some more flour."

"Yesm!" responded Nancy with alacrity. There was a passable, embryo grocer at Beeton's, and the trip presented itself as preferable even to the flourishing of a duster from the front bedroom window.

"And it's a fine morning," added Mrs. Stahl glancing out of the window, and discounting the force of the equinoctial gale that was ravishing the plane-trees. "Ye'd better take baby."

The baby was Jacob Stahl, aged seven months and two days.

2.

Nancy put a shawl over her head, and pinned up the bib of her apron. On week-days her potentialities as a pioneer were not in evidence. The perambulator was wheeled out, and little Master Jacob was laid therein. Little brother Eric, aged three, should have joined the pilgrimage on foot, but he was very much occupied with a large picture-book; he was studying the letters of the alphabet, and objected to being disturbed.

As usual, it was Mrs. Stahl who gave way. Eric already exhibited signs of precocity, a desire for book-learning, and a persistent habit of getting his own way were his most noticeable traits, seen at the age of three.

The perambulator deserves recognition. It was three-wheeled and heavy. Its tyres were of iron and its construction primitive, but in one respect it corresponded exactly to the finest product of twentieth-century mechanism. It conformed to the law of modern four-wheeled perambulators, that law which still obtains among present examples. It never ran in a straight line. Nancy was flurried by the wind,—it faced her on the outward journey,—and the necessity for the constant elevation and redirection of the front wheel, irritated her. Nowadays, perambulators are such butterfly, such delicately balanced contrivances, that little weight on the handles is required in order to tilt those self-willed front wheels off the ground, in fact, it is not unusual to see a logical nurse neglect the front wheels altogether, slant the whole contrivance to an angle at which equilibrium can be maintained without difficulty, and sail gaily along regardless of any risk from baby's unusual inclination, so perilously suggestive of a "rush of blood to the head." But it would have needed the exercise of considerable strength so to have tilted Jacob's perambulator; moreover, Nancy required a free hand to prevent the forcible abduction of her shawl. The wind was in one of its most rakish moods that morning. Little wonder that Nancy lost her temper at the necessity of loosing her grip on the shawl, and thus risk its elopement with Æolus, in order to reset that obstinately divagating front wheel, on the straight path.

Nevertheless the journey to Beeton's was accomplished successfully, a brief flirtation was conducted, and the flour obtained and placed in the foot of the perambulator beyond the reach of Jacob's tiny legs.

"A fine child," remarked the passable young grocer, as he arranged the parcel.

"M—yes!" replied Nancy casually, and then to show her interest she added: "Nice eyes, he's got."

"Not the only one," said the young grocer with marked intention, and Nancy bridled and answered that she didn't want any of his impertinence, and so sailed off in the direction of home with a following wind.

She appeared to be set for a fine passage. The shawl now clung tightly to her, and if the outline of her form was very clearly exposed to any who might follow her, Nancy was not apparently handicapped by the circumstance.

The penny postman was a fortuity. He turned into the wake of Nancy's passage from a side street, and Nancy glimpsed him out of the tail of her eye. Forgetful of the wind, she turned half round to make sure.

It is at this point that all the trivialities, outcomes of other trivialities, suddenly coincide. As Nancy turned, there came one of those insidious gusts of wind that are to the last degree exasperating. One of those bursts that take you by the shoulders and shake you, that wriggle and push and struggle, that seem desperately anxious to escape from nowhere and find you opposing them, that are rough and ill-tempered, and desperately vicious, self-assertive, arrogant, and overbearing; that throw dirt and leaves in your face, push you out of their way with an unbelievable rudeness, and then career down the street with a triumphant shout, taking with them any article that can be violently wrenched from your person.

Nancy threw up both hands to clutch her shawl.

The pavement was on a slight incline, the perambulator had a little way on it, and the whole force of the wind behind. It was a heavy perambulator, and it gathered momentum.

Nancy, affronted by the ill-mannered jostling of the wind, did not realize the situation, and no one can blame her; nor can any blame be attached to the penny postman, for he saw the danger and started to run, shouting, in pursuit of the perambulator. He might have caught it if the infernal affair had run straight or turned in towards the wall, but as though rejoicing in its unwonted freedom, it set a diagonal course for the roadway, sailed along gaily for some ten yards, reached the curb, lost its hold of earth with the off rear wheel, staggered, lurched, and upset.

The still shouting postman was first on the scene. Nancy, so soon as she caught sight of the runaway, covered her face in the shawl, the retention of which was to be so dearly paid for, and was subsequently led home, weeping. It was the postman who rescued a floury and ominously quiet baby from the gutter, and who placed him in the perambulator re-erected by the first contingent of the rapidly collecting crowd.

"Is 'e 'urt?" "'Oo was with 'im?" "Is it a boy or a gel?" were the questions suggested by the various characters and sexes of the crowd. The penny postman's face was very grave as he looked down at the uncannily silent child.

"I know where 'e lives. I'll take 'im 'ome," was all the answer vouchsafed to inquirers.

It was a startling and terrifying picture which met Mrs. Stahl on the doorstep. A solemn postman, a very white baby, and a miscellaneous assortment of wide-eyed onlookers—withal no Nancy.

"Been a little haccident," said the postman. "I'll fetch the doctor."

3.

Dr. Pennyfather was a reassuring person but weak in diagnosis. After he had made a somewhat cursory examination of the tender little frame of baby Jacob, he beamed encouragingly on the anxious Mrs. Stahl. "No, nothing serious, I *think*," was his verdict, "but we must be careful of this bruise at the back of the head. Very careful. The sutures are hardly closed yet." That bruise was the scare which drew Pennyfather off the track. He tended that bruise with solicitude. It was a marked thing, other bruises, notably one at the base of the spine, were overlooked.

Even after this reassurance, Mrs. Stahl's fury of resentment against Nancy did not subside. Nancy was packed off within an hour, despite all protestations of sorrow and of innocence.

In passing out of the Stahls' household, she passed, also, out of the history of Jacob. In after years she was a name to him, a name round which a legend of carelessness and neglect

had been woven. To Jacob the name of Nancy Freeman stood later for all that was flippant, idle, and self-seeking in woman. Yet Nancy made an excellent wife and mother, and reared five healthy children. It was the young grocer she married, not the penny postman.

CHAPTER II

EARLY INFLUENCES

1.

JACOB STAHL's grandfather, Otto Stahl, generically a German, specifically a Bavarian, a Municher, had settled in London somewhere in the thirties, and had eventually been made a partner in the business of Myers and Co., a firm of wool-brokers in Coleman Street, known under the style of Myers and Stahl. Otto Stahl married Hester Myers, the daughter of his partner, a pure-blooded Jewess, after waging a five years' war of aggression upon the orthodox principles of Hester's father, and took her to live in Bloomsbury, the early Victorian Kensington. There were three children of this marriage, one of whom, the second girl, died young. The eldest daughter was christened Hester after her mother, and like her brother Hermann was brought up on her father's Lutheran principles, placidly acquiesced in, though never actually adopted, by Mrs. Stahl.

Hester favoured her father's family in appearance as well as in faith, and became a wide, flat, plain-featured woman, endowed with splendid qualities of steadfastness and good-nature—a woman who would have made an ideal wife and mother. Unfortunately her lack of physical charm, combined with a natural modesty that prevented her from ever taking the initiative, proved a barrier to the attainment of those ends for which she was pre-eminently fitted—a fact that she openly lamented with honest common sense when she had arrived at an age when any hope of marriage might reasonably be supposed to have disappeared.

When Hester was fifteen her mother died, the immediate cause of her death failure of the heart's action—a failure determined by the necessity for an increase of work within continually decreasing limits, due to the superabundantly flesh-forming qualities of Mrs. Myers' person. From this time until her father died, twenty years later, Hester managed the Bloomsbury establishment with a precision and economy that marked her out as a model housekeeper—indeed, she had what amounted to a genius for domestic management.

Her brother, Hermann, was more versatile. With him the Jewish graft bore more fruit than the German stock, but it was fruit of poor quality, giving evidence of arrested development. Doubtless the flow of sap was too sluggish.

Hermann was educated at the City of London School, was taken into his father's firm at the age of seventeen, and remained there until he was twenty-four. The immediate cause of the rupture between father and son was Hermann's determination to marry Hilda O'Connell, an Irish girl of little education, whom he had met during a summer holiday. This in itself was a matter of sufficient seriousness to cause a breach between the two men, but the relations between them were already strained, and a smaller point of dispute would have been sufficient to bring about a permanent estrangement.

Hermann's temperament was unsuited to office work, yet a certain determination of purpose, combined with a love of money for its own sake inherited from his mother's family, had held him in check, kept him within the bounds of his father's endurance. The boy's occasional outbursts and indiscretions had often been made the subject of severe reprimand, and many a telling punishment had been inflicted by a reduction or temporary cessation of his salary; but his offences had, hitherto, been ultimately condoned upon a promise of better behaviour, although these promises were never kept for long, and Otto Stahl had confessed to being "about sick of it," only a few weeks before his son's crowning indiscretion created the final breach between them.

There is not much to be said in favour of Hermann. He was a hybrid whose undeveloped virtues and unsteady desires

conflicted only to certain ends. In business his penurious methods and characteristic meanness in all money matters brought him financial security, but militated against his obtaining any great success. He made no big coups because he dared no risks, his financial genius was obscured by the caution and stolidity inherited from his father's family. When he left, or, to be more precise, was ejected, from his father's firm, he obtained a position as traveller for a wholesale house, in Wood Street, which dealt in machine-made lace, chiefly in the form of trimmings and insertions.

The work suited him, in that it gave him a certain amount of leisure and the interest of perpetual travel, as his work lay principally among the drapers in the smaller provincial towns of England and Wales. He never neglected his business, chiefly because he worked largely on commission, and among the pleasures he found in life, he found none so attractive as the acquisition of money.

His married life, if not a triumphant success, was not entirely a failure. The zest inspired by the natural purity and remoteness of his Irish girl, was never quite lost; largely maintained, no doubt, in later years by the long periods of separation between husband and wife, for Hermann was hardly ever at home except at the week-end, and not then, if he could make an additional sixpence by charging his firm for travelling expenses he had not incurred.

One other unpleasant trait of Hermann's character must be touched upon, however briefly—he was not a faithful husband, a fact never suspected by his wife. A simple, sweet-minded woman, this wife of Hermann Stahl's, devoid of evil thoughts, who attributed nothing but good to all with whom she associated; a devoted wife and mother, but quite inefficient as a housekeeper, her vagaries in this latter direction the one source of friction between her and her husband. With him domestic economy was a science, whilst she was innocent even of arithmetic.

Nevertheless it was not an unhappy household, this little Camberwell ménage of the Stahls'. Nancy Freeman's successor proved a jewel, and devoted herself heart and soul to

the care of the little Jacob, condemned for the first fifteen years of his life never to put his feet to the ground. The elder boy, Eric, neither then, nor at any later period of his life, gave trouble to anyone. A solid serious person, Jacob's brother, with a genius for application. In him all the hereditary tendencies seemed to have blended and consolidated. In Hermann Stahl they were all awash, bumping and tumbling; some two or three of the bigger always in evidence, the others, sometimes on top, at others forced below the surface; an untidy, heterogeneous collection of qualities with nothing to bind them together.

A strange convention of races and conflicting tendencies this that lies behind Jacob Stahl and his brother Eric, but the laws of heredity are hard to understand. That primary inclination to deviate from the original type upsets all calculation from the outset, since it is impossible to foretell what direction the variations will take, and all these variations are checked from spreading too rapidly by the human instinct that makes the small man marry a woman six feet high. If like were attracted to like in the making of marriages, how much more quickly man's evolution would progress, and what queer types we should have in a few generations, even in such a small matter as that of noses, for instance.

2.

The early years of Jacob's life were all spent in Camberwell, a suburb that offered among other advantages that of being within easy distance of Alleyn College. Not that this convenience affected Jacob, whose education was conducted spasmodically as occasion offered, but Eric was permitted to make full use of his opportunity, and solidified in body as a result of his compulsory six-mile walk each day, nearly as much as he solidified in mind as a result of his educational training.

It is hard to avoid using some variation of the word "solidity" in connection with Eric, but it is the quality of compactness that is implied rather than that of heaviness.

He was not brilliant, yet he won a certain measure of success, because he never tired, because he never failed to achieve what he set out to achieve, and because work came more easily to him than play. Games were not distasteful to him; he played cricket, football, and hockey according to the season, with a certain amount of success that was due to his concentration on the matter in hand. In fact as a cricketer he might have achieved high honours, for he was a "head bowler" of considerable capacity, and was endowed with great powers of physical endurance. But when at the age of fifteen he was in danger of being tried for the first eleven, he suddenly exhibited an extraordinary tendency to bowl wides and half-volleys. Eric had no ambition to win honours on the cricket field, no intention of wasting too much time on a sport that made no real appeal to him.

As a result of this lack of enthusiasm for such an essential part of the curriculum, Eric was not popular with the boys; neither was he, for another reason, a favourite with the masters, despite the credit he brought to them and to the college. The latter failure—if it can be called a failure—was due to his character as a whole; he was too self-contained, too self-sufficient, to win friendship either from his contemporaries or his seniors. He made no appeal of weakness, accepted the learning of superior scholarship with a quiet assurance that gave no gratification to him who imparted it, and was wont, in his confident, impassive way, to correct any of those slips that are certain to be made sooner or later, even by the most efficient teacher whose course of instruction is not confined to a single subject. This tendency of Eric's towards a sturdy dogmatism was the more irritating to a man of high attainments, in that the boy never made an assertion, much less attempted a contradiction, if he was not absolutely sure of his ground; and when Eric was sure of a thing it was quite certain that that thing was susceptible of proof.

As Eric plays an important, if not a very large, part in this history, it is as well to have a clear understanding of his character and attainments at the outset, and no better summary could be given of them than that of Percy Morpeth, the

man who spent his genius in teaching mathematics, officially, and the principles of life, unofficially, to boys of all ages in and out of college.

Morpeth was talking shop to two of his fellow masters, and the chief topic was Eric's success.

"Yes," remarked Morpeth, after a pause in the conversation, "I have a great pity for Stahl," and then in answer to the expostulation and surprise of his listeners, he continued: "He may win all manner of success, I grant you, in scholarship, but he is barred from great success in the world of men because he has neither principles, nor humanity. Yes, yes, I know he does the right thing, from what we call principle, but it is a matter of logic not of feeling. I noticed an incident not long ago that bears me out rather well on that point. When young Anderson was caught pilfering and was expelled, I found that Stahl amongst others had been a loser by Anderson's kleptomaniacal instincts. I was rather interested, and asked Stahl to come up to my room after school, which he did, as usual, without any sign of enthusiasm. You may remember that I was interested in Anderson because I believed, and do still, that the boy was suffering from an obsession and was not morally to blame. Well, I found that Stahl had known all about Anderson's little games for some weeks before the facts came to light generally. 'Why didn't you tell anyone?' I asked naturally enough. 'Hardly the thing to do, was it, sir?' said Stahl. I confess I was rather pleased, I didn't think the boy had so much generosity, so I asked him if he had tried to stop Anderson, if he had talked to him? 'No, sir,' said Stahl, and when I inquired why not, he said quite calmly, 'I saw he was sure to hang himself sooner or later, sir, if he was left alone.' You see, as a matter of principle he understands that it is not the right thing—that it is outside the code of the best schoolboy honour—to show up young Anderson; but there is not the slightest feeling about it, he did not care two straws whether the boy hung himself or not, to use his own expression. With Stahl it was just a matter of two and two must and ever will make four, a fact for which there is no palliation, and no excuse is needed.

An emotional two or a temperamental four is outside the range of Stahl's comprehension. I always feel that Stahl is a conglomerate, you cannot separate the ingredients of his character, they are all bound together in one solid mass. Your true artist must always have a deep sympathy with humanity, because he sees himself continually in the men and women he meets. And don't you see that this is because he has the faculty—which Stahl has not—of separating his ingredients as it were, of being able to call up any side of his character at will—or, if you prefer it, of surrendering himself to any of his emotions—and allowing one side of him to dominate his sensations for a time? It is that which gives him the power of understanding other men's weakness and strength; he has all their potentialities, and can develop them separately by the power of his imagination. Put it this way: a genius can weigh human nature because he is so delicately balanced; Stahl, never, because he is so rigid."

If Morpeth had needed any confirmation of his theory, he might have found it in the criticisms of his hearers, themselves grown too rusty at the mental hinge to respond to the theory put forward.

3.

Jacob had none of his brother's talent for application. It is true that his early training encouraged him in a habit of idleness, but the effect of training on character is merely that of development. There was a bias in Jacob's mind that no amount of education would have counteracted, just as in the case of Eric there was a combination that had no solvent. In the case of these two boys, it so chanced that each, by force of circumstances, fell under the influences best calculated to exaggerate his natural bent. If their positions had been reversed, the career of each would have been different—potentialities would have remained undeveloped, inclinations arrested, lesser powers encouraged—but no training could have produced in Jacob his brother's love of application, nor would the lack of opportunity have frustrated Eric's devotion to work.

Education may warp, even suppress, the inclinations of the commonplace mind ; it may in such cases produce a fruit exotic to the natural soil ; but its effect upon the finer intellects is limited by the power of discrimination exercised by the mind upon which the influence is exerted.

Jacob's youth was blighted, and his subsequent career largely affected, by that lack of unanimity in diagnosis which was even more marked in the opinions of medical men forty years ago than it is to-day.

His first adviser was the local practitioner Pennyfather, who decided after five months' careful study that the year-old baby had sustained a permanent injury to the spine, and would never be able to walk. The exact nature of the injury he was unable to define, preferring, in the absence of particular knowledge, to confine himself to a discourse upon the effect, rather than upon the cause, of the malady.

When he was three years old, Jacob was taken to Sir Frederick Miller, then acknowledged to be the first authority on spinal diseases in Great Britain. This expert, after an examination of the child's robust body and skeleton legs, decided that the nerve-motors of the extensor muscles had been paralyzed from the waist down, that it was impossible to trace the precise seat of the evil which had undoubtedly been caused by a concussion of the spine due to the fall, that even if the mischief could be precisely located no operation was possible, and, finally, that a medical battery might possibly be used with some beneficial results, but a complete cure must never be anticipated. Sir Frederick recommended the young patient to be kept flat on his back in order that Nature might be allowed full scope to repair the mischief in her own wonderful way.

As a result of this opinion and of Hermann Stahl's disinclination to spend any more money upon his youngerson, Jacob was condemned to a further period of quiescence. A small medical battery was acquired, second-hand, and used regularly for a few months, then, as the magnet had lost its power and no beneficial results had declared themselves, it was added to Jacob's stock of toys.

At the age of seven, Jacob's nature grew tired of too much resting, and, seeking an outlet for her undeveloped powers, spent her tempers upon Jacob's misunderstood person by visiting him with a succession of abscesses on the back. As a result of this and of the continued entreaties of his wife, Hermann at last consented once more to part with a sum sufficient to consult higher authority than the family doctor, and Jacob was taken to Mordaunt Stone. Stone was then at the height of his popularity, looked upon as a quack by the medical profession, but working, according to repute, wonderful cures in cases that had been abandoned as incurable by the faculty.

"We'll have him playin' cricket in a month," was Stone's pronouncement. "Ye see, madam," he explained to Mrs. Stahl, "there's one thing in this world your doctor with his hospital trainin' will never make any use of—and that's common sense. He's all for classifyin' the symptoms accordin' to rules and regulations, an' when he's reduced 'em to a proportion sum, he can work ye out an answer on paper as clever as paint. Only the trouble begins when his figures is all wrong at the beginnin', an' his calculations don't fit, because, ye see when ye're dealing with human nature twice two ull just as soon make twenty-foive as the number ye're taught naturally to expect. Now, what's wrong with the lad is just that he's been kept lyin' on his back for sivin years wid nothin' to kick against, an' his natural forces not havin' had the encouragement they'd every right to look for, have just protested by sending him these nasty little sores. They're just signals of distress, ma'am, an' we must send 'em a life-boat, only it's a boat as he'll have to work himself, and it'll go on wheels."

Stone was a mechanical genius, and his prescription took the form of an extraordinary vehicle propelled mainly by the arms of its occupant, but having a contributory means of power in rising and falling pedals—platforms is a better description—designed to exercise Jacob's feet and legs.

The idea was an excellent one, and did justice to Mordaunt Stone's powers of common sense, but it had two disadvan-

tages : the first that it was just three times too heavy—the cycle trade had not then revolutionized our conception of light vehicles—the second that the temptation to use the pedal motor was not sufficiently strong to overcome Jacob's natural disinclination to exert the atrophied muscles of his legs. As a consequence Jacob paddled himself along in his new carriage (it cost Hermann £25) by the exercise of his arms alone, his legs moving automatically up and down, but contributing not the least fraction of a horse-power to the propulsion of the vehicle. And even so, exercise could at first be taken only on a dead level, for the machine was too heavy, and Jacob's arms too weak to make the least headway against an incline, while the same elements of weight and weakness made it dangerous for him to attempt any descent. And his mother, dear, unpractical woman, was always there to push, and her feeble protests that Jacob must try to use his legs were instantly crushed by the complaint that it made him so tired.

Nevertheless, the movement necessitated by the use of his machine, saved Jacob's legs from wasting away altogether, and probably encouraged their growth, for they did grow lengthwise. One thing at least Stone's machine did for him, and that was to develop his arms and chest.

4.

There are few incidents worthy of notice in Jacob's life, other than that introduction of his machine, until he was nearly fourteen. By way of supplying him with some kind of education he was sent every morning to a preparatory school, kept by two sisters in the neighbourhood.

The sisters were of the Victorian, genteel type. Their father had been an alderman and had had an establishment at Herne Hill, but he left very little behind him, and his daughters had been compelled to augment their income by teaching. Not that they were to be pitied on that account, for they did very well, and their gentility suffered no diminishment. The elder Miss Parry was tall and thin. She dressed in black silk, and wore a pince-nez on a thin gold chain. She

was generally supposed to be "rather an invalid," a theory in which she herself was a firm believer, and encouraged by never putting in an appearance before lunch. Her part of the burden of educating the twelve small boarders and the twenty-two day boys, was confined to giving music lessons and taking one class in dictation during the afternoon. She had her value, however, for she received the parents, and Miss Janet's irreproachable manner, her dignified presence, and her air—when there were any parents about—of tenderness for, and calm forbearance with, the aggravating habits of small boys was a big financial asset. In private it may be noted that Miss Janet was slightly acid.

Her younger sister, Miss Nancy, was short and thick-set, and wore spectacles. No one would have recognized Miss Nancy without the spectacles. When she desired to see anything without their aid she wore them on her forehead, her eyebrows being apparently designed by nature to prevent them from slipping back to the bridge of her nose; but whether on her nose or her forehead, the spectacles were always there. Miss Nancy taught in the school from 9.30 to 1, and from 2 to 4, she did all the housekeeping and overlooked the cooking, mended the boarders' clothes, superintended the meals, saw the boys to bed, nursed her sister, and occupied her spare time in making her own dresses. In the work of the school she was assisted by two governesses, one who attended daily, and one who was resident. An excellent person, Miss Nancy, although she did not receive the respect accorded to the superior attainments of her sister.

Jacob was a favourite with both sisters. Janet spoiled him and Nancy taught him. Even the resident governess, an austere Scotchwoman of thirty-four, relaxed her discipline in his favour. For, even at the age of eight, Jacob was interesting to women. You picture him at this age with a long, oval face; pale and rather thin. He looks, perhaps, paler by virtue of the contrast afforded by thick dark hair—always too long because his mother preferred it like that—and the deep blue of his eyes. It is a very serious face, full of pathos that obtains for him a pity he does not merit, for Jacob was never

to be pitied even in his childhood. He had an exceedingly good time in his own way, and he never envied those ordinary, commonplace little boys who had the full use of their limbs. Not he!

But other boys could be a source of trouble sometimes. Jacob discovered this on the second day of his school career. Up to that time his only experience in this sort had been of Eric, who was kind to him on the whole, if a little inclined to bully him quietly when their mother was out of the way. Even Eric was somewhat as other boys at the age of ten.

5.

That incident of Jacob's second day at the Miss Parrys' does not show him in a very favourable light.

Miss Nancy had been urgently summoned by the cook, and had left the class to reconsider an ill-learned lesson, under threat of severe penalties should they fail to be letter-perfect on her return.

The moment Miss Nancy had closed the door behind her, an overgrown sandy-haired boy of eleven or twelve, who had been sitting with his back to Jacob, turned and surveyed him with a curious stare, an example followed by the seven other little boys who constituted the top form. It was their first opportunity for a decent examination of this new and strange specimen, as their previous covert glances in his direction had been so severely reprimanded by Miss Nancy as to make it inadvisable to indulge further curiosity. Miss Nancy kept a cane and knew how to use it.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the sandy-haired boy.

"My legs are weak," returned Jacob with a conciliatory smile—he was not at all shy, he had never had cause to be afraid.

"Can't you walk?" continued his cross-examiner. Jacob shook his head.

"Won't you ever be able to?"

"I don't expect so."

"What's the matter with 'em?" The sandy-haired boy had by this time put his legs over the form, and was studying the rug that covered Jacob's lower limbs, stretched out on the sofa that had been specially introduced for his benefit.

"I hurt my back when I was a baby," said Jacob.

"Let's look at 'em," said the sandy-haired boy, pulling aside the rug. Jacob made no resistance, he was not self-conscious on this point—as yet—a little vain, rather, of the distinction between himself and the rest of his species.

"Oh Lummy!" remarked Sandy-hair, when Jacob's wasted limbs were disclosed. "Don't they look rum? I say, look," he continued, addressing the rest of the class, who were all attention, the boys on the far side of the table standing up in order to get a better view. "Yus' look at his legs. Can you feel in 'em?" This to Jacob.

"Of course I can," replied Jacob, a little hurt at not getting the sympathy and tenderness he always received from strangers.

"Let's see!" said Sandy-hair, tittering. "'S anyone got a pin?"

Half-a-dozen pins were forthcoming instantly.

"What are you going to do?" asked Jacob, a little puzzled.

"Stick a pin into you, see if you can't feel," replied Sandy-hair maliciously. The other boys giggled, keenly interested in the experiment, full of admiration for the audacity of their ringleader.

"But you mustn't! It'll hurt; of course I can feel," said Jacob querulously, still unable to believe, however, that the threat would be carried out. Eric never went so far as this.

"Oh, I mustn't, mustn't I?" mimicked Sandy-hair. "Will it hurt? Let's see," and he advanced the pin in the direction of Jacob's legs.

Then Jacob, beginning to be terrorized by this bully, who seemed so big and strange to him, did the worst thing he could have done, he made threat of appeal to a higher power.

"If you do I shall tell Miss Nancy," he said.

"Sneaky, sneaky custard," broke out the class in a song, subdued in tone by fear of a returning Miss Nancy.

"Sneak, are you!" said Sandy-hair, dropping his teasing, tentative manner, and becoming suddenly threatening, overbearing.

"You tell Miss Nancy, that's all, and see what I'll do. Hear? You do tell, that's all."

"Go away!" returned Jacob, "I *shall* tell her."

"Better not," replied Sandy-hair, and then hearing a sound from the kitchen, he made a sudden dart at Jacob's legs with the pin. Jacob hit out quickly, open-handed like a woman, and succeeded in scratching Sandy-hair on the nose, but before further retaliation was possible, Miss Nancy's voice was heard in the passage and the whole class instantly became absorbed in the contemplation of their lesson; Sandy-hair back in his seat, head on hands, privately seeking traces of blood on his nose by the application and examination of a dirty forefinger.

But Jacob was in tears, tears that he was at no pains to conceal, and no friction of application by the class was able to hide their misdemeanour, from the examination that followed. Jacob was a too willing witness. He had as yet no feeling for the school-boy concepts of honour and manliness; and Miss Nancy, well-meaning, hard-working creature that she was, had no understanding for the boys she endeavoured to teach, and heard Jacob's whimpered story through without interruption.

"Did you prick him, Miles?" she asked of Sandy-hair at the conclusion, and the sturdy Miles replied: "Yes, Miss Nancy," without equivocation, and rubbed an anticipatory hand on his knickerbockers.

The cane was at the other end of the room, and the brief interval afforded while Miss Nancy reached for it behind the glass-fronted bureau-bookcase, was utilized in the extension of tongues, the making of hideous grimaces, and the framing of the words "Sneaky, sneaky custard" by the members of the class; all directed to Jacob, who felt a lonely, hard-used, little outcast from his kind, and developed an urgent hatred of all small boys, and an equally urgent desire for mother-comfort.

Miles took his caning without a flinch, although it was

administered with no light hand, and thereafter signified to the remainder of the class by a covert wink that he had not the least inclination to cry, seeking salve for his hurt in a further application of his tender palm to the seat of his knickerbookers.

Jacob, refusing to be comforted, was sent home early in charge of the Scotch governess, who sought to inspire him with ideals of manliness in her own rough, hardy way—without effect.

It was not the physical hurt that had reduced Jacob to those hysterical tears, and it was only his mother who could comfort that wound to his childish vanity, that check to his natural anticipation of love and sympathy that he had always been led to expect as a natural right.

CHAPTER III

HESTER

I.

THE first great influence in Jacob's life was an intruding mouse, the second, which was not exerted till nearly fourteen years later, was a misinterred sparrow, which in its death became a plague.

It was Pennyfather with the bent for prognosis, now growing grey in the service, who first instigated the search for the body.

"Unquestionably a case of typhoid," he remarked to the husband of his patient, "and the only one in the neighbourhood. You ought to have your drains seen to."

"It ain't the drains," replied Hermann, with confidence, "they were done a few months back, before I took on a new lease. Vereker's my landlord, and I made him overhaul the place before I'd take it on again. I've been here fifteen years, now, and he didn't want to lose a good tenant. Oh! no, it ain't drains, you can gamble on that!"

"What about the water?" asked the doctor. "Do you keep the cistern clean?"

"Cistern's new," said Hermann. "We scrapped the old one in March, when the house was done. Come up and see for yourself."

The new cistern proved rather inaccessible, but when at last the two men had scrambled through the trap-door, and made their way across the ceiling joists into the far corner of the roof, they were assailed by an odour that did not speak well for the cleanliness of the water.

"Rum thing," remarked Hermann, peering down into the dark recesses of the new cistern, "stinks, don't it?"

The doctor assented, holding his nose, as he, too, tried to see the smell in the black water of the half-filled cistern.

"Don't have a constant supply," said Hermann, indicating the pendant ball-cock which dripped slowly and mournfully into the water below. "The water gets run right off sometimes. I'll get a light."

"I've told 'em to draw the water off," he announced, when he returned a few minutes later with a candle, "they're saving some in buckets, and it comes on again at six. We'll get to the bottom of this. 'Struth, it does stink."

There was a fascination in watching the sinking water and the two men kept returning to the corner, despite the obnoxious smell that seemed to grow in intensity as the water fell.

"Something there!" says Hermann, when he was able at last to stand his candle on the floor of the cistern, from which the water was rapidly receding, and they watched the something that dragged with the ebbing water in the direction of the outlet pipe.

"Damned if it isn't a blasted bird!" said Hermann with sudden conviction as he examined, at a respectful distance, the sodden mass of decomposition.

"Phew! Yes. Undoubtedly a bird. Phew!" assented the doctor, and the two beat a retreat.

"Chuck that water away, it's rotten," commanded Hermann when they got downstairs, and later, "I'll have a man in to clean out that cistern thoroughly—wonder how the

brute got in ? Well, doctor, no one's fault, eh ? But we have got at the cause, that's one comfort. It's a blessing we're not all down. I'll get a man in to clean the cistern at once. I suppose it ought to be disinfected ? All right, I'll see to that." And he did see to it at once. Quite a practical man in some ways, Hermann Stahl.

2.

The location and abolition of the prime cause of the trouble and the purifying of the infected pipes did not, however, materially conduce to the recovery of Mrs. Stahl.

It was considered advisable to send away both the boys, and Eric found a place as a temporary boarder at the College, while Jacob was accommodated at the Miss Parrys'.

It was Jacob who was most affected. He was very helpless at that age, mentally as well as physically. He lacked power of initiative, and was unable to formulate, much less to grapple with, any idea of change.

Meanwhile a new force was coming into his life, a force that was destined to effect a great change in his whole manner of living. The name of this force was Hester Stahl, Hermann's sister, who came at her brother's appeal to nurse her sister-in-law, and manage the house.

Otto Stahl had been dead two years. After his death Hester had found herself provided with no more than an income of £150 a year, for the business of Myers and Stahl had not prospered too well in its later days, and old Otto had been living on his capital in order to keep up the house in Bedford Square. Hester, when she found herself practically alone in the world, had elected to live in the country, and had taken a cottage in a small village in the Eastern Midlands. She and her brother had corresponded at long intervals, but there had never been any real sympathy between them, and it was in desperation that Hermann had written and appealed to her for help in his distress. He had certainly been in a serious difficulty, his house upset himself kept away from business in order to attend to things, and, worst of all

to him, all sorts of horrible extra charges to be met on every side, Eric's board, Jacob's board, nurses, doctors, Heaven knows what! To do him justice, however, Hermann had done everything in his power to save his wife, and it had been the thought of his sister's shrewd common sense and her gift for management that had influenced him to beg her assistance. He had felt that her presence in the house would, in itself, go a long way towards assisting his wife's recovery.

3.

Hester first saw Jacob in Miss Parry's drawing-room. She had heard something of him from her brother, but had no very definite idea as to the nature or cause of his weakness.

Miss Janet introduced them, but Hester found that lady's praises of Jacob too highly sweetened, and soon asked in her blunt, straightforward way to be left alone with her nephew.

"I want you to tell me all about this," said Hester, laying her hand on the rug that covered Jacob's legs. "May I see?"

Jacob willingly assented, the strength and self-confidence of this new aunt appealed to him, he felt, already, that here was someone to whom he could look for support, and at this period of his life support was what he most needed.

"They're only weak," he explained, "but I can waggle my toes and I can draw them up, like this, only they're not strong enough for me to stand on."

"What did the doctor say about them?" inquired Hester, and Jacob gave her a fairly accurate account of Mordaunt Stone's opinion and prescription.

"And do you use the machine, or whatever you call it?" was Hester's practical comment.

"Oh yes," replied Jacob eagerly, "I go about in it everywhere, only I can't push with my legs, you know, they're not strong enough."

"And never will be, if you don't use them," said Hester. "Haven't you ever tried any exercises; little exercises to develop the muscles?"

"Oh yes," assented Jacob, "but they made me rather tired."

"And you didn't stick to them?"

"It didn't seem worth the bother," remarked Jacob, and Hester began to see where the trouble lay. She saw the boy lacking in initiative and steadiness of purpose, and the well-meaning but careless mother so easily persuaded into relaxing any effort she had set herself to make.

"I'm going to take you in hand, Jackie," said Hester. "We'll soon have you on your legs."

"You'll have to make me do it," replied Jacob, showing that he, too, had some understanding of the difficulty.

"Make you?" questioned Hester. "Don't you want to be able to walk?"

"Oh yes, rather," returned Jacob. "Of course I do; I often think about it, only it takes so long and it is such a bother, and it never seems to do any good."

Hester was not quite clever enough to guess how Jacob's imagination, running ahead of his actions, was in itself a deterrent from any continuity of purpose, but at least she grasped the main fact that he needed a firm hand and close supervision, and these she intended to supply. As postponement was no part of her policy, she set about her purpose without delay by making a closer examination of Jacob's limbs.

"Now," she said, when she had partly undressed him and seated him on the sofa with his legs hanging. "Can you kick my hand?"

Jacob succeeded in reaching the hand placed a few inches in front of his toes, but he did it by retracting his legs and letting them swing forward, an action which did not utilize the atrophied extensors, the real source of his weakness.

Hester did not realize this, and exclaimed, "Oh! but you can use them quite a lot. Are you sure you couldn't stand if you tried hard?"

"That—that wasn't quite fair, really," stammered Jacob, who had a moderately clear comprehension of the true state of affairs, "I didn't kick, then, properly, I just let 'em swing.

I can pull 'em up, you know, only I can't kick 'em out, not without swinging."

It was Hester's first lesson in physiology, but she was an apt pupil, quick to grasp essentials. Jacob had given himself away, already, and his aunt had no intention of allowing him to shirk.

"Try again, then," she said, and this time Jacob played fair and the effort to reach her hand proved abortive. Still there was a slight, almost imperceptible, forward movement of the leg from the knee downward, and under cross-examination Jacob admitted that he could feel a "sort of tweak" in the shrunken muscles of his thigh.

This is as far as they went that morning, for Miss Janet returned and was rather shocked to find a little boy with bare legs in her drawing-room.

4.

In the intervals of nursing her sister-in-law, in itself no light task, and of managing her brother's house, Hester managed to spend at least one hour every day with her younger nephew, and the whole of this time she devoted to enforcing the practice of exercises.

For Mrs. Stahl this task had been an impossible one. That imaginative temperament of hers which had descended in a large part to Jacob could not brook the lack of encouragement. To do a thing day after day and see no result, receive no inspiring sign of improvement, was not possible for her, and added to this primary inability, she had had to contend with an opposition from her son arising from the same attitude of mind that she herself brought to the solution of the problem.

It was on the fifth day of her ministrations to Jacob that Hester first encountered the real difficulty which beset her.

Jacob was seated in the dormitory, his legs hanging down, a wooden box under the bed behind his heels to prevent him from resorting to the unfair practice of swinging, and Hester was kneeling by him, assisting the awakening of power in his muscles by a primitive form of massage.

"I don't think I can do much this morning," remarked Jacob. "I feel rather tired, and I can't feel the muscles at all when I'm tired."

He was bored with the performance already, the excitement of a new experiment had not been maintained by any prospect of success. The exhilaration of mind, the stimulus provided by the new hope instilled by his aunt's steadiness of purpose had died down. He saw this new treatment following the lines he knew so well. It had become a bother, why worry about it, after all he was quite happy as he was.

"I am sorry you feel tired, dear," said Hester, "but I can't come to you at any other time, so you must try and do your best now."

"It isn't any good, Aunt Hester," persisted Jacob, "I'm sure it isn't any good, I can't kick a little bit better now than I could the first day; not a little bit."

"Going to give up after five days?" returned Hester. "That's not the sort of stuff men are made of. You must stick to things, Jackie, go on, and on, and on, with them or you'll never succeed."

"Yes, I know, Auntie," said Jacob, "only it's no good going on, and on, and on, with a thing that's hopeless, is it?"

This was the point at which Mrs. Stahl had always failed. Her boy's mind affected her own, she saw things from his point of view, began to feel that he was right, that it was hopeless this effort of their's to put Jacob on his feet, and so, weakly fighting her own inclination to let things slide, she gradually gave in, and she and Jacob were happy together—telling each other stories of what they would do when he was miraculously cured.

On the other hand Hester could not have succeeded if she had adopted an attitude which may be taken as being exactly the reverse of Mrs. Stahl's, that is to say if she had merely insisted by reiterated command on the continuation of the exercises. In that curious balance of forces known to us as a human being, the powers of impulse and conduct are so inextricably involved that to neglect the former was, in Jacob's case, to court certain failure. The attitude of mind in which

he set about his exercises was an essential factor in the problem. Hester Stahl was unimagi ve—for a woman—her knowledge of psychology in relation to physiology, or in fact in any relation, was almost nil, yet by that intuition common to women—an intuition that becomes genius when allied to a clear reasoning power—she understood that Jacob must be encouraged to do his exercises, not driven; and she set herself to instil into him the hope and enthusiasm that had not been kindled hitherto by any material sign of improvement in his condition.

Her encouragement took two forms. One was a magical eye for improvement. Hester, the unimagi native, became suddenly endowed with extraordinary powers of seeing the things that were not. Was Jacob able to move his legs the smallest fraction of an inch more than he did yesterday, Hester became exuberantly cheerful at the rapidity of his progress, dilated on it, exaggerated its significance, and confidently prophesied a complete cure. The other form of encouragement came into play when Jacob was at his worst, when his despondent mind exercised no influence on his dilatory muscles, and the slight improvement of yesterday had been turned into an apparent retrogression. Then Hester was full of plans and thoughts for the future, a constructor of pictures, exciting the boy's imagination with ideals of physical completeness. And Jacob reacted under her influence until energy and purpose returned. After such mornings as these, it was Hester who was tired rather than her patient.

But at the end of three weeks there came a check to the exercises, for a few days they were forgotten. By Jacob everything was forgotten, save the one fact that he had lost his mother.

5.

It was all unexpected. Mrs. Stahl had apparently been on the highroad to recovery, and her prognostic medical adviser had been confidently indulging himself in a very revel of cheerful anticipations. Then had come a sudden, alarming relapse, and within a few hours Mrs. Stahl was dead. Medical

details are of no further interest, though Hermann, struggling in an abyss of grief and confusion, vainly reiterated: "I can't understand it. She was going on so well—you said. What could have happened?"

Pennyfather saw a suspicion of his incompetence in Hermann's eye, and forced his reluctant mind to a tardy diagnosis, but Hermann gleaned no comfort from half-caught medical terms, "ulceration of the intestines,—probably developed into an abscess—perforation, the ultimate cause,"—and so returned to his original position with: "Well, I can't understand it. You said she was going on so well."

But it was Jacob who suffered most, because he had the greatest capacity, and because he could not understand that his mother was dead.

He had been kept away from the contagion for five weeks, longing always for the time when his mother would be well enough to see him again—a time that was always near at hand—and at the last Hester thought it mere cruelty to bring the boy to the side of the unconscious, dying woman.

To Hester fell the task of breaking the news, a task she would not delegate, for already Jacob had become to her the dearest thing in the world, and she performed her task resolutely and well. She had been up all night, but she went to Jacob at the usual time, began his exercises as if there were nothing amiss, and replied to his usual questions about his mother by saying that she was better.

"Shall I be able to see her soon?" he asked, and she hesitated before she answered.

"Not just yet, dear."

"But why not? Why can't I see her soon if she is better?"

"She has been so ill," said Hester, "and she must go away—perhaps for quite a long, long time."

"Oh! but why can't I go with her?" asked Jacob.

"You must make up your mind that things won't be quite the same again," said Hester, seeking some way of reconciling the boy's mind to the thought of separation. "You mustn't expect now to be with mother as you used to be."

Jacob, racking his brain for an explanation and finding none,

fell back on his perpetual "Why, why?" and Hester physically worn out, and strained nervously almost to the breaking-point, was hard put to it to repress her irritation against that unanswerable monosyllable.

"You will learn why in time, Jackie. I want you to come down into the country with me—to my cottage. Wouldn't you like that?"

"Oh yes, rather. When? Soon? Why couldn't mother come too? That *would* be jolly," replied Jacob, and then added "Couldn't she?" so eagerly that Hester found her task harder than ever.

Something of her misery showed itself in her dear, plain face, for Jacob asked her why she was so sad this morning; it was a new experience for him to see Aunt Hester depressed.

"There is a good deal of sadness in the world, Jackie," she answered, "only it's no use making a fuss about it and thinking oneself ill-used. I think sometimes that the people who make the most of their troubles, do not know what trouble really means, and make a big pretence to cover their own lack of feeling. If I did look sad, it was because I was sorry for you. Not because of this," she went on, touching his skeleton limbs; "we are going to cure that, but because you will have to make up your mind to endure a great sorrow."

There was a solemnity in Hester's tone which chilled Jacob and conveyed to him the first thought of apprehension. "What?" he asked, puzzled and half fearful. "What is it? What's the matter?"

"Jackie dear," said Hester, putting a protecting arm round him, "do you think you could bear it, if you didn't see mother again for quite a long time? If you came to live with me in the country?"

"I should like to come and live with you," replied Jacob after a short silence. "I don't like being here very much—but why can't mother come too?"

And still Hester did not tell him the whole cruel truth. She persisted, with a wonderful patience, in preparing his mind for the thought of separation, before telling him how long that separation would be. Her task was made somewhat easier by

the fact that the boy had not seen his mother for some weeks, and, with the elasticity of youth, had already adapted himself in some measure to new circumstances. Nevertheless Hester had to soften the blow to that warm living hope of a speedy return to the confidence and companionship that had made life something more than endurable to Jacob, and she understood that the blow could only be softened by substituting a new consolation for the old one.

So, while she continually recurred to that note of foreboding, she alternated with it a note of new mother comfort, and lingered over her descriptions of the new life she and Jacob would live together.

When the truth came at last, Jacob was not conscious of any shock. He felt that he had known it before, although incapable of putting it into words, and he nestled close to Hester, conscious only of the wish that she should not go away from him.

Hester neglected many important duties, and stayed with him until late in the afternoon, for she felt that of all the many things she had to do, to comfort and console this boy was the thing best worth doing.

She did not absolve herself entirely from the charge of selfishness; she knew that she had had no happiness in her life equal to this of finding some object upon which to spend her love, but she was not troubled by any weighing of her own motives. Hester was too self-confident, too clear-sighted, too healthy-minded to indulge in any morbid analysis of her own character. Her method was always to take the path which seemed to her the most direct and profitable; and when her choice was proved to be ill-advised, she profited by the lesson learned, but wasted no time on regrets.

When Hester left him at last, Jacob still found consolation. Everyone made much of him, and the small boarders regarded him with admiration. Any sense of loss or loneliness was made almost pleasant by the excess of sympathy and consideration, and Jacob fell asleep, a happy martyr. The setting had been supplied, he unconsciously took his note from those around him, and played the part he was expected to play.

But in the night he dreamed of his mother, and when he awoke the bitter tears, the desperate longing, the agony of desire for her presence, were all intensely real ; and the reality stayed with him, until Hester took him away, ten days later, to live with her in the little village of Ashby Sutton.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROCESS OF THE MIRACLE

1.

SOME lives fall naturally into periods, and one stage is definitely separable from another in retrospect by some marked difference in residence, companionship, or occupation that has affected the mode of life and of thought. Other lives remain unaffected by change, their continuity is never broken, differences of living and companionship have little or no influence on their character. The cause of the distinction lies in the amount of susceptibility to influence and in the power of adaptation to circumstance, possessed by him or her whose life is acted upon. Enough has been said to show that the character of Jacob Stahl was essentially one that must be classified as being susceptible to influence, whilst that of his brother, Eric, furnishes an example of character that determines its own circumstance, is independent of influence or support.

The second stage of Jacob's life began when he went to live with Hester Stahl in her cottage at Ashby Sutton. It is a stage that had the greatest determining influence on his life, yet the incidents of the first five years were few.

Hester had seen but one difficulty in the way of her proposal to adopt Jacob, the difficulty of providing him with an education. Her own income of £150 a year, though ample for her simple needs, and sufficient to provide maintenance for herself and Jacob, was not enough to cover the expenses of an education such as she desired for her nephew. She

therefore tackled her brother, anticipating a curt refusal, but determined nevertheless to stick to her point. Hermann, however, proved quite amenable, and admitted his liability without discussion. It was decided between them that an allowance of £100 a year should be paid to Hester as Jacob's guardian, and Hermann did not even suggest that an account should be rendered by his sister. One is apt to judge Hermann Stahl harshly ; inclined to seek reasons for any act of apparent generosity on his part, and certainly in this case there were many inducements to be urged for providing his invalid son with a home in the country ; there were possible even ultimate savings to be effected by thus ridding himself of responsibility for the sum of a hundred pounds a year. At the same time it should be remembered that Hermann was genuinely distressed by the loss of his wife, and it is exceedingly probable that he wished to do all in his power for that son to whom his wife had been so devoted. The last two years of Hermann Stahl's life were not happy ones ; we may prefer to believe that his conscience was clear as to the provision he had made for Jacob, to believe that it was an act of generosity unalloyed by any petty considerations.

It remained for Hester to find a means of spending a part of Jacob's allowance to the best advantage, and on her return she consulted the rector of Ashby Sutton, the nearest reliable authority on the subject.

Peter Fearon, the rector in question, found an admirable way out of the difficulty, a way that incidentally assisted him to solve a little problem of his own. Fearon was an Irishman from the North, a man of some ability, but his ability was not of a kind to win him distinction in the Church. He may perhaps be counted lucky in having been given a living,—worth between three and four hundred a year,—by a compatriot bishop ; but an Irish wife and a family of seven children—the eldest eleven years old—were sufficient counteractions to over-indulgence.

When consulted by Hester with regard to Jacob's education, Fearon immediately grasped the possibilities of the scheme.

" It seems to me, Miss Stahl," he said, " that you're by way

of being in rather a difficult position. You say the lad can't walk a step, and you can't therefore send him to school in the ordinary way. On the other hand, you tell me that you can't afford more than £60 a year, which will hardly be sufficient to provide you with a private tutor. And yet you wish him to have a sound education, you say?"

"It is difficult, I know," replied Hester, who had not caught the rector's drift, as yet.

"I was thinking," continued Fearon, "if there was no one you could send him to. Hopkins at Shennington, now, takes pupils, but that's seven miles; too far to go—and Hopkins looks for more than you're giving in the case of a resident pupil. But, anyway, you want to keep the lad at home in order to look after him, I understand."

Hester nodded; the suggestion of "Hopkins at Shennington" had given her the clue she wanted. "What are you doing with your own boys?" she asked.

"Well, I was just thinking of that," returned the rector. "I've been obliged to teach them, myself, up to the present, but I'm thinking now of sending Feargus to the King's School. He's only ten, but he'd be better with other boys. There's three girls between him and Colin, and he wants playmates. Now, ye see," continued the rector laughing, "I'll be frank with you. It's just this way. If I could take your nephew myself—I could send my own boy to school, and if I could send Feargus to school, I could take your nephew. It just fits in like the pieces of a puzzle—only, to tell you the truth, I'm just wondering whether I'm worth the money you're offerin'."

Hester, however, had no doubts upon this question. She had come to the rector with no definite plan in her mind, but the moment that the suggestion of Fearon's tutorship was made, she saw in it a practical and satisfactory solution of her difficulty.

Jacob's hours of tuition were not lengthy. As originally agreed, they were from ten to one in the morning, and from three to five in the afternoon, but the morning lessons were continually interrupted, and that in the afternoon was not as a rule overlooked.

Ashby Sutton was a parish of some seven hundred souls, and their claims could not be entirely neglected.

Fearon's conception of his tutorial duties was a high one, but he continually fell below his own standard. As a consequence Jacob's tuition exhibited every phase of application on the part of his instructor, passing from the rigorous and conscientious attention that usually marked Fearon's attitude on Monday morning, to the careless and absent-minded distraction that continually resulted from the manifold cares attendant upon his duties as the head of a difficult and dependent household, and—upon occasion—from his duties as a priest.

A good fellow this rector, but much afflicted by family responsibilities, some conscience—and a temperament.

Jacob was responsive to the mood of his tutor, attentive or idle according to the temper of the day, occasionally making some effort to work on his own account when discipline was relaxed, but most often idling, trifling with a book that was no part of his work, some book introduced surreptitiously or borrowed from his tutor's store of fiction.

Yet he assimilated some learning. His knowledge was not specialized, there was no subject in which he was well grounded, his Latin was weak and his Greek contemptible, his mathematics never reached the calculus, his history and geography—subjects that did not interest him in his youth—would have disgraced the fifth standard of any Board School, his French exhibited the characteristics usual to English teaching, yet Jacob passed as a clever boy. He produced the effect of knowing more than he did. It can hardly be said that he deceived his aunt and his tutor, yet the result of his attitude was a misconception as to the amount of his learning.

There is no need to labour this point, yet it is so typical not only of the boy, but also of the man, that some mention must be made of it. Perhaps the truth of the matter is that Jacob was clever, inasmuch as he had an apprehensive and distinctive mind, quick to seize knowledge and appreciate its value; a mind capable of a measure of concentration, analytic up to a point. above all—introspective. As an illustration of

the first two faculties it may be mentioned that after three years' instruction he was able almost to hold his own with Fearon at chess, and Fearon had a mathematical turn and was a fair player.

One other factor of Jacob's youth must be dealt with historically, before representing the incidents and development of his career, a factor this, of supreme importance, to wit, the use of his legs.

2.

The indefatigable Hester took the whole burden of his care upon her shoulders, from the time Jacob came to Ashby Sutton. She allowed no relaxation of discipline, no shirking, no postponement. Yet with all her firmness she avoided any appearance of the dictatorial manner that might have made her ministrations an irksome necessity.

Her task was brightened by the sudden improvement that began to show itself soon after the change of surroundings. This may have been due to more healthy air and food of the country, or it may have been the result of the work she had already expended at Herne Hill. Whatever the cause, the results began to be evident before Jacob had been a week in the country. It was a joyful occasion, that on which it could be agreed with glorious certainty between them that Jacob was positively regaining the use of his thigh muscles.

"Aunt Hester," said Jacob one morning in a high state of excitement, "I can really kick a little, look," and he succeeded in agitating the lower half of his legs to the extent of more than an inch. "I know it doesn't look much," he went on, "but I can feel an awful difference. I feel I *can* do it. I can feel the muscles doing what I want. Do you know what I mean?"

Hester did know, or pretended she did, but she exhibited a certain caution; not that her own hopes were not high, but because she saw Jacob already eager to enter for a walking race, and she knew how long would be the progress of revitalizing and developing these wasted limbs.

Jacob was incapable of restraint that day, he kicked dili-

gently, if surreptitiously, throughout his morning lessons, could hardly be constrained to lie down after lunch, and was all eagerness to continue his usual exercises after tea. As a result there was a slight reaction next day—chiefly mental—that only Hester's inspiring influence could prevent from becoming a fit of depression. But the enthusiasm soon returned, and faith in the ultimate success of the remedy begot a frame of mind eminently conducive to the desired result. Still it was Hester who was responsible. Left to himself, even at this stage, Jacob would have relapsed through sheer inertia; incapable, without assistance, of sustained effort.

Progress was rapid at first. In a few weeks Jacob was able almost to straighten his legs, but there improvement hesitated for a time; he couldn't walk, he couldn't stand without assistance, and Hester saw evidence that tendons had contracted, the heels were raised, the knees always a little bent. Jacob, too, retarded his own recovery by being over-anxious, another symptom of the same conditions that had earlier led to his despondency. The machine had been brought into requisition again on new terms which forbade the use of the hands for any purpose but that of steering, and Jacob, when left to himself, would overtire himself by his diligence in working it up and down the level stretch of road in front of the cottage. The important point of diet was one that was not neglected at this time. Hester fed her patient with meat and strengthening foods, backed by an abundant supply of milk.

At the end of a year Jacob could walk in some fashion with the help of two sticks, but it was a very travesty of human ambulation. The unpractised muscles of the foot, the imperfect control of the thigh muscles, contracted tendons, the failure to co-ordinate the whole, all militated against that attainment of poise necessary to the maintenance of the upright position. Jacob tumbled rather than walked along, his body bent forward, his wobbly legs never straightened, swaying dangerously every time his sticks were lifted in order to make advance.

It came to Hester one day after watching the boy's maimed

efforts that she had reached the limits of her capacity. Something she had done for this body of his, but its improvement beyond the point attained, was outside the scope of her powers. She understood that she must call in a more expert authority, for she was determined that Jacob should not only walk, but should walk as other men. With this object in view she took the advice, as a preliminary measure, of the chief surgeon of the Infirmary at Pelsworthy, the nearest town, a man of much discrimination, who, after a searching examination of Jacob, opined that the case might be permanently cured, and advised her to take the patient to Sir Anthony Broadstone of the Orthopædic Hospital in London. As a result of the consultation with this authority, Jacob had to undergo various operations that kept him and Hester in London for many weeks, and made severe demands on Hester's savings. Thereafter Jacob was furnished with expensive instruments designed to keep his legs straight laterally, and to prevent the tendons from again contracting, and further he was prescribed a new and very elaborate set of exercises that were first learned in a medical gymnasium off Oxford Street, and afterwards practised diligently in the cottage by means of a complete set of apparatus especially purchased for their performance; Hester as usual, supervising and enforcing that thoroughness and attention to detail which commands success in all intricate and involved operations.

For two years after the cutting of his tendons—that is, until he was seventeen—Jacob was compelled to wear steel splints, and to walk with crutches. During these years he had to develop his leg muscles for two hours—divided into four exercises of half an hour each—every day, and, in addition, to practise walking exercises with the help of crutches or sticks, designed to instruct him in the proper usage of his limbs, and to familiarize him with that difficult art of balancing, an art so easily acquired in babyhood, but so difficult when neglected for the first fifteen years of life.

At seventeen he walked without splints, and with the help of one stick. His shoulders, arms, chest, and trunk were, even at this age, finely developed, but his legs were noticeably

thin and weak, and too short for the length of his body. He had trouble, too, at times with his joints, hips, knees, and ankles : for disuse of functions often brings an even greater penalty than their misuse. These troubles, however, tended to diminish as he grew older, though he was never able to walk long distances or to stand for any length of time without considerable fatigue and some revival of those pains in his joints.

Jacob was always in some sense a lame man, his muscles refused to be developed beyond a certain point, and, as a consequence, you saw when he entered a room, that there was something wrong with his walk, something that made women feel sorry for him.

He always had some look of the martyr in his face, he was naturally pale, his features were finely cut, rather ascetic, and those gentle, expressive eyes of his seemed to call for sympathy. But he is not to be pitied, he does not even deserve sympathy. His lameness was no drawback to him, it did not hamper him in the life he led, his pallor was due not to ill-health but to the texture of his skin, that look of suffering was the result of his childhood's experience, it did not express his thought, his real feeling ; it was no indication of mental or physical trouble.

3.

It becomes necessary to finish this account of the earlier years of Jacob Stahl, by making some reference to the settlement of his financial position and that of his brother.

Hermann, after his wife's death, began to degenerate very rapidly. His bent had always been in that direction, and now the last restraint was removed ; however feeble the check may have been, it had always exercised some influence on the inhibition of his natural tendencies.

Eric was sent to the College as a boarder ; his holidays were spent with his aunt and younger brother at Ashby Sutton. Hermann thus freed from all domestic responsibilities, sold the remainder of the lease of his Camberwell house—he did not lose by the transaction—and lived entirely in commercial

hotels, a mode of life to which he was well accustomed, and one that admirably suited his temperament. He had saved money,—his income for the past fifteen years had never fallen below £800,—but he still stuck to his work, not because he liked it, but because he would have been miserable if his savings had not been accumulating.

But at the end of six months his excesses in a certain direction were suddenly interrupted. Hermann had to undergo a serious operation, and was ill for many weeks. When he returned to business, he found his one source of excitement and interest taken from him, and life soon became unendurable without a substitute. This substitute he found in alcohol, and submitting himself feebly to his new master, he drank himself to death in eighteen months.

During the last year of his life he gave up his business entirely, for the drug seemed to develop his latent sluggishness of disposition, and his money-grubbing propensities were afterwards exhibited only in small acts of meanness and cheating. If he had lived a few more years it is probable that he would have dissipated entirely the capital he had saved, for the desire for alcohol soon overpowered any other spring of action, and drove him to expenditure that horrified him in his rare moments of sobriety.

At the end of it all, however, he bequeathed something short of £5,000 to his sons, £500 went to Eric, for the completion of his education—Eric was then seventeen and had won an open scholarship at Caius, which he afterwards bettered by an exhibition at Trinity—the remainder to Jacob. There was a justice in this act that must be entered to Hermann's credit, for Eric had been his favourite son. Hermann had a dislike for the physically unfit that he could not overcome. This legacy of Jacob's, after paying duty and settling his father's affairs, was invested in "trustee" stock, and brought him in an income of just over £120 a year, but the capital was entirely at his own command, although it was managed by Hester so long as Jacob remained in her charge.

One word as to Eric at this point of his history. We find him, despite his self-confidence, rather resentful of his father's

will, for he knew the value of money, and had the capacity to use it to advantage. This resentment of his made itself apparent during the Christmas holidays spent at Ashby Sutton, the first holiday after Hermann's death. The two brothers had little in common, but this inheritance served to thrust them even further apart. Eric bullied Jacob intellectually at this time, continually cross-examining him as to his scholastic attainments, and making a jest of his ignorance. Jacob resented this intensely, for he had begun to show a pedantic vanity, airing his scraps of knowledge for the benefit of Hester, and thoroughly appreciating the meed of her admiration. As a consequence the household was divided and uneasy, and it was a relief to Hester and Jacob when Eric returned to school at the end of January. The money was a passing influence, the breach between the brothers was, fundamentally, one of temperament.

CHAPTER V

THE CHOICE OF A PROFESSION

1.

"WHY not an architect, James?" remarked Eric. The name comes by a natural process, thus, Jacob—Jacobus—James; a sequence suggested as a form of facetiousness by Eric, who occasionally used the complete expression.

The question arose from a discussion as to the choice of a profession for Jacob, a problem that so far had failed to yield any solution.

Both Hester and the rector saw in Jacob an ideal curate, and their influence had been mildly exerted to create in him an aspiration for the taking of Holy Orders, but Jacob had no desire to assume the office of a priest. He had a full share of obstinacy if he lacked determination—his powers of resistance were greater than his capacity for initiative.

In this matter of entering the Church, Jacob's real objection

lay in the desire for freedom. Although but dimly conscious of this himself, he feared the obligations of a perpetual duty, a conception of the demands of the priesthood that haunted his imagination. He had before him the example of Peter Fearon, a man perpetually tormented by conscience for not living up to his own standard, and Jacob felt that his own standard must needs be an even higher one than Fearon's. Jacob had strong religious tendencies at this time, but they were manifested as a condition of mind rather than as a standard of morals, they were emotional rather than practical. Thus he glorified the duties of the priest, but feared to face the practice.

The participants in the present discussion were Jacob, Hester, and Eric, who was spending the latter half of his second long vacation with his aunt and brother at Ashby Sutton.

"An architect?" repeated Hester. "Wouldn't that mean he would have to go up ladders and walk about scaffoldings?"

Jacob, according to his usual practice, was thinking out the proposition by the application of his own mind, without regard to experience or previous knowledge.

"I don't believe," he continued, disregarding Hester's objections, "that I could possibly design a house. I haven't the least idea how to do it."

"Well, do you suppose anyone—with the remarkable exception of Martin Chuzzlewit—ever did or could design a house or any other complicated affair without having studied the principles?" asked Eric with a sneer.

"I suppose there are rules you would learn," said Jacob, still analyzing, "but I haven't the least gift for building things like houses in my mind, the detail worries me."

"You're very handy with your pencil," interpolated Hester.

"Have you got a gift for doing anything with your mind?" asked Eric.

Jacob paused, Eric's bullying superiority always crushed and depressed him.

"Oh! I don't know," was his answer to his brother's question. "You never think I can do anything. You're worse than ever now you're at College."

"One doesn't say 'at College,'" remarked Eric casually; "you're very provincial, James."

"Well, what *do* you say?"

"The whole purport of the sentence was rather childish," returned Eric, "but the expression 'at College' is horrible in any connection. You might say 'at Trinity' or even 'at Cambridge,' if you want to be colloquial."

Jacob was continually being dropped on by Eric for such faults of speech as this and, if he resented the manner of the correction at the time, he did not forget the lesson. It took time to learn avoidance of stilted and provincial phrases, but he was imitative in these things, and had, moreover, an instinct for adopting the right forms of speech. Thanks to Fearon and Eric, he had no accent.

"Oh! never mind that!" broke in Hester. "What about architecture as a profession? We've never thought about it before."

"Well, what of the scaffold and ladder difficulty?" asked Eric. "I hadn't thought of that."

"That's no difficulty," said Jacob, who had a conceit of his own agility. "I'm all right so long as I can get my hands on to anything. I don't know that architecture's such a bad idea. How do you begin?"

"Get articulated to an architect, I suppose," suggested Eric.

"There's Mr. Baker at Pelsworthy," said Hester; "he's quite in a big way, I believe. We might ask him."

As a result of this discussion Mr. Baker was consulted.

2.

Mr. Henry Baker was a short, stout man, with an intellectual head, and a fussy manner that covered a nervousness he had never been able to conquer. After an exchange of letters, there was an interview between him, Hester, and Jacob, followed in due time by the signing of articles, an operation that conferred upon Jacob all the privileges appertaining to the use of Mr. Baker's office, and to the study and imitation of Mr. Baker's methods, for which benefit Hester

as Jacob's guardian was content to pay an immediate premium of £50, and to hold herself responsible in two further sums of £25 each, to be paid at intervals of twelve months. And thus Jacob was formally indentured for a term of three years.

It was rather a fascinating office this of Baker's in the precincts at Pelsworthy, full of relics garnered in church restorations—poppyheads from old pews, carved stone bosses, crockets, finials and stops; lengths of string-courses and hood-moulds; fragments of tracery in stone and wood, one or two brasses, and a heterogeneous collection of other Gothic, ecclesiastical remnants were fixed upon the walls, in place of the usual perspectives of work executed, or the uninformative drawings of past pupils. At one end of the outer office a complete stone sedilia and piscina had been erected, taken intact from the ruined chancel of a neighbouring church that had been awaiting restoration for the past twenty-five years.

Jacob's first task on entering upon his duties was to make a measured drawing of the piscina, a work consecrated by long established usage as the inevitable preliminary step in the instruction of Mr. Baker's pupils. Jacob was nervous and shy, regardful of the eye of George Bennetts, a square, dark young man who was paid a salary of £2 a week to conduct the affairs of the office, keep the books, go over buildings, make the greater number of the working drawings, copy specifications, and, when there were no pupils, take tracings. A steady plodding young man this Bennetts, who was even more shy of Jacob than Jacob was of him.

As a sample of the kind of drawing he should aspire to make, Jacob was shown the achievement of the brilliant Mr. Bradley, a former pupil, who passed his A.R.I.B.A. examination whilst still in his articles, and was now earning £3 a week in the office of a London architect. Jacob was allowed to retain this drawing of Mr. Bradley's as a guide—but lest he should be tempted to take his measurements therefrom by means of 'dividers,' instead of from the solid by means of tape and foot-rule, he was advised to make his own drawing to a different scale.

Jacob was very quick to apprehend the subtleties of geo-

metrical drawing, and the enthusiastic interest he displayed in the representation of a 'dog-tooth' enrichment, earned for him the commendation of Mr. Baker.

"Hm! Come! Very good," said Baker. "Eh? not half bad, for a first attempt. Eh? Mr. Bennetts? Yes, yes, very quick to get the idea."

Bennetts morosely pointed out some dozen or so mistakes in Jacob's drawing; morosely because this was his cover for nervousness as fussiness was that for Mr. Baker's. His criticism, too, was not due to any ill-humour or a hypercritical spirit, but to a conscientious desire to help and instruct the new pupil.

Jacob grew gloomy at the alteration involved in the rectification of his mistakes, and had to learn that the making of his first measured drawing was not to be achieved without toil and application. It must be confessed that he grew tired before the drawing was completed, and was not sorry when a rush of work induced Mr. Baker to set him the new task of tracing, a task that he learned to perform with enough efficiency in two days, to allow of his work being used for office purposes. When he returned to his first drawing after a three weeks' interval, he decided to begin it all over again, in order that he might make it without a single mistake. But this second drawing was also consigned later to the scrap-heap, and it was not until Jacob had been in the office some eight months that his first work was inked in and finished up.

Even so, it did not please him, and he finally entered his determination to make another at some future time, that should utterly eclipse the work of Mr. Bradley.

3.

The period of pupilage does not furnish any incident of real importance, but the tendencies that Jacob has already exhibited show signs of becoming matured. As an example it may be noticed that he wasted more time in Mr. Baker's office than he did under the tutelage of Fearon. To the solemn Bennetts, Jacob was by way of being a revelation, a

type of reckless daring, but Bennetts came of a solid, God-fearing family, and consequently his opinion is not without prejudice.

To him, the manufacture of a chess-board for office use, whilst Mr. Baker was absent on one of his frequent visits to measure the dilapidations in some recently vacated rectory, was a revolutionary act daring the wrath of small gods who visit neglect of discipline with merited punishments, so Bennetts regarded Jacob with something of awed admiration, even as he administered sarcastic rebukes thus,

"I suppose you're not in a hurry to finish that tracing? It's got to go off to-night or to-morrow."

Jacob was very busy blacking the alternate squares.

"If you don't finish it, I shall have to stop and do it."

"All right—I'll finish it in half a tick, don't worry. I'll go on with it as soon as I've done this. I've got to leave this then, till it's dry."

The tracing was eventually finished in time for post, but showed signs of imperfect and hurried workmanship that was unworthy of the office standard, as Bennetts did not fail to point out.

Jacob regretfully criticizing the finished chess-board, advised his fellow worker that he was a "fearful grouser" and there admonition ceased. The chess-board was to be the best of its kind produced by any amateur in office hours, but the hinge had not had sufficient consideration and was a failure, as the board would only shut up quite flat when the working side was folded outwards. It may be put in the same class of production as the drawing of the piscina—not quite up to the contemplated standard.

By degrees Jacob's influence and example effected a broadening of Bennetts' outlook, displayed not only in a greater leniency towards this wayward pupil, but even in occasional acts of confederacy. For instance he allowed Jacob to initiate him into the subtleties of chess in surreptitious moments, and developed a remarkable capacity for that game. But Bennetts was of the type that adventures wisely. He had a conscience that could not be tricked by sophistry, and

he noted all time spent in those dissipations with Jacob, and made it up later by staying after hours in the office, or by taking work home.

In one other way did Jacob astonish and inform Bennette, though a year's companionship was necessary before sufficient confidence had been established to allow Jacob to express the budding flower of his imagination. Jacob was then nineteen and his burgeoning was something premature, maybe, but it gave promise of future efflorescence.

BOOK II
MADELINE

CHAPTER VI

THE BURGEONING

1.

It was the outline of his very first love-affair that Jacob confided—an imperfect outline, and not entirely a true one. The difference was caused by a wish to convey the fine romantic atmosphere surrounding the affair in Jacob's mind, and this one fact hardly seemed likely to reproduce the glamour that had exalted the original incident. The story may be told in his own words, making note of his one deliberate inaccuracy.

"I say, Bennetts!"

Bennetts flashed a side glance at Jacob, and noticed that his elbows were on his drawing-board, and that he was staring intently at the lower sash of the windows in front of him. No doubt he would have stared out into the street beyond, but Mr. Baker had had the lower sashes glazed with obscured glass to hide the distractions of the thoroughfare. Mr. Baker knew well that when there was work to be done, the temptation to look out of the window was quite irresistible alike to pupils or paid assistants.

"I say, Bennetts!" repeated Jacob.

Bennetts grunted and continued to make progress with his drawing. Mr. Baker had departed for a distant rectory half an hour before, and Bennetts, though he might waste a little time later, had no intention of beginning too early.

"I say, Bennetts," said Jacob for the third time, "have you ever been engaged?"

"No!" The monosyllable was as emphatic and whole-hearted a denial as anyone could wish.

"Why not?"

"Why don't you get on with your work?"

"That's all right! Why haven't you?"

Bennetts sniffed disdainfully. "Why haven't you ever been married?"

"Don't be an ass! Haven't you ever seen a girl you wanted to marry?"

"No!"

Bennetts had a great fear of young women. On the few occasions that had found him an unwilling companion to one of the sex, though only for a few minutes, he had suffered untold torture. His shyness in such circumstances made him a determined misogynist.

"Do you mean to say you've never been in love?" urged Jacob, but Bennetts refused to give him either encouragement or confidence, so he resumed work for the time, but being full of his subject, returned to it when he and his companion were having a picnic lunch in the office. A special entertainment, this, that had become a feature of the day in the absence of Mr. Baker.

"It seems funny," said Jacob, eating a dry and floury scone, and making grunting pauses in his efforts to retain his hold on the conversation whilst chomping over the disposition of his powdery food, "funny you shouldn't ever have seen any girl—you know, any girl, I mean, that seemed different to other girls, or women. You're sure to; sooner or later."

Bennetts regarded him with a sceptical stare, but only vouchsafed a monosyllable. "Why?"

"Everyone does sooner or later."

"Meaning to say . . .?"

Jacob blushed, but accepted the encouragement and, losing self-consciousness as he continued, bore down his unsympathetic listener.

"There was a sort of fate about it," he began. "I was

thinking about—things of that sort, and then I saw her, all of a sudden."

"Oh! did you propose to her on the spot?" Bennetts, always self-conscious, was constrained to become facetious.

"Don't be a silly ass," returned Jacob. "Why can't you be serious, sometimes—I'm not making this up, I want to tell you about it, only how can I, if you make idiotic remarks? They're not funny."

"Sorry," replied Bennetts, with a markedly ironical inflection, "I didn't know it was so serious."

"I think it must have been Sir Anthony Felmersdale's daughter. They've been away in Italy for ever so long—I've never seen any of them before, but we heard they were coming back last week."

"Bit hopeless, isn't it?" put in Bennetts with a grin. Jacob resented this insinuation, but passed it by lightly enough.

"Oh! well," he went on, "I haven't got as far as that yet, I haven't even spoken to her—in fact, I've only just seen her once—yesterday."

"How old is she?" Bennetts would not have been surprised to learn that the lady was of mature age.

"Oh! I don't know. She's, she's quite young—I shouldn't think more than sixteen—or seventeen."

This was his deliberate misstatement. Jacob had guessed Sir Anthony's eldest daughter to be not more than thirteen, as a matter of fact she was a year older.

"Bit young, isn't she?" Bennetts was of opinion that this affair need not be taken seriously, even with Jacob's exaggeration, which he did not guess at.

Jacob blushed again, this time at his own mendacity, more than ever resolved that the truth must never escape him. He couldn't face ridicule on such a subject. To avert it he made successful appeal to the snobbery, inevitable in the provincial mind, in which the tradition of the thrall is still so near the surface.

"Do you know anything about the Felmersdales?" he asked.

"Not much," returned Bennetts, "Sir Anthony has been away a lot. Mr. Baker has never done any work there."

"He's a baronet, isn't he?"

Bennetts nodded and the conversation languished. A return to the original theme had become difficult.

2.

The scene, which Jacob had feared to describe, had not been without a certain atmosphere of romance, despite the tender years of Miss Felmersdale.

Jacob had wandered over to the park fence of Elmoval, and, tired by his mile walk, as yet the limit for a single effort, had climbed the ladder stile and perched himself on the top bar, from whence he looked down through an avenue of young green that pressed upon the narrow path leading through the plantation to the open land beyond. His mind had been wandering in doubtful ways. Already he had begun to speculate on the mysteries and attractions of women. There had been a confectioner's assistant at Pelsworthy for whom he had cultivated a shy and distant admiration, until, venturing into the shop, he had discovered serious defects in her front teeth. This and her accent had disillusioned him. The ideal refused to expand, despite careful encouragement. The memory of front teeth that had decayed into strange pointed shapes—possibly by over-indulgence in her own wares—was too insistent, and the conception of other teeth that did not grow, and that might discover a foundation of an unnaturally red composition, was even more repulsive to him. For a few days he had continued to take occasional glances at the undoubtedly pretty profile that could be glimpsed between the big glass jars of unhealthy-looking sweets that stood in solemn and uniform rows in the window; but this soon palled, and he was seeking another, and more perfect ideal, conceived in his own mind as a refined and completed version of the young lady confectioner.

The vision that came to him was of a different order.

A girl of fourteen, flushed with running, her great mane of red-brown hair flying loose over a white summer frock, that would seem by its scantiness to have been a relic of the

previous year ; hatless, breathless, but radiating a glory of eager, petulant, intoxicating youth and vigour, she came down the narrow path, her long legs taking leaping strides, till she drew up within two yards of Jacob, and stopped at last to regard him with an insolent stare.

Jacob was oppressed by a sudden shyness, uncertain whether speech was expected of him, in any case unable to find words. So he sat silently, taking in a picture of two rather contemptuous eyes of a warm hazel brown that matched very nearly the colour of that glowing tangle of loose hair. Later he remembered other items, subconsciously noted during that moment of tensity which held them, locked as it were, in mutual regard. Such items as a white skin, somewhat freckled across the bridge of a nose that was short, straight and daintily finished as to the springing of the nostrils ; a full red mouth, also daintily shaped, and now slightly open to admit of rapid breathing ; teeth that were a very model for all confectioner's young ladies. But above all he carried away an impression of personality, of something wilful, proud, commanding, yet essentially feminine, a picture of a girl-woman who might be his tyrant, for whom he would sacrifice anything, everything.

All this came later, even the memory of facial detail, when Jacob had had time to exercise his power of imagination and idealization. For now the nymph, held for no more than a brief second by Jacob's stare, broke away from the hold of his eyes, and, turning impatiently with a shrug of childish shoulders and a distinctly uttered " Oh ! quelle bêtise," retreated in the manner of her coming.

And " How silly ! " echoed Jacob in English, as he watched eagerly his flying nymph. Then redundantly he blamed himself for being an ass, an idiot, a mooning, tongue-tied, foolish calf that could not utter so much as a foolish bleat to detain even for an instant this warm, living impersonation of all beauty. As he turned reluctant footsteps back to Ashby Sutton, he carried with him wonderful material for a new and splendid ideal of femininity, albeit juvenescent, but then he was only nineteen, and in three years. . . .

3.

From this desire he wove the fabric of a hundred dreams, and sought convincing detail to give reality. She had been disdainful, and he pictured conditions that should change her disdain to admiration. He became a hero in a hundred ways, strong, triumphant, elevated to an admirable glory that made him the envy of men and the desire of women. Then, from his height, he would stretch a hand to his vision of loveliness and tell her that great and wonderful though he was, he was her very slave, a creature fain to obey her smallest word. Or, wandering in a lower plane, he created a simple danger, some tinker tramp, menacing this frail, female thing with horrid threat of kidnapping or holding to ransom, till Jacob, the hero, outwits or overpowers him—the victory is intellectual or physical according to the mood—and thereafter throws himself at the dainty feet of the thirteen-year-old maiden (his estimate) to be again her slave and abject lover till such time as . . . In three years. . . .

But how could Jacob say these things to Bennetts the scoffer, Bennetts the unimaginative misogynist who gloried only in completed work of the most trivial kind—such as a drawing kept clean, a neat tracing, or some minor problem of building construction, successfully grappled with ?

Nor dared he confide in Aunt Hester, inasmuch as he realized by a precocious instinct that Aunt Hester, however sweet and kind she might be, would have an inclination to repress his dreaming in this direction. No, he saw the impossibility of any confidant ; there could be but one, and she was hopelessly far above him, the daughter of a titled landowner, and even as a child proud ; indignant at his intrusion on her father's estate. So Jacob dreamed, and wandered as often as might be to the ladder stile in the park fence of Elmoor, and was unrewarded by any further glimpse of his ideal. Was she not far removed from him ? Picture to yourself that at thirteen she thought in French. What a world separated her from the confectioner's assistant. How great the difference between Miss Brown's " How silly " and this vision with her " Quelle bêtise."

4.

This precocious blossoming of Jacob's was a false spring ; an immature budding followed by a "blackthorn winter" that lasted two years. During this time of retarded growth in one direction, he made some progress in others. He read much modern fiction from a Pelsworthy circulating library, a few of the English classics, an occasional volume of essays on literature that inspired him with the wish to write, and much nondescript, worthless stuff that he had hard work to forget later. His attempts at writing were feeble and spasmodic, though they pleased him at the time, and were the subject of stimulating praise by Aunt Hester. To her, Jacob confided his desire to become a great novelist, but his plot—an involved, machine-made affair—refused to develop on any but the most conventional lines, and he found the effort of concentration necessary to describe the actions of his unrealized puppets, distasteful and wearying. The writing of this novel never passed the stage of an attempted first chapter, the whole of which was entirely irrelevant. This attempt gave him some pleasure in the doing and diverted his mind to the thought of becoming an essayist. He was even encouraged in the ambition by Eric, who condescended to read the effort on the occasion of one of his visits to Ashby Sutton, and remarked that Jacob "had rather an original style." For two days after this criticism, Jacob racked his brains for a subject, but the things he knew did not seem worth recording, and he was not then equal to the task of writing an essay on a subject of which he knew practically nothing. So his literary ambitions waned after a time, and his progress in Mr. Baker's office waxed in proportion, and Aunt Hester was no longer perplexed by Jacob's demand to suggest something for him to write about.

When the subject came to him, it was not material for an essay but for a poem.

Eric was down for a few days' holiday ; a glorious Eric with a dark moustache, passed safely into the Home Civil, a man with an income and a position, a man who was saving money.

To Jacob he was a paralyzing representative of learning, a scholar who had the material for a hundred essays at his command, who could quote Lessing and Fichte and read them in the original, and who had, indeed, written an article on the Ethics of Criticism which had been accepted by one of the Reviews. The proximity of so much scholarship depressed and disheartened Jacob, made him feel the worthlessness of his own literary ambitions, made him more resolved than ever to stick to architecture. And even here Eric's reading had been more thorough than his own, if it were a question of some classic remnant, such as the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli for instance. But in such a vulgar matter as building construction, Jacob's office training gave him an opportunity to display some superiority, an opportunity he used to the best advantage; for his brother had an inquisitive mind, listened to Jacob's discourses on the framing of a double hung sash frame with interest, and occasionally put questions that necessitated reference to office authorities.

It was a cold day in early June that brought new experience to Jacob. The occasion was a cricket match between Ashby Sutton and a neighbouring village. Eric had volunteered his services on behalf of Ashby Sutton, and Jacob and Aunt Hester had accompanied him as spectators. The match was played in a great rough field, known locally as Sharpe's Ease. Sharpe, it may be noted, was merely a local carpenter, but as the Ease (probably a corruption of Easement), in which he had no proprietary rights, adjoined his yard, and could be only entered therefrom from the village side, it had been named after him. The accommodation for spectators was as primitive as the pitch, the latter being a roughly shorn and incompletely rolled area some thirty yards square, while the seating consisted of two long forms, unstable and not to be sat upon at their extremities unless properly weighted with other occupants, lest they should rear suddenly to the perpendicular and slide the unwary sitter to grass.

Aunt Hester, with motherly consideration, had brought a rug, and insisted on wrapping it round the lower half of a slightly peevish Jacob, resentful of coddling. These two had

the whole seating accommodation to themselves, for the opposing team, who had won the toss and taken first innings, as a matter of course, preferred the grass, and avoided the neighbourhood of the uncertain forms; and the partisans of Ashby Sutton, some dozen villagers, had taken up positions close at hand, ready for counter-acclamations and encouragement to their own team. Tent, pavilion or boundary there was none, indeed a man might have run twenty for a single hit, if he could have hit hard enough. A cold, depressing stretch of pasturage it seemed to Jacob, and he could have wished the dulness relieved by the intrusion of the cattle which had been driven into a remote corner of the wilderness, but were, apparently, either lacking in curiosity or accustomed to the vagaries of the strange two-legged race.

Of the Ashby Sutton team only two were in flannels, Eric and a red-haired youth of seventeen or so, a stranger about whom Aunt Hester was unable to afford any information.

It was very dull. Jacob was waiting patiently to see Eric go in, his bowling on that uncertain pitch had not been successful, and the fielding was of the feeblest. Who could arouse any enthusiasm for the run-getting of the opposition, some lout swiping haphazard at a "good length ball"? Though his eye must have been true enough, for the lout was making many runs.

5.

Four o'clock brought school-children and preparations for tea, a long trestle-table, large white metal urns, a clothes-basket full of loaves and cakes, and more unstable forms. These things, both preparations and school-children, were a mild diversion, but Aunt Hester was no longer present to receive Jacob's criticisms. She had seen a widow protégée assisting in the tea-making, and had gone to make inquiries in regard to some domestic detail of laundry, and Jacob looked round in search of her, fretfully anxious for her return.

His eye was caught by a vision of white dresses, seen dimly through the perspective of shed and piled timber afforded by Sharpe's yard. "Village girls," was his inward comment,

uttered in the spirit of "unberufen," an anticipation of disappointment, for he had not forgotten his fairy of Elmoor and still looked for her—on occasion; still made her the heroine of dreams at increasingly long intervals.

This time he did not look in vain. No village girl ever came with that quick impatient stride, nor carried her hat, swinging it recklessly by the brim—instead of wearing it according to the usual convention. Nor had any village girl such a wild mane of glorious red-brown hair; unrestrainable, burning, wilful, petulant hair. It was by that he knew her as she came through the little gate from the yard, and made straight for the form on which he was sitting. The small dark girl, also dressed in white, who was with her, was a negligible detail.

But when Jacob saw the subject of his dreams actually approaching him, no longer a dream but a glowing, beautiful young woman of sixteen, he was stricken with a horrible nervousness that might have disgraced the misogynical Bennetts. His heart began to beat wildly; if any escape had offered he would have accepted it, but he was afraid to exhibit himself walking alone, so noticeable an object in that wilderness of cattle-shorn, mole-mined field. So he sat still, very still, bending an absorbed gaze on the reckless hitting of Ashby Sutton's visitors, and the materialized day-dream passed him without a glance, turned, stared for a moment at the rapidly progressing cricket match, and then sat down within a foot of him. The dark sister followed, more precise, her very manner of sitting a demure rebuke to that vital, buoyant creature beside her.

Jacob remained frozen to his seat, afraid to make the least movement; his eyes were glued on the progress of the uninteresting match—but he was deliciously conscious of the presence of this new, invigorating personality. He was conscious of her movements, the impatient fanning of her big straw hat—she had undoubtedly been running—of the sweet scent of a clean linen dress, of an atmosphere of girlish freshness. But his dreams wanted remodelling—she was two years older, nearly a woman, and, alas! more unapproachable

than ever. "Quelle bêtise," rang in his mind, but when speech came from his neighbour, it was English of the English.

"They're in."

"How do you know?" from the negligible sister.

"Can't you see Billy fielding over there? Who's the other man in flannels? He doesn't look like a villager."

An opportunity this, for Jacob, but he dared not venture and the sister replied with an uninterested shake of her head, and silence fell again.

Jacob became occupied with a jealousy of Eric, thus singled out for attention, but was not Eric always blessed, a paragon stalking through life with glorious potentialities. . . . This line of thought was interrupted by another observation from his neighbour.

"What an awful pull! I wish they'd get out—I want to see Billy go in."

Billy! was he a brother? He had red hair, but of quite another shade to that of the divinity. Billy's hair was red, distinctly, disgustingly red, while hers was not red at all. Jacob toyed for a moment with the attempt to find adequate description, but "autumn leaves," the only simile that came to him, was rejected and he returned to pondering on Billy's relationship.

"Oh, good! There's one of them out, anyway."

A refined voice, though her phraseology was of the school-room. Jacob fell to wishing that she could hear his voice, that she might know that he, too, was not a villager or a farmer's son. He wished he could edge away a little further in order to see her better, but he was afraid such an action might be misconstrued. As a matter of fact she had hardly noticed his presence, but Jacob was thinking so much of her that it seemed hardly possible she should not be thinking at all of him.

This desire of Jacob's to make his voice heard, to attract attention, was partly the outcome of inward dissension. He had been inclined to argue himself out of the sphere of dream-land, beautifully commendable but unreal. He was fighting the tendency to think things instead of doing them, as he

phrased it, and he struggled desperately to overcome a shyness, for which he found ready excuse in physical disability, disability to shine by deeds of athletic prowess ; how glorious a thing it would be to bowl that slogging anti-Ashby-Suttonite, for instance. He could not forbear lingering over the idea for a few moments.

His first effort at speech was a painful failure, an attempt—it was no more—to say “ Well fielded ” when Eric succeeded in correctly anticipating the erratic leaping of a bumping ball. The sound of his own voice frightened him, he choked in the middle, and, imagining that he must be the object of amused contempt, suddenly became the victim of a hard cough. He persisted in the cough, even after his furious blushes had subsided ; he wished to demonstrate unmistakably that it was a genuine affliction. Then he became angry with himself, and becoming unspeakably brave, deliberately moved a few inches further from the girl beside him, and turning, looked full at her. She was, apparently, quite unconscious of his regard, absorbed in the play of the match, but Jacob could not watch her even from the vantage of the unseen. It seemed to him an act of profanation to stare at that soft, sun-warmed cheek, those brown eyes, the firm, hot curve of the red mouth. She was to him a thing too wonderfully beautiful to be looked at, save with the deepest reverence, a separate creation far removed from the ordinary world of commonplace humanity—and yet, if she could but be conscious of his homage, his almost craven worship.

But the end came before opportunity offered.

“ Oh, good, Billy’s going on.” The ejaculation was followed by a cheer and “ Oh, well bowled, Billy,” as that hero sent down, first ball, a full-pitch that spreadeagled the defender’s wicket. In a fine glory of excitement at Felmersdale prowess, the two girls rose suddenly, and Jacob was nearly precipitated to grass. Swinging a moment on the short end of a balanced see-saw he saved himself only by an undignified and hurried struggle to find his feet, legs and hands being enveloped in the rug ; the hands were in his pockets partly because of the cold—though the mere sight

of Miss Felmersdale should have warmed him—chiefly, perhaps, to find a refuge for them. Jacob through inexperience was backward in the minutiae of self-assurance; at twenty-one he retained memories of an awkwardness, excusable only at sixteen. Even this slight mishap depressed him.

6.

The tea which followed was a failure from his point of view. There was an uncomfortable five minutes before he found a place at the table. Eric was discussing policy with the chief batting hope of Ashby Sutton; Aunt Hester, the ever helpful, had been appointed organizer-in-chief of the preparations, and Jacob, burdened with an ill-folded rug, uncomfortably conscious of an imagined conspicuousness, an altogether unheroic figure, stood silent and solitary, nervously stealing an occasional glance at a restless white figure that spoke condescendingly to a few favoured villagers, and then displayed a familiarity with the horrible red-haired Billy that plunged the lonely watcher into an abyss of misery. Never had he seen quite so beastly and contemptible a youth as this one with the red hair.

When at last he was installed on Aunt Hester's right hand at the top of the table, and was able to make some show of importance by assisting in the replenishment and disposal of ill-matched cups of coffee-coloured tea, Jacob still remained disconsolate. The boy, Billy, was noisy, joking lightly with confused rustics, and his rallyings on missed catches or evaded hits, made him the centre of admiration. Even she, the wonderful one, laughed and encouraged this vulgarian, and Jacob wondered morbidly whether this were the type admired of women. In his own mind he found delight in the contrast between himself and the coarseness of a youth capable of such horse-play as the throwing of cake across the table, but what did he know of the feminine mind? He pictured it gentle, tender, delicate, but might it not by virtue of these very attributes admire the strong, the virile?

Inquiry of a great and garrulous Mrs. Smith who sat next

him and talked steadily as she ate, grunting when her mouth was too full for words and becoming slowly articulate as she prepared the way for a refilling, elicited the fact that "'Is name's Mister Kingdon, sir. 'E's been 'ere afore, I'm told, though not often in the village. Staying with Sir Hanthony, and Mrs. Cook, who does some of their washing, told me only two days back as some 'ankerchers she 'ad was marked Kingdon, which is where I got the name from. 'E's a nice, pleasant spoken young gentleman, ain't 'e, very free and open-like with heveryone ?"

Jacob in disgust turned again to Aunt Hester, vouching only a nod by way of reply, and the tea dragged on, a mere accompaniment to Mr. Kingdon's "free and open-like" joviality.

7.

Jacob had become hopeless, now. His mood was one of self-sacrifice, as the slighted lover—who had never so much as received a glance from his beloved—he saw himself condemned to a life of dreary celibacy. In furtherance of this project, he did not return to his form for quite half an hour after the match had begun again, and then only when he had at last divorced the useful Aunt Hester from the circumstance of tea and village inquiry.

Rain threatened, and he allowed himself once more to be wrapped in the odious rug, preferring this degradation to the ignominy of an argument with Aunt Hester which might have revealed too many intimacies to a certain lady within earshot.

The day finished with an encouragement and an insult. Billy had fallen somewhat from his pedestal. Disgraced by a paltry score of three, he had come, gloomy for the moment and out of temper, to explain to his admirers the exact cause of his dismissal, obviously a gross mischance; and Jacob, delighted at his downfall, listened to his excuses and hoped their patent disingenuity bore the same message of "silly brag" to the ladies of Felmersdale that he himself read so plainly. And then when every allowance had been asked

for, bad wicket, bad light, bad luck, and a dozen other bad things, Jacob heard a question put in a lower voice that gave him a sudden glow of happiness.

"Do you know who that is? Don't look round, silly, close to you, that boy with the blue eyes?"

It was she who asked the question. Then she was interested in him after all; she had noticed him.—But the answer was crushing, horrible, an answer Jacob never forgot.

"Oh! that! I don't know, I thought it was a woman."

Then came the rain that saved Ashby Sutton from defeat.

You picture Jacob that night killing Billy by horrible torture, but also you see him looking at himself in the glass, to satisfy himself as to the colour of his eyes. Were they unusually blue? And she had noticed them.

CHAPTER VII

ELMOVER

1.

THE family of Felmersdale had been established at Elmoever since the twelfth century, but the baronetcy dated only from the days of George III. They had been staunch Whigs every one, till after the Reform Bill, when old Sir Miles Felmersdale had found himself suddenly without a seat in the House, and had relinquished active politics. Since that time the family had fallen into a stertorous Conservatism that went no further than supporting the Tory candidate by personal encouragement and registering some half-a-dozen votes in his favour.

The present Baronet, Sir Anthony, was an apathetic man of fifty with a surly manner. He had been a rake in his youth and spent the accumulations that had awaited his majority,—his father had died when he was a boy of eleven. His mother was an Italian from Lombardy, and had taken her only son with her to Italy every winter so long as she had had control

of his movements. This accounted for the slight foreign accent, Sir Anthony still retained, noticeable in a slight trill of the "r" in certain words, and also accounted in part for something not truly English in his character. After ten years of foolishness, the usual riot of a young man with plenty of money and little brains, Sir Anthony had fallen in love with a girl of sixteen and had married her out of hand. She was the daughter of a lawyer's clerk, and Sir Anthony had scraped up an acquaintance with her in Hyde Park one Saturday afternoon. She had come to look at what she called the "grand folk" and had occupied the chair next to him. The courtship had been brief but urgent. The young Baronet was suffering reaction after a long bout of the special fatuities encouraged by the Gaiety ladies of that period, and he turned with relief to the innocence and freshness of the ingenuous child, and for the sake of these qualities overlooked her pronounced Cockney accent.

Sir Anthony certainly had the excuse that the lady of his choice was beautiful. She was a London type, with a complexion for which no better simile can be found than the hackneyed one of a peach, which conveys the idea both of colour and texture. She had been married in her parish church in Camden Town and after a few months in Italy had come to take up her position as Lady Felmersdale at Elmover, somewhat to the dismay of the county, who found the combination of Cockney manners and accent, and hair still dependent in a long plait, altogether opposed to their sense of fitness.

2.

After the birth of her first child, a son who died when he was a few days old, Lady Felmersdale, then a matron of seventeen, put up her hair and asserted her individuality. Her first conquest was the dowager, whom she drove out of England after two years' bickering; her second was Sir Anthony, who was reduced in the course of another two years to his proper position in the household, a position subordinate to the will of his wife.

There should have been a third conquest—the county ; but this was never achieved, hardly essayed. Lady Felmersdale was a vain woman, but she had neither the ability nor the patience to achieve social success. The county called, disapproved, and departed with contempt—the men pitying Felmersdale and excusing him, the women pitying without finding excuse. Nevertheless, if it had been boldly attacked and entertained, the county might have been won, but Felmersdale was indifferent, he hardly knew the people, he had never mixed with them, was not interested in them. His wife found herself in those early days too hopelessly at sea. She had no knowledge of the usages of these people. She would have been more at home in a London drawing-room than among these hard-riding women who talked nothing but hunting one half the time, and little else for the other half.

There is no need to dwell on the solecisms of young Lady Felmersdale, or her flounderings in a world where the glory of titles greater than her own did not excuse the absence of what she expected in the way of "drawing-room manners." The good-natured Flora March "had a try," as she said, "to help her on a bit," but Ethel Felmersdale was not the right type to be helped on. She had, despite her personal vanity, a gift of sturdy common sense and it helped her in this matter to realize the impossibility of ever becoming on terms of intimacy with the county. Nor would she be patronized by Flora March for whom she had a feeling akin to contempt, notwithstanding the fact that she was the daughter of a Marquis. So Lady Flora had to give her up as impossible, which she did promptly at the first rebuff, a rebuff in particularly bad taste, a suburban rudeness unforgivable in March circles.

There followed a long period of Continental wanderings, during which time Elmover saw little of its Lady and her husband. The eldest girl, Madeline, was born in Italy and favoured her paternal grandmother, the dowager. In her childhood Madeline was polyglot, speaking Italian, French, or English indifferently well, then Italian was dropped and forgotten, and though French sometimes came uppermost,

as on the occasion of her first meeting with Jacob by the Elmover ladder stile, English had gradually supplanted the other languages. But this familiarity with other forms of speech saved Madeline and her sister, who was two years younger, from any imitation of their mother's accent. Ethel Felmersdale soon reached the limit of her powers of self-education. Her ear was incapable of appreciating the difference in the vowel sound of such a word as "county" as pronounced by the native of Camden Town or spoken by Lady Flora March, nor was this the only crux, for Lady Felmersdale's pronunciation of her husband's name came perilously near to "Sir Anthony," and, curiously enough, the youngest of her three daughters, she came eight years after Madeline caught the same accent, though she, too, was born in Italy.

3.

It was not till Madeline was nearly seventeen that the Felmersdales with their family of three daughters came to live permanently at Elmover. By this time Ethel Felmersdale had developed a noticeable rotundity, though she kept her beauty and still studied it; no one ever saw her untidy. But there is one more confession to make—she had become a secret drinker.

As a vice it was of the mildest type. Two glasses of sherry and a little whisky, taken surreptitiously, was sufficient to make her maudlin and foolish. Her husband knew of her weakness, but welcoming the change of temper generally associated with these periodic outbursts, made little effort to control her mild excesses. Nevertheless, the fact formed another link in the chain of causes that drove him away from his own kind.

Madeline and her next sister, Nina, knew also, and made some tentative efforts to restrain their mother. Although standing less in awe of her furious temper than their father, they did not remonstrate openly, but tried to remain with her when they knew by plain evidences that her desire was towards the sideboard. It was Madeline who suffered most,

for Lady Felmersdale at her worst, on the happily rare occasions when she had gone beyond the limits of her capacity, had developed the qualities of a virago, and Sir Anthony being always absent at such times, a craven in hiding, Madeline, who knew no fear of her mother, had borne the brunt of a temper which had more than once found vent in blows.

Yet on the whole the household was not an unhappy one. Anthony Felmersdale was devoted to his three daughters and still admired his wife, rotundity, shrewishness, and evil habits notwithstanding. It is true that there were times when he regretted the society of his youth, and he had on occasion given way to brief outbreaks. But he had found subsequent submission to authority—the coarse, plain-spoken, strongly resentful authority of Lady Felmersdale—too high a price to pay, and now as he neared the respectable age of fifty, he had settled down to a careless, do-nothing life, chiefly occupied by farming and rabbit-shooting. The county looked down on him, not so much for having married a wife from Camden Town as for his general slackness in the matter of sport. A Felmersdale that didn't hunt! Waster, weak-kneed, poor creature, sloppy fool, spavined, were some of the adjectives and epithets that passed and were accepted as truly descriptive of Sir Anthony by the county. It was enough to make a man misanthrope to see him turn out on the Boxing Day meet at Elmover, an institution that was still upheld. A bad day for the hunt by reason of the Pelsworthy crowd that always put in an appearance, but still an institution.

4.

It was in the summer of their first real year at Elmover that Lady Felmersdale started the annual garden-party. It did not represent a vain attempt to capture society;—that was done with—ambition, if it had ever existed, merged into a contempt for the manners of Flora March and her kind, or, at least, so expressed by the lady of Elmover. Rather might the annual garden-party have been described as an act of condescending charity extended to neighbouring rectors,

their wives and families, and to certain selected households in Ashby Sutton, dependents in some kind on Elmover freeholds. How Hester Stahl and her nephew came to be included in the invitations is not quite certain. It may have been through Fearon, who was on visiting terms at Elmover and despised his richest parishioners as he himself was despised, but made an exception in favour of Madeline and Nina, both of whom he wished to prepare for confirmation—a wish that did not concern Sir Anthony and was opposed by his wife because Fearon had been the first to make the suggestion. But how the invitation came to be sent is not a matter of moment; others less worthy were also invited; indeed, certain rectors' wives who knew the county turned up their noses at the Elmover garden-party and declined all subsequent invitations, becoming more subjects for contempt added to the many in Lady Felmersdale's list.

To Jacob the invitation seemed to be sent direct from heaven. His heart bumped, stopped, and then raced like the engine of an unreliable motor, when the over-elaborate card was put before him by Aunt Hester, with the remark that we were "going up in the world."

Jacob temporized, intent on breakfast to hide the extraordinarily irregular workings of his heart, which he feared might become apparent to the keen observer.

"I wonder why they asked us?" was his comment.

"It's a big affair for tenants and people, I expect," explained Aunt Hester, who was not posted in Elmover affairs and knew nothing of county contempt.

"Oh! I see, I suppose so. You're an Elmover tenant, aren't you?"

Jacob was at once relieved and disappointed: relieved in that already a cold sickness of apprehension had beset him at the thought of meeting the "great ones of the earth"; disappointed in that he approved the honour of being asked so to meet them.

"I suppose we'd better go," remarked Aunt Hester, "not that I care much about it, I've become such an old country woman, but it will be a good thing for you to meet new people."

"I suppose I ought," returned Jacob. "If I'm ever to work up any sort of a private connection, get private work or anything, I suppose I ought to meet everybody I can."

"You might be made the Elmover architect," suggested Aunt Hester, always hopeful where Jacob was concerned.

Jacob took up the idea by refuting it, as was his way, anticipating contradiction.

"Oh! well, hardly, considering I'm not out of my articles yet," he said with simulated contempt. "Besides, they're sure to have some big pot, a regular expert on the place, who knows all about the house and things like that."

"Well, you never know," replied Aunt Hester, cheerfully, accepting her cue. "Who can tell what might happen?"

The fact of the invitation leaked out at Mr. Baker's office in the course of the next morning's work. Not to appear too snobbish Jacob laid great stress on its being a "tenants' affair," as he supposed, but when Bennetts amplified the supposition by suggesting that "they asked all sorts of people to things like that," Jacob hedged a little by drawing Bennetts' attention to the fact that the "tenants' affair" explanation was merely hypothesis. A hint, this, that he had had a kind intention in propounding it, a wish not to overwhelm a middle-class Bennetts by any brag of moving in high society.

"I suppose you expect to get appointed architect to the estate?" Thus Bennetts, who was careful not only of Jacob's instruction in affairs technical, but had an eye, also, to his training in matters of social intercourse. After three years' daily intimacy, Bennetts found an occasional tendency to bumptiousness in the artied pupil, which he felt called upon to suppress. It was his method of displaying affection.

"Oh! don't be an idiotic ass!" was Jacob's comment. Bennetts was really a little difficult at times. But Bennetts merely grinned and being gifted with a retentive memory made reference to a two-year-old conversation.

"Or marry the heiress?"

"Very likely!" Jacob also could make use of the weapon of satire, but he had to dive into a convenient desk and pro-

mote a long and hopeless search for a scale that was not there, in order to cover a blush that no straining of the jaw or resolute composition of his features could suppress. From ambush he elaborated his satire, talking to stop further suggestions from Bennetts.

"Or both. Why not both? You don't half realize the opportunities, I see endless possibilities. There's many a true word spoken in jest, you know. You're making a joke of it, being a funny ass by nature, but I'm deadly serious. . . ."

He ran on, still hunting for a non-existent scale, hoping to have diverted the conversation into safer channels by the time the burn had left the face. But Bennetts was malignant, envious perhaps.

"Well, you fell in love with her two years ago," he persisted without remorse, "met her in the park or something. How old did you say she was?"

"Oh! don't be funny!" Jacob was angry this time, but Bennetts, as was his custom, only grinned satirically.

5.

The invitation was accepted by Aunt Hester in proper form, but there remained a question, difficult of settlement. What clothes should one wear for a country garden-party? In the corner of the elaborate card, the word "Tennis" was printed in inverted commas as though it were a quotation; but Jacob did not, could not, play tennis. He had no flannels, and though the interval before the great event was long enough to allow of flannels being made in Pelsworthy, he considered that his wearing of them would be inappropriate. He might be asked to play, and have to suffer the humiliation of acknowledging his inability. No, flannels, the one certainty, were impossible for him.

Revolving the question and finding Aunt Hester and Bennetts equally unreliable, obviously unversed by the nature of their replies in the etiquette of the subject, Jacob wrote to Eric, an authority on the right form in all matters. The reply was exceedingly unsatisfactory. "In town one goes

to garden-parties in a frock, or morning, coat and a top hat. If the Elmover affair is a more or less formal occasion, I should think this would be the correct dress."

Jacob tried to picture himself in these almost unknown garments. He saw himself in a tail-coat and top hat after the pattern favoured by Mr. Baker, walking across the park, or being received by Lady Felmersdale on the lawn in front of the house. His artistic soul rose in protest against such a picture. No, Eric was probably right, that terrible combination might be correct, but for him it was impossible. Remained his best suit of blue serge, Pelsworthy made. But would they regard him as a country bumpkin, these aristocrats, dwellers in high places? Lord Tony March and his compeers might be there, dressed according to the prescribed code, and by comparison Jacob would be singled out as an ignorant, ill-dressed lout who knew nothing of society's ceremonial observances. Or even, if it were indeed nothing more than a "tenants' affair," would not Jacob be classing himself with the unknowing in the eyes of the Felmersdales, who, though they might not expect the London mode, would recognize its fitness.

So Jacob argued back and forth, and for once wished that he had taken Holy Orders. How easily these things are ordained for the clergy!

This question of clothes is an instance of a growing feeling in Jacob for what may be called the fitness of things. He had a sense of the incongruous. In dress his first idea was to be inconspicuous. It is probable that could he have known for a certainty that the rank and fashion of the county would be present at Elmover, apparelled as for a morning call in Mayfair, he would still have shrunk from the mile and a half walk over the fields in so hideously inappropriate a dress. But after much agony of mind and anticipatory nervousness, he solved the question for himself in his own way.

He would wear his best blue clothes because his others were noticeably shabby. He would wear black boots, because he preferred them to brown, which drew attention to his feet. For the rest he would go in the character of an artist—so he

conceived it—who is not bound by the ordinary sartorial conventions. He would in this character wear a straw hat, a loose green tie and no gloves—and when opportunity occurred he would allow it to be known that he was studying Art, of which architecture was certainly a branch. When he had got the feeling of the part, Jacob was comparatively at ease again. The problem was naturally and gracefully solved. Moreover, the dress he had designed for himself suited him; he hated the sight of himself on a Sunday morning in gloves and a bowler hat.

He saw a new fitness in having adopted the profession of an architect, and toyed with the idea of letting his hair grow.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ELMOVER GARDEN-PARTY

1.

THE great affair was over.

The Jacob walking slowly back over the fields with Aunt Hester was a new Jacob. He was a conqueror, uplifted, whose imagination was running riot. He was glad that Aunt Hester was silent, for he did not want to talk. His mind was full of wonderful thoughts, too wonderful to be put into words, impossible of translation, as yet, to Aunt Hester.

This, not because Madeline had taken any peculiar notice of him, but because he had been a social success, and had realized possibilities in himself which to this shy, country-bred boy seemed new and altogether wonderful.

Aunt Hester was quiet also, because she had seen his success, and guessing something of his present state of mind, was trying to reconcile herself to the thought that the time was fast coming when Jacob would rely less and less upon her, when she would slip into the background of his thoughts, and become to him a person of secondary importance. Hester Stahl had failed in none of a mother's duties, since she had

adopted Jacob, and she had fulfilled them to better purpose than his own mother would have done. She had now to suffer a mother's pain, the pain of being superseded.

It was not till supper was half over that they began to discuss the details of the great affair, by which time Jacob's fervour of mind had cooled down sufficiently to need relief in expression, and Hester had prepared herself to give him the admiration and applause she knew he would demand from her. Her own mood she must hide, though she longed for sympathy as much as he, longed to have Jacob's assurance that she could never be less to him than she was now.

2.

"Well, it was quite a success, don't you think?" Jacob began. He wanted his applause to be spontaneous.

"Oh! quite." Hester's reply was given cheerfully, but she stuck there, the words would not come.

"I think Lady Felmersdale's awfully jolly, don't you?"

This time the insinuation was not to be neglected, and Hester took her fence with a rush.

"Well, I had hardly any chance of judging—you monopolized her."

"Oh! no, hardly that." This modestly. He waited for more encouragement.

"Oh! yes, you did. She seems to have taken a tremendous fancy to you."

"Do you think so? Really? I like her awfully."

"Oh! there can't be any doubt of it. She took you about with her all the time. I think Sir Anthony was getting quite jealous."

Jacob laughed. "She has asked me to go up to Elmover whenever I like. A sort of general invitation, and she said I was to be sure and come, and that I wasn't to think she didn't mean it. . . . I wonder why she liked me."

Hester, who had sensed something of the conditions at Elmover, the unequal marriage, the social failure, might have given Jacob a reason fairly corresponding to the truth, but,

instead she put out her hand to him, and smiling affectionately said, "Of course she liked you, silly boy."

Jacob took the hand offered, this exchange of little caresses between them was an everyday matter, but the reason he found unsatisfying.

"Oh! that's only because you do," he said, somewhat inconsequently, though his meaning was clear enough to Hester, "but you're prejudiced, you know, there must have been some reason or other."

It had been plain enough to the discerning. To Ethel Fellersdale the evident admiration and respect of this handsome, intelligent boy, had been gratifying to a vanity, that was starving for something to feed upon. The fact that she was nearly old enough to be his mother allowed her to accept his tribute of reverence in the right spirit. If Lord Tony had offered her an apparently similar tribute, her inborn respectability would have taken offence, she would have placed, correctly enough, the worth and intention of his regard. But Jacob's admiration had been of another kind, imbued with respect. So she had been flattered, and finding in him a ready listener had come to feel for him a very real liking.

Hester had guessed something of this, partly by her woman's ready observation and intuition, partly by the attitude of one or two of her fellow guests, noticeably that of two clerically attached ladies who fondly believed himself to be hand and glove with the county. But her plain duty at the present moment was not to belittle Jacob's conquest, so she parried his search for reasons by asking him what he had found to talk about.

"Oh! all sorts of things," replied Jacob. "The place, you know, and some of the people and that sort of thing. I told her about being an architect, and she said she had an uncle who was an architect, and she seemed to know something about it. She did a good bit of the talking, but I kept my end up all right. I didn't feel a bit shy. I don't think she was bored."

"Oh! I'm quite sure she wasn't bored, dear, you were a great success."

"You're pleased, aren't you, dear?"

Hester was taken off her guard by this sudden question. She thought she had been acting so well, giving Jacob his share of praise with enthusiasm and cheerfulness.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

"I don't know. You seem to be rather reserved about it all. I thought you would be awfully pleased. You want me to know people and get on. Don't you like Lady Felmersdale?"

"Of course, dear—I hardly saw anything of her to-day." Hester's innate honesty made her a bad prevaricator.

"I'm sure you will like her when you know her better," persisted Jacob. "She's so kind, and she's good fun, too. And when you come to think of it, it was very good of her to take such a lot of notice of me. After all I'm nobody."

"Quite as much as she is——" Hester let her true opinion slip out without consideration, but Jacob, used to her measure of adoration, missed the standard of the comparison.

"Oh! well, not quite, you know, dear," he said, with a tolerant smile. "After all, she is Lady Felmersdale of Elmover—one of the great ones of the earth."

Hester did not disillusion him. Jacob should have his triumph untouched by any hint that could flaw its magnificence, so she merely replied fondly that she hoped great things of Jacob one day.

He was in the mood to respond to this touch, and did not deny the possibility; but, after enlarging for a moment or two on his prospects, he returned to the garden-party. There was still one essential, engrossing subject upon which he desired Hester's opinion, but he dared not open it directly, so began with a hesitating "Did you notice any of the other people—anyone particular?"

3.

As a matter of fact he had seen but little of Madeline. She had been playing tennis when he and Aunt Hester had arrived. He had caught a vision of her, of something eager,

cleverly active. He had heard her rebuking her partner with schoolroom phrases in laughing screams that the critical might have judged unnecessarily loud. To Jacob the loudness had left only an impression of aristocratic confidence; it appeared something admirable by reason of its inimitability so far as he was concerned.

Later he had seen her in the distance, active again, superintending a subordinate tea-table, whilst he had been attached to Lady Felmersdale, making a show of assisting at the centre of affairs. Once Madeline had come over to ask her mother whether she might invite some guest to stay to dinner.

By virtue of this one incident, she had become woven into the fabric of associations that became to Jacob a brilliant tapestry, the colours of which remained vivid, the figures distinct, when a thousand subsequent incidents had faded into a dull, oblivious grey, a dim blur of indistinguishable shades. Always he could recall that picture of the garden-party:—Madeline in the centre, vivid, graceful, a loose strand of red-brown hair rusting the whiteness of her frock, Madeline clutching a disordered hat with impatient hands, obedient to the unspoken reproof conveyed by critical motherly regard of untidiness, whilst half defiantly, as if anticipating denial, she broke out: "Oh! Mums, can I ask Basil Reade to stay to dinner, else we shan't have time to play another set? He's . . . Oh! thanks, Mumsie dear; I thought you wouldn't mind." Then Madeline flying off again, a bearer of good news, but recalled to receive a whispered but audible admonition concerning untidiness, and a warning not to get too hot. All this is in Jacob's picture, not as a moving series but, strangely, as one impression. Part and parcel of it is his own feeling, the fear of being introduced, which proved needless, and ceasing to be a nervous fear was turned into regret, and more than all, one delicious moment, when he caught and held Madeline's regard for the fraction of a second, and seemed to understand in that instant that he was not altogether negligible in her estimation.

Round this centre of life and emotion was a background that

did not remain constant. Lady Felmersdale, flushed with the sun but still beautiful, her cheeks retaining their downy softness but warmed to too ripe a tint, as of a peach ripe and ready to fall; Elmover distances, the smooth green of old lawns, brilliant islands of scarlet geraniums, and farther, beyond the park fence, the rough pasture-land of the park sloping away past scattered forest trees, to die against a cliff of distant wood. Interwoven with it all the smell of crushed grass, mingled with that of dainty cakes, tea, and the scent worn by his hostess—and, dimly, an impression of many other people; moving, chattering figures, servants and guests associated with the silver and china of the tea-table, giving an atmosphere of a new luxury and refinement, of a strange heaven of delight, in which Jacob had suffered recurrence of wonder to find himself at ease; a fairy-land in which Bennetts, Mr. Baker, and the office had no part, and the thought of them was as the waking from a blissful dream to a dreary, vulgar world, tedious and commonplace. . . .

4.

“Did you notice any of the other people, anyone particular?”

Hester had no clue, she had had no hint as yet of Jacob's admiration—and her reply was irrelevant to the theme of the Elmover masterpiece that filled her nephew's mind. He recalled her from discursions anent drab, faded personalities with a plainer question.

“Did you see any of the children? There are three, aren't there?” The tone was one of well-assumed indifference.

“I saw something of the second one,” replied Hester innocently—“Nina, I think they call her. Rather a prim little girl, with dark hair. Shy and awkward; of course, she's only a child, not more than thirteen or fourteen.”

“Oh yes! I think I know the one you mean. She was at the cricket match in June—you remember, when Eric was here?”

“Oh yes! I'd forgotten.” Still Aunt Hester would not

bite; she appeared to think he was talking for the sake of finding something to say. The bait must be plainer still; in a minute or two she would be getting ready to wash up and put away the supper things, and then the opportunity would be gone; so Jacob continued boldly in fear of a blush that would betray him.

"The eldest one was playing tennis most of the time, I think."

"Oh, I don't know which was Miss Felmersdale: there were two or three girls playing. Do you know which it was?"

"She was in white," returned Jacob, faltering at description, and conscious of weak definition, for white had been the chief wear of the younger women, and even of some who might more wisely have chosen a less conspicuous material.

"In white?" repeated Hester. "It seems to me they were all of them in white."

There was no help for it. Jacob saw that he must either drop the subject or give the clue boldly, so, still avoiding a definition of the Florentine red, for which he had no phrase, he leaped desperately.

"She had rather remarkable hair."

"Oh!" Aunt Hester awoke to sudden comprehension and interest.

"Was that girl with red hair, Miss Felmersdale?"

"I believe so," said Jacob, still seeking an answer, but with teeth on edge, intensely resentful of Aunt Hester's description.

"Oh, really! Yes, I did notice her particularly. She was so full of life and spirits. Rather a tomboy, but very pretty. She'll be a handful one of these days, I know."

"A handful? How? Do you mean——"

"I mean she looks the sort of Miss who gets her own way, and may be dangerously attractive when she grows up. If I were her mother I should keep a very sharp eye on her."



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5.

Jacob meditated this judgment, smoking a cigarette in the little back garden, while Aunt Hester was capably performing the menial duties of their small household.

He found solace in the feminine tribute to Madeline's beauty, but many a twinge and pinch of jealousy at the prophecy of future entanglements. She was so far off and so "dangerously attractive," but surely she was well guarded. It was to be noted with joy that there had been no sign of the red-haired Kingdon at Elmoor, and indeed, as a rival, he faded gradually from Jacob's thought after this date; but who was the favoured Basil Reade invited to stay to dinner with such eagerness? Some tennis-playing, athletic sprig of gentility, with every chance in his favour? Jacob hated him already; picturing him endowed with a grace and strength of body that he himself could never rival. Women admired strength in a man! He remembered imagined slights from shop-girls whom he had met and stared at in the streets of Pelsworthy. It seemed to him that they always looked first at his legs to see why he walked with a stick, leaning on it more heavily than is customary; and, then, that they regarded him either with contempt, or, still worse, with pity. Would she, the glorious Madeline, pity him? Heaven forbid. If pity were akin to love, it was not the kind of love he desired. He wanted—no, he could not picture his desire yet, but at least it was not the motherly, protecting love so generously given by Aunt Hester. . . .

Madeline! He had heard Lady Felmersdale pronounce the perfect name, that was shortened familiarly to the almost equally beautiful "Maidie." A tender, lovable diminutive, so it seemed to Jacob. He remembered the exact tone of Lady Felmersdale's voice as she recalled her elated daughter to warn her of untidiness and undue exertion. "Madeline!" and then as the girl turned, "Come here a moment. I want you." He remembered the petulant frown, anticipating, and impatient of rebuke, as Madeline came back, and the quick assuring nod of her head as she acceded to her mother's

whispered admonition. "All right," she had said; "I won't—it is rather warm." Even the school-girl phrases were something to be admired, the lack of primness was in the atmosphere of Elmoever, an aristocratic disregard for middle-class conventionalities. Aunt Hester's "tomboy" was a misapprehension; she did not understand these things, was incapable of a true appreciation of what she would perhaps call the "Elmoever folk"; they were out of her world, but *he* understood, or thought he did, for that garden-party made Jacob a terrible snob for a time.

That night, alone in his own room, Jacob went round the same circle again, ending always with Madeline's remoteness. Remote not only by reason of birth and circumstance, but by reason of her glorious beauty. She could never condescend to notice him. Such thoughts begot dreams of ambition that sent him to sleep at last, a world conqueror, and, more wonderful still, the conqueror of the glorious Madeline.

And that general invitation to Elmoever? Would he ever be brave enough to venture there alone—without Aunt Hester? At least they could first make a formal call together. It would be expected after the garden-party.

CHAPTER IX

THE PURLIEUS OF ELMOVER

1.

THE formal call was a failure.

"Not at home, madam!" was the report of the butler, though Jacob felt sure he had caught sight of Lady Felmersdale at one of the upper windows. He wanted to remonstrate, to urge the butler to more careful search for her ladyship, who might so easily be overlooked in that big house, but while he pondered on these things Aunt Hester had delivered their cards and the butler had taken a step backward into

the hall, plainly awaiting their departure in order that he might close the door.

Still, the cards had been left as a reminder of his presence, the cards which had been the subject of considerable forethought and some perturbation. They had been specially printed in Pelsworthy for this occasion. Jacob had been determined to do the thing properly, but he had had grave doubts as to whether he should figure on them as *Mr. J. L. Stahl* or simply as *J. L. Stahl*. Hester thought either would do, not realizing the importance of being correct in such matters, and had even suggested that "Jacob Stahl," with "Architect" in small capitals underneath, would look professional—a suggestion that contained two horrors: first, the hint of advertising his profession, and, second, the disclosure of his Christian name. That, at least, might be kept secret, and he took advantage of the occasion to advise Aunt Hester that he preferred to be called James, or, better still, Jimmy.

"But why, dear?" Aunt Hester had asked. To her the name had become associated with the owner of it, and had lost all other significance.

"Oh, I hate Bible names!" replied Jacob.

"But isn't James a Bible name?"

"Oh yes; but that's different—it's English, too—the other makes you think of Abraham and Isaac and all those Old Testament people. Really, Aunt Hester, don't you think you might call me Jimmy? Eric always calls me James."

Aunt Hester had promised to try.

Eric had been in Germany when the serious question of the "Mr." or "no Mr." had to be settled, and so, lacking high authority, Jacob had decided to figure simply as *J. L. Stahl*. When the cards arrived, he had regarded them with a very critical eye, and had found no difficulty in persuading himself that they "looked all right." Aunt Hester had agreed, but she would have done that in any case; besides, she was no authority.

2.

The call had been paid on the first day of Jacob's holidays. He took three weeks in August, time that might well be spent, according to Mr. Baker, in making measured drawings of the fine old church of Ashby Sutton. Previous efforts had not been altogether satisfactory, and Jacob had determined to set about the work in grim earnest, this year. Monday had been wasted, the anticipation of going to Elmover had precluded concentration, but Tuesday morning saw him diligent with rod, tape, notebook and step-ladder, engrossed in measuring the priest's door—a rare bit of late twelfth-century work, with deeply undercut mouldings in a semi-circular arch. Quite a remarkable sprint of work he made that morning, and he displayed a fine conscientiousness in his regard to detail, measuring every joint in the stonework, rubble as well as ashlar. But he found it dull working without an admirer, and by twelve o'clock he was hoping that Aunt Hester would disobey his injunctions not to interrupt him, a hint thrown out at breakfast in a noble spirit of determination, after a final resolve that he would think no more of Elmover and its people, but would devote himself to making the ablest and most completely perfect drawing of that South door. The ambition kept him at fever heat for an hour or more, while his imagination ran ahead of the mechanical work of taking measurements, and pictured delicate details of the subtle delineation that was to follow. Then his imagination began to tire, and the thoughts of the drawing he was to make became stale and used up. Physical calls for relaxation supervened, and for a quarter of an hour he rested on a flat-topped tomb and smoked a cigarette while he allowed his thoughts to wander in fields dissociated from architecture. It required an effort to begin again when the cigarette—the consumption of which he had assigned as a limit to this period of resting—could be nursed no longer, and though he drove himself to return to his self-imposed task, he no longer worked with the same enthusiasm. His mind now rejected the picture of an ideal drawing, with the same dis-

taste that may be felt by other senses after the persistent eating of one kind of food, and he employed his imagination in constructing a story of urgent necessity; he saw himself working against time to achieve some notable object. As a stimulus this conception was not so effective as the earlier one, but it served for a time. One o'clock had been the hour fixed by Jacob as the limit of his morning's work, but the last half-hour was not fruitful of results, and he gave up finally twenty minutes before his limit was reached. But Fearon's step-ladder had to be returned, an undertaking that involved a chat with the rector's factotum on the subject of fishing, and Jacob saved his reputation, so far as Aunt Hester was concerned, by not arriving at the cottage till nearly half-past one.

"You *have* done a good morning's work," was the cheering reception that awaited him.

"Pretty fair," he replied; "I have practically finished taking the measurements; it's rather tiring sort of work, you know. You have to stand about such a lot."

"Yes, dear, you must rest this afternoon," said Aunt Hester.

"Yes, I think I've earned a rest," responded Jacob, who was beginning to feel now that he had really put in a very full morning. "I can plot my dimensions after tea."

"Don't do too much, dear," was the answer he received, "after all you are having a holiday now."

No answer could have been more effective as a spur to fresh endeavour, though no such effect had been intended by Aunt Hester. Jacob became imbued with fresh energy, and started to plot his drawing half an hour after lunch. He would have worked after tea if he had not arrived at a point where it became imperative to rub out half that he had already done, owing to a mistake due to misreading his own figures. These sets-back always discouraged him. Nevertheless the drawing was partly inked in by Thursday afternoon, though the operation had been begun before the pencil work was properly completed and the result gave indications of falling very far

short of the design conceived at that diligent outset of Monday morning. Then came a glorious irruption and for a time the drawing made no further progress.

3.

Jacob was gardening, weeding a bed in the little strip of grass that separated the cottage from the village street. It was a blazing August afternoon, and he had discarded coat and waistcoat. He knelt on a mat to save the knees of his trousers, leaning over the border of marigolds to reach among the stems of the rose-trees, one hand half buried in soft earth, the other busily employed in uprooting every intruding blade of wild growth—in such things he was exceedingly thorough—while his mind was occupied with a fairy story, by the light of which it would seem that the sole chance of winning the Princess lay in accomplishing the superhuman task imposed by the jealous spirit of evil, who had ordained that one fragment, however small, of alien growth not uprooted, should condemn Jacob to the fate of his innumerable predecessors, none of whom had been able to perform such an incredibly difficult feat. So engrossed was he that when some vehicle drew up beyond the open palings which divided him from the road, he imputed it to the baker without looking round, and wove the tradesman into his story as an emissary of the jealous spirit employed to divert his attention and frustrate his design of perfection.

“Doesn't Miss Stahl live here?”

Jacob rose hurriedly, and stood, earthy hands instinctively held aloof from contact with his clothes, speechless and awkward as at that first meeting at the stile at Elmover, the only thought in his mind a desire to push back a damp lock of hair that had fallen down over his forehead, a desire impossible of accomplishment with such hands.

“You're Mr. Stahl, aren't you? We met at the garden-party.” Madeline's eyes were smiling with a friendly wish to relieve Jacob's embarrassment; her sister, sitting in the governess cart, preserved her usual expression of faint disapproval.

"I—I've been weeding," stammered Jacob, striving to recover self-possession. "Excuse me being in such a beastly mess. Won't you come in?"

"Well, we came to know whether you would come over to tea," said Madeline. "Only us, you know," she added, with a warm smile, as though to relieve him of perplexity.

Jacob was smitten with an urgency to escape from the invitation. The thing he had longed for, and played with in his imagination, now only filled him with fear and a wish to be alone—he had seen her and spoken to her—in a way—it was enough, splendid material for day-dreams. His reply came instinctively.

"Oh! thanks very much! I don't know that I could come this afternoon, I'm afraid . . . my aunt's out. . . . She would wonder where I'd gone." And even as he spoke, his objective, logical, controlling self was arguing, "Fool! Here's your chance. Don't dream things, do them!" Yet if Madeline had accepted his excuses, he would not have had the hardihood to withdraw them, and the golden opportunity would have gone, probably for ever; but she sensed something of the spirit of his refusal, and suggested, still smiling, that he "might leave a note for Miss Stahl."

This was a bridge, it gave him back courage, this glorious thought of leaving a note to say that he had gone to Elmover, by invitation; that he had been fetched, in fact. He began mentally to word the note even as he answered.

"I might do that, of course, I . . . But," with a sudden accession of courage, "I say, I can't come like this."

"You might like to wash," suggested Miss Felmersdale.

Jacob smiled, and essayed, without success, to push back that confounded wisp of hair with the back of his hand. "Well, rather," he agreed. "Do you mind waiting? Won't you come in?"

"We might go on to Mrs. Hales' and come back," put in the sister from the governess cart, speaking for the first time.

"Oh! good idea!" said Madeline; and then to Jacob, "We've got to go and see someone in the village; we'll come

back and fetch you. We shan't be more than ten minutes." As she got back into the cart and took the reins from her sister, she added, "Then you are coming, aren't you?"

"Oh! thanks very much!" was all Jacob could find to say as the cart swerved round and rattled away. Madeline's driving was like that of Jehu.

4.

He found much to say to himself, however, as he washed and dressed with a fervent haste that involved misunderstandings with studs and a clean shirt, and, as was his habit, he occasionally spoke his feelings aloud. "Idiot! what did you want to refuse for? Lord! you must have looked a pretty sight, with your hair all over your face and your hands inches thick with mud, and a dirty shirt on. Hang these links! Now I suppose you're going to keep her waiting half an hour. Beastly ungracious you were, too; looked as if you didn't want to go in the least. Oh! do buck up."

But the governess cart was not kept waiting, for when Jacob had at last succeeded in "making himself decent," as he phrased it, always with an anxious eye directed towards the road below his window, the cart had not returned, and he had a few minutes to cool down while he wrote this characteristic note to Aunt Hester. "The Miss Felmersdales drove over and have asked me to go back with them to tea. Don't know when I shall be back—probably for supper." Then, clean, and with some recovery of self-respect, he waited at the gate, rather cold as to the spine and in much the same nervous condition as a patient before a serious operation.

"Sorry we've been such a time," said Madeline, as she whirled up to the cottage, the little grey pony nearly sitting on his hind-quarters when brought to an abrupt standstill. "Mrs. Hales is such a gossip, you simply can't get away from her. Do you mind sitting a bit more in front? It keeps the balance. Oh, come up, you little beast!"—this to the pony, with an impetuous application of the whip. "What are you waiting for?"

Jacob found words unnecessary as they cantered up the steep hill out of the village, all Madeline's remarks being addressed to the pony, but when they had reached the high level ground of the common, the quiet sister opened a polite conversation by inquiring,

"Have you been long in Ashby Sutton?"

"Oh! eight years—rather more," replied Jacob. "I was born in London, at least, Camberwell: it's a suburb, you know." He would have enlarged upon this subject, safe ground and sure as he found it, but the younger Miss Felmersdale, with good intention but chilling effect, broke in upon his description of South London, a description to which she had been listening without the slightest interest. Her interruption took the form of another polite question: did not Jacob admire the view from the common? she asked; and Jacob felt crushed. With an access of sensitiveness, he inferred that his conversation had been a bore, and so, after a formal acquiescence in approving the scenery, he relapsed into monosyllabic answers to the endless string of polite futilities which the younger Miss Felmersdale had at her command.

The situation aggravated Jacob; he wished to shine before Madeline, who made no attempt to join in the conversation. He had the male desire to "show off," common to men and other animals in the mating season, and if this conventional little dark-haired girl of fifteen would have given him an opportunity, he felt that he could have taken advantage of it; but instead she crushed him with polite phrases—put him in his place, as it were, a favoured visitor of lower social status, to be treated with condescending approval. There was a strong vein of dull respectability in Nina Felmersdale, she had the making of a district visitor, a Sunday-school teacher; she was an acceptable type, reading the English code of life—morals and manners—with docile reverence, obedient to the letter of that which to her was infallible, right beyond any possibility of dispute, the thing that was and is and ever will be.

While Nina Felmersdale crushed Jacob into silence with

insipid and formal conversation, Madeline, without deliberate intention, was silently provocative. At seventeen she was not without experience, and the tilt of her unformed mind was towards romance. Her young idealism saw in any man by whom she was temporarily attracted the possibility of perfection. This because her vividly imaginative mind was constructive; it was not so much what she saw as what she sought, that constituted her realities in this direction. Jacob attracted her by that dominating law which ordains the union of opposites and so preserves the average. There was this essential difference between Madeline and Jacob, that she sought instinctively to live her dreams and he to dream his life. At this moment she was, without conscious purpose, playing the game of the woman who compels attraction. By her reserve and withdrawal of interest she enhanced the power of her least submission, and at the same time stimulated the active principle of pursuit inherent in the masculine character.

5.

Tea on the Elmover lawn was an ordeal to Jacob. Lady Felmersdale had had ulterior motives in sending Madeline and Nina to Ashby Sutton. In their absence she had visited the sideboard, and now put a strong restraint upon herself in the presence of a stranger, which was manifested in a stiff formality, a Camden Town correctitude, coloured but not structurally altered by nineteen years' consciousness of a title. Sir Anthony, understanding the situation, was morose—"grumpy," as Madeline put it—and Nina, with pursed mouth and disapproval in her small dark eyes, maintained a prohibitive silence. There was a social chill in the air which strongly affected Jacob, who had no suspicion of its origin. He sought an explanation in his own presence, and construed the surly formality offered him without politeness, into a deliberate intention to impress upon him a sense of social inferiority. At a later period of development he would have resented the attitude, but he was too young as yet in Felmersdale graces, also he lacked knowledge and experience.

After tea and a period of uncomfortable silence,— Sir Anthony reading a paper, Lady Felmersdale gazing somewhat too intently upon nothing in particular—Jacob made a movement to rise, his intention a formal leave-taking, but Madeline, who up to this time had appeared to be lost in a fit of sulks, frowned at him suddenly and shook her head. Jacob blushed. He found himself taken into a confidence, though he did not understand its purpose, and followed Madeline eagerly with his eyes for another sign.

“Nina!”

“Well?” The young lady addressed, looked up inquiringly at her sister with raised eyebrows and a slight inclination of her head towards her mother.

“Oh! come here a minute,” said Madeline, and then to Jacob: “Excuse us for an instant. I want to . . .” The sentence died away as she led Nina a few paces from the tea-table.

Sir Anthony looked up over the top of his paper, following his daughters’ movements with his eyes.

Jacob could hear nothing of the conference that followed, but he saw an explanatory Madeline glancing every now and again at him and Lady Felmersdale; and a slightly resentful Nina apparently unwilling to play the part assigned to her. Then Madeline returned and addressed him.

“Would you care to see the garden?” she asked.

“Oh! thanks very much. Yes, I should. . . . Thank you.” Jacob wondered why it was so difficult to answer a simple invitation in appropriate language.

“I may not see you again” grunted Sir Anthony, proffering a limp hand—which he withdrew again immediately Jacob had touched it—and with this civility he got up and walked away. Lady Felmersdale rose quite steadily, and remarked: “You must come again while this weather lasts; don’t wait for an invitation. . . .”

“Come along,” interrupted Madeline impatiently, but Jacob hesitated; politeness demanded that he should at least shake hands with his hostess, who was now regarding him with an affectionate smile. But Lady Felmersdale

relieved him of this embarrassment,—though she substituted another—by saying, with a playful assumption of being hurt:

“Oh! yes; go along! I know! You don’t want to talk to an old woman like me; you want to be off with Maidie somewhere in the garden. . . .”

“Oh! aren’t you coming?” broke in Madeline, this time with real temper.

“Why don’t you go?” simpered Lady Felmersdale. “You can’t want to stop and talk to an old woman like me. . . .”

Poor Jacob, utterly unable to understand why he was so peremptorily ordered away by Madeline while her mother was talking to him, stood confused and uncomfortable. How could he turn his back on his hostess while she was actually speaking to him, regarding him, too, with a rather fond smile? If he must be rude to someone, it must be to the person—however adorable—who was manifestly in the wrong. But Nina saved him and put an end to the dilemma, by interposing between him and her mother, saying “Oh! Mumsie, I want you to come and look at the puppies.”

“Oh! You!” replied Lady Felmersdale. “You’re all alike. Never let me talk to the young men. You’re jealous both of you, that’s what it is,” and as she was led off, almost forcibly, by her younger daughter, she looked back over her shoulder and waved Jacob a coquettish good-bye.

6.

“I thought you wanted to see the garden”—Madeline was plainly in a hot temper—“but if you prefer to go and see the puppies with Nina and mother. . . .” She finished her sentence with a gesture.

“No, I don’t. . . . I want to see the garden, only. . . .” Jacob paused and gathered courage. “I couldn’t possibly come while Lady Felmersdale was talking to me. Could I?”

Madeline regarded him quietly. Already her temper had cooled. “Of course, you don’t understand,” she said.

“Understand? What?” asked Jacob, perplexed.

“Oh! couldn’t you see mother was not quite herself to-

day? It's the heat—she goes to sleep and she's funny like this when she wakes up; not quite herself. That's why father was so rude to you. . . ."

"I didn't notice anything. . . ."

"Very polite of you, but you can't be quite blind. Are we going to stand here all night?"

"I'm sorry." What he was sorry for exactly, Jacob did not know, but as he followed Madeline, who, as usual, found it difficult to walk when she might run, he felt that a confidence had been established, something which couldn't be analyzed, but an encouragement.

The garden, as such, did not occupy their attention for long. They made their way up behind the house across the Italian garden, now a blaze of geraniums, across a sloping lawn broken up by ornamental designs of flower-beds, till they reached a great galvanized wire construction like a large aviary, covered with climbing roses.

"Let's sit down," said Madeline, "it's so hot," and by way of keeping up her rôle of cicerone, she added: "We call this the quarter-deck, this path, you know, and this affair's a rosary, of course. Do you smoke?"

"Oh! thanks, yes! Don't you mind?" said Jacob, producing a cigarette case.

"Rather not. It keeps the flies off. I smoke, too, sometimes."

Jacob had read of women who smoked, he remembered *Cigarette* in Ouida's novel, but those women were all vivandières, or little better, and his naïve mind was a little shocked, but he proffered his case, nevertheless, with a hesitating "Would you care to smoke now? The flies are rather a nuisance."

"Thanks, I don't mind," replied Madeline; and there followed a tremulous moment as Jacob assisted with a match and nearly touched Madeline's finger. He had never touched her yet, not even shaken hands.

Madeline smoked her cigarette jerkily, drawing in the smoke with half-closed eyes and blowing it out with absorbed attention in the manner of the inexperienced; and Jacob

watched her with a shade, the first shade of disillusionment, but an exhilarating sense of adventure. "They did these things in Society," was his thought. "He had been shocked because he was a country bumpkin, but he was learning"—indeed he was learning more rapidly than he knew.

Their conversation had no particular point. They talked first of the weather and then of London. Madeline's London was a very different place to the London Jacob knew, and they compared notes and discovered each their own ignorance. Jacob's London was provincial, a little self-contained town of a suburb, from which his only excursions had been to that quarter north of Oxford Street which the elect of the medical profession have made their own; Wimpole, Harley and Welbeck Streets. They found common ground in Bond Street, but little to discuss. Then they drifted on to Jacob's present occupation—and future, and so by degrees he was warmed into talking about himself and grew more at ease; and Madeline found him interesting because he was of a type that she had never met before, because he was intelligent, and because he attracted her in some way that she didn't understand.

They had been in the rosary an hour when Nina came and interrupted them, whispering something to Madeline that made her frown impatiently.

"Oh! all right," was her comment, and then to Jacob: "I'm sorry I've got to go in to mother."

"I'm afraid I have stayed too long. I ought to be going," he said, and then the unnecessary Nina interposed, and offered to show him the way across the park.

"Oh! don't you bother! I know the way," returned Jacob, as he watched the figure of Madeline flying across the lawn. He had meant to shake hands with her, but she had gone with a friendly nod, and Jacob felt that by this curt leavetaking she had cancelled the joy of that hour's conversation. He was a little rude to Nina, protesting that she really needn't come with him, and she took him at his word, which fitted well enough with her own inclination.

He loitered across the garden, skirting the back of the

house, and made his way to the side gate which let him into the spinny, and so to the ladder stile where he had first seen Madeline. Arrived there, he perched himself in the same position he had occupied on that memorable occasion.

Then the unexpected happened, for again he saw Madeline running towards him down the narrow footpath.

"Oh! I'm so glad I caught you," she panted as she came up to him. "Mother asked me to find you and say she was sorry she wasn't able to entertain you this afternoon, but will you come and have tea on Tuesday?"

"Oh! Thanks. Yes. I should like to, awfully."

"Au revoir, then." Madeline looked at him with a new expression. "You will come, won't you?" she said, holding out her hand.

Jacob made no reply, but he looked straight into her eyes for a moment, and Madeline laughed a little self-conscious laugh, tightened her grasp of his hand for a fraction of a second, and then ran off down the path.

At the end of the path, she turned and waved to him.

For the first half of his walk home Jacob's exaltation bore him on wings, then physical tiredness asserted itself and his legs dragged, but still joy surged over him in waves.

"You look tired, dear," said Aunt Hester when he came into the cottage. "Have you had a good time?"

"I am rather tired," replied Jacob. "Yes! I've had a very nice time."

CHAPTER X

DEVELOPMENT

1.

THE drawing of the priest's door made no progress between Thursday and Tuesday. Two or three times Jacob uncovered it and laid it on the table, but a strong disinclination for work overtook him on each occasion. Instead, he sat making aimless little sketches on the corner of that large sheet

of hand-made paper; sketches that strove to convey the impression of a young girlish face, and that were rubbed out again with sudden vigour and little spurts of temper.

"Won't it go?" asked Aunt Hester, coming in during an interlude of fierce erasure.

"It isn't a question of 'going' exactly," returned Jacob, crossly, "I can't work. I don't know what's the matter with me. I hate the beastly thing."

Aunt Hester sighed. It had required no gift of insight to diagnose Jacob's malady, it was written plainly in his face, his speech, his restlessness, his abstraction, but Hester had given no sign that she guessed what was in his mind, and, for once, she feared confidence, for it was not in her heart to encourage him in what she believed to be hopeless, however great her love and sympathy, or, perhaps, because of it.

Everything was confessed on Tuesday evening, however, after the second visit to Elmover, a short visit which ended abruptly in Jacob's being driven back by Lady Felmersdale and Nina, an entirely unsatisfactory visit in every way. Madeline had been childishly merry with her mother and sister, but had not vouchsafed Jacob an encouraging glance, she had, in fact, been almost rude in her neglect of him. Jacob put his own construction on her attitude, took the whole burden of it upon himself, read into it a contemptuous dismissal of his worship, and so, after supper, he stared moodily out of the window, sighed like a tempest, and contemplated early death.

Later, when the lamp was lit, he essayed to smoke a pipe, and pretended to read, while Aunt Hester, apparently engrossed in darning her household linen, watched him and waited for the confidence she knew could be delayed no longer. Presently Jacob attempted to relight his pipe for the tenth time, shut his book with an air of determination, and announced that he was going to bed.

Aunt Hester looked up at the clock. "You're early to-night," she said.

"Yes. I'm sick of everything. I want to go to sleep and forget," returned Jacob.

"What is it, dear?"

"Oh! nothing." Jacob got up and went over to the fireplace and knocked out his empty pipe with careless diligence. From this retreat—he was behind his aunt's back—he adventured the remark that there didn't seem to be anything worth living for.

"Why to-night more particularly?" inquired Hester.

"Oh! I don't know," said Jacob, still aimlessly tapping his pipe on the bars of the grate, and then, "I suppose you can't guess?"

"Is it something to do with Miss Felmersdale?" Hester was still engrossed in her needlework, and did not look up.

"Yes! Something. I suppose I'm an awful ass. It isn't likely she'd ever take any notice of me—only, last time I went over there I thought, somehow, she might. She was rather jolly to me, you know—when she said good-bye. Of course she didn't mean anything really, only it meant a lot to me. . . ."

"You'll soon get over it, dear!"

The inevitable, futile consolation, always true and never to be believed. Even as Hester spoke it, she recognized its futility, and putting down her work, turned towards Jacob all love and sympathy. He was only twenty-one, and his reply was as inevitable and futile as her attempt at consolation.

"No! I shan't ever get over it!" Then, realizing that his statement lacked any power of carrying conviction until elaborated, he continued: "I fell in love with her years ago, when she was quite little—I saw her in the park at Elmover! It's . . . it's fate."

Hester was practical, she wasted no more time in clichés. "Come and tell me all about it," she said, for she knew that a trouble such as Jacob's loses much of its bitterness when it has been put into words.

When full and free confession had been made, Hester hesitated. She took an entirely different view of the facts, and drew an inference directly opposed to Jacob's. She hesitated because she feared that this boy and girl love-affair might grow, not because she thought it was over and done

with. She made a mistake as the result of the hesitation, because in the pause she forgot everything but Jacob's immediate happiness, but it was not a mistake that in any way affected the issue—no word or influence of Hester's could have swerved the outcome.

"I don't think you need despair, yet, dear," was what she said, and Jacob brightened visibly. This was the consolation he sought before all else.

"Don't you? . . . Really? . . . Why? . . . Why don't you? . . ." Jacob pressed eagerly, and Hester tried to encourage and to hedge at the same time.

"Well, dear," she began, still hesitating, a little unwilling, perhaps, to elucidate the feminine psychology of Madeline's attitude. "Miss Felmersdale gave you some—some encouragement on Thursday, didn't she?"

"I suppose so—yes, I thought it tremendously encouraging."

"And afterwards, I suspect, she thought, perhaps, she had gone a little too far—knowing you so little, and she was waiting for you to take the next step. . . ." Hester paused, her analysis sadly incomplete, and Jacob, deeply introspective, interpolated "I wonder."

"But, Jacob—Jimmy, dear, what can come of it, even if Miss Felmersdale did learn to care for you, in that way?"

"Do you really think it's possible she might?" Jacob could not, as yet, consider any other problem.

"Of course she *might*, dear," persisted Hester, "but even if she did, what then? What could come of it? How . . ."

"Heaven!" interrupted Jacob, ecstatically. "Just—heaven. I can't think beyond that point—yet. I don't want to. I leave all the rest on the knees of the gods. But is it possible; do you really, really think it's possible?"

For this time Hester ceased remonstrance, but it was then in her mind to return to that attitude when she could find her nephew in a more plastic mood. Afterwards, in the dark, quiet hours, she threshed out the whole problem. It seems as if in this thing, the determined, practical woman

was untrue to the principles of her own character ; but she was shrewd and far-seeing enough to know when she encountered a force too strong for her to oppose. She recognized such a force here. This was no matter to be dealt with in the manner of Jacob's exercises. There, inertia had to be overcome, this was a positive, dynamic force that, if faced, must be resisted. And above and beyond all questions of common sense was Hester's love for Jacob. "Was it for his ultimate good," she argued, "to attempt any drastic remedy for his madness?" She debated giving up her cottage and moving to some village on the further side of Pelsworthy, beyond the sphere of Felmersdale influence. Then, supposing the present passion to be outlived, would not another, possibly a worse, take its place? Hester thought of her brother, and from that came to thinking that Jacob's love-affair was in its way a beautiful thing, however hopeless from a worldly point of view. And if tragedy came, a bar upon Jacob's visits to Elmover, a forcible separation, a removal of Madeline beyond the sphere of attraction, would not these things, finally, help to strengthen him and to keep his mind free from evil? For of any suspicion of evil in connection with this affair, Hester had never a single thought; that and the possibility of any happy issue, she did not take into consideration. Thus in her practical, unimaginative way, Hester came to a decision. After that night, though she suffered occasional doubts, her help and sympathies were enlisted on Jacob's behalf. Hester, it may be noticed in conclusion, always anticipated an unhappy outcome for Jacob's love-affairs—but she never considered her own interests; in this as in all other things touching Jacob's welfare she was supremely unselfish.

2.

The next morning, Jacob was so far emboldened as to plan a walk to the Elmover stile, and after some faltering and much nervousness, he set out across the Common, lingering by the way and searching his mind for excuses, in preparation for that which he did not dare to anticipate. When he was

still a quarter of a mile or more from the outskirts of Elmover, his loitering culminated in a dead stop. Arguing back and forwards with himself, he decided that he would look such a "silly ass" if *she* should happen to come through the plantation and find him mooning on that particular stile. Acute self-consciousness overtook him, he blushed, and with a sudden determination took a course at right angles to his original direction, a course which led him down the slope of the hill. At the bottom, he sat down on a convenient hump of brown grass that had once been an ant-hill, and studied the meandering trickle of the little brook which runs across the Common and then dives underground to emerge as a clear spring some half-mile nearer to Ashby Sutton. Running water always held a fascination for Jacob.

It was a glorious day; a still, hot morning of August sunshine. The brown-green of the Common stretched up before him to a thin, hazy sky-line that seemed to wriggle with the heat, and against the light the little humped bushes of blackthorn, distorted and bent with the force of winter winds, looked dead and parched. Jacob turned sideways and regarded the cool, clear green of the forest trees in the Elmover plantation. "Exquisite," he murmured without limited application of the adjective, and then with a fall to bathos he added: "Phew! but isn't it hot?" and fell to fanning himself with his straw hat.

The trees of Elmover continued to hold his attention. He could see the break where the path ran out to the ladder stile, and the sun just caught the stile itself, the flight of six steps and the crossed supports at the top, a little, remote step-ladder, dwarfed by the magnificence of the trees, but the entrance to Paradise. Thinking of it as an entrance, Jacob overlooked the fact that it was equally an exit, and when a little bunch of white, distorted by the heat haze, showed momentarily on the top, and then flickered down to be hidden by a dip in the ground, Jacob's heart gave a jump, and then began to beat to suffocation.

What should he do? It might be . . . and if it was, she wouldn't see him there, down by the brook. He stood up

and gazed and saw nothing, waited for an eternity, and then began to climb slowly back up the hill towards the path. Yes! It was. She was coming up the rise, carrying her hat, and evidently going over to Ashby Sutton. Jacob was overcome with nervousness; he felt an overpowering desire to hide. Would she think he had come out to look for her? He compromised by turning his back resolutely on Elmover, and took a diagonal path up the slope towards the village. "She *must* see me," he argued, "and she needn't take any notice of me, if she doesn't want to. I can pretend not to know she is there till she is past me, or just take off my hat."

So with a step that lagged and grew slower and slower, he sauntered back across the Common, resolutely keeping his eyes away from Elmover, but listening tensely for the sound of a step that should overtake him. Slowly and yet more slowly he walked, and no one overtook him.

Two hundred yards behind, Madeline restraining her impetuosity with some trouble, screwed up her mouth and regarded Jacob's back! "I'm not going to run after him," she said to herself. "He must have seen me. If he doesn't want to speak to me, he needn't . . ."

At last Jacob stopped, took off his hat and wiped his forehead, hesitated, and then turned quickly. Madeline was pulling a stick out of a hedge two hundred yards away. She was not looking in his direction; she seemed quite unconscious of his presence. Jacob wiped his forehead again and called himself a fool. Then he swore faintly but with a soft insistence, small, foolish repetitions of one word, the only expletive he ever used. "Damn!" said Jacob, by way of tonic; "damn!" and then, taking his courage in his hands, he made a bee-line in the direction of Madeline, with the blood singing in his ears and his knees trembling.

The desired stick was not easily to be disengaged; it was not free when Jacob had reached the path.

"May I—can I help you?" he said.

Madeline turned with composure, physically heated, but socially calm. "Hallo!" she said. "Hot, isn't it? Never mind about the stick, it won't do, it's too big."

"Yes, it is hot," replied Jacob, and for a moment they stood and looked at one another.

"Let's go down to the spring," said Madeline, breaking a silence that was becoming uncomfortable; "there's some shade there."

"Oh! yes, rather!" Jacob wished to express warm approval of the project, then he added: "Were you going over to the village?"

"No! I wasn't going anywhere particular. I got sick of lessons and told Mumsie I had a headache, and she told Miss Peares I needn't do any more, so I just came out for a walk. Isn't it a ripping day?"

"Ripping!" agreed Jacob with enthusiasm. His speech was chiefly of the weather till they reached the spring.

3.

The spring comes out of the earth at the bottom of a cleft, driven into the hill of the Common; it looks as if it might have been a railway cutting that had been intended, and stopped prematurely. Madeline went ahead, clambering easily down the steep slope, but Jacob had to follow more warily, holding on to the stems of the lank and rather barren bushes that grew on the incline. When he reached the bottom, Madeline was paddling her hands in the little basin of water that receives the cold stream from the hill.

"Jolly and cool," remarked Madeline.

"Yes, isn't it?" was all Jacob found to say, and by way of giving emphasis and feeling to his appreciation, he, too, squatted down and dabbled. He was desperately anxious to be bright and amusing, but his thoughts stammered, and lucid speech was beyond him. Madeline wringing her chilled hands came to his rescue by demanding a handkerchief, which was proffered with enthusiasm. Fortunately, as he noted with some relief, the handkerchief was passably clean.

From this incident onward, progress was rapid. Madeline returned the damp handkerchief by throwing it at its owner. The action was, perhaps, reminiscent of the flirtations of

village girls, as observed on festive occasions, but it established easier relations. "Schoolroom" was a word that occurred to the mind, offering at once explanation of a forwardness not to be abused or misunderstood, and suggestion of a convenient attitude that might be adopted. Jacob realized that he had been too serious; he took his cue and essayed the frivolous.

Soon they were splashing water at each other, Jacob with restraint, Madeline with intention, and when that palled they were both laughing.

"Are you wet?" asked Jacob.

"Not nearly so wet as you are," returned Madeline, but still she was wet enough—a wetness almost entirely due to her own efforts—to demand further recourse to the damp handkerchief, and Jacob had become bold enough to proffer assistance in its use. He trembled when permitted to help in the dabbing of the white blouse and grew nervous, hot and afraid. He became suddenly deferential again, polite and formal. He would have drawn away and resumed distant relations (he had been so near her, her face sun-warmed and flushed had almost touched him, his hands had hovered over her shoulders, a strand of wonderful hair had lain for a moment over his wrist. All this was sacrilege. In his heart and mind was adoration, remote, detached worship), but Madeline held the situation.

"You are a rum pup," she said, half laughing. "Why are you so serious, all of a sudden?"

"Am I serious? I suppose—— I don't know . . ."

Madeline looked at him, smilingly, provokingly, and Jacob looked back at her with a new and startling question rising in his mind. "Did she *expect* him to kiss her?" This was a new situation, something that in dreams took an entirely different aspect. His imagination had played him false.

"I say," he stammered, his face burning, "do you—I mean it isn't possible, is it, that you like me a little?"

It amounted to a proposal, but Madeline maintained the atmosphere of the schoolroom.

"Oh, I don't know! Perhaps—— You are so awfully serious."

She turned her head slightly away from him, waiting; but Jacob kept quite still, staring at her; trying to understand this new wonder. "Perhaps she cared for him, for *him*!"

It is doubtful how long the situation might have lasted if Madeline had not continued the initiative. It was a small indication, but enough. They were sitting side by side on the sloping bank, and she moved an inch or two nearer to him—there was just the faintest suggestion of "snuggling" in that movement.

Jacob, trembling, laid his hand on hers that was still damp and cold with spring water, and then, fearfully, almost religiously, he bent forward and kissed that warm, delicate, fragrant cheek.

The very ghost of a kiss it was, made without any movement of the lips. Just the slightest contact without pressure.

There came to them the sound of one faint "Boom" from the distant church of Ashby Sutton.

"Oh, my goodness, it's one o'clock! I must simply fly!" exclaimed Madeline, and before Jacob had quite recovered his sense of reality she was on her feet and scrambling up the bank. He followed, calling to her, "One moment, I'm coming," but she didn't stop for him. At the top of the bank she turned for a moment, looked down, and waved to him, but when Jacob had reached level ground, she was a hundred yards away, running with her head down.

Jacob watched her out of sight.

There are two points to be noted, immediately consequent upon this kiss. The first that Jacob did not want to go home and dream about it, he wanted to see Madeline again, to be with her instantly. The second that when interrogated as to her movements, Madeline made no mention either to her mother or to Nina—though the latter was the recipient of most confidences—that she had met or even seen "that rather nice boy, young Stahl." The description is borrowed from Lady Felmersdale. These two points each involve a distinct change of attitude.

That night Aunt Hester was again wakeful. Jacob's elation had been too manifest for him to hide his triumph as he had intended—a determination arrived at during his walk home—but his account had been abridged, there were reservations. Hester, pondering, worrying and speculating, was chiefly concerned as to the feelings and intentions—if she had any—of Madeline. Was the child in earnest, or merely a flirt? To Hester the problem resolved itself into these two definite alternatives. Hester frequently made this mistake in considering her problems.

CHAPTER XI

BENNETTS IN OPPOSITION

I.

JACOB'S holiday was extended from three weeks to six that year. It might have undergone further expansion, but Aunt Hester's silent reproach was not to be borne any longer, and Jacob acknowledged defeat at last, unwillingly. He had made a stand for freedom and boldly resisted authority. He was of age, and for the matter of that independent, now, financially, and if he chose to stay away from the office, in which he was only a pupil, that was his own affair. This was Jacob's first quarrel with Hester, and he became very hot, assertive and ill-tempered over it,—deliberately ill-tempered to give himself more courage—and Hester, at first, made the mistake of being authoritative, which gave her nephew the opportunity of saying things he could never have said if she had pleaded and not scolded. Jacob never saw Hester's tears, nor guessed that she had shed any; he was engrossed in greater matters, at Elmover almost every day, and he had become impatient of restraint. After that quarrel there was an atmosphere of unhappiness and uneasiness in the cottage for three days, and then followed a reconciliation—which broke up the old relations for ever.

"We can't go on like this, Aunt Hester," Jacob said.
"You must see, really, that I am not a boy any longer."

Hester had seen it, seen it with bitterness and resentment, but she only said with a sigh: "I don't want to go on like this, dear, you know that."

"Can't you see things from my point of view?" asked Jacob.

"But what can come of this Elmover affair?" replied Hester.

Jacob was on his feet, moving restlessly about the cottage.
"I don't know, I don't know—yet," he said. "I suppose I shall have to say something to Sir Anthony, soon. Lady Felmersdale knows, of course, and she doesn't seem to mind. . . ."

"Perhaps she thinks you are both too young to be serious."

"Yes, perhaps. I don't know—I don't want to bother about the future, not yet. I want to enjoy the beautiful present."

"Doesn't Sir Anthony guess? You are up there nearly every day."

"I hardly ever see him. I—I don't always go up to the house, and when I do, he is not there, generally."

"I suppose you don't go except when you know he's out."

"That isn't a very nice way of putting it, is it? I don't mind seeing him a bit, only they—only she—I mean it seems better not to, somehow." Jacob could not bring himself to pronounce the beloved name except in the presence of its owner, and then the saying of it became a term of endearment.

"I don't see what can *come* of it," repeated Hester.

"I don't see why we shouldn't—be married. Not yet, of course."

"On a hundred and twenty pounds a year?"

"Oh! Lord no! But I've got a profession. Do you think I've no chance of making a *7* money, myself?"

"But you're neglecting your profession, dear," said Aunt Hester, gently, bringing back the conversation to the point of difference.

"Oh! neglecting it!" Jacob was becoming angry again.

"For a week or two. What possible difference can that make? I shall work harder than ever when I get back, but I must have this time, now. I shall never have another time like this. Besides. . . ."

"Yes? Besides what?" prompted Hester as Jacob hesitated.

"Does it matter?" asked Jacob. "You must see that the thing has got to be. You couldn't ask me to give it up, could you?"

Hester sighed. She felt weak and very desolate. She wanted her boy back again, and was willing to pay almost any price to get him. "I haven't asked you to give it up," she compromised feebly.

"Well, couldn't you try not to worry about it? Can't you trust me?" Jacob's tone was petulant.

"I'll try, dear," said Hester, and kissed him. After that there was quite a reconciliation. It almost seemed, for a time, as if the old relations had been renewed, but Hester knew that that was impossible. She had been first, and she was now undeniably second in Jacob's thoughts.

After this she entered no open remonstrances, but Jacob became continually more conscious of her disapproval with regard to his absence from Mr. Baker's office, and so gave in, at last. He was assisted by his own consciousness of the fact that he was wasting his time. There was the future to be thought of, he admitted that, but he preferred to forget it in the glorious present. The future would be all right, he had wonderful dreams about the future. on occasion he even had designs on the premiership.

2.

It was a horrible experience, that return to the study of architecture. As Jacob toiled up the hill to Mr. Baker's office, the smell of Pelsworthy streets choked him with dusty familiarity.

It was one of those perfect September days which have a character all their own. There had been a slight frost in the

night, and the grass was heavy with dew. The hedges had been hung with a rich lace-work of spider's web. The air was very still, giving promise of a hot day when the sun had dried the dew. The smoke from cottage chimneys went up in a straight column, gradually fading into the hazy blue of the sky. An occasional brown leaf fell softly through the heavy green of the still living foliage, rustling and tapping as it slid from branch to branch. In the big elms behind the church, the rooks were congratulating one another on the promise of the morning and comparing notes as to the frost in the night, all cawing at once and apparently enjoying themselves amazingly.

"Fancy wasting a day like this in Pelsworthy," murmured Jacob, as he walked to the station, and being in a mood to find fault with all that called him from the clean, sweet loveliness of that September morning, he worked himself into a fine state of disgust with all that was Pelsworthy.

The smell of the office struck him as unbearably mouldy and stale as he opened the half-glass inner door that gave access to the room in which he worked, and there was Bennetts hard at it as usual, tracing, as though there were no finer thing in the world than this dusty, dingy, degrading business of designing horrible shelters from the freshness of the sweet air.

"So you have condescended to come back?" was Bennetts' ironical greeting. "I thought you had set up business on your own account in Ashby Sutton?"

Jacob smiled feebly. How could he reply to these stupid, vulgar jests of the incurably bourgeois? What could he possibly have in common with this middle-class Bennetts?

Mr. Baker came out of the inner office, brisk, fussy and energetic.

"Eh?" he said on catching sight of Jacob. "Eh? Ah! of course, of course. Well, well, been enjoying the fine weather? Um! Ah! Now! what about those tracings, eh? Bennetts, you'd better get on with the details. Come now, all the fresher for a rest, eh? How's your aunt?"

"She's quite well, thank you," murmured Jacob, feeling rather like a schoolboy in trouble, and struggling to regard the little round figure of Mr. Baker with Elmovert contempt.

"Ah! indeed. Capital! Capital! Well, well. Now! Bennetts, copy these letters, will you. I've got to catch the 10.25 to Nassington," and Mr. Baker suddenly looked very stern and retreated into his own office with an air of being hard pressed for time.

Everything going on as usual, the same old dreary uninteresting round, but Jacob could not resist a feeling of delight that Mr. Baker, at least, would be away all day—Nassington was at the other end of the diocese. He determined to take two hours for lunch, and leave early, regardless of all sneers and sarcasms from Bennetts. After all, he wasn't paid for his time, he needn't come at all if he didn't want to. Why shouldn't he take the afternoon off and go to Elmover?

"You'd better come and work over here," remarked Bennetts. "I've got the big board. If you take this tracing up, you'll never get it flat again."

"I suppose we can move the board," snapped Jacob. "It isn't glued down, is it?" He felt a strong disinclination to work anywhere but at his own seat.

"Bit Mondayish, aren't you?" queried Bennetts. "You can move the board if you like—I thought it would save trouble for you to work here, that's all!"

"I don't care." Jacob hesitated and relented somewhat, but he still felt a distaste to being moved. He had dreamed dreams of Elmover in that place of his, dreams that had materialized in the most astonishing manner. "Don't you bother," he added; "I'll do it." However, they moved the boards together.

Jacob worked that morning. It seemed preferable to talking to Bennetts, and tracing allows one plenty of opportunity for dreams. Moreover, he was dreading some allusion to Elmover. It was quite evident that Bennetts could never be made a recipient of any confidences that touched the sacred things of life. Never had Bennetts seemed so incurably middle-class, as he did that morning. He hadn't shaved, and he had a Pelsworthy accent which Jacob had never noticed before. Therefore Jacob worked, and if he had short intervals of gazing at the ground glass in front of

him which hid the hot Pelsworthy street, there was excuse, one must wait for the ink to dry. He was not at ease concerning the announcement he thought of making as to his proposed absence in the afternoon. He regretted that he had not done the bold thing and mentioned his intention to Mr. Baker. There was no reason why he shouldn't do as he liked, but it meant a fuss; Bennetts might be "funny," or he might be nasty, there were precedents for both attitudes. Jacob wavered, uncertain whether the afternoon was worth the bother. He reflected that even if he went home, it was long odds against his seeing "anyone"—a convenient word that had in Jacob's mind a very limited application. She knew that he would be at the office all day, and would not be expecting him.

And then Aunt Hester would be hurt, and think his new-made resolution to work hard did not amount to much. At last he decided to stick to his tracing, and became conscious of a feeling of relief. He hated the mental effort necessary to face an unpleasant situation.

Later he saw the finger of a kindly fate in his decision.

A little after three a timid knock came at the outer door.

"Come in!" bellowed Bennetts, but no one replied. It was cattle market at Pelsworthy on Monday, and the occupants of Mr. Baker's office were used to the shy invasions of country drovers, who mistook the little lobby for the entrance to the next-door public-house.

"Some fool of a yokel," murmured Jacob without looking up.

The knock was repeated, very timidly.

"Oh, come in!" bawled Bennetts, getting down from his stool. The door was opened nervously, and Jacob, turning, saw Nina Felmersdale, very red and awkward, standing in the entrance. He was off his stool in a moment, and Nina turned to him with relief.

"Oh, Jimmy!"—to such familiarity had he come, even with the reserved Nina, in those five weeks—"we're driving, and we thought, perhaps, you'd care to come back with us—can you?" Nina paused and looked askance at Bennetts,

who was absorbed in his drawing, but pink as to the ears; then she dropped her voice, "Maidie wouldn't come. Will you meet us at the Angel, in about half an hour?"

"Yes, rather, of course I will." It didn't occur to Jacob until Nina had gone that it would have been wiser to have accompanied her. When he came back into the office he found Bennetts, still a little pink, but no longer absorbed in his drawing.

"That's Miss Felmersdale, I suppose," he remarked ironically.

Jacob stopped and looked at him. There was a silence which seemed to last quite a long time, while Jacob regarded Bennetts with a long and speculative stare that gradually lost focus, so that Bennetts felt that Jacob was no longer looking at him, but through him.

"No," said Jacob at last, "it's not."

"Taken up with someone else?" asked Bennetts.

"That was Miss Felmersdale's younger sister," returned Jacob. His vanity could not allow of such a misconception, but Bennetts obviously did not believe him.

"Oh! is it?" His grin evidenced his scepticism. "Getting on, aren't you?"

Jacob was overcome with anger at his own inability to make Bennetts comprehend. For a moment he struggled with a desire to shout at him, swear at him, call him a fool, but he realized the futility of these methods. Instead he controlled himself with an effort, shrugged his shoulders, and proceeded to change his coat.

"You're not going, are you?" inquired Bennetts, with a change of tone, as he watched the proceeding. "That tracing's got to go off to-night."

"It can go to hell for all I care," said Jacob as he walked out of the office.

The slow, dogged Bennetts was offended. You picture him—this broad-shouldered, black-haired, square-headed man, with his strongly marked, slightly arched eyebrows—heavily angry, even passionate, throwing down his square and pencils and going over to inspect the tracing on Jacob's board, then

with a sullen resolution taking up the uncompleted work, and setting himself to finish it, sulkily, morosely, with a slow, determined anger that would last for days.

CHAPTER XII

ELMOVER PRESERVES

1.

It was a day of portent, that twenty-third of September ; a day that began with the depression, incident on the return to an atmosphere of office work which contrasted so distressingly with the atmosphere of Elmovery ; a day that brought unanticipated relief in the afternoon, and a return to holiday delights ; a day that ended with a blow. . . .

Jacob had not to wait long in the precincts of the Angel Hotel, before Madeline and Nina appeared. Madeline was in one of her happiest moods, gay, irresponsible, and yet withal so gloriously affectionate, that Nina—who for once had been allowed to drive—spent much time in reminding her sister and Jacob that *they* were not the only occupants of the governess cart, and that there were, moreover, various other people in the world who—according to Nina—were of an inquisitive and tell-tale disposition, people represented by labourers in the fields and occasional foot-passengers on the road, any one of whom not only might, but probably would, recognize the occupants of the governess cart, “and you never know who they mayn’t tell,” was Nina’s conclusion. Nina was by nature afraid of being found out, even when there was nothing to find ; Madeline knew no control but her own wishes.

“We don’t care, dear, do we ?” she said to Jacob.

“Rather not,” responded Jacob, with enthusiasm.

Was it possible that only half an hour ago he had been tracing tedious plans in Mr. Baker’s office, in the company of the middle-class Bennetts ?

They had tea in the schoolroom, a merry, unchaperoned, delightful tea, and afterwards Madeline proposed that she and Jacob should go up to the woods that run down to join Elmoor grounds on the Pelsworthy side, woods where blackberries were abundant, and the hazel-nuts "practically" ripe.

"You are silly," protested Nina; "you're safe to get caught some time, and then there'll be a fine old row."

"Oh! it's all right," laughed Madeline. "She's—you know"—an irreverent allusion to Lady Felmersdale—"and father's gone over to shoot at Fordham."

"Well, I think you are awfully silly—both of you," said Nina with emphasis; "you'll go too far. Mother's just as likely as not to send for you."

"Not she," replied Madeline with a look of contempt; "she jolly well wants us out of the way."

2.

Lady Felmersdale's unhappy weakness was growing ever more pronounced. In the Felmersdale family the subject was not referred to openly. Between Sir Anthony and his daughters there was a tacit understanding, no more—the thing was never spoken of. Only between Madeline and Nina had there been any exchange of confidences, and even they dealt chiefly in innuendo when touching the mysterious topic. It is, therefore, unlikely that an outsider, such as Jacob, would have been let into the secret had he not made the discovery for himself, and, indeed, both Madeline and Nina had done their best to keep him from that discovery. But one evening at Elmoor, the only evening Jacob had ever spent there—Sir Anthony had gone up to town, a rare incident—Lady Felmersdale had been in an unhappily gay and amorous condition, and despite the angry efforts of her daughters had insisted on kissing Jacob. It was a memory that made him feel hot and uncomfortable for many subsequent days—the stout, flushed woman, with a silly smile, pushing aside the physical opposition of the two distressed

girls, and saying with an inane laugh, "Oh! you go away, you two, you want him all to yourselves, I know. You go away," and then to Jacob, "We don't want 'em, do we—they're only kids, only kids." And he saw himself stammering, distressfully looking to Madeline for assistance, making mute inquiry as to what he ought to do. . . . A horrible memory. . . . Madeline had explained everything to him next day; made to him, in a mood of appeal, a confession of her own weakness, her shirked attempts to prevent the occurrence of these horrors. . . . She had even asked Jacob to help her. . . .

3.

The blackberries were not very attractive. It had been a dry, hot summer, and they were small and hard; and the nuts, though ripe, were not plentiful. An oasis of mossy grass hidden amongst the thickest of the hazel, seemed designed for confidences, a material seclusion from all that was not nature.

Madeline was stretched carelessly on the grass, regardless alike of the negligence of her attitude or of possible damage to her dress. The attitude was characteristic, and as to the frock—the grass was dry and the bits could easily be picked off later. Jacob sat hugging his knees, thoughtful, and he hardly knew why, a little nervous. He had been regarding the unusually quiet Madeline with the eye of an artist, wishing that he had the genius to perpetuate the picture. Especially his senses were enraptured by the exquisite contrast of that great mane of rich brown hair, so gloriously alive, against the texture of the dead brown of parched moss. But he could not be content to fill his eyes with the picture, he wanted to touch it and fondle it, and then, he knew, would come kisses, and after a time even kisses palled. How could he find satisfaction, he wondered, and came to an answer in the thought of permanent possession. It was because the time was always so short; he had to make the most of it; if he could look forward to years of uninterrupted intercourse with this beautiful thing, he could find serene enjoyment in

mere contemplation, was the thought of his innocent and uninstructed mind and senses.

"Penny," said Madeline casually, without moving her gaze from its abstracted regardance of the sky.

"I was thinking how beautiful you were," replied Jacob solemnly.

Madeline lifted her head slightly, and looked at him for a moment, then sinking back into her former position, she remarked, "You *are* a rum pup, Jimmy!"

Jacob smiled and moved a little closer to her, near enough to bury his hand in the rippling masses of her hair. The bathos of her remark was not conducive to the continuance of detached, artistic idealization.

"But you are beautiful," he repeated.

Madeline smiled up at him, tolerant of worship. "I know *you* think so," she said, "but you're, oh! you're not quite right in your head on that subject."

"I am," protested Jacob. "I was looking at you from a purely artistic point of view."

"Mother doesn't think me beautiful," Madeline went on, smiling a little grimly, "when she's not quite—you know—and gets into one of her tearing rages; she always goes for me about being so ugly! The other night she called me . . ."

"Oh! Madeline, don't," interrupted Jacob. "I loathe your mother when she gets like that. She's, she's so . . ."

"Yes! I know, but you've got to be awfully nice to her all the same," replied Madeline, without waiting for Jacob's discovery of a just description. "If you aren't, she can make it beastly for us. I should never be able to see you if she didn't let me."

"She doesn't know you're here with me now, does she?" asked Jacob.

"She knows we went into Pelsworthy to fetch you. She suggested it; said we might bring you back to tea. Of course, she just wanted Nina and me out of the way. . . ."

"You do try to keep her from it, don't you?"

"Oh! Yes!" Madeline sighed hopelessly. "Not so

much as I used to—it's no good, you know. One can't do anything."

"I'm awfully sorry for you, dear."

"It's no good worrying," said Madeline, sitting up. "Let's forget all about it now," and then after a slight hesitation, she added, "I daren't stay, very long."

Jacob was still a tyro in the art of making love. He always hesitated to take the initiative. But he understood the purport of Madeline's last remark, and half shyly drew himself close to her, and then, having made the plunge, he drowned himself in rapture.

But kisses do not, cannot satisfy, and Jacob released himself, a little ashamed that he had pressed so far, foolishly anxious lest his innocent caresses had offended the modesty of his ideal. So unnecessarily anxious was he, that he must needs make an effort to reassure her that his adoration had offered no diminishment.

"You know that I love to kiss you," he said; "but I could love you just as much if I never kissed you."

Madeline, propped on one elbow, regarded him thoughtfully. "Why shouldn't you kiss me?" she asked.

"We are going to be married some day, aren't we?" agreed Jacob.

The ghost of a frown gathered for a moment on Madeline's forehead. "Oh! yes—some day, if you ever make enough money. . . ."

"Why did you frown?" asked the sensitive Jacob.

"Did I? I didn't know I did."

"Yes you did, a very little frown. Why did you?"

"Oh! I don't know. It's rather a long way off, isn't it? I say, what's the time?"

"Not six—you needn't go yet, need you?"

"I mustn't stay long."

Then followed another interlude out of which was born a question that Jacob had never before asked, though it had often trembled in his thoughts.

"Has anyone ever kissed you—before?" The tone of the question called for a negative answer.

Instead of replying as he expected, Madeline laughed gaily.

"But have they?" Jacob persisted, a new note of anxiety in his voice.

"What do you think?" Madeline answered.

The vulgarity jarred on Jacob. "Oh! don't play with me, dear," he urged. "I mean no one has ever kissed you as I have, not in the same way—you know what I mean."

His earnestness and anxiety produced their impression, she took her cue from him, and turned her head away.

"Tell me," persisted Jacob. "I must know."

"There was someone—he was only a boy. . . ."

The childish admission hurt him. He was fiercely jealous again, as he had been at the Elmover garden-party, but he must have more knowledge, and so continued.

"Oh! Madeline, you didn't care for him, did you? Who was it?"

"Nobody you know. It was last June."

"Can't you tell me about it?"

"N-no. What does it matter? It's all over and done with."

"You didn't *care* for him? Madeline!"

A great fear was springing up in Jacob's mind. He had not during the past five weeks considered the possibility that anyone but himself had ever made love to this girl. In the purity of his own mind he had conceived her love for him to be of the same kind as his own.

"Madeline! You didn't *care* for him?"

"Oh! I don't know. I suppose I thought I did. I was such a kid."

"But did he kiss you? Not as I have kissed you?"

Perhaps Madeline was in some way enjoying his suffering. It gave her a sense of power. But she assumed an attitude of humility, and her confession was made with her hands clasping her ankles, her forehead on her knees, her hair all about her face. She gave a ghost of a nod from this position, a vague affirmative that keened Jacob to a desire for the truth.

"Not often?" he protested.

"Pretty often," murmured Madeline.

"Then you did—care for him?"

"I suppose I thought so—then."

"How old was he?"

"Nineteen. It was my cousin, mother's nephew."

A memory awoke in Jacob of the scene on the cricket field, and of that gauche, common boy with the red hair who, someone had said, was staying at Elmoover.

"His name wasn't Kingdon, was it?" he asked, the name springing to his mind with horrible certainty. "Not a boy with red hair?"

Madeline looked up. "Why? What do you know about him?"

"Oh! *not* that boy. Say it wasn't!"

"Why? What was the matter with him?"

Poor Jacob, he was badly hurt. His too active imagination insisted upon picturing that coarse, horrible boy (Jacob had not forgotten the insult offered him) caressing this delicate, sweet Madeline. Ugh! How could she? For a moment he revolted. He got to his feet and moved away.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated. "How could you? That beast!"

Madeline looked up at him, ruffled by the wound to her vanity, so new from this source.

"He wasn't a beast," she said indignantly. "I've always liked Billy. Father was rather rotten to him, he's never had a chance."

"You didn't really like him."

"Yes, I did," defiantly. "Why not?"

"It makes me feel sick," returned Jacob. He sat down, a reasonable distance away, and began to smoke. To break the tensity of the silence he repeated his last remark with a variation, and murmured emphatically, "absolutely sick."

Madeline was resentful. For a moment she intended to go away, and never see Jacob again, but before she had time to act on the intention, she changed her mind. It may be that she saw that Jacob would make no effort to detain her, and that her pride would not admit what amounted to a defeat. Whatever her motives and emotions, she was con-

scious still of her power over him, and after a short interval of gloomy silence she went across to him and wound her arms round his neck.

"Don't be cross," she said caressingly.

But Jacob sat wounded and unresponsive, trying to adjust his conception of her to this new knowledge, yet vividly conscious of the joy of her presence, fearful lest she should withdraw it. It was this fear which quickened the conciliation, for Madeline, offended by his lack of response, made a movement to withdraw her arms, and found herself detained.

"I thought I made you sick," she said.

"Not you, not you," returned Jacob, holding her, "only the thought of that—that beast."

Madeline condescended. "I was such a kid," she said, her face against his. "I—I didn't know anything, and he was so big and strong. Don't shudder. There'll never be anybody but you again—never!"

"Never? You promise!"

"Of course."

"Promise!"

"I promise." This with a hug of warm assurance.

"After all," said the converted Jacob after an interval, giving expression to his new-found point of view—"after all, kisses don't count for much."

They had separated from their near embrace, and as he spoke Jacob was studying Madeline's face. At his words, she blushed as he had never seen her blush before, a great flood of colour crept up her neck, cheeks, forehead.

"Why did you blush?" he asked.

"I didn't," said Madeline, and hid her burning face in her hands.

"Madeline! Why did you blush?" he persisted.

Her only reply was a sob. Jacob, who had never seen Madeline cry even in anger, thought she was laughing.

"Why are you laughing?" he asked.

"Oh! I—I'm not. Oh! of course you'll never understand. It wasn't my fault! It . . ." She broke off and sobbed unrestrainedly.

Jacob didn't move; he felt cold and sick. His suspicion was growing clearer; innocent as he was of any experience, he had read much.

"I didn't know—I didn't understand. I didn't understand," sobbed Madeline.

"But," stammered Jacob, "you don't mean—you. . . ."

Madeline looked up. "Don't mean what?" she asked.

"You don't mean," said Jacob, "that you. . . ." He broke off and began again. "You don't mean that he. . . ."

"Of course not! You don't think! . . ." She, too, found words impossible.

Jacob rose slowly. "We ought to be going," he said.

Madeline agreed, and very silently they made their way back to Elmover. They skirted the house and went on to the ladder stile.

"Don't bother to come any farther," said Jacob. "Good-bye."

"Why are you so cross?" hesitated Madeline. "After all, Billy's my cousin, and kisses don't matter."

"No, kisses don't matter," replied Jacob.

"You don't think. . . ." said Madeline, looking at him, and then she turned away quickly and left him, for he knew, and she saw that he knew, and though she cried again after she had left him, in her heart of hearts she had wanted him to know.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WHEATSHEAF CLARET

1.

"You are late," said Aunt Hester cheerfully. "Have you been making up for lost time?"

The remark was intended as an encouragement, there was even a spice of praise in it, but it was peculiarly unfortunate. Jacob, weary with disaster, had had some thought of making confidences, but this greeting jarred him. At that moment

he loathed all memory of work, he was in a state of intense emotion that was not all pain. "Making up for lost time!" he thought. "Aunt Hester can't understand. If I told her she'd be glad—glad! She'd think that now I'd go on working. Good Lord, working!" He shut himself in, resolved that he would never confide any hint of his tragedy to Aunt Hester.

"Yes, I am rather late. There was a lot to do," he lied.

At supper, Hester watched him uneasily. Jacob made no effort to be cheerful, ate very little, and that mechanically. Hester talked on indifferent subjects, she anticipated another revolt against Mr. Baker's office, and was uncertain how to meet it. She thought this moody attitude was a preparation, deliberate; and she was surprised when, after a silent evening, he bade her good-night very quietly, and evinced no sign of opening the topic she dreaded.

"You're tired to-night, dear," she said, and then added:

"I suppose you want to catch the 9.10 in the morning?"

"The 9.10, yes," repeated Jacob. "Good-night."

Hester was puzzled, but she did not suspect that Jacob had not spent his whole day at Pelsworthy.

Jacob felt tired and wanted to sleep, but he was no sooner in bed than his imagination began to torture him. "I won't think of it," he said with desperate resolution. "I *will* go to sleep and forget—everything." A minute afterwards he found himself picturing new and more horrible details. At half-past eleven he thought it was nearly morning, lighted the candle and looked at his watch. When he had at last convinced himself that it was still going, he decided to give up the effort to sleep, and for a time sat on the edge of his bed smoking cigarettes. The night was cold, but he took a pleasure in a physical discomfort that distracted his thoughts from more painful things. About one o'clock, when he had smoked all his cigarettes, he got back into bed and curled himself up to warm his ice-cold feet. By degrees he began to doze and to wake again without any consciousness that he had been asleep. He was startled when his candle began to flicker, and he found that it had burned itself out. His

watch told him that it was now a quarter past three. Then he blew the candle out, and forgot everything till he was surprised by Aunt Hester's knock. Even then he could hardly realize that he had slept.

As he walked to the station, he knew that the office was not possible for him that day, but he could not have faced any disturbances or arguments with Aunt Hester. He decided to play truant. The weather still held, though a long wing of fine cirrus, very remote and high, that was spreading up from the south, gave evidence to the weatherwise that the period of summer was determined. At the station Jacob studied the time-table in the poky little booking-office, and found that there was a train out of Pelsworthy due at 9.18. He remembered that his train always met another in the morning, but he had never before concerned himself as to its destination. He had never been down the line before, and after one or two stations the names of the stopping-places were unfamiliar to him; he decided at last in favour of Stannisthorpe, because the first three letters were the same as those of his own name.

"Return?" asked the station-master, who was also booking-clerk and porter.

"Oh! yes, return, please," replied Jacob.

"Been 'aving a 'oliday?" remarked the station-master, by way of making conversation as he stamped the ticket.

"You're quite a stranger. Five an' thruppence, please."

"I went in yesterday. . . ."

"Didn't see you come back, though," parried the station-master.

"No! I drove," said Jacob, and the memory of that drive seemed to be of something very distant and far away. He went out on to the platform and wandered up and down till the train came in. His lips were sore and his mouth dry from smoking unaccustomed cigarettes in the middle of the night, but he was enjoying a spirit of adventure. Curious as it may seem, he had never before been so far, alone in a train.

2.

The spirit of adventure grew as he neared Stannisthorpe. The character of the scenery had changed. He was out of the river valley now and in a broad undulating country of few woods, that was new to him. He would have enjoyed this discovery of unknown country immensely, if he had not been forced to carry with him that memory of yesterday; it kept recurring and damping his pleasure. He wanted to put off the thought of it. . . .

"Which way is the village?" he asked of the man who collected his ticket, for there was no sign of human habitation visible from the little wooden platform.

The man jerked his head vaguely over his shoulder.

"How far is it?" asked Jacob.

"'Bout a milenarf," grumbled the man, and moved away.

"Here, I say," Jacob called after him. "Can you tell me what trains there are back to Ashby Sutton?"

"Twelve seven 'n four noine," replied the man, and made good his escape.

"Four nine," repeated Jacob to himself, to impress the time in his memory, as he went down the steps on to the road. It had taken him rather more than an hour to come, that meant he would be home about the usual time, and there would be no need to tell Aunt Hester anything about his excursion. The fate were being kind to him. For a few minutes his spirits went up. Hang Bennetts and Mr. Baker!

He loitered down the road to the village, still in an exploring mood. It was not so hot as it had been, a little fitful breeze had come out of the south-west, and there was a thin haze of cloud which dimmed the sun.

Stannisthorpe proved to be a village of quite respectable size on a main road, with an Inn which Jacob marked as a good place for lunch later on. Meanwhile he had to get through the time somehow, and he was becoming conscious of a desire to sit down. He walked on through the one straggling street of Stannisthorpe, and looked about for some wood or quiet spot where he might sit down and think.

He had decided that he would think out the whole situation thoroughly before he returned home. He must make up his mind definitely. He sighed, for how could there be any alternative to the utter renunciation of Madeline? The environs of Stannisthorpe were not inviting, and he loafed through the morning with constant references to his watch. He had nothing to smoke, as he had brought neither pipe nor cigarettes with him, but now his mouth felt comparatively clean again, and he called himself a fool for his neglect of so important a matter. He sat on a gate for some time, but the wind was getting stronger, and the clouds coming up out of the south-west were now heavy enough to blot out the sun altogether; he even felt cold, and glad to walk again.

3.

He had fixed half-past one as a reasonable time to return to the village for lunch, but he found himself back at the Inn nearly an hour earlier than he had intended. He was shy and doubtful about going in; perhaps they didn't provide food at places of this sort, he reflected, for he was quite unlearned in such matters. There were two doors. Under the sign was a door which opened boldly on to the high-road, the other was set back behind a strip of garden, and approached by a wicket-gate in a thick privet hedge. He decided that this entrance must be private, if it belonged to the Inn at all, which was not certain, and after two or three minutes of hesitation, he nervously opened the door under the sign, and found himself in a passage from which he could see into a room on his left, the walls set round with forms, drawn up to long trestle-tables, the floor strewn with sawdust. Two men were visible sitting at the table, with metal pots in front of them. Jacob approached nervously, and discovered a little pewter-covered bar set across the corner behind the door, and another door behind the counter. Trying to appear unconscious of the stare of the two men, he moved up to the bar and waited for someone to appear.

"Hey another! You're wanted!" called out one of the men, and then, as Jacob turned, he said: "She's joost away. You ring that there li'l bell there—she'll coom."

"Oh! thanks," stammered Jacob, and gently tinkled the little hand-bell which stood on the counter. Presently a stout, florid woman of about forty, bustled in through the door behind the bar.

"Well 'n what for you?" she demanded, looking Jacob over with a critical stare.

"Er—can I have anything to eat here?" he asked.

"Plenty of bread and cheese, if that'll suit you," returned the landlady.

This was not at all what Jacob wanted; the landlady, seeing his hesitation, said:

"Or did you want dinner?"

"Yes! I should prefer that, if you can manage it," answered Jacob. "I wasn't sure . . ."

"Oh! we can manage it," said the landlady, apparently a little huffed. "You came in the wrong door—the other's the 'otel entrance"; and Jacob found himself ushered across the passage, through a sitting-room, and then into another little room, chiefly remarkable for a very large table and an excess of chairs.

"You'd better 'ave it 'ere," said the landlady. "The coffee-room's beyond, but there's no one in to-day, and this is 'andier."

4.

By chance Jacob had stumbled on the Wheatsheaf, an old coaching Inn which still kept up its reputation, owing to the patronage afforded it as an excellent centre in the hunting season. In the winter the Wheatsheaf did a very select business, and the landlady, when she discovered that her guest wanted decent entertainment and was not unwilling to pay for it, bestirred herself to provide quite an elaborate meal.

It was all in the spirit of the adventure, and Jacob, waiting for the first course, decided that something stronger

than water was necessary as an accompaniment to the banquet.

"And what will you take to drink, sir?" asked the landlady, when she brought the soup.

"Have you any wine?" Jacob hardly knew sherry from claret, but he hoped for some intimation, some guide from the lips of his hostess.

"Why, yes, sir!" she said. "We've very old cellars 'ere. Quite noted we are for our wine, and no better judge than me 'usband, as many of the gentry round would tell you themselves. But I suppose you're a stranger in these parts?"

"Yes! I've never been here before," said Jacob, racking his brains for the name of some appropriate wine. He remembered in London, after his operation, that he had had dinner at a restaurant with Aunt Hester, who had ordered something that ended in "heimer," he thought, but he could not display his ignorance by ordering "something-that-ends-in-heimer," and the first syllable evaded him.

"P'raps you'd like to try some of our special claret," suggested the landlady, at last, as Jacob seemed to be no nearer an answer to her question. "It's four an' six the 'alf bottle, but me 'usband says it's worth double."

Jacob thought the price very reasonable.

It was a sound wine, and was brought by the landlord in person, nursed in a basket and uncorked with tender care. "Twenty-seven year in bottle," said the high-priest of the cellar, concluding his history, and waited with arms folded for Jacob to perform his part of the ritual. Jacob never knew how he fell in the landlord's estimation by his trial of that precious wine. He never inhaled its fragrance, nor examined its colour; there was no preliminary savouring of the bouquet, that last hesitation before the first drops are allowed to pass the lips; no rolling of the mellow fluid on the palate before the supreme act of swallowing; no appreciative smack of the lips, to be followed by the expected commendation: "A fine wine that, landlord, a very fine wine." No! Jacob tasted it as he might have tasted lemonade, and said it was "very nice." "It might a' been ginger-beer, and he'd

never 'ave knowed the difference," grunted the landlord on his return to the kitchen. "I 'ate to sell a good wine to a customer like that—it's fair wasted on 'em."

There, however, the landlord was in error, for that sound claret brought Jacob inspiration. Under its mellowing influence he began to see wonderful possibilities. He was a boy of a somewhat religious turn of mind, and his training and education had stiffened him into a conventional attitude towards what he labelled collectively as "sin." There can be no doubt, also, that at this age he was something of a milksop. His lameness had made him dependent, and it was only within the last six weeks that he had begun to develop any originality of thought.

Since that parting last night at the Elmover stile, he had regarded his problem only from one point of view. He had seen it as a story out of one of those many delightfully moral novels he obtained from the Pelsworthy library. He saw it all in black and white, there were no half-tones, and for his own part it had appeared to him that there was no option, save renunciation. He had, indeed, not thought out his problem at all; he had adopted the thoughts of writers of modern fiction to fit the situation.

It was not only the effects of the Wheatsheaf claret that brought him clearer sight on that September afternoon, the claret was merely an instrument which quickened his imagination and gave life to the thoughts that had been accumulating subconsciously during the past six weeks. For nearly twenty-four hours he had been considering a particular desire of the flesh; considering it with disgust as something removed from himself, he had made no personal application. Now, as that sound claret warmed and stimulated him, he began to find a new and strange courage. He had come out on an adventure, and he began to consider the possibilities of life under new and extraordinarily fascinating conditions. That other boy—Kingdon—was a beast, in that Jacob maintained his opinion; but he was a man, whereas he, himself . . . "Oh! he'd been a molly-coddle. What did she think of him?" Jacob hastily finished his wine and ordered cigarettes.

"Good Lord!" he reflected, as he smoked in blissful ease. "Why shouldn't I taste life? Why . . ."

A spatter of rain against the window roused him, he looked at his watch. It was half-past three. He rang the bell, asked for his bill, and inquired if he could have a trap to the station.

5.

By the time he reached Ashby Sutton the effects of the claret were subsiding, and the mile walk home to the cottage in the pouring rain reduced him to something more than ordinary flatness again.

"Oh! my dear boy," said Hester, "you're wet through. I sent a trap to meet you, and they said you hadn't come by the 4.50."

"I went in to see about my season ticket," lied Jacob. "I never thought of looking out for a trap."

The Wheatsheaf claret was not wasted, it had inspired Jacob to look over the edge of his world, and he had seen another world beyond. When he had once dared, the rest was easy. His adventure had resulted in a wonderful discovery, he had discovered that it was possible to hold views of life different from those of Fearon, Eric and Aunt Hester. This was the greatest discovery he ever made.

CHAPTER XIV

ERIC IN OPPOSITION

1.

THE benefits of a sound training in mathematics are inestimable. The study of the potentialities held by a fundamental and determinable x induces a logical and analytical habit of mind. The synthetic habit follows, or should follow; when it is attained the mind is equipped for the consequent study of the more intricate problems of life. This

in its application to training. A profound study of mathematics will not fit a man for life, nor will any other engrossing specialism. The ontologist must be many-minded, he may have fantasy, but not bigotry, and absorption, whether in the calculus, in a particular school of painting or letters, or in any specialism that tends towards a denial of other turns of thought, implies bigotry; wherefore specialism, though materially helpful, is bad for the soul. But as training there is nothing so strengthening as the study of the determinable x . If Jacob had persisted longer in his attentiveness and devotion to that fascinating sign, he would have floundered less and developed more rapidly. After his great discovery—after he had boldly conceived and grasped the disintegrating truth that it was possible and even creditable to have an independent mind—he should have made resort to the only study which deals in certainties. Instead he floundered, at first wildly, believing he was about to sink, and then, perceiving that if he sank it was no deeper than a man may sink into a comfortable heap of feathers, he floundered with enjoyment, or it might be said that he wallowed. Indeed, he wallowed until the feathers were dissipated, and he discovered beneath them a stony and uneven hardness that caused him grave discomfort. Not till then did he set about the determination of his particular x , which may be figured with unmathematical vagueness as a standard, some imitable integer of thought, conduct and purpose.

During the six months which followed his great discovery Jacob had some occasional dim perception of the uncertainties of general standards, even while there was still an unknown depth of feathers between him and the stony hardness below. While he was with Madeline there seemed no doubt or question, so far had he progressed from the original point of departure. He did not analyze his conceptions deeply, but he saw himself following a perfectly natural course. There was no sin in his relations with Madeline, because neither of them believed themselves to be sinning. Sin, so called, was in this instance a code, man-made, to preserve the moral *status quo*, a light and easily broken code

that could be set aside without incurring any penalty of the law, without incurring anything more than a certain, more or less negligible, displeasure of society, easily to be pacified. Moreover, society was in profound ignorance of the doings, which it might have described—from its own point of view—as culpable. Let society, therefore, remain in ignorance and the stigma did not exist. So powerful became Jacob's persuasion that at times he doubted whether society itself would blame him, or her,—except outwardly—and that merely for the ostensible purpose of impressing the code, by precept, on its own sons and daughters. Jacob recklessly preconceived a standard, and bent his mind to its determination, encouraging every tendency to deny the truth of the code. But on occasion a dim perception of uncertainty was superimposed. What would Aunt Hester, or Fearon, or Eric—say? When he was at Elmover they became in imagination supple, plastic creatures, to be moulded by argument, but when he came into their presence, they appeared suddenly rigid and unyielding, they radiated an atmosphere of unconquerable bigotry. Each had his, or her, own standard, but in this thing they would be united to disapprove him, and how could he argue with them and exhibit the fallacy of the code? If but one of the three had been on his side. . . . In fancy he heard Fearon's "But, my dear boy . . ." or Aunt Hester's "But, dear, you must see . . ." or Eric's "But, you young fool . . ." They would be so solid, so united in this. Most of all he feared the informed contempt of Eric, and after two years the brothers were to meet again.

2.

Eric was coming to spend Easter at Ashby Sutton. His letter to Aunt Hester had been short, but Eric always wrote briefly.

"Coming down here for Easter?" Jacob had asked.

"Only from Thursday till Tuesday," Hester had replied, and had passed Eric's letter across to Jacob. He had studied the meticulously neat, tiny writing, each line spaced with

absolute precision, the left margin wide and parallel ; and as he had read, Jacob had mentally compared his own indeterminate hand with this scrupulous regularity. Inimitable, he had decided,—but he would have liked to imitate it.

“ Doesn't say why he's coming,” he had commented.

“ I suppose he wants to see you.”

Jacob had drawn down the corners of his mouth to indicate at once incredulity and dissatisfaction at the compliment paid him.

“ Not he !” had been his sole comment.

Easter was late that year, and when Jacob started to meet the seven o'clock train it was still broad daylight. In the village he met Madeline unexpectedly, and was deflected from his original purpose of meeting Eric. Madeline explained that she had come over on her mother's behalf to fetch the altar vases which Lady Felmersdale was going to “ do for Easter.” Madeline was, indeed, carrying the vases in her hands. “ Are you coming back as far as the stile ?” she asked.

“ Well, my brother's coming down for Easter . . .” began Jacob.

“ Oh ! you'll get enough of him,” Madeline said, and then after a pause she added : “ Father's over at Pelsworthy, we needn't hurry, unless you want to get back for dinner. . . .”

3.

“ Where do you suppose James has gone ?” asked Eric, when he and Aunt Hester had finished supper alone.

Hester was embarrassed. She guessed where he was, but Jacob had asked her to say nothing to his brother of the Elmover intimacy. “ I'd sooner tell him myself,” Jacob had said. So Hester, who was an inexperienced liar, bungled her answer, and Eric frowned.

“ Does he often disappear suddenly like this ?” he asked, and at that moment Jacob came in.

“ Hullo ! we thought you were lost,” was Eric's greeting.

"Hullo!" responded Jacob. "Sorry I couldn't meet you."

It was not a cordial meeting after two years' separation, but Eric was displeased that his brother should not have met him, and Jacob had instantly become aware of some note of the old bullying authority in Eric's tone; he resented it, he was determined that he would not passively admit his old inferiority.

Jacob refused all offers of the supper pressed upon him by Aunt Hester, and presently Eric displayed the real object of his visit. He was going to be married, soon, in a few weeks at most. This was startling; neither Hester nor Jacob had had any hint of an engagement.

"Yes, I've been engaged for over a year," said Eric, "but there were some difficulties in the way. Her people are not strictly orthodox, but her father has some prejudice against her marrying out of their own persuasion . . ."

"Do you mean that they're Jews?" blundered Jacob.

"I hope you have no objection," sneered Eric.

"Oh! Good Lord, no!" said Jacob eagerly, intending propitiation, and blundering farther. "Why we're quarter Jewish, too."

Eric's expression conveyed a pitying contempt, but he made no answer, and continued his statement of intentions. Jacob, paying little attention, wondered why he had been snubbed. It is true that at Elmoor he would never have breathed a word of that Jew strain, but surely if Eric was going to marry a Jewess, he should be rather proud than otherwise of that Semitic ancestry. Always this attitude of superiority, this administering of snubs! Yet Jacob, struggling to persuade himself of his own equality, was borne down by his brother's personality. Eric was so certain, so infallible, so undeviatingly clever.

As Jacob watched him and listened to his recital, he became more and more depressed and conscious of inferiority. The girl whom Eric was going to marry had been at Girtcn, and had taken a first in modern languages; she had three hundred a year of her own, she was brilliantly clever, and had social experience and influence; she was, of course, just

the right and suitable person for Eric to marry. And Eric, himself, was in a good position; he was earning altogether some four hundred pounds a year, and had splendid prospects. He had saved enough money to take and furnish a house in West Hampstead, and to furnish it, if one could judge from his descriptions, without any of those petty economies which might have marred the completeness and uniformity of his scheme. He mentioned, casually, his books—eighteen hundred books that would line the walls of the room he had chosen for his library. How complete he was, this Eric, and it was all the outcome of his own cleverness. While he, Jacob, was such a miserable failure. What hope was there that he would ever make a decent income out of architecture? He remembered all his wasted time. During the last six months he had scamped his work, taking little or no interest in it, and doing only just so much as was necessary to avoid open reproof from Mr. Baker. His three years' indentureship had expired, but he was staying on as an "improver," without salary. He was supposed to be devoting special time to study, for the purpose of passing the second examination of the three that he must take before he could become an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects. The "preliminary" had been non-technical, a mere test of general knowledge, but the "intermediate" necessitated application and the making of many large sheets of drawings, which had to be approved before the candidate could sit for examination. These drawings were in progress, but two or three had not turned out satisfactorily, and he had shirked remaking them. But the worst part of the affair was the book-knowledge required, the dry details of building-construction and classic proportions in which he had never pretended to take the least interest. When Mr. Baker had made the suggestion of Jacob's qualifying for his A.R.I.B.A., and had quoted the historic performance of his late brilliant pupil, Mr. Bradley, the idea had been taken up with enthusiasm, but all that was long before the Elmovey days. Looking back, now, Jacob was only conscious of a dreary record of lost opportunities so far as his profession

was concerned. Somewhere upstairs was a half-completed drawing, dirty and incorrect, of the priest's door, which he had begun on his holiday last year. That, too, had to be finished or begun again, it was one of the test drawings required for the examination. . . . What was that Eric was saying ?

"No, the hours are very short ; I'm free by four o'clock, but I do a good deal of reviewing, and that takes up my time. . . ."

"Reviewing ?" queried Jacob.

"Yes!" Eric went on, half in answer to his brother's question. "I had an introduction to Maunders two years ago, and he gave me a book on Economics to do. Since then I have been doing two or three books every month for the *Monthly Review*, and regular work of the same sort as well for the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Daily Post*. The *Review* pays fairly well, but the dailies don't, and they always want the notices cut down as much as possible ; still, one gets the books."

How hopeless to attempt any claim of equality with this brilliant creature, so consistent, so hard-working, so admirably clever ! Jacob thought of his drawing of the priest's door and shivered. What achievement of any kind had he to show ? His illicit love-affair began to seem a reproach instead of a glory, something to be ashamed of and hidden. By Eric's standard Jacob was a very poor thing, and it seemed in the light of those records of success such an admirable, even a magnificent standard. Work—that was the real thing, the thing that brought happiness and satisfaction. "Yes, I must work," reiterated Jacob to himself. "I must, I will work."

When, towards the close of the evening, Eric inquired of his brother how he was "getting on," Jacob had found nothing to say, and it was left for Aunt Hester to answer the question. She guessed much of what had been passing in Jacob's mind, and had encouraged Eric to talk of his own doings, knowing that the effect produced upon Jacob must be salutary ; but now she took up the cudgels on behalf of her younger nephew,

and made out quite a good case for him, so good a case that Jacob attempted denial.

"You're too modest," said Eric. "Look here, I might get you some books on architecture to review."

"Oh! I don't know that I could, I don't know enough. I shouldn't know what to say," stammered Jacob, pleased nevertheless.

"Well, have a try," said Eric, encouragingly. "Send me the article, and I'll look over it for you, before it goes in."

As he undressed, Jacob was still inflamed with the resolution to work, and his depression had lifted. When he was in bed he gave himself up to dreams of accomplishment, which included Madeline and social success; they also included a vision of himself as the great authority on all written works of architecture. "One must specialize," Eric had said. That should be Jacob's speciality.

4.

As an object lesson Eric's visit was all that Aunt Hester could have desired, for her elder nephew spent the greater part of his holiday in working. He had brought three or four very solid-looking books with him, and was engrossed first in reading them, and then in writing. He read one of his articles to Jacob, who succeeded in understanding the gist of the argument, became quite interested for the moment in the subject of Economics, and began to read one of his brother's books. Though handicapped by the complete lack of previous knowledge on the subject, he apprehended the logical trend of the work, and on the strength of this reading and his conversations on the subject with Eric, he became quite an authority on Economics to Aunt Hester and Bennetts.

He saw no more of Madeline until the afternoon of Easter Monday, and then he met her, accidentally, while taking a "constitutional" (as Eric termed it) in the company of his brother.

He had given Eric no hint of his relations with Elmoover,

and when they saw Madeline in the village, Jacob was at first considerably embarrassed.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, when he caught sight of the familiar form in the distance, "there's . . ."

"There's what?" asked Eric.

"Miss Felmersdale," said Jacob, blushing violently.

"Sir Anthony Felmersdale's daughter?" questioned Eric, and then, "Do you know them?"

There was that in the tone of Eric's voice which gave Jacob his first consciousness of achievement since Eric's arrival. After all, this paragon of a brother, with his cleverness and success, his Liberal views in politics, and his assumption of completeness, was anxious to know the Felmersdales, was even, perhaps, envious of Jacob, the failure, for this one little superiority of attainment.

"Oh! yes—rather!" replied Jacob. "I'll introduce you."

He had his triumph, for Madeline, following her habit of ignoring any man whom she met for the first time, addressed herself exclusively to Jacob after the polite ceremony of introduction, asking him what he had been doing during Easter, and, with an assumption of ordinary relations, when he was coming up to Elmoor.

"Is your brother staying with you long?" she concluded, still addressing Jacob.

Eric interposed with, "No! I'm going back to town to-morrow afternoon. I am not taking a holiday this Easter. I . . ."

Madeline did not wait to hear Eric's reasons for not taking a holiday.

"Well, come up to tea on Wednesday," she said to Jacob. "I can't stop now—good-bye," and with a nod she moved away.

"Extraordinarily good-looking young woman," remarked Eric, as he and Jacob continued their walk, "but rather lacking in manners."

"I've never noticed it!" returned Jacob, leaving the application of his remark uncertain. He was elated at his triumph, but puzzled to know whether the invitation to tea on Wednesday was *bona fide*.

5.

Both Eric's comments were justified. He did not elaborate either just then, but after tea, when he and Jacob had the cottage to themselves, he returned to the subject.

"How did you come to know the Felmersdales?" he asked.

Jacob explained, and answered, to the best of his ability, various other questions about the family. Then, following a pause, Eric said,

"Don't fall in love with that handsome young woman, James."

"Not likely to do that," mumbled Jacob, feeling a strong desire to confess; "but, anyway, why not?"

"For one thing, because Sir Anthony would probably kick you out of the house," Eric replied; "and for another, because I shouldn't advise you to trust the constancy of the young woman."

"How can you possibly judge? You've only seen her for two minutes." Jacob resented the last expression bitterly; with regard to Sir Anthony's probable attitude, his own opinion coincided very closely with that of his brother.

"She's much too pretty to be faithful to anyone who wasn't in her own set. She might amuse herself—but she'll probably marry money or a title."

"Oh! that's rot," protested Jacob, with heat. "Do you mean to say that every girl who's good-looking . . .?" He stopped, fumbling over the construction of his sentence.

"You might discriminate," said Eric coolly. "It is not a question of 'every girl,' but of the particular girl under discussion."

"Oh! well, I don't see why you should say Miss Felmersdale's like that," said Jacob. "I've known her nearly a year. . . ."

"Intimately?" Eric interpolated.

"What do you mean by 'intimately'?"

Eric shrugged his shoulders. "I should really advise you not to make an ass of yourself by asking her to marry you," was his answer.

Jacob lost his temper. "Oh! of course, *you'd* sooner I didn't," he retorted.

"Why?" asked Eric, with composure.

"You think I can never do anything."

"I think it's about time you began to grow up and use your common sense a little—if you have any," returned Eric, still speaking in a calm, judicial voice, which Jacob found intensely irritating.

"Oh! damn your advice!" he said, choking with anger.

"It's quite unnecessary to swear," was Eric's quiet reply, and Jacob, feeling utterly impotent, got up and went out of the cottage, slamming the door behind him.

6.

A supper Eric was apparently quite undisturbed, and oblivious of any recent show of temper on the part of his younger brother, but Jacob, conscious that, as ever, he had been worsted and scored off, was gloomy and silent, and made an excuse to go early to bed.

When he had gone, Eric took the opportunity to talk about him to Aunt Hester. He was still the same Eric Stahl in all essentials that Morpeth had analyzed. His present attitude with regard to his brother was exactly the same as that which he had exhibited towards young Anderson's speculations. He did the right thing, not because he had any particular love of rectitude for its own sake, but because he understood, intellectually, that the right thing was the most profitable. In all things he respected the code, because he knew that to oppose the code entailed an expenditure of energy which he counted as profitless. He was singularly free from emotion and devoid of any true ambition. He had hitched his waggon to the sturdiest horse he could lay hold of, and he kept his eyes on the road. He had never seen the stars.

"About James," he began. "I think you ought to put a stop to his seeing Miss Felmersdale."

"Oh! Has he told you?" exclaimed Hester.

"In effect, yes! We met Miss Felmersdale this afternoon in the village, and I guessed that he was in love with her then. Afterwards, when I spoke to him about it, he lost his temper."

"Yes, of course; he would," murmured Hester.

"It is an absurd infatuation," Eric continued. "Miss Felmersdale, naturally, would never fall in love with him, and even if she did . . ."

"But you don't understand," interrupted Hester. "She has fallen in love with him, or, at least, I am bound to suppose so. Jacob is always seeing her, and people in the village talk about them. They say dreadful things, not to me, of course, but it gets round in all sorts of ways." Hester sighed.

"Then he is compromising Miss Felmersdale's reputation," said Eric, "which is selfish and dishonourable."

Hester regarded Eric thoughtfully. She had no particular affection for him, but she knew he was to be trusted, and she wanted his help because she felt that he was entirely reliable.

"Do you know, Eric," she began, hesitating, "I have been very, very much troubled over all this. . . ."

"James is utterly thoughtful," interpolated Eric.

"No! that is not true," said Hester. "He is headstrong and emotional, and he is, or has been, madly in love with this girl. But that is not what I want to say. I am afraid, I am almost sure or I wouldn't say this to you, that . . . that this Madeline Felmersdale is not a—nice girl. Do you understand?"

"A coquette?" suggested Eric, who wished for a plainer statement.

"Yes, and more than that, I am afraid. Young as she is—she won't be eighteen till next July—I have heard that Jacob is not her first lover. There was a cousin, a boy named Kingdon. They were seen—in the woods together. . . ."

Eric whistled. "I suppose James knows. . . ."

"Oh! no! He thinks she's perfection—though I have noticed some difference in his treatment of her lately. Still, he's absolutely at her beck and call. She can whistle him

up whenever she likes, and I have no control over him—none.”

Eric had formed a new picture of Madeline. An untrue picture, because he could not make allowance for temperament, for lack of training, for the circumstance of Elmo, and for a dozen other contributory causes. He did not know that her eager mind and her passionate body had been allowed to develop uncontrolled, he merely condemned, unhesitatingly, without any palliation. He thought of the beautiful face, the burning hair (not yet “put up,” but confined in a long thick plait), the hot eyes that were too bold for a girl of seventeen, and he accepted Aunt Hester’s statement without a shadow of doubt; and condemned. The picture he formed of Madeline at that moment was never to be altered, it remained with him always. For him she became a thing to be despised, to be treated with contempt.

“That alters the case,” he remarked after a pause. “I should say the best thing you can do is to get him away from her, if possible. He’s out of his articles, now; why not try to get him into a London office?”

Again Hester sighed, this time more heavily. “Yes! I have thought of it,” she said, wearily. “I suppose it must come to that, if I can persuade him to go. In any case she’s sure to give him up sooner or later, and then he won’t stop here. Oh! I hope, I hope he won’t break his heart over it.”

“ . . . ung fool!” thought Eric.

7.

Jacob went to the office next morning, he had excuse for taking an extra day’s holiday, but he wished to avoid any further discussions with his brother.

Eric made no further allusion to the Felmersdales, though he went to the station with Jacob. As they were saying good-bye, Eric said, “I’ll try to get you some architectural books for review.”

“Oh! will you? Thanks very much,” replied Jacob. “Though I really don’t know if I shall be able to do them.”

"Oh! that'll be all right," said Eric. "Send your article to me, and I'll look over it before it goes in."

"It's awfully good of you," said Jacob. "Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye," returned Eric, and then just as the train was going out he said, "You're coming up for the wedding?"

"Oh! yes, thanks, I should like to," called back Jacob.

"He might have asked me to be his best man," he reflected.

CHAPTER XV

A DETERMINATION

1.

ERIC did not forget his promise. A fortnight later Jacob received an interesting-looking parcel from his brother, and, by the same post, a letter the substance of which was, "Stubbs of the D.P. sent me these. Take your time over them, and let me have the notice when it is written." There were two books in the parcel. Jacob eagerly opened the larger and more important looking volume. The title was "Sixteenth-Century Art in Spain." "I suppose that includes architecture," reflected Jacob. The other volume he found to be on the "Architecture of Christian Rome."

"I say," he said to Aunt Hester, "I simply know nothing whatever about these. If they had been on Gothic or even ordinary Classic Architecture, I might have made something of them."

"But when you've read them, dear, you'll be able to write something about them, won't you?" replied Hester, comfortingly.

"That's all very well," expostulated Jacob, "but suppose either of these people have made a mistake, I couldn't possibly spot it. I shouldn't know, if they were chock-full of mistakes."

"Will that matter?" asked Hester.

"I should hardly think it's likely they have made any bad mistakes, would you?" said Jacob. "I should think a man would be pretty careful before he published a book like that."

"Sure to be," said Hester.

There were some loose papers inside the volumes. Two of them were printed notices from the respective publishers, giving the name and price of each book, and requesting that no notice might appear before the date of publication, which was added in writing.

"This one hasn't been published yet!" exclaimed Jacob gleefully, after examining these notices. "It won't be published till the day after to-morrow."

Hester did not seem to realize the glory of this fact; she was wishing that Jacob would go on with his breakfast, but she did not care to spoil his evident enjoyment of the new excitement. "Does that matter?" she asked, tepidly.

Jacob frowned. "Oh! of course, it doesn't *matter*," he said; "only, well, it's rather professional, isn't it, getting these books, at least this one, before it's published?"

"You'll soon be quite a critic," agreed Aunt Hester, with the best intentions. But she was not happy in striking the right note that morning, for Jacob frowned again.

"I haven't the least idea what I shall say," he said.

"Hadn't you better get on with your breakfast, dear?" Hester, at last, suggested mildly, seeing that Jacob was about to begin a study of his new toys by looking through the illustrations. "You'll miss your train."

"All right, all right, in half a minute," responded Jacob crossly. "Hullo, what's this?" He had come upon another loose slip of paper, on which was written in pencil: "Stahl. Not more than $\frac{1}{2}$ col. the two." He pondered this for a moment, and then, having deciphered the riddle, he announced, "I've got half a column to do 'em in. I wonder how much that would be of my writing. I shall have to get a *Daily Post*, and count the words." Then, seeing that Hester was not paying proper attention to the importance of this announcement, he continued, "I do think you might be a little

more interested. It's jolly important, you know, that I should do these books decently. I might make a lot by this sort of thing."

"I *am* interested, dear," protested Hester, and striving to make amends, she added, "Perhaps you'd better not go to the office to-day. Stop and work at these at home."

"No! I must go to the office," said Jacob. "There's a lot to do." The real cause of his righteous determination was the desire of exhibiting his glory to Bennetts.

2.

His manner of achieving this was characteristic. Arrived at the office, he deposited the two precious volumes by the side of his board, and when he had changed his coat, he proceeded unostentatiously to look through them.

Bennetts took no notice. Jacob was not engaged on office work just then, as he was supposed to be working for his examination; consequently Stahl's work was no affair of Bennetts'.

Presently Jacob asked whether Bennetts knew anything of that obscure period of building which followed the fall of Rome and preceded the birth of Gothic architecture. He phrased the question somewhat loosely.

Bennetts hesitated to plead entire ignorance, and parried the interrogation by pretending to misunderstand its purport. Jacob attempted greater precision of enunciation, which had the desired effect of making Bennetts get off his stool and come over to Jacob's board.

"Where did you get this?" asked Bennetts, looking over Jacob's shoulder.

"Came by post," replied Jacob, and then, "it isn't published yet;" and he gave Bennetts the printed notice from the publisher to prove the truth of his statement.

"What's the idea?" asked Bennetts, puzzled.

Jacob showed him the fly-leaf of one of the volumes, which had "Presentation Copy" punched upon it in raised letters.

"Someone you know, written it?" asked Bennetts.

"No! I've got to review the beastly thing," said Jacob, with an air of being rather perplexed as to how he was to accomplish the task.

Bennetts grinned. "Didn't know you were an authority on that period," he said, with his usual sarcasm.

"Oh! don't be an ass, I'm not," replied Jacob, and with a burst of confidence he added, "Nor on this," and displayed the work on "Spanish Art in the Sixteenth Century."

"Is it some sort of a joke?" asked Bennetts.

Jacob explained the manner of obtaining the books.

"Rather rough on the men who wrote them, isn't it?" said Bennetts caustically.

"I shall give them a good notice."

"How do you know before you've read them?"

"As a matter of fact," said Jacob, "half the books that are reviewed never get read at all. My brother does a lot of work of this sort, and he knows all about the way things are done." This remark was unjustifiable, for Eric, who was, himself, thoroughly conscientious, had never made any such charge against his fellow reviewers. However, it passed with Bennetts, who merely said,

"Well, I suppose you'll read them."

"Of course."

"Don't pick too many holes in them," remarked Bennetts as he returned to his seat.

3.

It is probable that few reviews receive as much attention, thought, and care as those which Jacob wrote for the *Daily Post*. He read both books from cover to cover, he found in the publisher's advertisement at the end of one of the volumes, a list of works on Architecture, and he bought two which touched on the dark ages of development covered by the work on Christian Rome. It was to this volume that he devoted most attention, inasmuch as the published price was fifteen shillings net, whereas the other was one of a series, and only cost six shillings. He had thought of buying the earlier issues of the series, in order that he might compare them with

the work he was engaged upon, but decided that he must occupy the greater part of his space with the more important work. He, also, searched the Architectural and Building papers for notices, but he was too early. Finally, in three weeks, he achieved his review. It was by no means to be despised. He had approached his work without prejudice, he had thoroughly grasped the writer's descriptions, and by the aid of the two books he had bought he was enabled to counter in some respects the point of view of the writer on Christian Rome. When his notice was finished he was very proud of it, and read it aloud three separate times to Aunt Hester. Madeline was not interested, which damped his ardour a little, but he reflected that she could not be expected to understand so highly technical a performance and wisely refrained from dwelling too much on the subject in her presence; occasional references could not be avoided. After four days had elapsed without his receiving any answer from Eric, he wrote to ask whether "his stuff would do," to which Eric replied that it was "all right," and that he had sent the notices in with some of his own, and added, "I found three split infinitives, and may I advise you that 'render' should only be used in the sense of 'to give *back*,' not of 'to offer.'" Jacob satisfied himself of the accuracy of the second criticism by means of a dictionary, but he had not the least idea what a split infinitive might be, nor could Bennetts, Aunt Hester, or Mr. Baker enlighten him. He bought a copy of the *Daily Post* every day, and read the book reviews with diligence, but many weeks went by before his own long-expected effort was printed, and among the events of those weeks was Eric's wedding.

4.

As an event it would not be worth alluding to, were it not for certain effects which it produced upon Jacob. These effects were the result of the journey to London, wearing the appropriate frock-coat and tall hat that could no longer be avoided, of the excitements of the reception at the house of

Mr. and Mrs. Myers, and of the picture of Miss Doris Myers in process of transformation into Mrs. Eric Stahl.

The ceremony was a civil one; the registry-office represented a compromise between a tradition of Judaism and a tradition of the Established Church of England. With Mr. Myers the tradition was feeble, representing certain habits of thought which interfered in no way with the arrangement of his working hours, or of his cuisine. With Eric and Miss Myers the tradition was feebler still, for they were agreed in philosophic doubt, content that no revelation had ever been vouchsafed to human minds by any supernal agency. Nevertheless the registry-office was, in effect, a compromise between church and synagogue. To Jacob and Aunt Hester it came as a surprise, but the explanation seemed sufficient. Neither of them had any suspicion that Eric or his bride was not strictly orthodox. This was one of those things that Eric never spoke about; he considered all religious beliefs as negligible, and religious discussions as a waste of time.

Miss Doris Myers was not pretty. Her features were heavy, she wore a pince-nez with glasses of considerable magnifying power, her forehead was intellectual but lumpy, and her figure evidenced a greater regard for health and comfort than for the prevailing fashion in waists. She suffered, too, on this occasion from her efforts to adapt herself to the expected attitude. Among professors she would have been at home, modestly competent, but the large circle of acquaintances that revolved round the Myers centre, represented much wealth, but little academic knowledge, and Doris, who knew comparatively little of her parents' friends, was clumsily cheerful, persevering in an assumption of pleased sociability that was obviously unnatural. She treated Jacob and Aunt Hester precisely as she treated all the other guests; indeed, for that day she had but one manner, and the impression left upon Jacob was unfortunate so far as his sister-in-law was concerned, but the effect was far-reaching.

He felt hopelessly out of place, yet envious of the prosperity of Eric. His brother was making his already assured position still more secure, fortifying his financial and social

edifices with strong, reliable walls. Then Jacob pictured Madeline as the centre of another crowd, of less corpulent average, possibly less wealthy, but representative of something that even the brilliant Eric might hopelessly aspire to reach. It was something that stood in Jacob's mind, at that time, for all that was best in England, for aristocracy, for power, for the born and natural rulers of the universe. When he thought of the green slopes of Elmover, they appeared to him as representative of that something infinitely far removed from, and above, this heated, chattering crowd of suburban magnates. With the influence of Elmover behind him, he could afford to despise this worthless triumph of Eric's; to look down upon him and his wife from heights, not intellectual, but of dizzy social altitude. There came to him in the contemplation of the contrast, a determination to grasp these wonderful potentialities. He registered a vow that he would no longer be regarded as a negligible cipher; that he would dally no more, but resolutely face the terrible ordeal of asking Sir Anthony's permission to an engagement to Madeline. And if Sir Anthony refused? Then, it might be that at the last resort Jacob would insist, would claim a right. Could Sir Anthony refuse then?

CHAPTER XVI

THE HEART OF ELMOVER

1.

BEFORE the great determination could be resolved into action, Madeline had to be consulted. The subject had already been discussed, in vague generalizations that had always ended in the pronouncement, "He never will, *never*." When pressed for reasons Madeline had fallen back on "You don't know what father's like," and a return to the definite "He'll never let me marry you, *never*." To Jacob, keenly conscious of the horrors involved in the projected

interview with Sir Anthony, these checks to active development had afforded more relief than disappointment. He had the present, he felt sure of Madeline, and was fain to believe that some miracle would provide for the future. But now he had been stirred to action, he was warm with his resolution to work and, before all else, to conquer the world of Elmoval, to become established as the accepted suitor of Miss Felmersdale. When that was accomplished he could work better, he would have an object that would lead him on, a perpetual stimulus ; or so he thought.

Fate gave him opportunity to broach the subject to Madeline while he was still glowing with purpose, caught him hot-foot even before he reached home. He and Hester stayed in London for one night after the wedding, and came down by the midday train to Pelsworthy. There they had to change and cross over for the little loop line that serves Ashby Sutton, and on the up-platform they met Sir Anthony and Madeline. Sir Anthony was unusually surly. He saluted them with a frown, raised his hat the bare limit permitted by courtesy, grumbled "How d'ye do?" and then, showing signs of a desire to get away at once, added, addressing Hester, "Going up to town?"

"No! we've just come back," said Hester.

"Oh! I'm going up by the 2.15," replied Sir Anthony, and turned away, again with the least possible acknowledgment of politeness in the way of hat-raising.

Jacob, nervous but still determined, was speaking to Madeline, but her father called to her imperatively to follow him, and she acceded with a somewhat unaccustomed meekness.

As Jacob, thus summarily snubbed and dismissed, followed his aunt up the length of the long platform, he realized with horrible clearness the kind of interview that was in store for him.

"I suppose they've come in to do some shopping," he said to Hester.

"No, dear. Sir Anthony is going up to town by the 2.15, I told me," replied Hester.

"Oh! is he?" said Jacob, and began to formulate a plan

in his mind. "I say, dear," he went on, as the plan grew plainer, "would you mind going on by yourself?"

"I shouldn't *mind*," wavered Hester, "but *why*? What are you going to do?"

For a moment he thought of prevaricating, but the urgent mood that still held him, gave him the courage of candour. "I want to drive back with—with Miss Felmersdale. I want to talk to her about something. It's no use going on as we have been, I'm going to do something definite. I mean to speak to Sir Anthony."

Hester set her lips together. "I'm afraid . . ." she began.

"Yes, so am I!" broke in Jacob. "But it's got to be done, and I want to talk it over."

"I think you're quite right, dear," said Hester, when she had taken her seat in the train.

"Yes. I ought to have done it before," returned Jacob, and then they were silent, watching the distant bustle which marked the arrival of the London Express. As it passed them a few minutes later with impressive, arrogant pantings, it seemed a type of Elmoover, an overwhelming, first-class train, despising the little group of still engineless carriages huddled together on the side line.

2.

Jacob turned and walked back along the platform. He found Madeline in conversation with a smartly dressed young man whom he recognized as "young Bassett," so designated to distinguish him from "old Bassett" his father, the Vicar of Pelsworthy.

"Hallo!" said Madeline, as Jacob approached. "I thought you'd gone."

"No, I'm not going by this train," replied Jacob, staring at young Bassett, and then to display his intimacy he added, "I say, are you driving?"

"Yes! Why?" asked Madeline carelessly.

"I thought you might give me a lift."

"I've got some shopping to do first."

"Well, I can hold the pony for you," said Jacob with an assumption of levity, wondering why Madeline was so cool.

"Oh! look here!" broke in young Bassett eagerly, "I'll trot the pony round for you, Miss Felmersdale. I've got jolly well nothing to do."

"Please don't trouble," interrupted Jacob, and then to clinch the matter he turned to Madeline and said with a suggestion of authority: "I want to talk to you about something. Do you mind?"

"Oh! of course not," returned Madeline, though she gave no sign of being pleased. "I thought you were going back with your aunt."

She said good-bye to young Bassett with unnecessary effusiveness, Jacob thought, and why should she press him to come over to Elmover for tennis? Young Bassett's "Thanks awfully, I should love to," sounded in his ears as he walked with Madeline out of the station. But Madeline gave him no opportunity to scold, for she took the offensive at once, even as they trotted briskly down the long station approach.

"You do give it away, Jimmy," she said. "I suppose you don't want everybody to know."

"Young Bassett isn't everybody," grumbled Jacob.

"Don't be silly. I do think you might behave decently when we are in public."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Jacob. "What did I do?"

"You looked as glum as anything just because I asked Mr. Bassett to come over and play tennis, and lugged me off just as if I belonged to you."

"Well, you do, don't you?"

"I suppose you don't want other people to think so, though?"

"Yes! I do," replied Jacob. "I should like everyone to know that you belong to me."

"Well, I shouldn't, anyway," rejoined Madeline.

"Why not?"

"Oh! don't be so absolutely idiotic. It's pretty obvious, isn't it?"

"Look here, Maidie," began Jacob earnestly, "I've made up my mind that we can't go on as we are going."

Madeline looked at him curiously, a look which Jacob couldn't interpret. "Well? What then?" she asked.

"I'm going to speak to your father."

Madeline laughed scornfully. "I know," she said; "I've heard that before."

"I am," asseverated Jacob.

"That'll jolly well be the end of everything," said Madeline.

3.

Jacob had no opportunity to reply until the shopping was done, but as soon as they were out of the town he began again.

"I must speak to Sir Anthony, Maidie, and ask him to let us be engaged."

"Of course you can if you like," said Madeline. "Only I tell you there's simply no earthly chance of his saying 'Yes.'"

"Well, do you mind my asking him?" Jacob persisted.

Again Madeline looked at him with that enigmatical expression which Jacob could not interpret, a look as of one who passes judgment.

"I don't mind," she said; "only, as I tell you, it'll be the end of everything."

"Why?"

Madeline shrugged her shoulders and whipped the pony with precision, flicking him carefully in exposed places.

"Why?" repeated Jacob.

"Oh! it's obvious," returned Madeline, her attention still concentrated on the galloping pony.

"You mean I'm not good enough."

"I mean father thinks so."

"Well, he's got to consent," said Jacob solemnly; "he had better make up his mind to it."

Madeline's attention was instantly diverted from the pony.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked sharply, looking at Jacob, startled, a little frightened.

"I mean he's *got* to."

"Do you mean to say you'd tell him ? Everything ?"

Jacob nodded.

"Oh ! Jimmy, you wouldn't, you couldn't be so wicked as that." Madeline's face was flaming.

"Why not ?" asked Jacob. "Why shouldn't I ? It's the only way to make him do what we want."

"If you do, I'll never speak to you again. Never ! I mean it," broke out Madeline vehemently.

"But . . ."

"I swear I won't. Never. If you do go and ask him, you must promise faithfully not to give me away."

"I shan't have the least chance. . . ."

"Look here, Jimmy. I won't let you see father, unless you swear you won't say a word about *that*."

Jacob was disturbed. He did not understand her vehemence. It seemed to him that if she cared enough for him, she would brave anything for his sake, even her father's anger, so he replied sulkily :

"You can't prevent my seeing him."

"I can," said Madeline passionately ; "or at least I can deny everything. And I would, too, and I'd never look at you again. I'd hate you."

"Oh ! all right," said Jacob weakly. "Only don't you see it's the only way I can possibly make him consent. Don't you want him to, Maidie ? You haven't got tired of me, have you ? You don't want to give me up ?"

"Of course not ; don't be silly !" Madeline answered ; a terribly unconvincing denial.

"Well, we can't go on like this," said Jacob, returning to his original standpoint.

"I don't see why not !"

The flush of resolution was beginning to fade, but he steeled himself into determination, thinking of Eric and the wedding and all that it connoted. "No, we can't," he said. "If you say I'm not to say anything about that, I won't, of course, but I must ask him."

"Well, I think it's simply silly," replied Madeline, return-

ing to a study of the pony's harness ; " but if you want to break up everything, I suppose I can't stop you."

By the end of the drive a decision had been arrived at. Jacob was to see Sir Anthony when he came back from town. If Madeline had really been anxious that the momentous interview should not take place, she could, undoubtedly, have prevented it. Jacob sensed something of this, yet did not put a right construction on her consent, however, apparently, unwilling. He thought, despite all the auguries, that he had a chance, and he believed that she thought so, too. In his innocence he was blind. He assumed that Madeline belonged to him, that she could never break with him. If he ever thought of the red-haired Kingdon, he put the thought away from him. "That was different" was the phrase which relegated such unwelcome remembrance to obscurity.

"You swear you won't say a word to him about—that?" were Madeline's last words. And Jacob pledged himself to silence. "But it will come to that in the end," he thought.

4.

The decision had been made on a Friday. Saturday passed uneventfully. Jacob caught no glimpse of Madeline. In the afternoon he walked over to the ladder stile, which had become an acknowledged trysting-place, but he dared go no farther, lest Sir Anthony should have returned. There was nothing to be gained by obtruding oneself until the actual time for the interview arrived. He stayed by the stile for an hour or more, and walked home slowly, inventing excuses for Madeline. He discovered several excellent reasons why she should not have been able to meet him, but he believed none of them.

At twenty minutes to eleven on Sunday morning, one of the Elmover under-gardeners who lived in Ashby Sutton, brought a note that, according to instructions, did not require an answer. It only contained a few words. "Come up this afternoon about four. I'll try and keep him in a good temper. Mother knows."

At midday dinner, Hester, who was not aware of the contents or the significance of the note received, found occasion to ask her nephew if he was ill.

"Ill? No! Why?" demanded Jacob crossly.

"I noticed you were looking very white in church, this morning. And, dear, you are shivering now, and eating nothing. Have you got a chill, do you think?"

Jacob rose hastily from his chair. His feelings demanded action. In church he had suffered from a veritable ague, and had had to cross his arms and press them with all his force against his chest to subdue the trembling that shook him. He felt sick, too, actually, physically sick, and clammy cold. But he was not going to admit his cowardice to Hester.

"I don't know. Perhaps I have," he said. "I feel cold. It's nothing;" and he stretched his arms and gaped a nervous yawn.

Hester came over to him. "Let me look at your tongue!" she said, after the manner of old wives' diagnoses. Jacob submitted, and was given a clean bill of health on that score. "But, my dear boy, you are as cold as ice, and shivering. You must go up to bed at once, and I'll get some hot bottles and bring them to you." Hester's prescription seemed justified by the symptoms.

A ray of beautiful hope fell across Jacob's mind. "Perhaps," he thought, "I am really ill. It would be silly for me to go and see Sir Anthony when I'm not fit. Why not put it off?" Oh! blessed relief; even as he contemplated the thought of a serene afternoon in bed, his shivering ceased and a pulse of colour came back to his cheeks.

"Well, perhaps I will go to bed after dinner," he said to Hester. "Let's go on now. I feel better." After a short argument they returned to the interrupted meal. Jacob's appetite seemed to have returned.

"You look much better again, now," said Hester, when they had finished, "but I think you ought to go to bed, all the same. You were as white as a sheet in church."

No, he was not ill. That reasonable and just excuse for

shirking was denied him. The thing had to be done, if not now, at some other time. So Jacob argued, and to Aunt Hester he replied that he would not go to bed, that he was going to Elmover—about four.

Hester was not surprised. Jacob often went over to Elmover for an hour or two on Sunday afternoons. Not up to the house; he and Madeline met in the spinnery; Sir Anthony was reckoned "safe" on Sunday afternoons, indoors, somnolent. So Hester's only comment on the visit was, "So late? You generally go about half-past two."

"Yes, I know. I—I'm going later to-day. I may stay to tea," said Jacob, and involuntarily shivered and yawned again.

"I'm sure you've got a chill," remonstrated Hester. "You really ought not to go out. Don't you think . . . ? Just this one afternoon?"

"Oh! *no*. I'm all right," returned Jacob petulantly. "Besides, it's a lovely day. The first day of summer."

But there were two mortal, miserable hours to be passed before he need start for Elmover; two awful hours of anticipation to be spent in repeating over and over again, "Well, he can only say 'No.' There's nothing to be afraid of. He isn't likely to kick me out, and even if he did . . . ? There's simply nothing in the world one need be afraid of but physical torture, and even that's worse when you think about it than when you actually have to go through it. I am a fool. There's nothing on earth to be nervous about. I won't be nervous. I simply will *not* be nervous!"

Part of the time he spent lying down on his bed; he had had an absurd idea that he might go to sleep, but most of the time was occupied in pacing up and down his little room. Also, he smoked until another qualm was added to the purely nervous indisposition, and he was compelled to forego that solace to agitation.

At a quarter past three he began to "get ready," to brush his hair, wash his hands, fidget with his tie, and generally to attempt small improvements in his appearance. At half-past three he set out resolutely for Elmover, repeating the

formula that there was "absolutely nothing to be afraid of," and feeling very cold, very sick, and a little light-headed—in much the same condition, in fact, as a person who is suffering from a high temperature, as, very possibly, he was.

Hester watched his departure, and looking after him thought, "I suppose he's going to speak to Sir Anthony. Well, I don't know what's going to be the end of it. I wish he had confided in me; though I don't know that I could have helped." She remained at the window long after he was out of sight, speculating, trying to plan some possible future.

5.

Jacob thought the spinny seemed very deserted. He had hoped that Madeline would meet him, and lingered a few minutes by the stile, looking for her eagerly. He was buoying up his courage with the thought that all feminine Elmoever was on his side. "Mother knows," Madeline had written, and Lady Felmersdale had always liked him and had never appeared to frown disapproval on his aspirations. She must have known it would come to this, and surely, now, she would help him. She might have prepared Sir Anthony already, and if she had, Jacob's task would be an easy one. He had a high opinion of the power of petticoat rule at Elmoever. So far as he had been able to understand, the seat of authority remained with Lady Felmersdale; Sir Anthony might disapprove of many things that were done in the house, he might grunt and sulk, but he submitted. Sir Anthony would have been a poor creature in Jacob's eyes, if he had not been a baronet and lord of Elmoever, but the dignity of the throne surrounded him. To the son of Hermann Stahl, Sir Anthony was, as yet, above criticism. Jacob's immature mind had been impressed with an image of respect and reverence; he could not free himself to judge. In his dependence on pre-conceptions he stands as a type of our immature society. . . .

This was only the second time that Jacob had rung at the front-door at Elmoever. Not since that first formal call with Hester, after the garden-party, had he stood trembling at

the top of that broad flight of stone steps, hesitating to lay sacrilegious hands on the heavy brass handle which would summon the stout, florid butler from his retreat. On this occasion Jacob was forced, after a decently long interval, to essay a second and less timorous attack on the bell-handle, which he did not observe to lack the brilliance that is expected of titled fittings. Lady Flora March, coming to that door, gloveless, as with her aristocratic contempt for small conventions she might have come, would have hesitated to soil her fingers by handling that orange-coloured brass, but to Jacob its massiveness was impressive; he did not see that it was dirty. Nor had he realized the many other failures of the Elmoor household; he had not discovered that the chief authority being culpable, every dependent had taken his or her tone from the head, and had fallen into neglectful untidiness. There was little law or order in that big house. Sir Anthony, grown sulky and careless, took no heed of his servants' lapses from duty; a man of small intelligence and idle habits, cut off, largely, from the society of his own rank, he had degenerated into a condition of sluggish acceptance. Lady Felmersdale alternated between brief fits of bullying energy, which often resulted in a wholesale giving of notice by servants, and a complete sinking of all dignity and authority during periods of indulgence; periods during which she was willing to hob-nob with the housekeeper, who on her part was ready enough to take advantage of the familiarity, and to use it for her own ends.

Jacob's second ring at the bell compelled the butler from his retreat.

"Is Lady Felmersdale in?" asked Jacob timorously. He had decided that on all counts this was the proper inquiry, and if only he could see Madeline's mother first and ascertain how far the ogre was prepared, he thought he might gain courage.

Butler Morgan had not, apparently, received any instructions as to Jacob's visit, for he hesitated visibly before replying, "I couldn't say, sir. I'll inquire."

Jacob was ushered into the great hall, one of the finest

apartments in Elmover, and shivered through ten minutes. At first he sat on a Chesterfield by one of the fireplaces, where an ill-tended fire burned inhospitably black; then he wandered round and inspected the wonderful historic clock that is so many other things besides a clock, and always he listened with high-strung attention for the sound of voices, Lady Felmersdale's, Madeline's, or even Nina's; yes, he would have welcomed Nina wholeheartedly as a friend, even though she would have damped him with gloomy pessimism.

At last came the sound of a closing door, and Morgan returned to say that Lady Felmersdale was not at 'ome, but Sir Anthony would see Mr. Stahl. "This way, sir," said Morgan, and Jacob followed like a victim to the scaffold, seeking consolation in the thought that "He must know, then," and "There's absolutely nothing to be afraid of."

6.

Sir Anthony was sitting back in a deep, comfortable-looking chair. He was dressed in an old tweed suit and slippers, and was very evidently only just awakened from a prolonged nap.

"Hullo! Sit down," was his greeting, and he pointed to a chair like his own at the opposite side of the fireplace.

Jacob was embarrassed from the outset by the disposal of his straw hat—the month was May, and he detested the hideous bowler—his stick and gloves. The latter had been carefully removed while he waited in the hall; he had anticipated a shaking of hands, a civility which Sir Anthony did not offer. The floor was the only place for these encumbrances, and Morgan, receiving a curt nod of dismissal from his master, allowed them to remain there. Jacob sat down, not too far back in that enveloping chair, but far enough to deny that he sat on the edge of it.

The door had been discreetly closed, but words did not come, there followed an eternal three seconds of silence.

Sir Anthony grunted. "Did you want to see me?" he asked at last.

"Yes," stammered Jacob, avoiding the addition of "please" by a miracle. "I wanted—I've come to . . ." He faltered into silence again, half inclined, even now, to ask for a subscription to the cricket club and get away undiagnosed.

The lord of Elmover had no pity, he merely grunted again and waited. It came out with a burst, finally, the result of a self-induced spasm of courage.

"I want to be engaged to your daughter." Nervousness forbade a nice choice of phrases. "I want to know if you'll give your consent."

Sir Anthony made a feeble show of surprise.

"What? What are you talking about?" he said.

"I want you to let me be engaged to Mad—to Miss Felmersdale," repeated Jacob. "We—we are . . ."

"Absurd nonsense!" said Sir Anthony.

"Do you mean you won't let us be engaged?" blurted out Jacob, taking the bit between his teeth.

"Of course not. Don't be a young fool," replied Sir Anthony.

"Of course not, don't be a young fool." That was so plainly the only possible answer to the son of Hermann Stahl, to the nephew of Miss Hester Stahl, who rented a little cottage at £8 a year from this county magnate; to the articled clerk of a Pelsworthy architect; to the companion of an impossible, middle-class Bennetts. Young fool, how dared he presume to the hand of Miss Felmersdale of Elmover! It all came to Jacob in a rush, he was hot-faced and ashamed to have contemplated for one moment any aspiring to Elmover standards. But there was another side to be considered, and even as Jacob weakly lowered his head to receive deserved contempt, that side presented itself to him with startling vividness. However great and fine was Elmover, its honour was in the keeping of this same Jacob Stahl, be he what he might. Yet, feebly, he was anxious to propitiate, conscious of his ineligibility; he wanted—with what painful futility—to please. So, still grasping desperately at the thought of responsibility, necessity, and that

confided honour, he compromised his case by saying in reply to that insulting denial :

"Of course, I know I'm not in a position, yet, to . . ."

"You couldn't ever be in a position to marry my daughter," interrupted Sir Anthony.

"I don't quite see why not."

"It's absurd. I've given you my answer. No ! Do you hear ? No ! Not under any circumstances." Sir Anthony raised his voice. He came very near to shouting.

"But . . ." began Jacob.

"No ! I tell you." This time there could be no doubt that Sir Anthony shouted. "That's enough ! You can go," and the lord of Elmover heaved himself out of his chair and rang the bell.

Jacob, confused and hot, collected his belongings. He was ashamed of himself, his origin, his breeding and his character. He felt utterly small and inefficient, and if some finer instinct stirred him to resentment, he gave no sign of that to Sir Anthony. With humiliation he followed Morgan across the hall, believing the officious, if slovenly, butler must regard him with contempt, and when he heard the great door closed noisily behind him almost before he had crossed the threshold, he felt the most degraded of pariahs.

7.

Not twenty yards from the hall-door he saw Madeline. She was sitting on the balustrade of the terrace, talking to young Bassett, evidently happy and pleased with herself, her surroundings and her companion.

"Hullo !" she said, as Jacob approached. "I've been waiting for you ; didn't know you'd come yet."

Young Bassett frowned. His expression said very plainly, "Confound the chap, what does *he* want ?"

"I was rather early—you said *about* four," returned Jacob. So it was young Bassett's presence that had engaged Madeline's attention.

"I was going to tell you it was no good," Madeline con-

tinued gaily. "He's frightfully lumpy about something to-day."

"But he—knew," faltered Jacob, cursing young Bassett in his heart, and wishing intruders could know when they were not wanted.

Young Bassett, however, smiled gaily. "You don't mean Sir Anthony?" he said, addressing Madeline, and referring to her last remark. "He was awfully jolly at lunch."

Madeline had the grace to flush slightly. "Oh! yes, before you," she explained, "but he was in a beastly temper this morning."

"When can I see you?" asked Jacob pointedly.

"Can't you see me now?" laughed Madeline. "I'm plain enough."

"Pretty enough, you mean," put in young Bassett inanely.

"Oh! you shut up," returned Madeline.

"You know what I mean," Jacob interrupted crossly, determined to put an end to these horrible familiarities.

"You seem to have caught daddy's complaint," remarked Madeline, at which young Bassett laughed stupidly, but she lowered herself from the balustrade.

"I say, you're not going, Miss Felmersdale," protested young Bassett. "Oh! look here, you mustn't leave me to entertain myself, you know, it isn't polite."

"Nina's somewhere about," replied Madeline, smiling.

"Oh! hang Nina!"

"I say, who's not being polite now?"

"Well, anyway, you're coming back?"

"Perhaps!" laughed Madeline, with a wave of her hand, as she moved away with Jacob. Young Bassett had the effrontery to kiss his hand in reply. He looked disgustingly fresh, athletic, and well-dressed, Jacob noticed, but he was an *absolute ass*, an *absolute ass*.

They walked in silence till they reached the spinny, and then Madeline said, "Of course, it was no earthly?"

"No," returned Jacob shortly.

"Well, I told you that before, but you would do it," said Madeline.

"I know. I know," returned Jacob crossly. "It's not that I'm thinking about. That doesn't make any difference, really."

"Oh! doesn't it? It does! You won't be able to come up now he knows."

"Do you mind?" asked Jacob. Despite his sudden, urgent jealousy of young Bassett, despite a noticeable shadow of coolness in her recent behaviour, despite everything, he still trusted and believed in her. His question was put as a test, he wanted her assurance. He wanted comfort even as he had wanted it many years ago when he had been bullied by Sandair, as he had wanted it when his mother died.

"I suppose we shall have to face things sooner or later," was Madeline's disappointing reply.

"Face things? Face what?" he asked.

"You know—we are growing up, we aren't children any longer."

"Do you mean to say," stammered Jacob, unable as yet to grasp the significance of her answer, "that we mustn't see each other—at least, not so much?"

"What's the good? It can't lead to anything."

"But, Maidie, you're mine."

They had come to the gate of the spinny; Madeline leaned against it, and kept her eyes on the ground, fidgeting with her shoe.

"We were only children," she said.

"But, darling, you can't mean that this is to be the end? You don't mean that, surely you don't mean that?"

"What's the good of going on with it?"

"Do you mean you don't care for me any more?"

Madeline closed her eyes and looked him straight in the face. "You can put it that way, if you like," she said.

All the insults heaped upon him that afternoon rose up in Jacob's mind, all his degradations of which this last was the greatest. That instinct of resentment which had smouldered in Sir Anthony's presence, burst into a flame before the girl who had so injured and wronged him.

"Damn you, damn you all!" he broke out. "You are

horrible, contemptible, every one of you. There isn't one of you fit for a decent person to know. I hate and loathe you. Thank God I need never meet any one of you again. Let me go! I want to get away from you. You're—I needn't tell you what, your own conscience will tell you that."

He pushed past Madeline and hurried on to the stile. He left her ashamed and silent, but she made no effort to call him back.

Thus Jacob learned to despise the standards of Elmover.

CHAPTER XVII

NEW HORIZONS

1.

"If only I hadn't . . ." or "If only I had . . ." In retrospect we can direct and form. The choice of paths has become plain, we think there is no doubt about which, if one could choose again, would be selected. Nevertheless, if we could put back time and still retain knowledge, the precious knowledge mined from experience, in how many cases would the experienced choose the other path, the one previously eschewed? "If only I had known!" If we knew and could choose we should, indeed, be certain of the dower of free-will. Yet so often we do know, and deny it, and later protest, "I went into it with my eyes open." We never know the fortuities, the million and one incalculable things that "happen," and they are so many that their intrusion may upset the provisions of the most stable prophet. But the main issue? In how many cases do we not anticipate correctly the main issue; even for ourselves? Precedent and the law of averages are the fundamentals of our calculation, subject to infinite variations, and therefore to be scrutinized with all patience and treated as variables, not as constants, but valuable quantities which produce results that are sometimes in accord with the facts. It is sound advice to

stick to the fundamentals, and if some little unforetrollable accident such as death upsets the sagest algebraist, it must be regarded as a fortuity and an exception, never as a precedent or example. Jacob Stahl, passionate and dejected by turns, may rave or lament. "If only I had . . . if only I hadn't . . ." But when he made his choice the factors were known to him, he had no reason to anticipate a fortuitous miracle. Yet it is plain enough, and will become plain also to him as he grows in knowledge of himself, that, even had the result been revealed to him by some supernal agency, he would have done, and will do again, as he did when he elected for love and experience; that he would have hazarded the miracle, and dreamed the possibility that his case of all cases, supernal interposition and warning notwithstanding, should prove the exception. In this he may be regarded as an exemplar; he stands for the ill-defined fundamental—the exponent may be calculated by the law of averages.

It was Hester who had to endure the effect of the storm of self-reproaches and self-pity which was the first outcome of that bitter experience at Elmoor. To Hester, confession was made that same Sunday afternoon, not, however, a full confession—the chief admission was withheld, and the fact that it was so withheld must be counted to Jacob's credit. For he longed to boast of past possession. That was the one consolation to his vanity; however scorned he might be now, there was that memory, significant and undeniable, to uphold his pride. Yet, wishing that Aunt Hester should know the great fact which proved so conclusively that he had not always been a mere object for contempt, he hid the knowledge from her, and when, tentatively and with infinite delicacy, she hinted a question, he denied it with a fervour that left her convinced. His motive for denial was an ideal of chivalry, there was nothing in it of self-defence; now that everything was done with, and there were no consequences to be shirked, he had no fear of the verdict of Society or the penalties of the code as far as he, himself, was concerned. For his late partner the thing was quite different, and he found a joy in wondering whether she was not on tenter-hooks, fearing his confession.

2.

She was not. Madeline, the reckless, trusted to his loyalty by instinct, but she had made a resolution, briefly, in two words: "Not again." The resolution included any falling in love, as she was ready to admit that she had fallen in love with Jacob—for a season. As a consequence young Bassett, who was something too forward, soon fell under the shadow of her displeasure, and after a brief period of hopefulness, was summarily snubbed and dismissed. Then that happened which changed Madeline's outlook, an accident, though due in a measure to Jacob's forlorn attack upon Elmoever acceptances.

Sir Anthony had a cousin who floated gracefully on a Society stream. It was not that admirable and carefully preserved water which upholds the remotest of the elect, but on it floated many who knew the remote elect, and Mrs. Fall was prominent among the many. She had married a younger son, who, by some strange freak of heredity, had been gifted with sufficient energy and intelligence to compete with the trained financial minds of the City. The Hon. Sidney Fall was a name and designation that figured on prospectuses, and figured not too often nor in connection with the wrong companies. Mrs. Fall, as a result of her husband's ability, was able to live in Curzon Street, and in consequence of her own and her husband's family, she was able to float within hailing distance of the remotest elect. For the mistress of Elmoever she had nothing but contempt, but she occasionally wrote to Sir Anthony for subscriptions to fashionable charities.

It was the arrival of some such appeal, after the first suitor had made formal application for the hand of Miss Felmersdale, that quickened the slow mind of Sir Anthony into the formulation of a plan of action. Madeline was evidently growing up, it was equally evident that a London season under the chaperonage of her mother was out of the question. The plan of taking Madeline up to town and introducing her to Mrs. Fall as a preliminary to further

negotiations was vetoed, for no obvious reason, by Lady Fehlersdale, but it was carried out nevertheless. Madeline approved the scheme, and her approval was a force to be reckoned with. On this occasion she completely bore down her mother's opposition by sheer force of personality.

Mrs. Fall was a woman of between fifty and sixty, and childless. If Madeline had been plain or merely ordinary, Mrs. Fall would have had none of her, but she saw great possibilities in Madeline. It was true that she was, to the eyes of one versed in the usages of Society, gauche and rather awkward in a drawing-room, at her ease, it is true, but in too countrified a manner; but there were wonderful possibilities. She was, indeed, a find; she would be the beauty of the next season. It was in June that Mrs. Fall first saw her, too late for a successful introduction into the full course, but a trial trip was arranged that was to include a few unimportant functions, the opera on occasion—the back of the box,—and perhaps Goodwood. "We can see about that, later," concluded Mrs. Fall, who lapsed now and again into the royal plural. Afterwards, a finishing school for six months, one of the most select, some establishment known to Mrs. Fall, which would regard the daughter of a baronet as a person but one degree above the middle-classes. And next year, of course, presentation and the whole regatta.

Sir Anthony grunted heavily. He had not foreseen all the expenses which this programme involved. But Madeline joined forces with her new first-cousin-once-removed, and Sir Anthony was committed for the whole scheme before he left Curzon Street. In her triumphant embarkment on the trial trip, Madeline forgot Jacob as completely as if he had never existed.

3.

Yet Jacob, also, was planning a new life, and a life in the same great city which held Madeline, though his scheme for the future did not include any prospect of meeting her again; he did not even know that she had gone to stay in London. Ashby Sutton, however, had become impossible to him.

It was full of cruel reminders of the thing he had lost, the thing he had adored and worshipped. There were moments of poignant sentimentalism when he entreated the skies to give her back to him, moments in the early morning when he had dreamed of her and suffered an agony of desire for her presence. . . .

Hester gave him her approval, and at first intended to leave Ashby Sutton herself ; to live in London lodgings with Jacob. But he was impatient of delay, and it was arranged that Hester should accompany him to town, stay with him for a week or two until he was settled, and then return to her cottage till the autumn, when she would take up her permanent residence with Jacob in London.

On a blazing day of early June they arrived in Gower Street at the rooms which Hester had always occupied during her brief visits to town. Jacob was armed with introductions, furnished by Mr. Baker, and fortified by the sternest of resolutions to work, work, work. What else, indeed, in the whole world was there left to live for ?

BOOK III
TONY FARRELL

CHAPTER XVIII

THE OFFICE OF MR. RIDOUT MORLEY

1.

It was a new London that opened to Jacob when Aunt Hester had returned to Ashby Sutton. Hitherto, even during the last fortnight, it had seemed a stereotyped place in which you travelled from point to point along main streets in a jolty, uncomfortable omnibus that was difficult to enter, and more difficult still to leave, with dignity; and had an unscaleable ladder that led to an inaccessible ridge on the top. This unsightly conveyance deposited you near the National Gallery, St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey, or upon more festive occasions at the door of an Italian restaurant in Holborn, and when the interiors of these places had been investigated, another omnibus conveyed you home again. This, with the dull walk up and down Gower Street to reach home or the transporting vehicle, appeared to be London.

But when Aunt Hester had returned to her cottage, and when her warnings of London dangers, that had been accepted in a spirit of perfect faith, were gradually discovered to be baseless and negligible, a new world of curious mysteries and strange possibilities was opened. The third day after Hester's departure, Jacob, in a spirit of reckless adventure, boldly dared an ascent to the knife-board of one of the jolty omnibuses, and discovered that the ladder was not unscaleable nor the ridge inaccessible, as he had been led to

believe. Then the leaven of doubt began to work in his mind, which was, as yet, the mind of a child so far as London was concerned, of a child in leading-strings ; and once doubt took hold of him, all the absolute, rigid, infallible truths were found to be merely relative and open to question in any application. There was that law concerning Regent Street and Piccadilly Circus, for instance, the law which ordained that they were unsafe and unsuitable places for decent people after sunset, and therefore on no account to be visited on foot, though they might be traversed in comparative safety inside an omnibus. This law held Jacob in thrall for a whole fortnight, so rigid had been its ordinance, and his belief. But as the leaven of doubt stirred him to examine the foundations of this law, he began to question its applicability to his own case, and, in some fear, he dared the exploration of the whole length of Regent Street on foot one evening, soon after the gas lamps were lit, and came to no harm. It was, perhaps, hardly an exploration, for he walked fast and kept his head down, the true exploration came later, after he had gained courage by immunity from accident.

The passage of these adventures saved him from nostalgia, and also diverted him for some days from the prosecution of his search for work. Once he had learned that London was not bounded by King's Cross, St. Paul's, Westminster, and the Marble Arch, and that the dangers of wandering beyond these limits had been grossly exaggerated, there were such vast distances and possibilities to be adventured ; strange, unknown roads that might lead to the most curious mysteries. One day he went north on the top of a tram and discovered Hampstead Heath, a strange, enthralling experience.

2.

A letter from Hester, the third in a week, recalled him to a sense of duty. He had forgotten his determination to work, he had for the moment almost forgotten Madeline. The introductions furnished by Mr. Baker had all been delivered during Aunt Hester's fortnight in town, all save one. None

of them had, as yet, been productive of any result. The architects visited, had been very friendly and polite, but all appeared to be suffering from a temporary depression in the building trade, which was compelling them to reduce rather than to increase their staff of assistants. The one letter of introduction that was still undelivered had been neglected because it gave little hope of any result. It was addressed to the incomparable Bradley, the model pupil, who, despite his brilliant promise, was still an assistant, and therefore not in a position to offer Jacob a stool in his office. Still, he might be able to furnish other introductions, and, moreover, his place of business was in Moorgate Street, a new field for discovery. A map indicated that the place sought was near the Bank, a goal familiar by name, from its free advertisement by omnibus conductors, though it had needed the knowledge of Hester to translate the strange cry "Obanerbenk," which seemed part of the Oxford Street atmosphere. There were many wonderful discoveries made from the knife-board of the bus that carried him into the unknown City—Holborn Viaduct, Newgate, the Blue-coat School—and Jacob had quite a shock when his old friend St. Paul's gloomed down at him from the corner by the General Post-Office. It was his first experience in connecting up the divergent thoroughfares that had been explored separately.

The Mansion House, the Royal Exchange, and the Bank almost diverted him from his intention of visiting Mr. Bradley, but after a cursory inspection of these famous buildings, he forced himself to stern duty, and having made inquiry of a policeman, he adventured up Princes Street on foot, and discovered 171, Moorgate Street, and the name and designation of Mr. Bradley's employer, Ridout Morley, F.R.I.B.A., Architect, on an unobtrusive brass plate—one of about fifty. The office was on the fifth floor, and Jacob, not realizing the advantages of a lift, climbed more than a hundred lead-covered stairs before he was confronted with a board bearing the same legend as the plate below, with the addition of a misshapen hand that pointed, and the word "Offices."

3.

He tapped nervously at a door with a big ground-glass panel, that also bore in black letters the name Ridout Morley—Architect, before he noticed that in smaller letters in one corner was the word "Enter." Timidly afraid of doing the wrong thing, he opened the door, and found himself in a passage lit by a skylight. On his right was another door with an obscured glass panel, inscribed "Ridout Morley. Private." That wouldn't do, he reflected, and hesitated towards the obscurity at the end of the passage, found another door marked "Private" and another marked "Office," summoned up courage to tap at the door of the office, and was encouraged by a shout from the other side to "Come in!"

He accepted the encouragement, and found himself in a sort of horse-box, surrounded by a six-foot-high glazed screen with one narrow egress into the office, barred by a dwarf door and a narrow, flat counter. A short, thickset man was the only visible occupant of the place, and he was too engrossed in his work to take any notice of callers. Jacob waited quietly for what seemed a considerable time; he peered round the edge of the horse-box and discovered two more stools, one with a drawing-board in front of it, in line with the engrossed figure in front of him, but both stools were unoccupied. Presently he rapped very gently on the flap-counter in front of him, and after a decent interval rapped again somewhat louder.

The short man glanced over his shoulder impatiently, "'Ere; boy! Bates!" he called; "where's everyone gone?" And then, realizing that he was in sole possession of the office, he pivoted on his stool, and discovered to Jacob the face of a middle-aged man with an immense brown moustache.

"Well? What's for you?" demanded this individual.

"Is Mr. Bradley in?" asked Jacob.

"Bradley? Oh, you'll find 'im in the next room. Down the passage on the left."

"Oh, thanks!" returned Jacob, but as he turned to go, he was met by a little old man with a bald head and a short

grey beard, who was coming in hurriedly, rolling up a cloth cricket-cap, and attempting to cram it into the pocket of the short alpaca jacket he was wearing.

"'Ere, Grover!" called out the man with the big moustache to the newcomer, "you've got nothing to do. Show this man where to find Bradley."

The reply to this command was a complicated series of silent gestures from the old man with the cap, which was now partly stowed out of sight, a lateral, indicative pointing both with head and a not over-clean thumb in the direction of the second room marked "Private." These gestures were accompanied by an elevation of the eyebrows, and the framing of some question with the lips—Jacob jumped to the conclusion that the little old man was dumb.

"'E's all right," said the man with the moustache, interpreting with great readiness the import of this pantomime. "'E's in there with Bates—busy, like me."

"Has he been to my board?" asked the little old man, in an anxious, high-pitched voice.

"No, 'asn't been in at all," replied the busy man, and abruptly turned his back and continued his interrupted work.

Apparently relieved of anxiety, the little man turned to Jacob with a sudden assumption of authority.

"Do you want to see Mr. Bradley on business?" he asked.

"M-yes," returned Jacob. "That is to say—I've a letter of introduction to him."

"Where's the boy?" asked the little man, addressing the back of his industrious colleague.

"Out," replied that gentleman, without turning round.

"He's no business to be out when Bates is in with the gov'nor," whined the little man, and then to Jacob: "Mr. Bradley is very busy, but I'll see if he can attend to you. Where's your letter?" Jacob delivered it, and the little man trotted along the passage, opened the door on the right of the entrance, and disappeared.

Jacob waited patiently in the skylit passage, wondering whether he was destined to know more of these mysterious people, whether the two he had seen were experts in their

profession, and whether all the assistants on Mr. Morley's staff were of the same social standing? His conjectures were interrupted by the reappearance of the bald-headed little man, who hardly paused to say "Mr. Bradley'll see you in a minute," and then with a great show of bustle and anxiety, made his way back to the other office.

4.

Jacob was so absorbed in watching him, and in wondering what it was the little man reminded him of—he rather thought it was the White Rabbit in "Alice in Wonderland"—that he did not hear Mr. Bradley come out into the passage, and started when someone said, cordially, "How do you do, Mr. Stahl? How's Pelsworthy getting on?"

Jacob took the hand offered him, and replied to the effect that Pelsworthy was much as usual. There was something about Mr. Bradley that invited confidence; Jacob felt as if he had met an old acquaintance, and his nervousness vanished.

Owen Bradley was a man of thirty-three or four, with smooth hair of remarkable fairness, and noticeably lighter in colour than his small closely-trimmed moustache. He had a fresh, clean complexion and blue eyes which always required the assistance of spectacles—one pair for working, another for general purposes. The end of a leather spectacle case projected from his upper waistcoat pocket, and there was a complete indication of the whole method of the man in his neat, rapid exchange of one pair of gold-rimmed glasses for the other.

They sat down on two imitation mahogany, round-bottomed, wooden armchairs, and fell at once into an easy conversation on the subjects of Bennetts, Mr. Baker, and other topics of mutual interest.

Presently they came to business.

"I suppose you didn't want to see me about anything particular?" asked Bradley.

"Well! I'm looking for a job," said Jacob. "I don't know if you happen to know of one?"

"Depends what sort of a job you're looking for," Bradley replied. "I believe Morley wants another tracer, but I don't expect it means more than twenty-five bob a week."

"I wouldn't mind taking that to start with," said Jacob thoughtfully. "I—I've got enough of my own to get along on—but what ought I to do? . . ."

"If you'll wait here half a jiff, I'll go and see him," said Bradley.

"That's awfully good of you!" said Jacob gratefully.

"Are you sure you don't mind?"

"Of course not," replied Bradley, and wasted no time in further preliminaries.

He returned in less than a minute to say that Mr. Morley was still engaged in dictating letters to the clerk and could not be disturbed, but that arrangements had been made for information to be given to them the moment that Mr. Morley should be free.

Jacob began to ask questions concerning the other workers in this important office. "Who's that funny little man with the bald head?" he asked.

"Oh! that's Grover, our damager," said Bradley with a smile—Jacob understood that this was a facetious rendering of the word "manager"—"He's of no account!"

"He looks rather a worm . . ." ventured Jacob.

"Yes—he is rather like that."

"And who's the man with the big moustache?"

"In the front office? That's Merrick."

"Doesn't he—drop his h's rather?"

Bradley smiled again. "In some words he does." He paused a moment, and then added: "No class, of course."

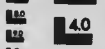
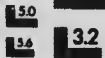
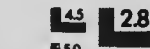
It was the first time Jacob had heard this descriptive phrase, but the meaning was obvious, and he took it up at once, and answered: "No class? No, I suppose not."

"It surprises you rather, does it?" asked Bradley. "This office is, perhaps, hardly typical. There are no pupils, and men like—well, Merrick"—he dropped his voice—"have been office boys once and worked their way up, like solicitors' clerks, you know. Only for Heaven's sake, never let Merrick



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know, if you should come here, that I told you he'd ever been an office boy. He's a very decent chap, really, and a splendid worker."

"Rather not," said Jacob.

"Doesn't make any difference to your wanting to come here?" asked Bradley.

"Oh, Lord, no!" answered Jacob. "I'm not that sort." He was about to add that he was, indeed, extremely anxious to come there, but he was stopped by the appearance of a cadaverous, black-haired young man, who came from the front office.

"Guv'nor's finished now," said this individual in an undertone, speaking to Bradley. "Look slippy—he's just off to Birmingham. Don't make him miss his train."

"All right," said Bradley, and was moving away, when there was heard the sharp click of a key being turned in a lock.

"Here he is!" said the black-haired man, and beat a hasty retreat. Next moment the door of Mr. Morley's private room was opened sharply, and the principal himself appeared.

5.

Already Jacob had sensed something of the atmosphere of this office, something of the feeling for its head, a feeling that was not all fear nor all respect, yet a certain apprehension which included these attitudes. Some such feeling, perhaps, as the ministers round the throne of an autocrat might exhibit, ministers capable of criticizing the wisdom of their master, yet all dependent on his good-will for their tenure of office. Sensitive to this atmospheric influence, Jacob had the sensation of being discovered in misdoing, as Mr. Ridout Morley came briskly down the passage.

He was a man of between forty and fifty, rather below the middle height, three or four inches shorter than either Jacob or Bradley. His hair was of an uncertain tint, much the colour of a well-used rope; and he wore a moustache and thin flat side-whiskers broadening at the base, just below his ear. He had a high but unhealthy-looking complexion

and pale blue eyes ; in his movements he was alert, active, rapid.

"Might I speak to you a moment, sir?" asked Bradley, stepping forward.

"Yes! What is it? I haven't much time," replied Mr. Morley briskly.

"I believe you were thinking of engaging another tracer," said Bradley, deliberately, "and a friend of mine, Mr. Stahl,"—he introduced Jacob by an indicative gesture, and Jacob made an attempt to compromise a bow and a nod—"who has been in the same office as I was before I came to town, is anxious to get into a big office where there is plenty of work,—for the sake of experience."

"Yes," replied Mr. Morley, and turning to Jacob with a benevolent condescension, he asked: "You've served your articles?"

"Yes, I was articed for three years in Pelsworthy," said Jacob, "and I stayed on as an improver for a few months."

"I'm afraid I can't stop now," said Mr. Morley, looking at his watch. "Come and see me on Monday at half-past nine, and bring any specimens of your work you have. Good-morning." And Mr. Morley politely shook hands with Jacob, and left him murmuring unintelligible thanks. They heard him ring for the lift, and then, as his call did not meet with immediate response, trot rapidly down the stairs.

6.

The door from which Bradley had emerged was opened immediately, and a rather smartly-dressed youth came out. "Was that him went?" he asked, with an indicative jerk of the head in the direction of the stairs.

Bradley nodded.

"Gone for the day, hasn't he?" continued the youth.

"Won't be back till Monday," replied Bradley.

"Oh! terrific business—tire-riffic," jubilated the youth and disappeared again with a slam.

"Who's that?" asked the amused Jacob.

"Tony Farrell," said Bradley.

"Rather a funny chap, isn't he?"

"He's a clever beggar," said Bradley; "but he wastes his time. Let's sit down. Do you smoke?"

"Rather! But I say, are you allowed to smoke—here?"

"Only when the gov'nor's out," rejoined Bradley. "Shall I roll you a cigarette?"

Jacob, however, had cigarettes all ready for consumption, but Bradley refused the offered case, excusing himself with the remark that he always made his own, and he gave a very neat, capable exhibition of the art.

When they were comfortably settled, Jacob said: "Do you think I've any chance of getting here?"

"Cert., I should say," replied Bradley, with quiet confidence.

"Really? Why do you think so?"

"He wants a tracer, and you've dropped in at the right moment. The only thing he asked was whether you had served your articles. That's his note, now. He wants to raise the tone. Farrell got his job here chiefly because he was rather 'more class' than the average; Leigh-Weston, too, you haven't seen him yet. All you've got to do on Monday is to rub in what I said about wanting to come to a big office with lots of work going, his pride is open to attack on that point, and put on your Sunday behaviour. He probably won't look at your drawings."

"What sort of man is he?" Jacob asked, and added: "You don't mind telling me these things, do you?"

"Of course not," said Bradley. "What sort? Well, a real good sort at bottom. I've been here six years, and Grover, old Eckholt, Merrick, and Illington for about twenty. Two years ago there wasn't a stroke of work going, and Morley kept us all on, we five and Bates,—that dark chap who came out to tell me Morley was free; he's the clerk—Morley kept us on, and paid us full screw when there wasn't a penny coming in."

"That was very decent of him," commented Jacob.

"Very decent."

"But there's plenty of work, now?"

"Plenty! We won the North-Western Hospital Competition. Didn't you see it? It was in all the papers."

"Of course. I remember now. Yes—Ridout Morley," assented Jacob. "But do you know, it never occurred to me to connect the name with this office. Stupid of me! It was a tremendous job, wasn't it?"

"Quarter of a million."

"By Jove! Quarter of a million," repeated Jacob breathlessly. "I suppose it's still going on," he added.

"They only started on the foundations three months ago," replied Bradley, "the contract date for completion is two years and a half ahead."

Jacob meditated in amazement over the thought of this stupendous contract. He was dimly picturing some vast self-contained building, he had no knowledge of the detail of hospital building nor any recollection of the drawings of this particular hospital which he had casually glanced over in the building papers, a year before. "How many of you are there here?" he asked, reflecting on the enormous number of drawings required.

Bradley made a mental calculation. "Eight draughtsmen," he answered, "besides the clerk and the office boy."

Jacob whistled. "It is a big office," he remarked.

"It'll probably be bigger before long," replied Bradley.

"There are one or two more large jobs on the tapis."

They continued to discuss Mr. Morley's promising business outlook until they were interrupted by the reappearance of Mr. Tony Farrell.

"Going out?" asked Bradley.

Farrell paused. "I'm just going to see a man about a dog," he remarked.

"Let me introduce you to Mr. Stahl," said Bradley; "he's coming to work here on Monday."

"Perhaps," interpolated Jacob.

"It's not a bad place, when the grand inquisitor's at Brum playing with bricks," said Mr. Farrell, as he shook hands with Jacob; "but he's got a poisonous habit of relying too much on his clerk-of-works, hasn't he, Bradder?"

"He's more confidence in him than he has in us, I expect," said Bradley.

"It's perfectly sickening the way he distrusts us," returned Farrell with mock earnestness. "After we've slaved and stayed late, and worked our T-squares to the bone for him. Why doesn't he go to live at Birmingham, and leave us to manage this end?"

A high-pitched, complaining voice suddenly broke into the conversation. "The minute the gov'nor's out of the way," it said, "you young men are all in the passage, smoking and talking. I shall have to tell Mr. Morley."

Jacob turned and saw the little bald-headed manager, Mr. Grover, and flushed hotly, feeling that he, too, was included in this reprimand. But Bradley never budged an inch, nor made any sign of discontinuing his cigarette; and Farrell turned on the little man and pretended to examine him with grave curiosity. "Why! It's Mr. Grover," he said, at last, with intense surprise.

"There'll be no work done, and he'll blame it all on to me," protested Mr. Grover ill-humouredly, in his whining voice. "You young men do nothing but chatter."

"There are worse things than chattering, you know, Mr. Grover," responded Farrell, "such as . . . however, we won't particularize. But if you should happen to be going to the Mason's Head by any chance, you might tell them I shan't be in to-day, will you?"

"There'll be a row when the gov'nor comes back," protested Mr. Grover as he went out.

When he had gone, Farrell remarked to Jacob: "Needn't take any notice of him, you know. Complaining and going out for drinks is his job. He was worried because we saw him go, that was all."

"Train up a child . . ." put in Bradley with apparent inconsequence.

"Oh! He'll learn quick enough, if he comes here," said Farrell.

"Meaning me?" asked Jacob.

Bradley nodded. "Some of us work," he said.

"I mean to work, too," affirmed Jacob.

"I'll come and watch you," said Farrell. "It bucks me up like anything to see other people working. That dog will be dead, if I don't go. Au reservoir!"

"I suppose . . ." began Jacob, breaking the short silence which had succeeded Farrell's departure. "I suppose with so many drawings to be made, it is almost impossible for Mr. Morley to know exactly how much has been done while he's away?"

"Making plans already?" asked Bradley.

"Oh! no! I was just wondering."

"It's very difficult to say how much Morley guesses; he never says anything unless the case is very flagrant—and not much then. You see, the work is always done, and done in time, some of us see to that, and if there is a rush we work overtime and don't get paid anything extra for it. Some of the slackers, Farrell for instance, make that an excuse for wasting time, but probably Morley works it out the other way, and gets his own back by the extra work we have to put in on occasion. So far as he's concerned it pans out pretty well—he's no nigger-driver, although he works mighty hard himself. Some things are taboo, of course, and take it all round, though we might do a lot more, collectively, we do all there is to be done and do it pretty well—the average of mistakes is very low . . ."

"What sort of things are 'taboo'?" asked Jacob.

"Oh! well, doing your own work in the gov'nor's time, for one—Grover does it, but no one else."

"Grover hasn't much authority as a manager, has he?"

"None, absolutely none. He's given himself away too badly, and too often."

"Any other 'taboos'?" asked Jacob, who rather liked the word.

"Slacking when there's important work to be done. That's less a point of honour than a rule in our own interests. It might mean we should all have to work overtime. There are other things, too, but you'll find out soon enough when you're here."

" You seem to take it for granted I shall come."

" It's pretty safe. Take my tip and come prepared to start work right away on Monday morning—bring your drawing instruments and things. You'll want set-squares and scales and pencils, they're not supplied."

" And a board ?"

" No, not a board or a T-square."

7.

Bradley's prophecy was realized in detail. Mr. Morley was very full of business on Monday morning after his three days' absence in Birmingham. When he arrived at the office a few minutes before the half-hour, Jacob was waiting for him, seated on one of the chairs in the passage, feeling nervous and very like a boy going to a new school. He rose as his future employer came in, and Morley, who had completely forgotten his existence, stopped in his brisk entrance and said, in a kindly tone that was, nevertheless, touched with a note of impatience :

" Yes ? Did you want to see me ?"

" You—you told me to come and see you this morning," said Jacob, " about my coming here—Mr. Bradley . . ."

" Yes. Yes. I remember, Mr.—" He paused for the name.

" Stahl," prompted Jacob.

" Stahl, yes, Stahl," went on Morley, taking up the name promptly. " You'd better work in Mr. Bradley's room," and he turned quickly and marched into the indicated department, Jacob following with his parcel of mathematical instruments and his big roll of drawings.

" No one here yet," continued Mr. Morley, taking out his watch. " Oh ! it's not quite half-past. Ask Mr. Bradley to give you some work when he arrives." He was turning to go, but misreading the look of hesitation on Jacob's face, he paused and added : " We didn't settle anything about salary, I believe. I am afraid I can only offer you a position as tracer to start with—thirty shillings a week, if you are prepared to accept that."

"Oh, yes, thank you; it wasn't that," said Jacob. "I thought you would want to see some of my drawings, perhaps, I . . ."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Morley, hurriedly taking the imposing roll which Jacob was wobbling uncertainly in his direction. "Certainly," he repeated as he made a rapid exit.

"Wonder why I always make such an ass of myself?" pondered Jacob, seating himself on a high stool to await the appearance of Bradley.

He was a little anxious as to the final outcome of this unorthodox method of engagement. Those drawings might still tell against him. He had gone through them all very carefully, weighing the merits of his earlier efforts in the light of later experience, and uncertain whether to include all his specimens. After wavering for more than an hour, he had decided that it would be best to make as good a show as possible, arranged the best specimens on the top, and added pencil notes in a bold hand on some of the lower ones, explaining reasons for certain faults, which he noted on the drawings themselves, in the most technical terms at his command. "That'll look as if I knew something about it, anyhow," he had murmured to himself, "better than letting him spot the howlers for himself."

Now, he pondered the effect these drawings might have upon Mr. Morley, and whether it were possible that they might adversely influence his decision. The actual story of the drawings is soon disposed of. Some three months after Jacob's admission to the office of Mr. Ridout Morley, the clerk, Bates, came in one afternoon with a big roll in his hands.

"This belong to you?" he asked Jacob. "It's been knocking round our office ever since you came. Guv'nor gave it to me, and I put in under the desk—Phew! pretty dusty, ain't it?"

CHAPTER XIX

VARIOUS DISCOVERIES

1.

AUNT HESTER received a very full and glowing account of Jacob's entry into the world of serious, strenuous work. It was an optimistic, rather thoughtless letter, full of Jacob's prospects and the wonders of his great achievement in getting a berth so soon, and at so encouraging a salary as £78 a year. "Very good, really, as things go," explained the writer, and added a précis of pessimistic anecdotes, gleaned from Bennetts, which described the unhappy experiences of the ordinary, average seeker after engagements in the offices of architects. "Of course, it was a bit of luck," he went on, but he did not mention the fact that his drawings had played no part in his engagement; there was no direct misrepresentation, the fact was omitted, that was all. The letter had a sting in the tail. "I don't think you had better make any plans yet as to coming to town," Jacob had written. "It is just possible that I may share rooms, later, with one of the men at the office, but I will let you know as soon as I know definitely." Jacob did not polish his style when writing to Aunt Hester.

The suggestion as to sharing rooms was the happiest excuse he had been able to invent, and had no reference to any actual proposition, but having written it, he pondered the notion and wondered whether it were not a sound idea. He thought not of Bradley but of Tony Farrell in this connection, for his desires were towards freedom, and Bradley would be a restraining influence. That burning to be free of all restraint had prompted the paragraph which was such bitter reading to Hester. Jacob had known the effect it would have, as he wrote, but he had deliberately combated and beaten down the thought of self-sacrifice. It was impossible that he should always be in leading-strings, he wanted to adventure out by himself into this mysterious world and life of London, not to be taken inside that limiting, respectable omnibus. He was

an anarchist; in revolt against all those limiting, clearly defined laws which he was proving daily to be untrue and groundless. He was at the outset of a long adventure, not only into physical but, also, into mental experience, an experience begun at the Wheatsheaf, continued within the purlieus of Elmoor, and now expanding vigorously in the atmosphere of new knowledge. For twenty-one years, though he did not yet realize the fact, himself, he had been cramped and thwarted in his intellectual training. One group of ideas had been taught to him with all the weight of certain authority. Ideas they were, but not communicated as such. There had been no hint that those infallible rules of life, those rigid explanations of the origins of human existence and of its ultimate goal, were founded upon any hypothesis; there had been no statement of a case which a pupil might decide on its merits.

"This is the law" was the formula that might have heralded all religious and moral precepts; and "This is the best" where the application was to any rule of human life which obviously admitted of an alternative.

Not that these laws and rules and preferences had, in Jacob's case, been taught dogmatically with stern warnings and threats of future punishment and disaster if they were neglected. Neither Fearon nor Hester had had anything of the Calvinist in their compositions, but the ordinances were accepted without the least doubt or question, and the denial of them was something to be ashamed of or brushed aside, as the case might be. Thus Fearon would speak with a disapproving frown of a certain cobbler in Sutton as a Radical, whose perverted state of mind was aggravated by the fact that he was also a chapel-goer. Even Aunt Hester, with all her generous tendencies, implied that the cobbler was some kind of reprobate, outside the pale of human intercourse. She did not accuse him, but by her very defence one could only infer that Hales the cobbler was very open to attack. Hales, in fact, was *mistaken* in his views, and Jacob regarded all Radicals and chapel-goers as curiously perverted people to be looked down upon with contempt.

It was chance alone that the laws of the Established Church and the traditions of a limiting conservatism should have been the rule by which Jacob was confined from the time his mind had been ready to receive any impressions on the subject. It would have been no better, no less limiting for him, if he had been taught the rule of Nonconformity, Roman Catholicism or of Mahomet, nor even, though the very word should speak of free and unrestrained opinion, any Liberal political creed, if it were bounded by a rigid denial of possible dissent. Chance, however, had ordained certain formulæ in the case of Jacob Stahl, and there need be no question of whether the limitations imposed upon him by these particular formulæ are those which we favour or condemn. Whether they be in conformity with our own leanings or not, we should admit that they are open to attack. Conservative, Liberal or Radical; member of the Established Church of England, Nonconformist or Mahomedan, we can only say this is our working hypothesis; there is no last human authority, whether an individual or a majority, which can decide the question for us; but, nevertheless, we protest, most of us, I am right and you are damned, politically or eternally, and I hope most fervently that no child of mine will ever become a Conservative, a Liberal or a Socialist, as the case may be. But what of the child, what of Jacob Stahl, if he have the wit to examine the foundations of our belief? And dissent? One thing is certain, his reaction will be the greater for our dogmatism, and we shall have impeded first and then hindered his development; his arrival at any synthesis on his own account. If we had given him a choice, if we had stated a case, however prejudiced, he would have had a better chance of arriving at the point of view that we had chosen for our own, than he will after he has discovered that our infallible laws are merely working hypotheses, when he has begun to think, to doubt; for then he may err as far on the other side, he may be as fanatic in his denial of our principles as we had been in affirmation.

2.

The struggle for a dimly visualized freedom took the path of least resistance in Jacob's case. He had in him none of the virtues or powers of the militant reformer, the breaker of idols. It would, plainly, have exhibited a more admirable temper if he had acceded to Aunt Hester's plan of living with him in town, and had then made his declaration of independence, asserted his individuality, and fought for the demonstrable rectitude of his attitude, step by step. There were two reasons against this fearless avowal of his revolt from conformity. The first that in his heart, Jacob was by no means conscious of demonstrable rectitude. The principles he had absorbed had become a habit of mind, and at this stage it was the practice only, and not the theory he was tentatively opposing. His first experience in the affairs of love he was willing to defend, for that had been, to him, a great and wonderful affair. So far as he was concerned there had been nothing small or self-seeking in it. He had worshipped and had never been allowed to reach the stage of satiety. His worship had been disdained, and he had been thrust out of the temple, but it had been a temple, and he did not reproach himself. But in the dimly projected adventures upon which he sometimes allowed his imagination to dwell, there was nothing to hallow and sanctify his shadowy conceptions. At times he was ashamed of his own propensities, and only granted himself absolution on an objective promise of repentance, made to himself with repeated asseverations. Subjectively, no doubt, some little dancing devil whispered that he could repent as well after the act, and the advice was noted and docketed in a corner of his intelligence for future use; though at the time of repentance the suggestion was crushed under objective asseverations. Thus, being ashamed of the thoughts of his mind, Jacob was in no spirit to demonstrate his splendid rectitude to another. In this he was merely breaking away from certain conventions, and erring by reaction.

The second reason was one of temperament. Jacob was

not a fighter except by fits and starts. For a day, two days, a week, perhaps, he could maintain an attitude against opposition or reproof, but after that he tired, and from sheer weariness would concede the point at issue, concede it for the sake of rest and peace. Hester, keenly intuitive in all that concerned Jacob, knew this, but she was shrewd enough to know, also, that to exercise her own powers of resolution in breaking down his opposition would be to turn the boy against her. That she could not face; even for the sake of a principle. It was her weakness, and if she lamented, now, that she had not fought stubbornly over the Elmover affair, she admitted to herself that if she were faced with another such struggle, she would not contest it. Too devoted a love, however disinterested, may make us cowards, and even what the world calls sinners. If Jacob had committed a murder and confessed it to Hester, she would have become his accessory, and done everything in her power to shield him, for which she would have appeared as a criminal in the eyes of the law. There is nothing about motive in the code, though there is a wise leniency in its administration.

The first upshot of Jacob's bid for freedom was a reproachful letter from Aunt Hester, which made him first angry and then sorry. "You have no use for an old woman like me, now, I suppose," was the essence of the complaint. "I thought we might have had such a nice little home together, but no doubt, you are making a lot of new friends." Hester's tact often failed her when she took up a pen, she had little power to express herself on paper.

"Oh! Lord, it isn't that! Can't she understand that I'm not a child any longer?" was the refrain of Jacob's first outburst on receiving these reproaches. It was not that, truly, but when faced with phrasing exactly what it was, in his reply, he found a difficulty, and compromised—sorry now that Hester had been wounded—with warm expressions of constant love and filial devotion—and a procrastination. "We won't settle it, now, anyway," he wrote. "I shall be able to come down to Ashby Sutton for the August Bank Holiday in a few weeks' time, and then we'll talk it all over."

As he wrote, he almost relented. After all it would be nice in many ways to have Aunt Hester with him. He nearly decided to tear up his letter and write definitely, but he did not feel inclined for further efforts of composition just then, and postponed his submission for a day or two. Probably the delay made no difference, but it chanced that Providence, in the person of Mr. Tony Farrell, interposed before the second letter was written.

3.

Tony Farrell was a two years' experience. During that time he wielded an influence, by example and by occasional precept, chiefly compounded of ridicule. Then he vanished into the unknown, wrote two letters from some unimaginable country of Canada, and ceased to be, so far as Jacob was concerned. Jacob was intensely assimilative at this period, and it may seem that the influence distorted his growth. Within limits this is true enough: men, like trees, are shaped by their circumstance. Set too close together they will either remain dwarfed or shoot up straight and tall to reach the sunlight; subjected to the pressure of one prevailing wind they will grow misshapen and stunted, and never reach perfection of contour or full development. But the essential character of the man and the tree remains unaltered, and the hump-backed, stooping thing stretching its arms desperately inland, will grow straight again if transplanted before the sap has grown too sluggish.

For two years Tony Farrell represented the prevailing wind.

The son of a country rector, educated at a public school, young Farrell was articled at seventeen to a well-known London architect, and given clearly to understand that an allowance of £100 a year for three years was all that he could expect from his father; the aggregate of this sum, together with the cost of his indentures, represented capital saved for his education, and not surplus income. The alternative had been another year at school, and then Downing or Cavendish, scholarships being beyond the scope of Tony's attainment, as at seventeen he was still an undistinguished

member of the "lower fifth." The opportunity to choose had been offered to Tony, who had taken London without a moment's hesitation, and the choice had not been distasteful to Farrell senior, who was a Trinity Hall man, and regarded most other Cambridge colleges with some contempt. As a substitute for a University education, architecture was suggested because Tony had exhibited some facility for drawing, and architecture was among the professions. It was assumed that Tony's prospects depended entirely on his own capacity for application.

Before his three years were up, Tony was in debt sixty pounds to the London branch of a firm of Cambridge tailors, who had "made for" his father for forty years, and considered themselves justified, if they ever considered at all, in giving the son unlimited credit on the strength of their certainty of obtaining final payment from their older customer before the son became legally responsible for his own debts. After the sum had been paid, and a distinct intimation given that the patronage of Farrell senior was withdrawn, and that no further responsibility would be taken, Tony, who was quite willing to return to the firm, found himself coldly received, and his business dealings relegated to a strictly cash basis. He had followed his father's lead, but, plainly, the firm suffered little, for old Farrell's dealings had been limited to one new suit in three years, for more than a quarter of a century.

When Jacob came to Ridout Morley's office, Tony Farrell was twenty-six, and for five years had been living on his own resources, during which time he had never been quite free from debt, but had never again made application to his father for financial assistance.

4.

At half-past five, on the evening of the day following that procrastinating letter to Aunt Hester, Tony strolled into "old Eckholt's room," smoking a cigarette. He paused for a moment watching with dumb admiration the absorption of the three occupants of the room.

"I suppose you know he's gone?" he remarked.

Jacob straightened his back and turned round; Bradley continued his drawing and took no notice, "old Eckholt" took upon himself the responsibility of answering the question, which intimated that Mr. Ridout Morley had left the office for the day.

"You won't work yourself, and won't let others work," explained old Eckholt; "why can't you keep in your own office?"

"I'm a restless spirit," replied Tony, "and I wander to and fro upon the earth seeking someone to play with."

"Why can't you play in your own room, then," retorted old Eckholt, "instead of upsettin' us here?"

Jacob and Tony exchanged a wink of mutual comprehension.

"About that dog——" began Tony.

"I was just coming in to ask you," said Jacob, "a brown patch over his left ear, I think you said."

"Oh! take your caninities out into the passage," put in Bradley good-humouredly. "I've got some work to finish."

"What are you doing to-night?" asked Tony, when he and Jacob were seated outside. "I'm at a loose end."

"Nothing particular," replied Jacob.

"Come and do a hall. I'm stony, of course, but I'm not down to the old Laurentian yet."

"Who's the old Laurentian?" asked Jacob.

"Geological for bed-rock, my son, where there's no more scrapings to be got; abso-bally-lutely the last word in rocks. I've sat on it. I asked you a question, you may remember."

"What was it?" said Jacob. He regarded Tony as a remarkable wit. "It's not only the things he says, it's the queer way he has, that is so funny," Jacob had written of Tony to Aunt Hester.

"I suggested that we should do a hall together."

Jacob had to confess that he was still unenlightened.

"I was proposing," said Tony, with elaborate distinctness, "that we should visit a music-hall in each other's company. Is that more like the language they use in Ashmead

Bartlett or whatever the name of the place was, where you were educated ?”

“Ashby Sutton,” suggested the amused Jacob.

“It’s all the same—why will you go off on to side issues ?”

“I’m afraid I don’t quite know what a music-hall is,” said Jacob.

“My Lord !” ejaculated Tony, with great solemnity, and then added : “But, then, you never even went to a public school.”

“No, I had a private tutor.”

“You’re one of the kippered aristocracy,” retorted Tony.

“Oh ! no ! rather not !” began Jacob, eager to disclaim a spurious reputation for superiority. “I——”

“Don’t worry about it,” interrupted Tony. “Set yourself to live it down. It’s easier than you might think. Let me explain the outstanding features of a music-hall as known to the initiated.”

Tony’s explanation interested Jacob immensely. Theatres he had been to—a very few,—but nothing so light as a musical comedy ; they called them burlesques in those days. Aunt Hester had said burlesques were “vulgar” ; but these music-halls, Farrell described, seemed to touch even a lower level, though Tony, whether to spare Jacob’s innocence or because he feared to frighten him away from the idea of visiting the “halls,” had left one feature of the entertainment undescribed, a feature not advertised on the bills or programmes.

“I should like to come, awfully,” said Jacob, hot with the spirit of strange adventure.

5.

“‘Prom.’ is extract of ‘promenade,’” explained Tony.

“But does that mean we shall have to walk about all the time ?” asked Jacob.

“You wouldn’t be fined for standing still.”

“But can’t we get a seat ?”

Tony hesitated ; he had an instinctive respect for what he regarded as this "spotless innocence." At the same time his common-sense urged that knowledge must come, and he was not versed in ethical speculations, he was unable to draw the just inference from his premisses. He had an instinct to leave Jacob's thoughts undisturbed, to take him to the "pit-stalls," and sit patiently through the "show," but young men of Tony's type are not apt to be guided by instincts which point the harder course. Wherefore Tony argued to himself that it was not good for Jacob to remain in such profound ignorance of "life," and took him to the promenade.

"Oh ! yes, there are plenty of seats," was his reply to Jacob's question, "if you want to sit all through the show."

"Isn't that what we've come for ?" asked Jacob.

Tony smiled. "You'll see," he said, and then by way of afterthought, "I may possibly meet a friend. If so, we might go and have a drink, some of the turns aren't worth watching ; acrobats and conjurers . . ."

"N—no," agreed Jacob, not wishing to exhibit a false taste in these things, and ashamed to confess that the idea of acrobats and conjurers appealed to him as altogether delightful.

Music-hall entertainments have changed little in the last quarter of a century, in so far as the programme is concerned, though a more delicate sense of morality, or maybe a more vigilant supervision, has since effected a considerable change in the management of the front of the house, a change by which the music-hall have benefited and the streets suffered.

To Jacob everything was new and wonderful. The fact that one was allowed to smoke seemed an indication of ease and luxury, combined with just a suspicion of rakishness that added a piquancy to the adventure. They were early, and plenty of seats were to be had below the waist-high barrier, which formed a convenient lounge for those of the audience who seemed to prefer standing ; and till half-past nine or thereabouts, Tony and Jacob sat and watched the

various items of the entertainments, the former highly critical, the latter appreciative, but subduing his admiration to the note demanded by his companion's strictures.

At the beginning Jacob was a little uneasy on occasion. Some of the jokes of an early-appearing "patter comedian" made him feel hot and uncomfortable.

"Oh! I say!" he murmured, and Tony hearing him, also felt a little ashamed of the vulgarity which was being given out from the stage, with no virtue of wit to cloak its lewdness.

"This chap's rotten," he commented, "he's probably being given a trial week."

"Yes, he's not funny, is he?" replied Jacob, for once in conscientious agreement with Tony's criticism.

"Absolutely poisonous," returned Tony, unconscious that for once he was using his favourite adjective appropriately.

It was during a trapeze act in which Jacob's attention was entirely absorbed, that Tony, who had been repeatedly looking over his shoulder at the leaners on the barrier which bounded the promenade, got up, and whispering to Jacob, "Just seen someone I know—I'll be back directly, keep my seat," made his way up the gangway and disappeared.

For three "turns" Jacob sat intent on the rapidly succeeding items of the programme, a little relieved to be able to listen, undisturbed by the slighting comments of his companion, and then Tony returned and whispered:

"I've got a friend here who wants to be introduced to you, if you can manage to tear yourself away."

Jacob turned with a start, expecting to find some male friend of Tony's waiting to be introduced—but no friend was visible.

"Oh! all right; yes, rather; I should like to," he said, and then, "I say, don't you think this girl's rather good-looking?"

The girl referred to, described in the programme, simply, as a "comedienne," was dressed in very short skirts, and wore her hair loose; her song was descriptive of her hypothetical innocence. She could not sing, did not attempt to dance though she occasionally gathered the skirt of her knee-

high frock as if in preparation, and had no histrionic talent, but she was graceful and pretty enough—one of the type of music-hall performers who used to appear for a time, despite their persistently cold reception by the audience, and then vanished from the stage, for ever.

“Not bad,” replied Tony. “She’s probably about forty”; in which he did the comedienne an injustice, for she was quite young.

“Surely not,” protested Jacob.

“You can’t tell when they’re made up like that. Come on!” said Tony, and Jacob reluctantly rose and accompanied him.

The venue of the introduction was a small alcove conveniently near the bar and the procession of the promenade, yet discreetly withdrawn, as it were an arbour from which the garden is visible but detached. The flat, wood tracery, which boxed the front of this little retreat, gave it an air of privacy, though the open fretwork—it had a suggestion of Moorish art in its design—did not protect the occupants from the observation of the inquisitive.

Tony’s “friend” was awaiting them. She was a young woman of from twenty-five to thirty, with a pale face and red lips. She was wearing a high black silk dress, slightly over-founced and bedecorated, but not noticeably exaggerated in style even in the matter of the absurd rear projection which was then the mode. Her hat was in keeping, there was, perhaps, just one feather too many, and her brown hair, some shades lighter than her eyebrows, which owed something of their blackness to art, was dressed a little too low over her ears.

“Thought you weren’t ever coming,” remarked this young woman languidly, when Tony and Jacob joined her. “Introduce me to your friend, Tony.”

“Allow me to present Mr. James Smith to you,” said Tony elaborately, then, turning to Jacob, he winked covertly, and said aloud: “Jimmy, my boy, this is Miss Catherine Mason, of whom you have doubtless heard.”

“Not too much of it, Tony,” put in Miss Mason, and then

to Jacob, "Pleased to meet you," and she held out a hand that displayed some remarkably fine rings, worn outside rather soiled kid gloves which reached to her elbows.

Jacob stammered out something about being "very pleased, too," wondering why Tony had called him James Smith, and had winked at him to accept the name without question.

"What are you drinking, Kitty?" asked Tony, when he and Jacob had sat down inside the alcove.

"Oh! I dunno," returned Kitty. "I've just had one," and she pointed to a liqueur glass on the little brown wooden table in front of her.

"Benedictine?" questioned Tony, after a critical whiff of the indicated glass. "Three Benedictines," he said to a waiter, who was lingering in the vicinity, plainly expecting an order.

To Jacob, all that followed was for evermore associated with the cloying, heavy aroma and taste of Benedictine, which completely dominated the smell of cigarette smoke and the profuse scent worn by Miss Mason.

"Are you a stranger to town?" asked that young woman presently, turning to Jacob with an air of interest.

"I've been up about a month," he replied, a little confused by the steadiness of her regard.

"There's no place like London, is there?" she continued. "You do see life in London."

"Yes, you do, don't you?" returned Jacob, and nearly choked over his first taste of Benedictine.

"Don't gulp it, old boy," interpolated Tony. "It's not a long drink."

"It is a bit strong," said Jacob, his eyes watering, "Jolly good, though."

"Never tried it before?" asked Miss Mason.

"No, not before," said Jacob.

"This is his first music-hall, too," remarked Tony. "He's an innocent lamb—as yet."

Miss Mason drew herself up, throwing back her shoulders and taking a deep breath, a handsome movement that suited

her. "What did you bring him here for, then?" she asked of Tony, with some dignity.

"Oh! he wants to see life, don't you, old boy?" replied Tony, slightly abashed.

"Oh! yes, rather, of course I do," agreed Jacob.

"It seems a pity," said Miss Mason, still dignified. "I thought you didn't seem quite the sort as come here; you've got a decent look about you."

Jacob did not know what to answer, he did not understand the drift of this young woman's remarks. He imagined her to be either a relation or an old friend of Farrell's, and he had wondered dimly whether her "people" were elsewhere in the house. He had wondered, too, whether she was not "rather fast," but was now quite at a loss to comprehend the terms in which she was addressing him.

His discomfiture was observed by Tony, who said:

"Oh, chuck it, Kitty, old girl, he doesn't even know what you're driving at."

"More shame to you to bring him to a place like this," replied Miss Mason tartly.

Tony flushed, and Jacob interposed: "I wanted to come, you know, Miss Mason."

"Because you didn't know what you were coming to. Look here, dear," she bent down and addressed Jacob confidentially. "You stay as you are, you've got a nice face, and there'll be plenty of women ready to fall in love with you. You get married and keep good, you'll be happier in the end. As for you," she went on, turning to Tony, who had burst into a high, mocking laugh, "there's enough of your sort about; you've got nothing to be proud of."

"Oh! I'm not proud," said Tony with a sneer, "only it's a bit funny to hear you coming the high, moral game."

"I've more right to than you, anyhow," returned the woman angrily, rising to her feet. "It's the likes of you as has most to answer for," and she rustled her way out into the crowd on the promenade, throwing back her shoulders with that striking dignified movement which suited her tall, handsome figure so well.

"I don't understand. What's the row?" asked Jacob.

"Come on, the show's practically over," said Tony, "let's get out."

When they were in the street, a hot and dusty July street that seemed, nevertheless, fresh and cool by contrast with the polluted atmosphere they had just left, Jacob said:

"I say, who was that girl, was she really a friend of yours?"

"Good Lord, no!" rejoined Toby, who was not in the best of tempers; "she was only a ——"—and he used an ugly word, and qualified it with an equally ugly adjective.

6.

Before he went to bed, Jacob consulted his dictionary, and spent some time searching under the wrong initial for Tony's ugly word. Then he tried his Bible, remembering the word in some Old Testament connection, and after a little trouble hit upon it and noted his mistake as to spelling. Then the dictionary came into use again, and if the definition was somewhat vague, it was sufficient.

It may be difficult to understand that there should be such unlettered spaces as this in a mind such as Jacob's, a mind in many ways already experienced and instructed, but this instance is of a phase of knowledge that does not come by instinct, and there had been no one to instruct him. If he had been curious in such matters, a means would have been found to gratify that curiosity, but his mind was singularly clean for a young man whose desires were perfectly normal. Under other, it may be happier, conditions, he would have remained clean in body also, but temptation was thrust before him, and if he had no inclination to seek it, he may still be blamed in that he made no effort to resist it. At twenty-two Jacob Stahl was not a developed, reasoning creature. If he hesitated between two courses, as he had done during the memorable day when fate had introduced him to the Wheatsheaf claret, his hesitation was due to an automatic inclination to reject those things which he had been taught to believe were "wrong," a category that included

the religious and political opinions of Hales, the cobbler; an inclination heightened, no doubt, by the fear of perpetual torment and burning, entailed by the committal of "wrong" deeds or the holding of unsound opinions. But when the deprecated thing is found to be pleasant and to entail no immediate punishment, the fear of hell is relegated to the background,—remains always the comforting assurance that there is time for repentance,—and the rigid precept ceases to have effect. The impression of it may remain for a time and be attributed to the workings of conscience, but when reason fails to indicate that the outcome of an action or mode of thought originally labelled "wrong" entails no injustice, this impression is rapidly filled up, though, curiously enough, in some cases it is never quite obliterated.

Jacob's mind was, at this time, stiff with the multitude of the impressions, and as a consequence his reason had little power. In this matter which was now vexing him, reason might, almost certainly would, have aided him to better ends. Instead he had nothing but the impression of a precept, and these precepts were already being found to be not universal in their application. If one were broken, why not another?

This night marks a definite stage in the breaking of precepts, some of which were good and sound and universal enough, but had nothing to differentiate them from the others, impressed with equal force, that were petty and unreasonable. Jacob lying awake with the heavy odour of Benedictine still in his nostrils, and the sight of that graceful, lightly dressed "comediienne," fresh in his memory, was in a condition when precepts have little restraining power. It was long before he slept, and when at last sleep came, his dreams were tainted, for he dreamt that he was making love to a tall, elegant woman in black silk, who threw back her fine shoulders with a striking gesture, and that she was looking at him with bold, inviting eyes.

CHAPTER XX

ADVENTURE

1.

THE next morning Jacob woke with a headache, an unpleasant taste in his mouth and an uneasy feeling in his mind. The two former ailments yielded readily enough to the treatment of tea followed by breakfast; the latter persisted till lunch-time. He arrived at the office full of good intentions, and was rather disappointed to learn that Mr. Morley would be absent all day. It was well enough to have the good intentions, but such a waste of opportunity to carry them out on one of these rare days of freedom. Also, the tracing he was doing was for Bradley, who was lenient, whereas it might have been for old Eckholt, who always desired early completion and nagged till he got it, though he had his own ways of wasting time, dreaming over his work, and what Farrell called "messaging about." Yet even the venerable Eckholt acclaimed his chief's absence, for he was a creature of routine, loving to do the same things at the same time in precisely the same way, and the erratic intrusions of Mr. Morley, full of initiative, and looking for a newer and better way of designing some detail of construction that had been hallowed by tradition, often upset the patient toil of days and necessitated alterations in the slowly completed drawings of this most conservative of his assistants. These intrusions of a too-vigorous employer accounted for Eckholt's eagerness to have his tracings completed at the earliest possible moment, for he clung to the theory that a drawing could not be altered after it had been traced, a theory which he fondly cherished despite all contradictory facts of experience.

"Well! We shan't have 'im interfering to-day, that's a comfort," was the salute with which old Eckholt greeted Jacob's appearance on this particular morning, and inquiry furnished confirmation of the statement.

Bradley alone, perhaps, of all Mr. Morley's assistants

was entirely unaffected by the absence of his chief; but Bradley was not a propagandist; he was in no way concerned to alter the habits of his colleagues, and the quiet force of his example was little counterbalance to the energies of Tony Farrell.

Yet in face of all disturbances, Jacob prepared for a day's strenuous work, though old Eckholt was reading the *Standard*, though three of the other assistants were discussing billiard handicaps in the lobby, though old Grover had found it necessary to spend the day in visiting a small house that was building in Surrey, though Tony Farrell did not put in an appearance until half-past ten, though there was a general atmosphere of relaxation pervading the whole office and even Bradley was smoking as he worked. In face of all this, Jacob was determined to work because he was suffering a mental reaction. His determination stayed him till half-past twelve—three hours—a fair test of the powers of determination in this direction, powers which never accomplish the world's work.

Tony broke the spell by inviting the toiler to come out to lunch, and the material of the determination, already wearing thin, gave out at once.

"Well, I've pretty nearly finished this," Jacob looked for some reward; such determinations as his on this morning always look for acknowledgment. Bradley was addressed, but it was Tony who replied:

"What's all this grind for?"

"Why can't you leave him alone when he's working?" interpolated old Eckholt, with good intention but ill effect.

"Glad you're being such a good boy," said Tony. "Don't let me disturb you."

"Oh! don't be an ass," returned Jacob, and then, still desiring the approval of Bradley, he repeated his earlier statement that the tracing was nearly finished.

"There's no hurry for it," remarked Bradley.

As Jacob and Farrell were washing their hands preparatory to going out, Jacob, pondering Bradley's peculiarities, ventured to remark that Bradley was a "rum chap."

"He's one of the exceptions," explained Tony. "Most people prefer slacking, but the exceptions like Herbert Spencer and old Bradder prefer working. It's just the way you're made."

"It's people like Bradder who get on, though." Jacob would have preferred to be classed among the exceptions.

"I don't know," rejoined Tony. "It's mostly luck at our game unless you've got influence. What price the damager for instance?"

"Grover? But he doesn't work!"

"Not now. Chucked it. But he did once. He's a clever little blighter, too. He knows his work, inside out."

"Does he? Yes! I suppose..." Jacob was analyzing; as usual on insufficient premisses, filling up many blanks with an uninformed imagination.

"Oh! rather, come on. I want a pick-me-up. I've got a shocking head this morning."

Tony, in fact, had by no means recovered from a night's dissipation, which had scarcely begun when he left Jacob at the doors of the music-hall. His lunch and a whisky-and-soda, however, seemed to renew his zest in life, and he afterwards took his companion to a great wilderness of an underground café, in a corner of which they drank coffee and smoked and talked, Tony pleading that his "head" was not yet equal to chess or even dominoes. Nevertheless he monopolized the greater part of a conversation which was not altogether desultory. It frequently wandered from the point, it is true, it was broken by comments on the other frequenters of the big café—most of whom were Germans,—and by interchanges of pleasantries between Tony and the waitresses, it went back over the same ground and there were occasional lapses into silence; but, roughly, this conversation which lasted for two hours and a half, and extended itself over tea-time, might be classified into three distinct sections, the purport of which is important.

The first section was by way of being an exultant confession of wrongdoing. Tony entered into the details of a night's adventure which is for the most part unreproducible.

He touched it here and there with a faint glamour, but chiefly he assumed an air of penitence that did not serve to delude his hearer into any belief in the promised reformation. The often repeated "By Jove, I must ease up" conveyed an impression of financial difficulties rather than of any ethical intention, and the general effect was to whip Jacob's curiosity and lust for similar adventure, to make him wish that he had not parted from Tony so soon on the previous night. But when the recital staled, and its original quality was hardly remarkable for freshness, Tony fell into a serious mood, which seemed to evidence a more genuine repentance. At this point the second heading became prominent, and turned upon the failure of Mr. Morley's manager. Disregarding the many interpolations, interruptions, and side issues, Tony's remarks under this heading may be reproduced in a précis. The essence of his review followed a question from Jacob :

"But why, if he's as clever as all that, and used not to drink, is he such a failure?"

"Sheer bad luck," returned Tony, and then he lighted a fresh cigarette, leaned one arm on the marble-topped table, and proceeded with his exposition. "Sheer—bad—luck. Look here, when he was a young man he used to go in for competitions just like Bradder. Went home and swatted away every evening, making endless drawings for bally jobs of all sorts."

"Why do you suppose he never won any of 'em, any of these competitions?"

"Didn't happen to hit the particular fads of the assessor, chiefly—it's all bally luck till you've won the first, and then it all comes your way—like Morley. But, as a matter of fact, my son, Grover did win a decent competition, and that's just where his infernal bad luck comes in. It was for some big technical schools at Birchester, and Grover's was the first premiated design. Of course, I wasn't at Morley's then, but I've heard about it from Merrick. The morning Grover got his letter from the committee saying his design had been placed first, he came up to the office so full of beans he didn't know where to put himself; pretending to be frightfully

modest about it, of course, but just full up to the eyelet-holes with pride—you know. He went into the governor, told him about it, and asked for two or three days off, as he had to go up to Birchester to interview the committee. The governor was not best pleased about it, he always thinks if we go in for competitions that we shall crib his ideas; however, he had to congratulate Grover, and Grover went off and bought himself a new frock coat and a top-hat, and two or three days later he started off for Birchester. Well, no one ever quite knew what happened up here, but we suppose poor little Grover was frightfully nervous, and took a tonic or two to buck him up before he interviewed the committee. Then you know what a worm he looks, and I'm told he looked a bit worse before he grew his beard, and naturally enough the committee didn't care for his appearance much, and I dare say the tonics he'd had didn't make him any sprucer. Anyway, when he came back he wasn't quite so bucked-up. He still supposed he'd have the work, but he thought it just possible he might be asked to collaborate with the Birchester Corporation architect, because he—Grover I mean—hadn't had any experience in independent practice. About six weeks afterwards the blow fell. The committee decided to give the work to the winner of the second premium, who happened to be a young Birchester man."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Jacob. "But do you mean to say Grover got nothing?"

"He got the first premium, of course, a hundred pounds I think it was, and the Birchester architect used all the best parts of Grover's design, and put his own name to the job."

"Couldn't Grover have brought an action or something?" asked Jacob.

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "How? What for? It's a condition of these things that the first premiated design is not necessarily accepted, and then as to using Grover's ideas, well, they'd bought his drawings for a hundred pounds."

"Pretty bad luck."

"I believe you, my boy, and I believe that was what first sent Grover down the hill. The disappointment put him on

to drinking—he had an inclination that way, I expect—and the hundred pounds came in handy to help him.”

Jacob missed the excellent moral of the anecdote ; he was picturing to himself how he would have appeared before the committee, contrasting his own manner and address with those of Grover. This not in vanity, the picture was too detached, it would have been nearly complete if another, imaginary, figure had been substituted for his own, but the imaginary figure would have lacked convincingsness ; Jacob's dreams always needed reality as a base.

“ Oh ! perfectly putrid luck ! ” The voice of Tony interrupted Jacob's dream. “ I say, it's a quarter to four ; we may as well have tea, now. It's not worth while to go back and come out again.”

Some faint stirring of the morning's determination came over Jacob, and he moved a feeble resolution that it was time to return. “ We've been out three hours. I shall get jip from the old man, besides, I rather want to finish that tracing of Bradder's.”

“ Rats ! Look here,” and Tony entered on the third head of the afternoon's conversation ; “ I'm chucking my digs next week.”

Jacob did not take this opportunity, though it gave him the very chance he had been seeking to broach that question of partnership already suggested to Aunt Hester. The truth is that he was afraid of foisting himself upon Farrell, whom he regarded, with innocent admiration, as a man of experience who condescended in permitting terms of friendship. Wherefore Jacob temporized with a question :

“ You're living down at Camberwell, somewhere, aren't you ? ”

“ Cheaper, that's why.”

“ Rather a swat getting home at night, isn't it ? ”

“ All very well for you, my boy, you're a bloated millionaire, with money in the Funds and that sort of thing.”

“ Where are you going to live now, then ? ” Jacob was still undecided, and Tony on his part hesitated to put the suggestion into plain words. The deadlock was put an end

to by the advent of a third person, otherwise it might have remained undetermined.

"I don't know exactly," said Tony, still hinting. "I should rather like to share digs with some other chap—it's a lot cheaper, only . . . Oh! Hi! Dulcie! A pot of tea for two."

"Taking the afternoon off?" asked Dulcie as she made her leisurely way to the table at which the two were sitting. "You seem to have got plenty to talk about. 'Atching picts, or what?"

"We've resolved ourselves into a committee of ways and means. V' 're discussing high finance," replied Tony.

"High cockalorum more likely," suggested Dulcie, who always remembered her h's when she had a lead.

"Now, seriously, dear," said Tony, "I'm looking out for a partner, not in business . . ."

"Thanks! I'm not takin' any, if that's what you're 'inting at," returned Dulcie vivaciously, with all the knowledge of innuendo gleaned in a two years' experience of a City café.

"You're too quick, my dear," parried Tony, who was talking with a purpose. "I told you I was serious."

"Feels a bit awkward at fust, I dare say," put in Dulcie, feeling that a repartee was expected.

"I'm looking for some fellow to share rooms with," went on Tony. "I thought you might know of some decent sort of chap who was on the look-out for the same sort of thing."

Dulcie had no objection to being asked for advice when she saw that her "customers" were seriously inclined for once in a way, and she rested her knuckles on the table and wrinkled her forehead to indicate that she was giving the matter her attention.

"I don't know as I do know of anyone who'd suit you. They're mostly Germans or Jews as come down 'ere, you know—not your sort at all."

"Not much; thanks," interpolated Tony.

"Why don't you and your friend live together?" suggested Dulcie with a flash of genius; "or perhaps he lives with 'is fam'ly?"

Jacob looked at Tony, afraid lest the suggestion should meet with disapproval, and Tony looked at Jacob to see how he would take it.

"I don't know why . . ." began Jacob with a conciliatory smile.

"By Jove! I believe there are the makings of a great idea in that," said Tony. "Dulcie, you're a genius."

"Well, you men are funny; fancy waitin' for me to set you right," beamed Dulcie, distinctly flattered by the success of her suggestion.

While their tea was in preparation, Tony and Jacob began to discuss possibilities, and when they at last returned to the office, little pretence of work was made by either. Not more than ten minutes had elapsed before Tony was anxious to continue the making of definite plans.

Jacob glanced apprehensively at old Eckholt when Farrell proposed an adjournment to the lobby in order to discuss immediate arrangements, but that veteran was, himself, making plans to go home twenty minutes earlier than was his custom, and he made no sign of disapproval.

Everything had been discussed in detail, and it was nearly time to go before Jacob summoned up courage to mention a subject that had been haunting him.

"I say," he said, "you remember what that girl in the café said about your not caring to live with Jews or Germans? Well, you know"—and he laughed apologetically—"I'm partly German and partly Jew."

"Oh! good Lord, that's absolutely different," replied Farrell; a remark which points the difference between the abstract conception of national characteristics and the practical application to personal likes and dislikes.

2.

The day had begun with a promise of reform, but circumstance was too strong. Any feeling of regret for wasted time was overlaid by the excitement arising from the anticipation of the new partnership. Tony was undoubtedly a "blood."

Tony's knowledge of London, if less extensive, was more peculiar than Mr. Weller's. Tony "knew the ropes"; he had said so, himself. Tony, in fact, had lived, and would, doubtless, teach Jacob also how to live; until now Jacob had vegetated. . . . At this point of his reflections, however, Jacob thought of Madeline. That experience was an exception; one day, perhaps, he would confide some particulars to Tony. Not yet. . . .

Jacob was at home, alone, in his lodgings in Gower Street, and his meditations were enlivening the progress of his dull meal;—tea with eggs or fish, the routine meal of seven o'clock; he had dinner in the City. The meal had never seemed so dull as it did to-day. Tony's brilliant conversation might have brightened it; he had been invited, but he had had an engagement to spend the evening at a friend's house. "Pretty slow," he had explained, "but they've got a billiard-table, thank Heaven." Tony was a "blood"; he knew people who had billiard-tables. Jacob had heard of billiards, but he had never seen the game played. He knew nothing of life. Now Tony . . .

When the dull meal was finished, Jacob sat by the open window, smoked a cigarette, and looked down from his second-floor eminence upon the traffic of Gower Street. It was very hot, and the passers-by were seldom interesting. There was one, however, who attracted his attention, a girl in a white frock, a young girl of sixteen or seventeen, with her hair hanging down and tied with a ribbon. She looked up at his window and smiled, an unmistakable smile. Jacob grew hot, and dodged hastily back into the shelter of the curtains. Then he called himself a fool and leant far out of the window, but the girl had passed and did not look back. He debated whether he would not go out into the street, but he knew that he had not the courage to speak to the girl if he did, and was not sure, even if she looked back now and saw him leaning out, whether he would dare to smile in return. Tony would have waved his hand. The very next girl who smiled . . . Jacob remained leaning out of the window, his arms on the sill. But the next passer-by who smiled up at him was a fat Frenchwoman with an

enormous bustle, and Jacob stared stonily past her ; he didn't want to encourage a person of that kind, she might ring the bell and ask for him. Nevertheless it was something of an excitement, and, though he maintained his rigid aloofness, Jacob was sorry when the stout lady had waddled away down Gower Street. It was undoubtedly a waddle, though the lady herself was under the delusion that her walk was particularly attractive ; "voluptuous" might have been her adjective. After this Gower Street became stagnant, there were no more smiles ; no one more noticeable than the lamplighter passed in ten minutes.

It was certainly very dull ; Jacob wished he had had the impertinence to smile back at that girl in the white frock—but suppose he had gone out and spoken to her, what could he have found to say ? Tony would have been funny, of course, and quite at his ease. Jacob wondered what sort of a girl she was, a shop-girl, probably ; she couldn't have been . . . He wondered ; after all, he knew very little about these things.

London was a wonderful place, full of strange adventure at this time of the evening. Jacob remembered how many attractive-looking women he had seen last night. Oxford Street was quite close, and there would be many people to look at there ; Gower Street was deserted. But then, if he went to Oxford Street, he would have to keep walking up and down, and that made him feel self-conscious. How delightful to have ground-floor rooms in Oxford Street, so that he could sit and watch the people go by, entrenched behind his own window-sill. Delightful ! There would hardly be a dull moment. The idea grew in his mind, but the fruit of it was poor, ungatherable stuff. To watch, always ? No, he wanted to play his part in the game, he wanted to live. . . .

Why was he so hesitant ? There was London outside his window. There was no one to restrain him. Why should he not go out and find adventure, real adventure ? Why should he not taste life ? It was a paralyzing idea. It made his heart throb and his hands grow cold and damp. It was a tremendous idea, and the next day was Saturday ; he need

not go to the office ; some of the other assistants took the morning off occasionally when there was no chance of Mr. Morley putting in an appearance. This was certainly a grand opportunity, he had two whole days ahead of him. He was not quite sure why these two possibly free days ahead should make any difference, but they seemed to suggest a deliverance from all restraint. If he were on the verge of a great adventure, he liked to feel that he was free, if only for two days, from all bondage of routine.

Why did he still hesitate ? Was it his early training ? No ! The more he thought of Ashby Sutton and of the principles he had been taught, the more eager was he to be free. He found the word " provincialism " in his mind, and repeated it. Provincialism ! He was a citizen of London, great, wonderful, free London ; he was not to be deterred by any consideration of the narrow little ideas that took such firm root in the unknowing, vegetating, conventional provinces. There, in Ashby Sutton, they would have condemned him for his love for Madeline. . . . Was that the restraint ? Did the memory of Madeline, of perfection, still hold him ? He had vowed earnestly a few weeks ago that there should never be another woman in his life. Never is a long day. Was he never to know life ? Madeline had jilted him. Why should he have such respect for her memory ? There could never be another Madeline, that was obvious, never another experience to equal that. He thought of the day by the spring when he just touched her cheek with his lip for the first time. His apotheosis ; and it had come to him while he was so young. All future knowledge of women must be smaller, less admirable, less wonderful ; but there must be further knowledge for him—oh ! No, the thought of his lost ecstasy need not restrain him.

Yet something did hold him back, for he had conceived the great idea quite a quarter of an hour ago, and here he was, still sitting at the window. " Two things," said Jacob suddenly, aloud, addressing the desert of Gower Street : " I am a dreamer, who never does things, and I am nervous. Well, I will go—I won't dream only, and I won't be nervous."

But as he put on his gloves, and as he took up his straw hat, and as he went slowly downstairs, it seemed to him that the nature of the adventure had undergone a change, it was no longer a free adventure, he was driving himself into it; it had even the aspect of a penance. . . .

3.

At the corner of Bedford Square he nearly turned back, but he thought of Tony the insouciant, Tony the dare-devil, Tony the inimitable—if one were not so consumed with shyness—what Tony did he might do, and Jacob felt wicked, now, he wanted the adventure.

So he made his way into the busier thoroughfares. Nine o'clock! There was plenty of time before him. He thought of the inspiration he had derived from the Wheatsheaf claret, and wondered if that experiment might not be repeated. There were plenty of public-houses about, but he was afraid to enter them. One couldn't go into a place like this, for instance, and order a bottle of claret. What was it one drank? brandy-and-soda? . . .

The elaborately heavy door of the public-house by which Jacob stood, was swung open and a man came out, reeling slightly. Jacob caught a glimpse of a floor covered with saw-dust, of earthenware spittoons, of a blue mist of smoke, and of rough men standing at a counter or sitting by brown, wooden-topped tables. He heard a roar of loud voices, the clank and jingle of pewter and glass. He smelt the acrid odour of cheap tobacco, an odour that was drenched with and yet unaltered by, the volatile, heady smell of alcohol.

No! Obviously that was not the right kind of public-house. "Public Bar" he read, as the door swung to again, beyond were the "Private" and "Saloon" bars, but he had taken a dislike to the place, and walked on hastily. He passed other houses of a similar kind, but he was now intent on finding some place where he could order something to eat and have a bottle of claret with it. He did not feel in the least inclined for food, but he knew that this would be a per-

fectly correct thing to do. He was in an unknown world, and he was afraid of violating the unknown conventions that doubtless ruled it. He might so easily go into the wrong place and order the wrong thing, and then people would stare at him. He hated to be stared at. If only he had Tony's *savoir vivre* . . .

A large and imposing-looking hotel attracted his attention. This, too, advertised its public bars, its saloon bars and "lounge," which were not what he sought, but in addition there was a notice as to a newly-opened grill-room; "Suppers, 9—12.30" was displayed prominently in black type, and by the entrance to the lounge, a long and elaborate-printed menu was fixed in a brass frame. But there was nothing to show which was the grill-room. Jacob walked the length of the hotel front, and read every description worked into the coloured glass of the various doors. He stopped at last by the big entrance under the glass-roofed portico which projected across the pavement. A commissionaire in uniform came out wiping his mouth on his cuff, and Jacob summoned up courage to ask him the way to the grill-room. "Through the lounge, second door on the left," replied the official curtly.

It was in some ways very reminiscent of his experience at the Wheatsheaf. He was alone; so very much alone in that big, gaudily-decorated grill-room, with its endless, empty tables shining with white tablecloths and electro-plate. The waiter had been hurried and uncommunicative; doubtless he had been disturbed from his own hastily snatched meal. The only other occupants of the place were a man and, presumably, his wife, who had a portmanteau and various smaller bags with them. They were dressed for travelling, and were eating quickly. They, like the vista of this unoccupied supper-room, were pre-eminently dull and uninteresting. Jacob sipped his claret and acknowledged that the adventure, so far, was a miserable failure. But there was the big world of London outside. Perhaps when he had imbibed a full measure of courage from that one-and-ninepenny half-bottle of St. Julien. . . .

No; smoking was not permitted until after eleven o'clock. Perhaps the gentleman might like to take his coffee and liqueur

in the Lounge? Jacob remembered the Lounge; he had passed through it on his way to the grill-room. There were small round wooden-topped tables on elaborate iron legs, and big settees that looked comfortable. Yes, he would take coffee and liqueur there. Benedictine! Would the waiter bring them to him, and his bill. The waiter was well satisfied with his *douceur*.

By a quarter to eleven the Lounge was making a show of being quite the right place for an adventure. There were several women sitting at various tables, handsomely dressed women, some of them extremely pretty. It is true that they nearly all of them had cavaliers, usually one cavalier to two ladies, but they appeared friendly, these women, and not disinclined to become communicative if offered encouragement. There was a dark, pretty little person, two or three tables away, who had smiled at Jacob more than once. On the strength of the St. Julien and the Benedictine he had smiled back, but he couldn't do more than that while there was a man with her. He did not want to become mixed up in a row. If the man went and left her, he would go up and speak to her, or perhaps if he went on smiling she might come over to him? But, presently, the dark young woman rose and went out with the man she had been talking to. Nevertheless, she waved her hand to Jacob as she left; he was making progress. This was almost an adventure, already. He ordered another Benedictine. . . .

He was endeavouring to avoid the eye of a superabundant woman sitting opposite. She was alone, but she was not attractive to Jacob. He was not sure that she was not the woman who had smiled up at him when he sat in the window in Gower Street. She was drinking something out of a tumbler, and on one occasion when he accidentally caught her eye, she lifted her glass with an effect of gaiety, and appeared to drink his health. He was stricken with a nervous fear lest she should come over and speak to him, and stared so hard at a man in another direction that the man became uneasy, and turned his chair round to avoid Jacob's gaze. . . .

Two women, unattached, came in, and Jacob started, for one

of them was the Miss Catherine Mason, to whom he had been introduced at the music-hall by Tony, and of whom he had dreamed last night. He had a strange sense of familiarity with her as the result of that dream. In any case here was someone whom he knew, to whom he had been introduced. He might speak to *her*. But she didn't see him, although she actually sat down at the table next to him. She was apparently in a state of some excitement, talking eagerly in a rather loud voice to the woman who accompanied her. She had her back to Jacob, and he could not see her face, but he overheard some of her complaints. "Wasting all my evening," he heard; "I ought to have known better, but the best of us make mistakes, sometimes;" and then, "I didn't half let him know what I thought of him . . . not one of them dressed-up little dolls from offices, either, or I shouldn't have encouraged him . . . old fool . . ." An interruption was caused by the intrusion of a waiter, who seemed to be on terms of easy familiarity with Miss Mason and her companion. "No! 'e ain't been in since Tuesday," said the waiter in answer to a whispered question from Miss Mason, and there followed some interchange of questions and answers in a lower tone, which Jacob could not catch. The confabulation was terminated by Miss Mason. "Oh well!" she said, "my luck's dead out. Bring me the usual, please, George, and put it on to our account. I'm broke to-night." George started to fulfil the order, and then his eye fell on Jacob, and he went back to Miss Mason and whispered something to her. When the waiter had gone, Miss Mason looked round, casually, over her shoulder. For an instant she paused in doubt, wrinkling her forehead with a look of perplexity, but seeing the half-nervous, half-eager smile on Jacob's face, she swung round and leaned towards him. "I'm sure we've met before somewhere," she said, "but I've no mem'ry for faces; was it . . .?"

"Last night," said Jacob. "Don't you remember at the . . . the music-hall," he had forgotten the name.

"Why, of course; how silly! You were with someone; who was it, now?"

"With Mr . . ." began Jacob, and hesitated, remembering

Farrell's caution with regard to the disclosure of Jacob's own name. "With a fellow named Tony," he substituted. Miss Mason had called Farrell "Tony," so that must be all right, he thought.

"To be sure," replied Miss Mason; "you were with that young imp Tony Farrell; him and me had a row, didn't we?" She paused, looking very straightly at Jacob. She remembered the cause of her quarrel with Tony; also, that she had made it a subject for self-congratulation. She had had quite a glow of righteous enthusiasm over her reproof of Tony, and now . . . ? Well, it was unfortunate that she should have come across the innocent when she was so hard up; but that was just her luck—or the innocent's.

"Let me introduce you to my friend," she said to Jacob, and then over her shoulder: "Hilda! this is a friend of mine, Mr. . . . There! I've forgotten your name, again."

"Stahl!" prompted Jacob, who could not have given any name but his own.

"Pleased to meet you," said the lady introduced as Hilda, as she came up and shook hands.

Jacob mumbled something, he had not yet learned a correct answer to this formula, and the little party settled down comfortably at the table, "Hilda" in a chair facing Miss Mason and Jacob, who were seated side by side on the "lounge," which formed a continuous seat down one side of the room.

An adventure, indeed!

"Stahl?" questioned Miss Mason. "Sounds a bit German, doesn't it?"

"Yes! It is German really, a long way back, you know," said Jacob, "but I'm quite English . . . quite English."

"What's your first name?" asked Hilda in a friendly fashion. She was a blonde young woman of five or six and twenty, with blue eyes and a rather vacuous face, the flesh of which lacked all appearance of elasticity, in silence.

"My first name—oh—er—James," stammered Jacob.

"Jimmy for short?" asked Miss Mason.

"Sometimes," agreed Jacob.

"And where's that imp of darkness you was with last night?" continued Miss Mason, to make conversation, but before Jacob could answer, the waiter addressed as George came up with a tray.

"Any orders, sir?" he asked, as Jacob made no acknowledgment of his presence.

"Oh! I'm sorry. I say, would you care to have anything?" asked Jacob, speaking chiefly to Miss Mason, and wondering why the waiter had not brought the "usual" that he had heard ordered.

"Well, I don't mind," responded Miss Mason. "What's yours, dear?"

"I'll have a kummel, thanks," replied Hilda, to whom the question had been addressed—she pronounced it "kimmel."

"So will I," agreed Miss Mason.

"Anything for you, sir?" asked the waiter, with an eye on Jacob, who paused for a moment, and then, determined to make the leap, said: "Brandy-and-soda, please."

"Two kimmels and a brandy-and-soda," repeated George, and disappeared.

"Poor old George!" murmured Miss Mason.

"Oh? Why?" asked Jacob, rising readily to the bait.

"Poor fellow has got a bad foot, and has to go on working because he's got a fam'ly to keep; and they don't get wages here, you know, only what they make in tips."

Jacob was quite interested in the sorrows of George, and regarded him with a new interest when he brought the liqueurs and the brandy-and-soda. Jacob would have liked to have made some friendly reference to the bad foot or the family, but his courage failed him, and he was reduced to an attempt to put something of unusual friendliness into the usual question, softening its abruptness by the addition of two words. "How much is it?" he asked with rather a sprightly air, as though to imply that he was glad to employ George, and intended to pay him well for his trouble.

"Two kimmels and a brandy-and-soda. Um! . . ." George appeared to be making a mental calculation and to be looking at Miss Mason, as though she could help him in his

arithmetical difficulties. "Three and eight," was the outcome of his momentary struggle.

Jacob thought that this unknown "kimmel" must be a very expensive drink, but he gave George two half-crowns, and nodded in a friendly fashion to convey that no change was required.

"Thank you, sir," replied George with respect, and then, seeing that Miss Mason had something to say, he bent over her and received a whispered communication.

"You must excuse me whisperin'," apologized Miss Mason when George had departed; "I was just askin' him about his foot. He doesn't like it mentioned before people, as he's afraid if it gets known, his boss 'll sack him."

Up to this point Jacob had a very distinct and vivid memory of all the events of the evening, but after the advent of the brandy-and-soda his impressions became blurred. Some incidents stand out clearly but inconsequently, the order in which they occurred cannot be remembered.

There was a point when he remembers that Miss Mason was regarding him with very close attention, and that there was some look in her eyes which led him to the confession that he had dreamed of her the night before. He remembers that when he told her this, she drew herself up with that striking gesture of hers, and said he was a "nice boy," and that it "did seem a shame." Also, there remained a picture of Hilda taking leave of him, as she had a "friend" nowhere whom she was anxious to see, and of his squeezing her hand very long and affectionately, and being told that she was not Kitty, the point of which remark he apprehended with astonishing clearness, and replied to with great boldness by telling Miss Mason she needn't be jealous.

After that his impression is one of a growing affection for Miss Mason, of being alone in a hansom cab with her, and of a sense of being uplifted, together with Miss Mason, to a higher plane of being; a plane on which the feeling called nervousness had entirely disappeared, and from which he could regard the foot-passengers seen from the cab with a sense of pity for their obvious inferiority. He was, of course, an

altogether superior being, but he was sorry for them, sorry for their infirmities, mental and physical, poor, nervous, hesitating things stumbling along on foot, while he was being borne with extraordinary swiftness over enchanted roads in company with Miss Mason. He called her Kitty now, and kissed her several times in the cab. He was a very superior being with a really wonderful mind. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

THE END OF HESTER AND TONY

1.

IN the life of the body, two years represent a definite period, measurable in retrospect by certain incidents and experiences, by an account, whether of change or monotony, which can be spoken of as the history of the individual. In the life of the mind, two years of existence may represent a generation of growth, or may be negligible, representing no change either progressive or retrogressive. Some minds are mature at twenty-five, and thereafter merely harden in the mould into which they have been cast.

In the history of Jacob Stahl the two years of his fellowship with Tony Farrell represent a time of plasticity. The old mould was being broken up, piece by piece, but as yet there are few indications of any new form to supersede the stereotype.

The influence of Farrell may seem to have been altogether bad ; certainly it did not encourage a desire for steady application in the study of architecture, nor did it conduce to any noticeable purity of moral standards, although Farrell was no thorough-going hedonist. He did not live for pleasure and for that alone, moreover he had a nice sense of public-school honour which steadied him over many dangerous places. But even if the determinable influence for good be neglected, the other influence which so soon opened up an experience of a hidden world for Jacob must not be too soon written off as unequivocal-

cally bad. It was necessary that certain writings should be made on the blank pages of Jacob's mind, and it was better for him that those writings should be ill-made than that the pages should have remained unsoiled. There was some failing in the quality of Jacob's imagination, by which failing he fell short of anything approaching genius. His mind was uncreative outside his personal experience, and it was better for him that he should find that experience in life, and not in the untrue representations of the novels of the period. Better for him, too, that he should find his personal ethics on realities, than make a profession of half-realized beliefs with no reason behind them other than the uncertain traditions which he had read of, or heard stated as infallible,—though, indeed, any development of a recognizable ethic is still far to seek. This does not imply that the particular steps by which he arrived at knowledge are those which it is advisable to follow. Jacob was fortunate in many ways where others might fall into pitfalls dangerous enough to mean disqualification for the real business of life. Moreover, it is essential to realize that Jacob's mind represents an unusual type in that, with all its plasticity, it still had some remarkable qualities of resilience. The stamp which marked it so clearly for a time, became gradually altered, the mark remained, perhaps, but it took a new shape, individual and representative.

The influence which might have served as an admirable qualification to that of Farroll was, unhappily, little in evidence during these two years. This was largely Jacob's own fault. He shrank from visiting Eric, and it was not until after a brief visit to Ashby Sutton for the August Bank Holiday, that he decided to pay his first call in West Hampstead. He knew that in his brother's house he would be "out of it"; to use his own phrase. The atmosphere of that house would be the atmosphere of certain knowledge. Eric and his wife were learned in so many subjects, all essential if one would take a place among the successful. And Eric was a success, would be, probably, a great success; and he, Jacob, was going to be a failure. He saw the prospect of it already. He did not work, he seemed incapable of work sometimes.

Even in architecture he was not doing as well as he should. He had not passed that examination for the Institute, he had not yet completed the preliminary drawings; the drawings he had begun so long ago, before he knew Madeline. Before he knew Madeline! The thought came home to him. How long ago was that? Looking back, he saw himself as another individual. He *had* been a fool. Nevertheless, if it were all to do over again, would he take a different course? The answer came readily enough; with regard to Madeline—no, he did not regret that, it was, at least, experience. He dwelt on that word; experience, yes, that was what he needed, he had been so cloistered and sheltered, he knew nothing of life. But he ought to have worked more. By Jove, he would work more! It was not too late to begin!

It is possible that the visit to West Hampstead might have been deferred still longer, had not the post brought him one morning a letter from Eric. Jacob had returned two days before from Ashby Sutton, to enter upon his new partnership with Farrell, in the rooms they had discovered in Great Ormond Street. The freshness of the association was still unimpaired; they were polite to each other, interested in each other's affairs, anxious to please and to prove that the association was going to be an ideal one, a proposition which had already been stated in so many different forms that it was assumed to be almost a certainty.

The letter had been forwarded from his old address in Gower Street,—certain stamps having been left with his former landlady for that purpose,—and it contained a cheque for sixteen shillings and ninepence.

“Money pouring in, eh?” asked Farrell, as he saw the cheque.

“Simply pouring in,” replied Jacob, “sixteen and ninepence this morning.”

“What's it all for?” asked Farrell. Unconsciously he had adopted a slight air of patronage towards his fellow-lodger. The question represented an attitude of friendly encouragement, not one of curiosity.

“I reviewed two books for the *Daily Post* about three months ago,” said Jacob, “and this is the magnificent result.”

"Did you, though?" Farrell was interested. "I didn't know you were a literary Johnnie."

"I'm not," returned Jacob promptly. "Of course I should like to be. I've always had an inclination that way. Only . . ."

"Why not go in for it? There's a pot of money in that game, if you strike lucky."

"Y—es? I suppose there is." It was not the money that appealed to Jacob in this connection, so much as the éclat. If he could be a success, he would be able to assert himself, even before Eric; and, perhaps, Madeline would be sorry that she had jilted him. Yes, and he wanted fame, he would like to be somebody. "I'd give anything to be able to write," were the spoken words that gave expression to his thought.

"You seem to have made a start anyway," commented Farrell. "Must be pretty good to write reviews. Where are they? I've never seen 'em."

"More have I, in print," said Jacob. "I must find out when they appeared." And he gave Farrell an account of how the books had been obtained, and his relations with Eric.

"Didn't even know you had a brother," said Farrell. "I should cultivate his society a bit more if I were you, and get some more books."

"By Jove, yes, I must," determined Jacob, and added: "I say, come with me on Sunday and see him."

"Sunday? All right," agreed Farrell.

It needed but this little stimulus to set Jacob dreaming again on the possibilities of literature, and he piled a wonderful castle on his foundationless imaginings. He pictured always the end, not the means, and in his mind wrote many reviews of his own novels. It was almost painful to come down from these pictured heights of success to the realization that he had not, as yet, even conceived the first idea of a story, and at odd moments he struggled with the practical, and attempted to plan a novel. It was always a novel which was to bring him fame, he recoiled from the thought of the application necessary if he would write anything but fiction; he believed that no study was required for the latter form of literary effort.

2.

The visit to West Hampstead was not a success. Tony had believed that he could make himself at home in any society, but he had discovered himself mistaken. He had asked Jacob what they talked about chiefly at his brother's house, and the answer had been definite: "Oh! books!" Still Tony had not been dispirited. He had a bowing acquaintance with a few of the classics, and knew the names of many others to whom he had not, as yet, been introduced; his intimate friends in this world, were the works of Kingsley, Charles Reade, and Mark Twain. With this list he had always been able to "keep his end up," as he expressed it, among those suburban ladies of culture with whom he had come in contact; he had had many "literary conversations," and he had always found that one skimmed lightly from title to title, the impression conveyed was the chief thing. So Tony had had no qualms, and at tea-time had lightly engaged Mrs. Eric Stahl on the subject of books, while Jacob talked to his brother. It was, Tony confessed, a terrifying experience. Mrs. Eric was a pedant who had mixed with schoolmen, and never learned the art of talking down. She never made any assumption of knowledge unless she were sure of her ground, and had no shame in her confessions of ignorance. It was certainly a new experience for Tony, who glimpsed,—for the first time, perhaps,—the depths of his own ignorance.

"That sister-in-law of yours is a holy terror," he said to Jacob on the way home. "Phew! I began to wonder if I knew the proper way to spell 'cat' before she'd done with me. I say, Jimmy, my boy, that's the place for you to go to, if you want to improve your mind and become a literary Johnnie. It's a bit too high for me, I haven't got the brain."

Jacob was depressed. Conversation with Eric always took the heart out of him. He may have had a moment's pride in the thought that even the wonderful Tony had had to confess defeat at the hands of the infallible Eric and his wife, but the pleasure was very fleeting. Tony had no literary ambitions, whereas Jacob had been planning a career in the world of

letters for the past three days, and had seen this visit as a practical step,—he had lingered lovingly over the adjective—towards a beginning. He had met with nothing but discouragement.

Eric in his neat, finished manner had definitely put an end to the prospect of any further reviewing work.

“I have no further connection with the *Daily Post*,” he had said. “I have very little time, now, and the only reviewing I do, myself, is on technical subjects. I am afraid I can’t help you there.”

“Wasn’t that review I did all right?” Jacob had asked.

“Yes, oh! yes, it was sufficient, but it is not difficult to find plenty of men capable of that kind of work. . . .” This had been the note, and when Jacob had hesitatingly formulated his ambition to write, Eric, without directly discouraging him, had dwelt on the essentials of style, the difficulty of formulating a characteristic mode of expression, and the study required before one should attempt any essay in the difficult art. Novels? That in Eric’s opinion was a complicated and exceedingly difficult medium. The best models were undoubtedly French; Flaubert, for instance; no intending novelist should attempt to write until he had studied Flaubert. Other names had come to Eric’s tongue, also, Turgenev—in translation—for construction, Daudet, Balzac . . . a long list, and Mrs. Eric, whose conversation with Tony had faded into an uncomfortable silence, had cut in with Dostoieffsky and other suggestions, mere English models seemed outside their recognition. “I will make out a list for you,” had been Eric’s conclusion, and he had added: “It is absolutely essential that you should be able to read French.”

It had not occurred to Jacob that it required study in order to become a novelist; he did not remember to have read that it was necessary. In the novels he knew which dealt with such things, there was always an undoubted implication that novelists were born, not made—like poets. Surely the people who wrote these novels were the best judges, they must have known how they obtained their own successes, and never did he remember any description of the methods which Eric had

advised. But he would read some of the English classics, Thackeray, perhaps, and Sir Walter Scott; Dickens he knew well, but he acknowledged without hesitation that the model of Dickens was beyond his powers. Besides, he wanted to write a modern novel. There was that new writer who had written a book which was a great success, "Robert Elswood," or something like that. He would study "Robert Elswood"; he had begun it once and found it dull, he would take it up again and study it. Yes, it seemed that all these things needed study, and he knew nothing, simply nothing; he must begin to work.

"Let's go and have supper, somewhere," suggested Tony, who knew of "just the right sort of little place" in which they could get rid of the depressing impression of the afternoon.

Yet even in the lively, cosmopolitan atmosphere of the little French restaurant, Jacob could not forget the necessity for study which had been made so clear to him, and he returned to the subject when he and Tony went home to their rooms in Great Ormond Street.

"It's all right in a way, you know," he said, "what those two say. One's jolly well got to work if you want to get on."

"If you're going to write novels, old boy," replied Tony, "take my tip and study life; that's what you want to know."

"That's all very well," expostulated Jacob. "I quite agree with you, but one's got to know how to write about life, too. Writing is an art, and you have to learn the technique." This was a recollection of Eric.

"All right, old chap, fire away," replied Tony, "only for the love of heaven don't get like that sister-in-law of yours. She's a warning to snakes. I couldn't live with you, if you began to talk of Dotty-whiffsky, or whatever his name was."

The next day Jacob took out a subscription to Mudie's, and brought home "Robert Elsmere," for the purpose of study. As a novel it didn't hold him. Within limits he understood it, but the character and intellectual development of Elsmere were outside Jacob's experience, and he was unable to appreciate the quality of the argument. Swayed by the precedents afforded by the highly moral literature with which he was

more familiar, he anticipated that Elsmere would receive some miraculous illumination which would restore his faith in the teachings of the English Church. Of the truth of these doctrines, Jacob had no more doubt than he had of the dates of English history. All the sturdy logic of the book was lost on him because his preconceptions were so strong that he supposed Elsmere was "misguided"—a word he had from Fearon—and would inevitably discover his mistake in the last chapter. He skipped freely, and took no intellectual pleasure in the reading, and when he failed to discover any account of Robert Elsmere's conversion to the faith of his fathers, Jacob condemned the book unhesitatingly as "atheistic"; atheists, Radicals, and criminals were associated in his mind as similarly misguided persons. (Three years later he read "Robert Elsmere" from cover to cover with absorbed interest.)

During the same week Jacob also went one day to the offices of the *Daily Post* in Fleet Street, and obtained a copy of the paper containing his reviews. Eric had remembered the appearance of the notice, and had been able to furnish the approximate date. These interests kept Jacob in the mood for study, with the objective of literary fame, for several days. He showed the notice to Tony, who said it was "jolly good," an opinion which coincided with Jacob's own judgment. He had been surprised to find how much he had appeared to know of the books he had been criticizing, and how well he had expressed himself. It was undoubtedly a beginning, he thought, and he was very full of ambition and determination for many days.

It was a curious chance that marked the first decline of his eagerness to win literary success. Tony took him to the Vienna Café one Sunday afternoon, and Jacob, greatly daring, engaged in a contest with a professional chess-player for the nominal stake of a shilling a game. He played and lost five games at increasing odds, and when he had been finally beaten at the odds of "rook, pawn, and move," he was quite willing to acknowledge that he knew nothing of the game of chess as played by a master.

It was Tony who, in an unusually serious mood, gave point

to the experience. "Oh! you have to give those Johnnies best," he remarked afterwards, "they're clean beyond our limit. I've played them occasionally. You're so absolutely helpless from the start, they're simply all round you before you know where you are. You and I haven't got the brain for that sort of thing, old chap. I felt just like you did this afternoon, when we went up to your brother's last Sunday. You can't get on a level with these clever beggars anyhow, you haven't a dog's chance."

Jacob took this casual pronouncement to heart, and pondered it. It killed his confidence for the time. That book of Mrs. Humphry Ward's, for instance; it might not be the sort of book he wanted to write himself, but how much of scholarship and wide knowledge had gone to the making of it. Would mere reading and study enable him to bridge the enormous gap which divided him from the writers of such books? Was there not some difference in the quality—or quantity—of brains which were capable of thus expressing themselves? "You and I haven't got the brain for that sort of thing, old chap." Was that true? Could he ever attain to the proficiency of that professional chess-player? In imagination, yes; but seriously, now, without any silly dreamings or pretences? He put the question on one side, unanswered, but his devotion to the literary project wavered from that time. It was not pleasant to be faced with one's own ignorance, an ignorance so appalling and profound that it appeared hopeless ever to make up leeway. Jacob liked pleasant things; drifting and dreaming were not profitable, perhaps, but he preferred them to the arduous business of such prolonged application as would be necessary if he desired to come within an appreciable distance of the attainments of Eric, or the writers of such novels as "Robert Elsmere." As to the question of potentiality, he shirked the answer without shame.

Thus his futile determinations took another shape, and he prescribed for himself a course of architectural reading. He decided, also, that his will-power was weak, and set himself foolish little tasks in order to strengthen it, such as getting up earlier in the morning, or walking part of the way to the office.

3.

Those two years of association with Tony in Great Ormond Street did not pass without various disagreements. When two men are working in the same office, day by day, it is better that they should not share the same lodgings, unless they are so perfectly adapted to each other's society as to be capable of a great friendship. This was certainly not the case here. For a few months Tony was a hero, but when Jacob began to come up, or down, to Tony's level in certain respects, an inevitable rivalry followed. The consequences were no less inevitable. Little bickerings arose. Tony, no longer a hero, became subject, like other imperfect creatures, to contradictions ; even in his own departments of knowledge. Tony was selfish, and though he could be magnanimous and self-sacrificing during the first days of partnership, when the gloss of politeness consequent on new relations, had worn off, his selfishness became apparent. If Jacob had been willing to give way, the selfishness of Tony might have passed unremarked, but Jacob's egotism, though of another type, exceeded that of his partner. They accused each other openly of selfishness within three months of their first association, and quarrelled violently, nursing resentment against each other for two whole days. When the breach was healed, the friendship had taken a new shape ; there was no further place for blind admiration on Jacob's side, nor for condescension on Tony's. Moreover, from the date of this quarrel the balance of authority began to waver. Jacob had the better intelligence, and if Tony were still his superior in the office, and if Tony's present capacity as an architectural draughtsman was greater, the gap was rapidly closing up, and it was soon not a question of teacher and pupil, but of seniority between rivals. Outside office matters Jacob was demonstrating greater attainments. He was reading. It is true that he read through vast masses of utterly worthless fiction, but, unconsciously, he was learning to criticize, to discriminate. Impossible as it is to trace its source, he had a feeling for literary style which constant reading developed. This feeling is one

that seems to be inborn, and is difficult of acquirement by those who lack the sense originally, but it is capable of almost limitless development, the grades are innumerable. By constant reading, even such heterogeneous reading as he practised, Jacob was developing his innate taste in the matter of literature, and was keeping his mind in health by the exercise of his critical faculties.

Tony, on the other hand, was degenerating. He had an idle mind which shirked any prolonged effort. His deductions were made quickly, almost intuitively, and were never the outcome of analysis. He tended always towards living in the world of sensation, whether muscular or nervous. At the age of twenty-seven he was outliving London with its comparatively limited opportunities for physical exercise, and as a natural consequence he was slowly deteriorating physically and mentally. Thus it was that Jacob by sheer intellectual force was becoming the predominant influence, and Tony, conscious of the change in their relationships and resenting the implication, sought to emphasize his superiority by excesses which were no longer commanding his room-fellow's admiration. For Jacob had another natural endowment—an ethical sense. Possibly it was allied to that other sense in literature, another expression of a consciousness of a certain fitness or appropriateness in the proportions of life. At this time that ethical sense of his was restrained by his acceptance—in theory—of a tabulated code of morals. As a sense it was therefore little exercised; as a test of right-doing it was not required, and was only manifested in two ways.

The first was by a sense of uneasiness after a lapse from morality. Little sophistry was required to excuse himself for indulgence by the code on which he had been brought up. Repentance excused; more, repentance when genuine, obliterated the lapse, and repentance was always genuine at the moment. The promise of amendment solemnly made to some imaginary audience, completed the reform; he could start out with a clean slate and sin again, the burden was not cumulative. But that sense of uneasiness, the primitive workings of an ethical seed striving to germinate in a frost-bound

soil, was not to be allayed by any sophistries of repentance or promised reform. "Are you to-day what you were yesterday?" was the uncompromising question which could not be answered, and must therefore be shirked. Yet each time that it was evaded, the memory of former repetitions was quickened.

The second way was emotional and valueless, save inasmuch as it demonstrated that the little seed was bursting, cracking the hard soil as it strove to squeeze out a pale new growth between the fissures it had rent. This way was evidenced in strong religious aspirations. These aspirations were unfulfilled by any penance of church-going or ritual observances, although they invariably sought that mode of expression in the first instance. But they went farther and induced moods of unselfishness, moods in which this undeveloped child sought to embody his theory of righteousness in small details of practice, little denials and unnecessary submissions. On the theoretical side Jacob toyed with an emotional ritualism, and appraised the idea of the confessional, seeing in it a support to those futile determinations of his.

These things are aspects of a phase. Jacob was suffering experience of mind and body, but he was uncultured. The garden of his intelligence had been sown with a handful of haphazard seeds, a wilderness in which a few pretty flowers fought for existence among many strange stiff growths, stubborn as an araucaria, growths that needed to be laid by the roots, before his plot could become fertile. Meanwhile he, the gardener, hesitated and pottered, now attempting to trim his araucaria into a pleasing shape, now assiduously watering a fine crop of weeds, and again seeking tentatively to cultivate some of his prettier flowers. While unknown to him, one vigorous but thwarted seed lay at the root of that ugly, stubborn, prickly tree which dominated his garden, a seed which sought to push a tendril through harsh roots, even though it could find no better environment to grow in than that afforded by the sombre shade of those formal leaves which overhung its nursery.

Nevertheless there were signs of growth, however uncon-

trolled, and the signs were manifested in the ways described, in the cultivation of a taste for literature, in phases of religious emotionalism, and in quarrels with Tony Farrell.

Tony objected for one thing to be persistently beaten at chess. He counted himself a fair chess-player, brilliant rather than sound, and when he first met Jacob they were a very good match. But Jacob, after his experience at the Vienna Café, bought a book on the openings and began to develop his powers. He spent many hours of Mr. Morley's time in that underground, smoky wilderness of a café in the City, to which Tony had introduced him. He met Germans there who were vastly his superiors at the game, and both by playing with them and by watching them play with each other, he stepped up into a class that enabled him to give Tony the odds of pawn and move, though Tony would never accept the odds.

During these two years Jacob saw less and less of his brother. Eric had fulfilled his promise by sending the list of books he had recommended as a guide to the formation of literary style, and Jacob found in this another reason for not journeying to West Hampstead; he could not read French, and he did not wish to parade his ignorance. The French language was one of the subjects he had marked out for study, but, unfortunately, it was, also, one of the subjects which did not get beyond the initial stage, and, as a consequence, the next visit to West Hampstead suffered a parallel postponement.

Again Eric was demonstrating more and more his capability of becoming a success. He had written a distinctive criticism of the new Socialism of the 'eighties, a criticism which had been well received. Jacob's first intimation of this achievement was a half-column notice of the book in the *Daily Post*, and it roused in him less pride for the family triumph, than resentment at the criticism on his own futility. He wrote and congratulated Eric, and took considerable pains over his letter. He tried to make it a clever letter, and was pleased with the result, but in Eric's reply there was no commendation of Jacob's cleverness, and Jacob wondered whether his letter

had not, after all, been rather silly. Eric had given him a general invitation to West Hampstead which met with no response. If the invitation had been for a particular time or occasion, Jacob might have put his pride in his pocket and accepted it, but he decided that those vague terms, "Why do you never come and see us? We are always in on Sunday afternoons," conveyed no cordial interest in his welfare. He did not want to visit West Hampstead until he had "done something."

4.

Further evidence of growth is afforded by the gradual change of Jacob's relations to Aunt Hester. Unhappily, this change, though it marks the progress in self-reliance, marks, also, the increase of a small egotism which cannot be regarded as admirable. But in this, as in all human relations, there are two points of view, and the mean between them does not necessarily represent a just estimate. Indeed, no one is capable of making any approximation to a just estimate in judging human relations, for everyone is biassed either by their own necessarily imperfect experience, or by what is worse,—their own little adopted standard of morality. Nor can these judgments be referred to any majority test, for we have not yet arrived at any agreement as to a universal code. Murder which appears, probably, as the greatest crime is excused in many relations, and even regarded with admiration. For, putting aside the more obvious application of war, we may see a whole community lusting for the blood of an escaped criminal who has been guilty of a murder, judged as horrible by the self-constituted jury of his fellow-countrymen. The community is outraged at a crime which threatens its own safety and thirsts for revenge, and every one of its members becomes for the time a potential murderer. It is self-protection; and this affords sufficient excuse for the community, but not for the individual in all cases. The tramp who robs a house to save himself from starvation becomes an outlaw by the act, and if he has entered the house burglariously may be shot at sight by the owner of that house,

but if the threatened tramp gets his blow in first, he is a murderer, because he represents an individual minority of one, against the many of the community; but, ethically, the murder of the individual may be as justifiable as the judicially approved murder carried out by the many. So, in judging the small detail of human relationships, we are swayed unconsciously by a similar test. We put ourselves always in the position of the murdered, the misdemeanour is weighed by the test of our personal safety as a member of the community, and selfishness is condemned by our code, because it represents the opposition of the one against the many. This is but a restatement of Nietzsche's philosophy of "slave-morality," a philosophy which, if carried into effect, would upset the foundations of society, and no doubt work incalculable harm; but the point at issue is that in condemning, we should remember that it is no fine, moral principle which actuates us, but respect for an inculcated code which has its origin in fear for our own safety.

For, in effect, Jacob undoubtedly shortened Hester's life, though he did it unthinkingly, unknowingly. He took away from her, her joy in living, her object in life, and he did it selfishly, which is a crime according to our standards. If we put ourselves in Aunt Hester's position, in the position of the murdered, the facts seem to rise up in condemnation of Jacob.

The many interests of Hester's life were no longer sufficient to her. After Jacob had gone to London she found her loneliness almost insupportable. So great was her loss that the habits of half a lifetime, her interests in the village, her preference for country life, were all outweighed by her desire to be with Jacob, even though it necessitated the circumstance of London. That letter of Jacob's, in which he suggested for the first time that he might be sharing rooms with some new friend whose acquaintance he had made in the office, was a desperate blow. It is little wonder that in her bitterness she wrote the complaint that Jacob had no further room in his affections for an old woman who had once been all in all to him, a letter which did justice to the intensity of her own affection but little to her common-sense.

Then, almost before she had realized it, the thing was done. When he came to Ashby Sutton on the Saturday before the August Bank Holiday, Jacob had been full of his proposed partnership with Tony Farrell. As Hester listened to the praises of this unknown and, to her, quite unsympathetic individual, she realized the full extent of the tragedy which had overtaken her. Nothing she could do or say would win Jacob back to her; she had been jilted just as surely as Jacob had been jilted by Madeline, but with a difference. For Hester there was no prospect of consolation. At times in a fit of revolt she almost decided to cut herself off from Jacob entirely, to cease writing to him, to cease asking him to come and visit her. He was her nephew, no more, she argued with herself, there was no tie to bind them. Why should she lose all her interest in life because her brother's child was ungrateful? Even on that August Sunday afternoon, Jacob had absented himself. He had gone for a solitary walk after hinting, gently, perhaps, but quite plainly, that he wanted to be alone. Hester knew where he went. Madeline was not there, but he must needs indulge a sentimental mood by wandering over to the Elmover stile. "He thinks more of the girl who threw him over than he does of me, and I gave him the power to walk," thought Hester bitterly, and, watching him from her window, she noted with something like pride in her own achievement, how little there was, now, to show that Jacob had ever spent those early years on his back. She went back in memory over the scenes in which she had been such an important participator; the first feeble efforts to raise his leg without swinging it; the gradual improvements; and then she figured to herself the grotesque misshapen figure which had essayed to hobble across the cottage floor with the help of two sticks. And, now, though he carried a stick, he barely leaned on it; a certain lack of spring and muscular vigour in his legs, an occasional hesitancy in walking, an inclination to bend forward slightly from the hips, these things were all that differentiated him from the ordinary man, a convalescent recovered after a long illness, one might have said—oh! yes, almost fully recovered. "My work," Hester

was inclined to boast, "and he throws me over for some friend of a few weeks' acquaintanceship." It must be admitted that Hester was bitter.

But when Jacob had returned to town, the bitterness died away. If she had retained it, she might have fought back her way to a renewed zest in life. "I am an old fool," she admitted to herself, "but it's no use trying to help it. He is all I have, I can't seem to want another interest now." Admitting this, she had recourse to keeping the interest alive. She wrote often and uncomplainingly, but she begged for a full account of Jacob's doings and his manner of life, and was disappointed when the weekly letter contained little but a few feeble epigrams, composed sometimes in the office on a Monday morning when the previous Sunday—the day for writing—had been too much occupied to allow of the toil of composing a letter. "Not *all* fun," had been Hester's mild complaint on one such occasion, and Jacob, who had been rather proud of a letter which he had thought would be amusing, wrote petulantly in reply that his life was a monotonous routine, containing no incidents worthy of record. The truth is that the weekly letter had become a toil, and he frequently brought himself to the task of writing it by an attempt to add a literary atmosphere to its composition. But to write on a set subject was impossible to him at this time, and the result was an impersonal affair which afforded Hester little satisfaction. She had one consolation, she found nothing in Jacob's letters which breathed any suggestion of his being led astray among the pitfalls of London. The name of Miss Mason did not disfigure Jacob's essays.

Sometimes, when he was in a condition of temporary religious enthusiasm, he wrote at great length, and at such times Hester wondered whether, after all, she had ever understood the boy. "What a pity he did not go into the Church!" she reflected after one such effusion, and she allowed her mind to dwell on a delightful picture—a small country rectory, with Jacob in charge of the parish, and herself established as his housekeeper. "If he had only gone into the Church, things would have been different,"

she sighed again. Possibly her pronouncement was a true one. Possibly !

To have an object in life is everything, whether the object be a source of pain or pleasure. Robbed of the interest which had ruled her life for so many years, Hester began to age rapidly. She did not idle ; she still busied herself with works of charity in the village, she maintained her devotion for the affairs of the Church, she kept her cottage spotless as ever, but she went about her duties more wearily, and her broad, solid figure was not quite as erect as of old. She became absent-minded for the first time in her life, and found her memory was failing in little things. " I'm getting an old woman," was her constant thought, though she was still some three or four years short of sixty ; the burden of the thought pressed upon her and affected her physically, so that she did, indeed, begin to grow old more and more rapidly.

Even Jacob noticed the change. He missed coming to Ashby Sutton at Whitsuntide, although at Easter it had been understood that he was to spend his three days there. Tony had suggested the river, and Jacob, who had never been on the Thames, found the temptation too strong. " I can't spend every holiday at Ashby Sutton," he argued, " and Aunt Hester will have me for a whole fortnight in August," so two days before the holiday he wrote a long letter explaining his reasons for not coming, and added : " But, of course, I will come, if you want me to very particularly." Hester had been bitterly disappointed, but she wrote as cheerfully as she could, and said she was sure the river would be a change for him. Her own words lingered in her mind after she had sent the letter. She saw that Jacob must be attracted, now, she could no longer expect him to spend all his holidays in so unattractive a place as the small village in which she lived. She spent her time planning an expedition for the summer fortnight. She decided that they would go to the sea.

Jacob assented willingly enough to this proposition, and they fixed upon Cromer as a compromise which would not necessitate Hester's crossing London. Hester was to go a day earlier than Jacob, and find rooms. It was when Jacob

saw her first, waiting to meet her on Cromer platform, that he noticed a change. "You aren't looking very well, dear," he said, after he had greeted her.

"Oh! I'm well enough," replied Hester. "You forget that I'm getting an old woman."

"Oh, nonsense!" protested Jacob; "you're not really old."

It was not a convincing answer; it availed nothing to counter that perpetual suggestion which was being made so constantly in Hester's own mind. It seemed that all she did, now, was done to the accompaniment of that one refrain.

Even Jacob's company during that fortnight at Cromer did not serve to revive her waning interest in life. He was inclined to find fault with her. He did not understand her lapses of memory, which were new to him, and he was occasionally fretful in consequence. Above all, he no longer looked to her for advice or assistance. It was Jacob, now, who planned their walks and excursions. He was independent, and proud of his independence. Moreover, during the last two or three days of the holiday she saw comparatively little of him. He had made the acquaintance of some young woman on the sea-front. It was a harmless flirtation enough, and ended with the holiday, but it was a source of preoccupation for him at the time, and as he wished to keep the knowledge of it from Aunt Hester—in this he was quite successful—he appeared to be neglecting her deliberately.

Hester made little remonstrance. On one or two occasions her old spirit flared up for a few minutes, and once she spoke bitterly of his loss of affection. Jacob's reply was very unsatisfactory.

"I don't see how you can say that," he protested, looking rather sulky, "seeing that I might have gone up the river this summer with Farrell and Leigh-Weston. They asked me to go, and I refused because I was coming here with you."

"Did you think it was your duty?" asked Hester.

"Oh! of course not," replied Jacob. "It's absurd to talk like that."

Useless, quite useless. Hester saw that, and gave way, almost, apologizing for her brief outburst. He was inde-

pendent of her, now. She might have kept him if she had not set him on his legs, she thought, and there were times when it was almost in her heart to regret that she had been so thorough in her cure of him. She rebelled against the injustice of life at such moments. Why should she suffer, now, for having attempted so much ; for having succeeded ? If she had not given all her energies to making Jacob a man fit for life, she would not be suffering her present loneliness. Then she prayed to be forgiven for her ungrateful spirit, and found consolation in the thought that she was getting old and had not very long to live. In truth her hold on life was weakening with every new experience. . . .

It was just a year after this holiday that Hester finally relaxed her hold, and Jacob was not with her when she died.

That summer the temptation of a trip to Oxford with Farrell and Leigh-Weston proved too strong ; but he compromised by promising to cut the trip short by four days, which were to be spent with Hester. He and his two companions were camping out, and had no address till they reached Oxford, where Jacob found two telegrams from Fearon, summoning him to Ashby Sutton. The first was a week old and imperative enough, the second told him that he was too late. There was no letter. His first feeling was one of resentment. He had an illogical desire to find fault with someone—Fearon, perhaps ; but in the train his mood changed. He ought to have gone to Ashby Sutton first, but how could he know, how could he possibly know ? He couldn't know ! No, that was plain enough, but still some relentless voice accused him of selfishness, and he wanted to make reparation, now that none was possible.

" Well, it was some kind of an apoplectic seizure," explained Fearon. Jacob was staying at the rectory. He arrived on the afternoon of the funeral, two hours after the ceremony was over, and now he was sitting in the study where he had spent so many hours in the days of Fearon's tuition. Subconsciously he was aware of his old tutor's change of attitude towards himself. He was no longer at school, he was treated as an equal. Fearon was growing old, too, he noticed.

" She had been a little queer in her head for some days

past," went on the rector. "Her memory played her tricks, you know; she'd come up to see me about parish affairs or what not, and forget what she'd come about. Then a week last Sunday, which must have been the day after you started on your river trip, Mrs. Hales found her wandering about the village in the afternoon, not knowing where she was. Mrs. Hales helped her home and sent for me, and I sent for Doctor Brown, but she never recovered consciousness. Some little bloodvessel in the brain gave way, so Brown says."

"She didn't know, then, that I was not there?" asked Jacob.

"She never spoke an intelligible word after she was found by Mrs. Hales," said Fearon. "I think you may make your mind quite easy on that score. I'm sorry I could not have found you, but your aunt had told me of your river excursion, and I knew you'd never call anywhere for letters."

"No! It wouldn't have been any good," said Jacob, and thought that here was another omission for which he was to blame.

He pondered many omissions that night in the rectory's best bedroom; certainly he had been selfish, and he was sorry, very sorry. He regretted those last days at Cromer the previous summer, and the shortness of his letters, but above all, he regretted that he had gone to Oxford. Yet if he had not gone? If he had actually been with Aunt Hester, what good would it have done? Before he had realized that she was ill, he would have been just as usual to her, and after it would have been too late. Fate had not been kind to him. He was angry with fate for not giving him an opportunity.

In the novels he had read, dying people always recovered consciousness "just before the end," and spoke a few words to the best-beloved. But Fearon had told him that Aunt Hester did not recover consciousness at all, so it was no use picturing his timely arrival to assure her of his undying love.

He wondered why he was not heart-broken. If Aunt Hester had died two years ago, he would have been beside himself with grief. Now he had learned to live without her, and when he went back to London the only difference in his life would be that he would not be obliged to write a letter

once a week, and would be able to spend his holidays how and where he pleased. Here in Ashby Sutton he missed her, of course—missed her badly. He wanted to tell her about his adventures on the river. There was no one, now, in whom he could confide, he was absolutely alone in the world. . . .

In his regrets Jacob was, unknowingly perhaps, more selfish than he had been during Hester's life.

5.

Jacob spent four days in Ashby Sutton, four dull, useless days. He went over to Pelsworthy and called on Mr. Baker. Unhappily Bennetts was away on his summer holiday. Jacob was sorry; he wanted to see Bennetts, and surprise him with details of Mr. Morley's office, possibly with a vague hint or two of the glamour of London life. Mr. Baker consoled with him on his loss, and was sufficiently impressed, later, to hear of the magnitude of some of Mr. Morley's jobs. "We've made three hundred and seventy-three sheets of drawings so far, for the North-Western Hospital," was one of Jacob's fireworks, and Mr. Baker responded handsomely. "God bless me!" he said. "Ha! ha! Three—hundred—and seventy—three drawings for one job, eh? Wonderful! Wonderful! That makes some of us country fellows sing small, eh? Dear, dear."

Afterwards there was Aunt Hester's solicitor to be seen, and—vaguely—arrangements to be made. The solicitor, however, was quite willing to take over all arrangements. Miss Stahl's annuity ceased with her death, of course, he explained, but there were certain savings, amounting to some two or three hundred pounds, and the furniture of the cottage, all of which came to Mr. Stahl under his aunt's will. There was nothing in the cottage he wished to keep, Jacob told the lawyer, nothing; would the lawyer make all the arrangements for the sale?

Later it came over him that the "certain savings" referred to had been accumulated for his benefit, and he reproached himself again for being an ungrateful brute. He had not been to the cottage, and he did not mean to go. What was the use?

Why should he make himself unhappy by a sentimental revival of old associations? He had not even been to the Elmover stile, he wanted to forget these things and go back to London. Fearon was going to preach a "funeral sermon" on Sunday, he would make some excuse and go back on Saturday; he had to be at the office on Monday.

He had talked very little to Fearon on local matters, and it was not till Friday night,—he had finally decided to go next day, despite a warm invitation to stay over Sunday for the sake of the funeral sermon—that quite by accident the conversation turned on the affairs of Elmover. It was over two years since he had seen Madeline, and some time since he had heard of her. She had swum out of Aunt Hester's ken into the waters of that great social world in London, and Aunt Hester did not read the *Morning Post*.

Fearon had startling news. "You've heard, no doubt, that Miss Felmersdale is to be married soon?" he said, and looked at Jacob over the top of his spectacles, to see whether there was any tenderness left in him on that subject.

For the moment Jacob was more concerned with his attitude towards the rector than anything. How much did Fearon know? he wondered. "Anyone down here?" he asked, casually, rather proud of his self-control.

"Dear, no!" replied Fearon. "Miss Felmersdale's to become quite a grand lady, she's engaged to Lord Paighton."

"Lord Paighton?" repeated Jacob. "I suppose one ought to know the name, but I don't remember it in any connection."

"I'm afraid I can't help you much," said Fearon. "He's an Earl, of course, so Miss Madeline will be a Countess, and I believe he's well off."

Fearon's information went no further than this. He had heard the news in the village, doubtless it had been announced in the paper, but he had not seen it. He saw very little of the Felmersdales, nowadays, he continued. Nina had been in London, too, this summer, and Sir Anthony and his wife shut themselves up and saw no one. Lady Felmersdale did not even send flowers for the altar vases, now; they hardly counted as Church-people. Fearon seemed a little bitter.

Jacob wondered whether Lady Felmersdale was "worse," but he did not put his thought into words. He did not know whether Fearon had any suspicions on that subject. . . .

The rooms in Great Ormond Street seemed very empty and gloomy when Jacob arrived on Saturday night. Tony would not be back till the next evening, or, possibly, he might go straight to the office on Monday morning.

The rooms had an atmosphere which was unfamiliar. This may have been due to the fact that the competent landlady had taken advantage of her lodgers' absence, and given them what she called "a good turn-out." There was a fairly steady, oblong table in the middle of the room, and this had not been clear since the last holiday. In the ordinary course, at least one-half of it was covered with a litter of books, papers, and magazines, piled generally on the top of a drawing-board, together with such details as pipes, an ink-bottle, a T-square, a roll of drawing-paper, odd parts of mathematical instruments. . . . When one was working and a meal happened, half the table was cleared—a rapid process—and treasures accumulated at that end were sometimes lost there. Periodically, Tony undertook a clearance, but he seldom worked down as far as the drawing-board. Now even that lowest of strata was removed and standing against the wall, and the dingy red and black table-cloth had been brushed and shaken. Jacob noted the ink-stains which marked Tony's attempts to clear; the ink-bottle which generally lay concealed somewhere in that piled-up confusion, always came out upside down.

"You'd like some supper, I suppose?" said Mrs. Foster, the competent landlady.

"Oh! if it's not too much trouble," replied Jacob. He had never succeeded in making a friend of Mrs. Foster, though he had made overtures at first. Mrs. Foster, with all her long experience, had never learned suppleness. She was not dependent entirely on her lodgers, as she had a small tobacconist's and newsagent's shop on the ground-floor. She did not quite approve of the habits of either Mr. Farrell or Mr. Stahl; still, she allowed them to stay, since they behaved themselves fairly decently at home. Also they paid her thirty-

five shillings a week for the rooms, and prices in Great Ormond Street were going down.

"No trouble," replied Mrs. Foster curtly, "what'd you like?"

"Some tea and an egg, I think," said Jacob; he had no ideas on the subject of food.

The egg was not satisfactory, it had a flavour of straw, and the yolk was adherent to the shell on one side, a peculiarity of London eggs which seems to suggest that they have been lying down too long. Jacob drank three cups of tea, and tried to make good with bread and butter and jam. He had been smoking too much in the train, and had a general feeling of dirt and staleness. He had not got rid of the stuffy smell of the railway carriage. He thought that when he had had something to eat, he might be able to enjoy a cigarette again.

He did not feel inclined to go out, and the feeling of staleness was developing into a headache which pressed on his temples and hurt his eyes.

Life seemed very worthless to Jacob at this moment. What was there to look forward to except the routine of office work? Who cared what became of him? Certainly not Eric, who had been too much occupied to attend Aunt Hester's funeral, though he had done the correct thing by sending an expensive wreath. Jacob had not thought of that. He never did the correct thing, he made a mess of everything, he was making a mess of his life. What was the good of making determinations to work? He never kept them. And if he did achieve any little success, now, there was no one who cared. What could he do to find interest in life again? No prospect immediately possible to him offered any allurements. He might go abroad for six months on the strength of that legacy of Aunt Hester's, but he knew nothing of hotel life. He would be hopelessly lost and out of it, wandering alone about foreign cities. Or he might go and live in the country, but then what was there to do there? He had no object or purpose in life, and there was none he could think of, which made any appeal to him, just then. He wished Tony were back, they might exchange notes of their river experience.

He went to bed at half-past nine and soon fell asleep, but the next day found the despondent mood still heavy upon him. He had lunch at the Vienna Café, played chess all the afternoon, and lost four shillings and his temper. He was wasting all his time, playing the fool and idling, he reflected. Well, in a way, it was of no consequence, of course, he had £120 a year; but something, perhaps that bursting seed, reproached him. He wished he could *do* something, but the effort needed seemed too great. The very thought of it made him feel sick. If Aunt Hester had lived, things would have been different, she always encouraged him, she believed in him. Yes, he wanted Aunt Hester back. Now, for the first time since she had died, he wanted her badly. He could have cried if he had let himself go. . . .

Life was a failure and not worth living. His imagination was asleep, and refused to lift him out of this dull, dreary world.

When he returned to his rooms at half-past eight, he found Tony feasting on bacon and eggs.

"Hal-lo!" said Jacob, genuinely pleased to find a companion again.

"Hal-lo, my son!" replied Tony genially. "How goes it?"

They had not been on such terms of real amity for quite a long time. Even up the river they had quarrelled on more than one occasion.

Tony had news, but he kept it till he had finished his supper, plying Jacob meanwhile with questions as to his doings—and sufferings—since his departure from Oxford.

Jacob did not expand. He gave the details briefly, and Tony expressed his sympathy with a comprehending nod and an assumption of appropriate gloom.

"More like losing a mother than anything!" he put in on one occasion. "Rough luck, old chap."

When they had escaped from the subject, however, Tony brightened again and dropped his bombshell.

"I'm chucking Morley's, my son."

"What?" said Jacob. "Why? When? What are you going to do?"

"Going to Canada next month."

"Are you rotting?" asked Jacob.

"Rather not. It's practically all fixed up. I met a chap in Oxford I was at school with. We were pals—rather. Joey Frazer? I expect you've heard me mention him? He's got a bally great farm over there, and is making a pot of money. He's just over on a holiday, and he's been looking for someone to go back with him who'd put in good work on his farm. Finds it a bit lonely, I fancy, from what I could make out. Well, I wrote straight off to the gov'nor and gave him all the partics, and he is willing to start me with a couple of hundred quid. Jolly good sort, the gov'nor. I'm going to see Morley to-morrow, and sling the office at once, if he'll let me off, and then I'm going home for a day or two, and afterwards I shall come back and get my outfit. Joey 'll be in town then and show me the ropes."

"Great Scott!" commented Jacob, and then, "How much longer shall you want to keep on these rooms?"

"Oh! till I go. We're sailing on the 9th of September, three weeks on Tuesday."

"Great Scott!" repeated Jacob. "Wish I were coming with you."

It is possible that if Tony had taken up the suggestion, Jacob would, indeed, have gone to Canada. He had realizable capital, and the suggestion that he should employ it on the resources of the Canadian farm would doubtless not have been disagreeable to Mr. Frazer. But Tony did not want Jacob. Jacob was something of a handicap, he meant restraint in many small ways, and Tony wanted to be free of all restraint, so he answered,

"Poor old chap, I'm afraid you wouldn't be able to stand roughing it as we shall have to do. All day in the saddle sometimes and that kind of thing. Besides, it means jolly hard manual labour—you wouldn't be up to that, would you?"

"No. I suppose not," said Jacob. He was a useless person in this world, and no one wanted him.

6.

He saw Tony off at Euston, but Joey Frazer was there, very full of bustle and importance, and Jacob had to play the part of a bystander, for Tony, too, seemed to be fully occupied.

At the last moment only was there any sign of the old relations. Tony leant out of the carriage-window, as the guard was blowing the whistle.

"Good-bye, old chap," he said warmly, reaching out his hand. "I say, Jimmy, you'll write, won't you?"

"Rather! Good-bye."

As Jacob watched the train out, he was puzzling over his admiration of two years back. Tony wasn't a bad old sort in some ways, but good Lord . . .

BOOK IV
OWEN BRADLEY

CHAPTER XXII

ILLUMINATION

1.

FOR more than two years Jacob had worked side by side with Owen Bradley, and at the end of that time the two men knew little more of one another's private affairs than they did on the morning of their first meeting. They were on excellent terms, they had never come within sight of a disagreement; they occasionally discussed matters of general interest during office hours. But outside the office they never met. It was not that Bradley was unapproachable, but he made no advances. He was self-sufficient, he had his work and his ambitions. He was the most respected, perhaps the only respected man in the office. He worked hard, yet he was not a "mugger," and certainly not a "prig"; and he had no more fear of his employer than he had of the office-boy, whereas to the rest of the staff, including even old Eckholt, Mr. Morley was something of the schoolmaster, a person to be avoided whenever possible, flattered if necessary, and never, in any circumstances, contradicted.

Jacob knew vaguely that Bradley worked at home in the evenings, that he went in for competitions; but Bradley did not talk of his own doings, and his answers to questions were short and not illuminating, wherefore Jacob's knowledge on the subject remained vague. One thing he knew, however, and knew with certainty, in all technical matters Bradley

was an authority, more reliable than Mr. Morley himself. If any point arose which needed settling, one said, as a matter of course, "Oh! ask Bradder." In those days steel was only just coming into general use in England for floor-construction, and its use as a skeleton framework for the shell of a building was still confined to America, but Bradley understood the intricacies of steel-construction and the formulæ for calculating strains. It was Bradley who advised the use of rolled steel H stanchions cased in concrete, in place of the unreliable cast-iron columns originally designed by Mr. Morley for various purposes, in the building of the great North-Western Hospital. This advice subsequently brought great credit to Mr. Morley; for a rival architect, the designer of the big Eastern Hospital, had an ugly smash during the progress of the works, owing to an undiscovered "sand-hole" in one of the cast-iron columns he was using. Mr. Morley seized his opportunity,—he was quite justified,—and wrote a long letter to the *Daily Post*, in which he pointed out the defects of cast-iron construction, and inveighed against its use as old-fashioned; he pointed his remarks with a few instances of the steel-construction adopted throughout the North-Western Hospital.

Yet no one would have thought of calling "old Bradder" conceited, and because he made no boast of his own achievements, his colleagues treated his cleverness as a matter of course; he was an authority in all technical matters, but he was one of themselves, they even forgot to regard him as an intellectual superior. Mr. Morley knew his assistant's worth, and before the North-Western Hospital had been in progress eighteen months, he gave him a substantial advance in salary—but it was, at times, a little amusing to hear Mr. Morley talking about the advantages of steel-construction. He had adopted the suggestion with such enthusiasm that he had long forgotten the fact that the idea did not originate from the creative imaginings of his own brain. Jacob knew the story and smiled to himself sometimes, when he heard his chief talking to Bradley on this subject, but Bradley himself never smiled; he, too, appeared to have forgotten

that the use of steel stanchions in covered-ways, boiler-house, and the dining-room of the Nurses' House, was his own suggestion.

To Jacob, Bradley figured as the Eric of architecture. He was so safe, he knew so much and knew it so well, his store of knowledge, in fact, was so great that it was inimitable. How could he, Jacob, ever hope to bridge so wide a gap. So he treated Bradley with admiration and some respect, though he chaffed him occasionally on matters outside office affairs.

The emigration of Tony made a difference, though it is difficult to say by whom the initiative was taken, or if either side made any particular advance. Yet when Tony had gone, a sort of intimacy began to grow between the two men who had worked for over two years side by side without knowing each other. Doubtless Jacob in his new loneliness was very willing to make another friend. There was Leigh-Weston, it is true, who had been the third partner in that trip to Oxford, but Leigh-Weston was rather inclined to live the same life that Tony had lived. Unconsciously, Jacob wanted a change, new knowledge; and there was little, now, that Leigh-Weston could teach him.

For two years Jacob and Tony had gone out to lunch together; Bradley had always gone alone. It seemed natural, now, that Jacob and Bradley should go together. That lunch-hour made a difference. The office was not a good place in which to discuss private affairs; there was always the fear of interruption, but a greater deterrent than this was the atmosphere of technicality which ruled within its precincts. There was something in the air of the place which compelled one, intellectually. One could no more talk to Bradley of personal emotions in the office than one could discuss one's relations with a form-master during class.

The first time he went out to lunch with Bradley, Jacob felt slightly ill-at-ease, he realized that his companion was a stranger to him. What interests had they in common outside office matters? Yet it was a waste of time to "talk office" during that one brief hour of relaxation. Then there was a change in Bradley, also, he was a human being after all,

with an outlook on life not completely bounded by building materials and the complexities of their representation.

The slight stiffness consequent on new relations did not wear off until lunch was finished, and then Jacob fell on, what was to him, an astounding revelation of Bradley's capacity. Some mention of Bradley's home-work made Jacob curious, and he pressed his questions home as he had never had the desire to press them in the office.

"You seem to be always working on competitions," said Jacob in reply to a remark of Bradley's. "How many have you been in for?"

"A good many," answered Bradley with a smile.

"How many?" went on Jacob. "I think this is awfully interesting. Do you mind telling me?"

"No! why should I? Though I would sooner you didn't say anything about it in the office."

"Rather not. Of course I won't, if you'd sooner I didn't. I should like to know about these things. I've thought of going in for a com. myself."

"The one I'm on, now, is the twenty-ninth," remarked Bradley simply.

This amazing announcement took Jacob's breath away. He knew what the work of making a complete set of competition drawings for any big job implied — the knowledge required, the difficulties of planning and designing, the grasp of detail necessary to fit every requirement into the general scheme, above all the days and weeks of close attention in making an accurate set of geometrical drawings. Twenty-nine times had Bradley been through that mind-shattering experience, and Jacob had idly "thought of going in for a competition" himself. He gasped—audibly.

"Twenty-nine! All by yourself?"

"In five of them I collaborated with some other man, but it wasn't a success. I prefer to work alone."

"And you've never won a single one?" asked Jacob, still on the high note of amazement.

"No! I have been placed several times; second or third premium, you know. It helps towards expenses."

Expenses ? Yes, the expenses must have been quite an item. The conditions usually required that all drawings should be mounted on stretchers, then there was paper, carriage, goodness knows what else. Bradley had nothing but his salary. Jacob knew that, from what Bennetts had told him in the old days at Pelsworthy.

"But, I say, do you think it's worth while ?" The question was inevitable. To Jacob, the mere thought of the energy expended on such uncertain results made the task seem not "worth while."

"How else can one start in practice ?" asked Bradley.

"N—no. I don't know. But are you really going on till you win a competition ?"

"Of course."

Amazing creature ! If his energies had been properly directed, he might, perhaps, have been another Pitt, the younger ; with such capacities for application and for the assimilation and retention of accurate knowledge, no ambition need have been too high for him. But he had set his mind on success in this one particular direction, and had never stayed to consider whether his forces might be better applied.

"Good Lord !" ejaculated Jacob. "It hardly seems worth while !"

"Oh ! it is," went on Bradley calmly, amused at his companion's excess of amazement, "one learns a good deal ; much that's very useful in office work, and when I do win a competition, all the experience I've had will be so much to the good."

"I say, couldn't I help you a bit on the one you're doing now ? Help to ink in, or something ? It must be such an awful grind ?" Jacob's sympathies were aroused, the offer was purely altruistic.

"It's very good of you. Later you might ink in some of the plans, they're not ready yet. These drawings haven't to go in for nearly three months."

"I should like to help, awfully,—if I could," said Jacob.

"I have had to have some help, occasionally, in that sort of thing, in order to finish in time. I should be very glad to let you have the job, if you care about it."

"I don't want to be paid, if that's what you mean," said Jacob, getting a little red. "Great Scott, you didn't suppose I was thinking of that, did you?"

"Why not you, as well as anyone else?"

"I couldn't be bothered to do it, if I were being paid for it."

Curious that Jacob could make so representative a statement and not realize its applicability to his own wasted efforts, to his little determinations to work for a particular end; curious that he should have lived for nearly a quarter of a century and never have come within reasonable distance of apprehending the fact that the only work he could do was the work he did for the love of doing it. But then he had not yet found the right work; though there were some sides of an architect's work which appealed to him, and to which he devoted himself with zest.

"Why do you want to help, then?" asked Bradley.

It was a difficult question, and one which Jacob could not answer. He could not explain that his offer arose from a genuine, spontaneous wish to relieve the toil of Bradley's long and patient labours, so he framed a reason that had, at least, some truth in it.

"Oh! I don't know. I should like to. I haven't much to do in the evenings."

"Very good of you. I'll remember that offer in a week or two's time."

"I shall remind you of it," returned Jacob.

"It's time we went back," said Bradley, looking at his watch.

2.

Owen Bradley's chief failing was that he had too little of the artist in him. If you study his elevations, say, the Corporation Offices in Birchester, or that great block of the Phelps-Casterton building in London, you will find that his critics have not erred. These two designs are fairly representative of his work, and in them you will find a certain stateliness, an appreciation of proportions, even something of the individuality which is so rare in this connection; but they lack what we speak of in vague terms as "feeling," there is no

emotional quality in them, nothing of that flamboyance which gives life to French architecture, for instance, nor, on the other hand, of that devotional reverence which inspired English Gothic. His big works were great achievements, but they were not inspired. It was this lack of artistic feeling that told against him in his long struggle to win a competition. He excelled in his plans, but he failed in his elevations. As a set-off to this failure, it is worth while to note that in his designs for big hospitals, where elevations were of no account, he was too original, his methods were ahead of his time, and beyond the intelligence of the assessors. Even now some technical critics look askance at the plans of his big infectious hospitals.

The same lack shows in the character of the man. He had a quick brain, he was comprehensive and thorough, he had imagination and originality, but all his capacities were of that quality which we associate with the gifts of the scientist rather than with the gifts of the artist. If he had genius it was mathematical, not emotional.

When Jacob made that spontaneous offer to help in the completion of those endless competition drawings, Bradley considered the spirit of the offer, and found it matter for surprise that there should be no motive in it except goodwill to himself. He did not impute, or try to impute, any smaller motive of personal gain to Jacob, but he decided that it was possibly a superficial and slightly emotional friendliness, and tested its genuineness by avoiding any further mention of his home-work, in order to see whether the offer would be renewed.

It was renewed about a fortnight later. Jacob had been waiting till such time as he thought Bradley would be needing his assistance, and then broached the subject, boldly, at lunch. Bradley made a mental note that there was more in Stahl than he had given him credit for, and accepted the offer with gratitude.

During those evenings, in which Jacob was employed in the purely mechanical work of inking in plans and sections (he realized that he was not clever enough to be trusted with the

elevations), putting an amount of care and finish into his work such as he had never put into anything he had done for Mr. Baker or Mr. Morley, while Bradley's quick, clever pencil or pen was flying over the paper with the mathematical certainty that marked his complete comprehension of the task upon which he was employed—the two men found time for many a discussion on subjects unrelated to the work in hand, discussions which would have seemed out of place in the office. It was during those evenings that Jacob began a new phase of his education.

Bradley might be the Eric of architecture, but in literature, though he had read much, and had understood and remembered what was best worth retaining, he was, frankly, an amateur. And as an amateur who loved literature for its own sake, not for any ulterior purpose, he was able to teach Jacob more in a single evening than he could have learnt in a month from the academic Eric, whose very axioms stated assumptions which were beyond the limits of Jacob's comprehension. Bradley's knowledge as he displayed some fraction of it to Jacob was not academic. Bradley did not quote authors and assume that his hearer had read them as a matter of course. He did not compare authorities, nor discuss the bearing of the evidence on some subtle, but quite negligible, rendering of the classics. His learning was transmuted in the passage from eye to tongue; it entered his brain as precisely as learning entered the brain of Eric, but it emerged in a different form, assimilated and applied to a philosophy of life. Eric's learning came out of him as it went in—his uses were mainly those of the encyclopædia.

Yet these snatches of conversation, interesting and suggestive as they were to Jacob, were necessarily disjointed and imperfect. Some detail requiring calculation would, perhaps, absorb Bradley's attention, and then the discussion, however interesting, was broken off. It was not till the drawings were despatched, and Bradley was taking what he called his usual holiday—a few days' respite from evening and Sunday work—that the great discussion took place which altered Jacob's outlook on life.

3.

It was a dull, tepid Saturday afternoon in early December, and the competition drawings had been gone for over a week. In the interim Jacob had seen nothing of Bradley except during office hours, for that energetic worker had been taking his physical constitution in hand, and had spent most of his spare time in taking long walks through South London, preparatory to beginning work on another big competition, the particulars of which he had already obtained.

"Anything particular to do this afternoon?" asked Bradley casually as Jacob was putting away his drawing instruments and covering over his board, preparatory to leaving for the day. The time was half-past one. On Saturdays the office closed nominally at two, but Jacob counted the odd half-hour as lunch-time, a chronology he had learnt from Tony.

"No! Nothing particular. Why?" replied Jacob, with a touch of eagerness.

"Care to come back with me? This is the last day of my holiday. I'm starting on the new competition to-morrow."

"Thanks. Yes, I should like to very much," said Jacob, and added: "Are you really starting on another competition? Aren't you going to wait till you hear the result of the one you've just finished?"

"Why should I?" asked Bradley, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. "Even if I won it, which I don't anticipate, I should be glad of the other job, too."

"Oh, you're a marvel," said Jacob.

Old Eckholt, who was standing in front of the fire and passing the time till two o'clock, took the opportunity to join in the conversation.

"Mr. Bradley's one of the hopeful sort," he said in his rather high, whining voice. "I used to go in for competitions when I was his age."

"Why did you give it up?" asked Jacob, with a hint of aggressiveness in his voice.

"Because I found out it was no good," replied Eckholt

with a sneer. "The assessors aren't supposed to know the names of the competitors, but, of course, they do. They know the style of all the big men who go in, and know their drawings just as well as if the name was written across them."

"And you think they're influenced by that?" put in Bradley.

"Why, of course they must be," whined Eckholt. "Doesn't it stand to reason that they want to give the job to a man the committee can trust to carry it out. The assessors want to please the committee."

"Beastly unfair," commented Jacob.

"It isn't quite the fact, though," said Bradley. "I admit that where it's a case of *ceteris paribus*, an assessor, if he guesses that the drawings of one man are those of an architect of experience and the drawings of the other are unknown to him, will be influenced in the direction of safety, and I don't blame him either. But the facts are against your theory, Mr. Eckholt. Didn't Morley win, in an open field, the first hospital competition he went in for? His style couldn't have been known to those particular assessors, such as Tiltman, for instance."

"Oh! there's lots of ways of getting round the conditions," suggested Eckholt libellously.

"Well, then," said Bradley, "what about Grover? He won a competition."

"He didn't get the job, though," replied Eckholt.

"That's outside the argument. He won the first premium."

"Oh! it 'appens sometimes by a fluke," returned old Eckholt, "but it's a waste of time going in for 'em, in my opinion."

"How many did you go in for?" asked Jacob rather rudely. He was incensed by the old man's pessimism; he had quite made up his mind that Bradley was going to win.

"I'm sure I can't remember, now," answered Eckholt, "but I've known a good many young men who went in, in this office, and none of 'em ever won anything except Mr. Grover, and he didn't get the job."

"Shut up and come on," interposed Bradley, fearing that

Jacob was preparing to demonstrate that none of the young men Mr. Eckholt had ever known, nor Mr. Eckholt himself, was to be compared for one moment with Owen Bradley.

"The old fool riles me," expostulated Jacob when he and Bradley were outside; "he's always grumbling and saying nothing's any good."

"Well! You won't change his attitude by talking or losing your temper. It's a waste of time to argue with him," replied Bradley. "Shall we go for a breather before we go back to my digs?"

The "breather" took the form of a ride on the top of a 'bus to Hyde Park Corner, and a walk across the Park in the face of the blustering south-west wind. They loitered for some time by the Serpentine, and then made their way towards Bradley's humble lodgings in Stockwell by bus and horse-tram, arriving only just in time for a composite meal, chiefly tea, at half-past five.

4.

The heir of the ages! When the poetic fire glows and the imagination grows fervid with ecstasy what splendid names we find for him. It was for this that the nebula threw out arms in its gyrations, that the arms condensed as they dispersed from the glowing parent centre, condensed and split and united again, and formed centres and tiny systems of their own as they went heeling round that vast central nucleus. It was for this that one, apparently negligible, fragment settled down into a steady path, and threw off, or held by its attraction, one still more negligible congregation of cooling atoms. For this that the fragment, recognizable as the third important fragment counting outwards from the centre, cooled through countless millions of years till the great cloud of vapour which enveloped it fell as rain; for this all the experiments with a million shapes that have perished. Out of Heaven knows how many million nebulae that have condensed in the unimaginable history of the universe, one nebula was chosen in which lay the material for a fragment

that should in time produce the heir of the ages, Nature's last work, the creature with splendid purpose in his eyes, the Bushman in Australia, or Socrates in Athens, or two architect's assistants discussing their origin in a little back-room in Stockwell by the light of an oil-lamp.

Either of those two, or any other individual living at the present moment, represents the last development of the miracle which grew out of glowing vapour. The very atoms of Jacob Stahl's body once formed a part of that vast spinning mass of white-hot gas, which extended from what we now call the sun to far beyond the limits of the great orbit of Uranus. The energy with which Jacob Stahl softly blows out a cloud of smoke, or with which he attempts to follow by an effort of imagination the pronouncements of Owen Bradley, is merely a transformation of some infinitely small fraction of the energy of that original furnace.

On this wonderful night in the stuffy little back-room in Stockwell the miracle of miracles dawned upon Jacob, in all its magnificence. Up to this time he had thought in terms of man. Here was a world, so he imagined, carefully designed by a man of colossal proportions, much as Jacob himself in a very small way designed a house or a hospital. It was a world the arrangement of which one did not criticize, since it was taken for granted that the colossus thoroughly understood the creation of worlds, even though this one—incidentally designed to accommodate Jacob Stahl—was his only experiment. Among the items also specially designed for Jacob Stahl's benefit, were so-called stars, the majority of them so far away that he could not see them without the artificial aid of a telescope. At times, it is true, his attention had been called to certain remarkable instances of forethought, such as the fact that since we could not live without air and water these elements had been supplied with a generous hand. But on the whole one had taken the arrangements for granted, perhaps one remembered that certain things were beyond one's comprehension, and one was "not intended" to question them.

Bradley had been talking vaguely of astronomy, not in terms

of the laws of Kepler, but reflectively, a halting monologue of wonder at the well-kept secrets of the heavens.

Jacob listened attentively, and encouraged him to further speculation by questions, but Bradley was drawing nearer home—he spoke of the cooling fragment and wandered into geology. Then man's first appearance on the earth occupied him. When was it, Early Miocene—say, 3,000,000 years ago—that the tailless beast of the forest began to walk without dropping his knuckles to the ground?

"I say, old chap," said Jacob, knocking out his pipe, "where do you get all this from?"

"Books," replied Bradley vaguely, not in the mood to give chapter and verse as he was capable of doing.

"But, I say," protested Jacob, "you don't believe in all that business about our being descended from monkeys? That chap, what's his name? is an atheist, isn't he?"

"Darwin?" asked Bradley.

"Yes, Darwin, that's it. Do you believe in his theory?"

"It's at least a theory that seems to fit the facts," returned Bradley, "which is more than the special creation theory does."

"But that isn't a theory," protested Jacob.

"What, then?" asked Bradley.

"It's—it's a revelation."

"Have you ever examined the evidence?"

"N—no, why should I?"

"It is very poor as evidence."

Then followed a long pause. Jacob was smoking another pipe and gazing into the fire. Bradley was wondering if Tennyson was right about leaving one's sister when she prays.

"Bradley!"

"Yes?"

"Don't you believe in God?"

"Not the God of the Christians, anyway," replied Bradley, without having resolved his doubts as to Tennyson's advice.

What an astounding revelation! It was not Hales, the Ashby Sutton cobbler, who made the grave statement, not some ignorant, arrogant fool setting himself up against the

wisdom of Peter Fearon and Aunt Hester, but Owen Bradley, the cleverest man in the office and the hardest worker, the man who never stole time from his employer or preached to his colleagues, Bradley by whose side he had worked for two years, and who was not in the least like Jacob's conception of an "atheist."

For a moment he hung on the verge, and then a question presented itself. "Suppose that all the things he had been taught about the origin of his own insignificant self were no more true than those other things which he had demonstrated to be false?"

You picture him later on the top of the 'bus which was to deposit him at Cosmo Place, gazing down into the rush of life that swirled through Piccadilly on a Saturday night. He is wrapped in a garment of wonder, his eyes seeing humanity in a new light. He is striving with little knowledge to relate himself to the nebula, and to comprehend the reason for all these other atoms, who are so intent on their own futile business that they have no time to spare for this intensely absorbing problem of their origin.

"It's a disgrace, ain't it?" remarked the 'bus-driver over his shoulder, with a large movement of his whip in the direction of the brilliant crowd.

"Do you believe in Darwin?" asked Jacob.

"This 'ere hidea of the monkey business," commented the 'bus-driver. "Well—that's another point, that is. Question whether a self-respectin' monkey'd be 'ave as bad as some o' them fly-by-nights, in my opinion."

The 'bus-driver was not great on religion, but he was a family man with daughters of his own.

Jacob was wondering whether the 'bus-driver had been specially designed and created by Providence to fill his particular niche in the world's economy, or whether he were merely an incidental outcome of the cooling process. Neither theory afforded the satisfaction of a completely reasonable explanation.

5.

Probably Mr. Mudie's assistants, like bank-clerks, are much too busy to make use of the wonderful material at their command. Yet some of those subscribers' cards, on which are entered so carefully every book borrowed, must furnish material for a complete life of the mind, just as the entries in the banker's ledgers would give us an insight into the material affairs and adventures of the depositors.

The collection of cards endorsed "Stahl—J. L.," for instance, beginning as a one-book subscription, would supply an interesting case for the dilettante psychologist. The earlier entries record the names of well-known authors: Lever, Smollett, one of old Samuel Richardson's,—*"Pamela,"* of course—it was returned in three days. Following these books, which give a hint of a slightly pornographic tendency, comes *"Robert Elsmere"*—kept for three weeks. This is succeeded by *"Silas Marner,"* *"Vanity Fair,"* *"The Mill on the Floss,"* and then a perfect revel of George Eliot, Wilkie Collins, and Charles Reade—nearly every work of the last named appears on the list. No work of Dickens appears, which is misleading, for Dickens had been read pretty thoroughly before the list opens; and only one more work of Thackeray's, *"The Newcomes."* Anthony Trollope is sampled with an unfortunate specimen, *"Is he Popinjoy?"* and dropped; but Thomas Hardy is appreciated, as we can see from the fact that after his current work has been read, Stahl—J. L. goes back to all the earlier works by the same author. So the list goes on recording an account of novels. We can trace roughly some little improvement in taste, but there is hardly a sign of any general reading. Even Essays are refused. Stevenson leaps into the list for the first time with *"The Treasure Island,"* which was returned in one day (was it read in the office?), but *"Travels with a Donkey,"* the next on the list, seems to have ended his popularity. Perhaps the subscriber may have asked the librarian whether *"Virginibus Puerisque"* was a story, and, receiving an unfavourable reply, decided to drop Stevenson. The work

which follows is by G. Manville Fenn—it may mark a reaction in favour of adventure.

Then one December, when the subscription is rather more than two years old, there comes an extraordinary change. In the first place, the subscription is increased from one book to three, which seems to imply that Stahl—J. L. has begun to read more eagerly. But the great difference lies in the subject of the books. Novels appear rarely; in place of them we find, heading the new list, "The Origin of Species" and "The Descent of Man," and these are followed by a catalogue that cannot be detailed. Works on biology, natural history, astronomy, geology, physics, even on anatomy, appear one after the other; indeed, for twelve months the sciences seem to hold complete sway over the reader; then comes a trickle of philosophy,—we note translations of Plato's dialogues,—some poetry, essays, biography, and a little history, chiefly of the type of Winwood Reade's "Martyrdom of Man."

The dilettante psychologist may lay the cards on one side—it is evident, now, that Stahl—J. L. is learning to read.

6.

In the attempt to ascertain his exact relation to the nebula, Jacob made many curious discoveries. Chief among them that we are what yesterday we were; to-morrow we shall not be less. He did not find the theory stated in the neat phrase of Fitzgerald, he formulated it for himself; it was by way of being a general deduction. This discovery finally robbed him of the hope that he might become "famous, or clever, or rich" by a miracle. Thus he found himself confronted with the hard necessity of making his own life, if he desired any of the three imagined rewards. The first he put away from him. His reading had discovered to him that the fame he desired was beyond his attainment. "If I had known ten years ago what I know, now," he reflected, "I might have had a chance. It's too late to begin. I haven't developed the powers of attention, concentration, and memory that are necessary." He decided not to worry about fame; and—a decision which

marks the growth of his faculties—he made no foolish determination that he would devote himself to the development of those powers aforementioned. As to riches, admittedly he desired them, but as there appeared no channel by which they might flow in his direction, he put this desire, also, in the background. There remains the third reward; “Cleverness,” as he phrased it, avoiding more grandiose synonyms. Speaking generally, he decided that the term or its alternatives was not only relative but diverse. Herbert Spencer was clever, also Mr. Ridout Morley, but their powers and attainments had nothing in common. In the same way Eric was clever, also his younger brother Jacob; but while Eric was precise and encyclopædic, Jacob was inexact, and his memory would not retain the items of a bibliography. On the other hand, Eric was rigid and academic; Jacob was an idealist and a dreamer, hence assimilative and constructive. Furthermore, Jacob was learning to think for himself—and Eric. . . .

Thinking of Eric one Sunday morning after he had just finished Spencer’s “First Principles,” Jacob decided to risk another visit to West Hampstead. It was more than twelve months since he had seen or heard from his brother. “He doesn’t care a hang about me nor I about him,” meditated Jacob, “but I may as well go and look him up again. Perhaps he may find me better worth talking to now, than he would have six months ago.”

He found Eric and his wife unaltered. He was greeted with exactly the same shade of warmth, and remonstrated with, mildly, for having neglected them so long. During tea-time he confined himself to asking questions, and discovered that Eric had written another book, and that Mrs. Stahl was translating Schelling’s “Natur-Philosophie.” In the train Jacob had formulated the idea of airing some of his own knowledge, but as he entered the atmosphere of his brother’s house, he became depressed and uncertain of himself. The conversation during tea lowered his spirits still further. He was overcome with the feeling that Spencer was elementary, and would be put on one side at once by Eric and his wife, and yet he was

conscious of a flaw in all their learning, while he was unable to put a finger on it.

After tea Jacob was invited to the study "for a smoke." He accepted gratefully—Eric was bad enough, but Mrs. Eric was worse. And the two together! They backed one another up, you understand.

The study might have been dignified by the name of library. Jacob looked at the walls of books with a new eye; the last time he had been in that room, he had hardly troubled to read the titles. Eric noted the change.

"I have added a good many volumes since you were here," he remarked, "and I've arranged them in better order."

"You've got a good many, now, by Jove," said Jacob.

"Only about three thousand," returned Eric, "but there is no rubbish."

Jacob had said the wrong thing, as usual. Why did he always make a fool of himself before Eric? It was largely Eric's fault, it must be; Eric spoke to him as if he were devoid of common intelligence.

Jacob meant to assert himself. "What's the principle of your arrangement?" he asked, trying to remember how the books were arranged at Mudie's. He had a dim idea that they were alphabetical, under authors.

"In subjects, of course," replied Eric. He had gone over to the mantelpiece, and was lighting a pipe—he only smoked on the rare occasions when he was not working and expected to be bored.

"Oh! I see!" Jacob was not encouraged—Eric had turned his back, and evidently did not consider it worth while to exhibit his library for the benefit of this unintelligent brother. Jacob caught the name of Ricardo. "Are these Italian books?" he asked at a venture.

Eric looked round. "Eh? Which?" he asked. "No, those are all economics, why Italian?"

Jacob grew hot and made no reply, looking closer at the titles of the books before him. This shelf were all strangers to him. No! "Adam Smith!" He seemed to remember that name in some connection, or was he thinking of "Adam

Bede" ? "The Wealth of Nations." Of course, that was the book he had begun to read in Ashby Sutton all those years ago, when Eric had come down for Easter. . . . He decided not to risk any comment, and raised his eyes to the next shelf.

"Sociology," remarked Eric from the mantelpiece.

Jacob felt that he was being watched. He wished he could think of something to say which would give him an opportunity to air some of his new-found knowledge. Ha ! There was a friend, a recent friend—Herbert Spencer. Jacob turned to his brother.

"What's your opinion of Herbert Spencer ?" he asked, and added : "I've been reading a good deal of him lately."

"I question the soundness of his metaphysic," said Eric, "on the other side, I am not competent to express an opinion. I'm no physicist, and biology is out of my sphere altogether."

The magnificent pedant—his very limitations were bound in leather—had thrown down a gage which an equal might have accepted. Scholar recognizes scholar in half-a-dozen words. But Jacob, who could never have become a scholar, did not even realize his opportunity. Also, he was uncertain of the signification of the word "metaphysic," he had only met it in the plural heretofore. He was in the familiar condition of being abashed, yet he persisted, seeking for heavy words.

"You're so technical and so—so abstract," he said. "I've found Herbert Spencer has made a big impression on me. I've seen life more clearly since I read him."

There was nothing about life in Eric's bibliographical mind. Humanity was a thing he measured with a rule graduated according to his own standards—his own achievements. He had forced a way to knowledge by his own effort ; those who had failed could have done the same if they had not wasted time in futilities. So when he regarded his brother, he measured him by the Eric standard of ability and success ; and when he regarded Herbert Spencer he measured him by the soundness—Eric standard—of his metaphysic ; he took no account of Spencer's far-reaching influence on human thought. Nevertheless as host and brother it was necessary on this occasion for Eric to make an effort. He adopted the attitude

of mind which a wrangler might adopt towards the lowest form of a preparatory school. Prepared for boredom he relighted his pipe.

"In what way have you seen life more clearly?" he asked. "By the way, what do you intend by life, in this connection?"

The obvious reply to the last question was "the whole bag of tricks," but Jacob fumbled.

"Just life," he stammered, "from . . . from its first appearance."

"Do you mean that you are converted to the theory of an inorganic evolution?"

"I suppose it comes to that," replied Jacob, groping; the problem had not presented itself to him in this form.

"I don't think you are justified in accepting that conclusion," said Eric, "it entails a very large assumption, which Spencer has not proved up to the present time."

Jacob had thought he understood Spencer, he saw, now, he did not understand him in the proper sense. Spencer made Jacob see pictures, that was all, and not necessarily the pictures Spencer intended him to see. Jacob read, and received a general impression. "Oh, Lord," he moaned inwardly, "what is the good of my attempting to understand?" One thing, however, he meant to have defined, and he put the question in decent form.

"I say, Eric, tell me one thing. Do you believe in the special creation theory?"

Eric shrugged his shoulders. "The theory is certainly not proved," he said. "I haven't devoted particular attention to the subject since I left Cambridge. Really, I never trouble about it, now; it has no bearing on my work."

"But do you believe in a God?" persisted Jacob.

"I haven't the least idea," said Eric. "I never think about it."

In effect this was the answer of the 'bus-driver. The main question was shelved as unimportant. Eric might be classed with all those shifting figures in Piccadilly; he, also, was too intent on his own futile business to spare time for the problem of his origin. Jacob sighed.

"Have you relinquished your orthodoxy?" asked Eric, condescendingly.

"I've been wondering about these things," replied Jacob.

"Believe me, it's waste of time," said Eric. "The problem is insoluble in the present state of our knowledge. How's the architecture getting on?"

"Oh! all right. I say, I must be going."

"Better stay to supper," suggested Eric. "Henderson is coming in—he's one of the lecturers at the School of Economics."

"I don't understand economics," said Jacob, boldly. "I must say good-bye to Mrs. Stahl."

"She's in the drawing-room, I expect." Eric did not press his invitation.

"Won't you stay to supper?" asked Mrs. Stahl when Jacob came to say good-bye. "Professor Henderson is coming."

"Thanks very much, but I don't understand economics," replied Jacob.

"Well, you mustn't neglect us so long again," said Mrs. Stahl. "We are always in on Sunday afternoons."

Damn Eric and his silly economics. Spencer to Eric meant sociology founded on an unsound metaphysic; laws and classifications that took no count of the individual. Eric wanted a definition of "life," and well he might—he knew no more of life than the bindings of his books. Eric might not have time to consider the problem of his origin, but he was a narrow bigot, none the less. He did not understand literature that dealt with the problem of humanity. In fiction his only regard was for form. For once Jacob was not downhearted and discouraged; he could not discuss any problem with Eric, he was vastly his inferior in the matter of learning. Well, Jacob had neither the memory nor the acumen of a schoolman, but he took an interest in life, thank Heaven for it, and he meant to get some value out of it. He was only twenty-five, and he intended to adventure into knowledge, practical and theoretical. Eric? Bah! Eric was dead, he ought to be bound and put among works of reference.

Eric understood books in terms of literature ; Jacob wanted to understand books in terms of life—all the rest was a formula, and the formula contained a constant that had never been evaluated. Jacob was for the evaluation of the constant, he wanted to understand life. Bother Spencer's metaphysic ! Damn Eric !

CHAPTER XXIII

BRADLEY'S TRANSLATION

1.

DURING the earlier part of this year Jacob had been full of eagerness and anxiety, he had been looking for the result of the great competition upon which he had worked for Bradley. In the office he had held his tongue, for he boldly prophesied success whenever he spoke of the competition, and he did not wish old Eckholt to hear him. If Bradley should not win—*absit omen*—Eckholt would not fail to remind him of his jubilations. Old Eckholt was bad enough at the best of times—it was superfluous to give him opportunities. Bradley smiled tolerantly when Jacob let himself go in the lunch hour. Bradley had twenty-eight competitions behind him, and was busy on the thirtieth ; he founded no unusual expectations on the success of the twenty-ninth.

The result when it appeared was aggravating to Bradley, if it afforded Jacob some measure of relief from the pessimisms of old Eckholt. For the third time in his career Bradley was *proxime accessit* ; the second premium was £25, a useful addition to his income, but to be so near and fail again was very mortifying.

"Perhaps they may carry out your designs after all," suggested the hopeful Jacob, when the announcement was made. "The first chap may be a rotter like old Grover."

"No, the first chap is ——," replied Bradley, naming a well-known architect.

"Men like that always seem to win," put in old Eckholt.

Jacob was on the point of being exceedingly rude to his

senior, but Bradley interrupted him with : " I'm not working to-night. Come home and have a jaw."

" Rather," consented Jacob.

" All right ! Good. Shut up about the competition, now. I'm a bit sick of it."

" No wonder," sneered Eckholt, who liked to have the last word.

The " jaw " was an interesting one to Jacob, and helped to point him on the new road he was travelling. Bradley gave him a list of books to read, and discussed many problems with him. For some time past Jacob had been applying the principle of natural selection to every natural object. He had stood for an hour in front of Rowland Ward's little shop in Piccadilly speculating on the tusks of an elephant, trying to follow in theory the steps by which they had been developed. These things fascinated him, and he had no one with whom he could discuss them but Bradley.

Rather late in the evening he reverted to the subject of competitions. " How's your new one getting on ?" he asked.

" Not very fast," replied Bradley. " I'm not sure whether I shall go on with it."

" You're not going to chuck going in for them, are you ?" Jacob's tone had a note of alarm. He worshipped the qualities that make for success in others. He liked to read of success, even the humblest. Failure to him was the great tragedy.

" Oh no ! This particular one is unusually difficult, that's all. It hardly seems worth while to go on with it. The site is so awkward."

" What's the job ?"

" New offices for the Birchester Corporation."

" Birchester ? Sounds big. What's the estimate for ?"

" Eighty thousand."

" By Jove ! That's a big thing ! I should stick to it if I were you."

" I may," said Bradley, and turned the conversation into other channels.

The truth is that Bradley did not wish Jacob to help him

in making the new drawings. This wish was partly due to a feeling of independence. He did not care to accept the gift of help, however generously and unselfishly the gift was offered. Bradley had never looked to any man for help, and he preferred to be self-sufficient. If Jacob would have accepted a fair rate of remuneration for his work, it would have been a different matter—but Jacob steadfastly refused any suggestion of payment; the point had been raised again soon after Christmas, some six weeks before. This feeling, however, was not all. Bradley was human enough to have a thought for Jacob also. He believed that Jacob was wasting his time in the study of architecture, and now that he saw the youngster intent on a new study which, if it promised no immediate reward, would, at least, educate him, Bradley thought it better that Jacob should spend his evenings in reading rather than in the mechanical work of inking in plans and sections.

Thus it came about that Jacob had no hand in the making of the new drawings. He mentioned the subject once or twice, but it must be confessed that he was somewhat easily put off. He was very engrossed in his reading at this time, and if working on the competition meant close association with Bradley, it entailed, also, long absences from his books. Moreover, when Bradley was working, his conversation was very disjointed; Jacob had heard Bradley at his best, and he was not now content with the little that had once seemed so much.

When one day in June, the Monday after the visit to Eric, Bradley announced quietly at lunch that the Birchester competition drawings had gone in, Jacob was at first surprised and then resentful.

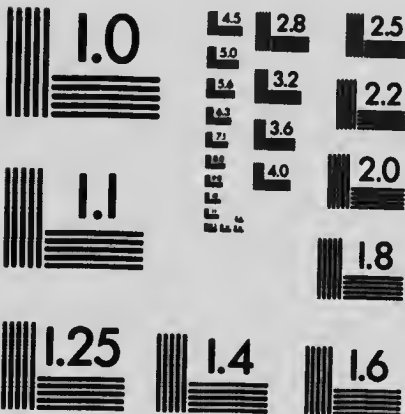
"Hang it all, you needn't have kept it so dark," he said, trying to disguise from himself the fact that he had not, perhaps, been so eager in his offer to help as on a former occasion.

"I thought you were better employed," said Bradley. "Now, don't get excited. I mean that. You needn't be offended if I tell you that I don't think you'll ever make a big success as an architect."



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Jacob immediately became depressed. "No! I suppose not," he sighed.

"Well, you needn't get downhearted over it. There are other ways of making a living."

"None that I'm fitted for," returned Jacob.

"Writing?"

"Oh! Lord! You know how much chance I have in that direction," expostulated Jacob.

"Time, man. Time and patience. You always want to rush things so. Go on reading for a bit, and then learn to write. You have got plenty of imagination, but no patience to learn."

"Do you mean, really, that you think I might learn to write?" Jacob's tone expressed a hopefulness as suddenly developed as his earlier despondency.

"Yes, I do. Certainly I do. You've got a lot of the qualifications—but you must learn."

"Yes! I must learn. I am learning," said Jacob, not "By Jove, I will learn," as he would have said six months before. And then he returned to Bradley's affairs.

"I suppose you've started another competition?" he asked.

"Not yet. There isn't one going at the moment. By the way, when are you taking your holiday?"

"I don't know. I haven't thought about it."

"I suppose you wouldn't care to join me. I'm going to Paris."

"By Gad, shouldn't I, though? I say, Bradder, do you mean it? You are a brick. Would I care? I should just think so."

It is a pity that hero-worship should always be devoted to those who are independent of worship. Bradley knew that Jacob's enthusiasm was inspired less by the vision of Paris than by the fact that the holiday was to be spent in the company of one, Owen Bradley. But the knowledge gave him no thrill of satisfaction.

"What ought one to wear for Paris?" asked Jacob, when other details had been discussed.

"Whatever is most comfortable," replied Bradley. "Don't on any account wear new boots, for instance."

2.

The memory of that fortnight in Paris must remain for ever associated in Jacob's mind with the figure of Owen Bradley, a figure in a light tweed suit which was plainly not new, and a straw hat; a figure, nevertheless, neat, inconspicuous. Bradley seemed as much at home, at ease, in Paris as in the City of London. His French was fluent, and if his accent and gesture were unmistakably English, yet his Anglicisms lacked insularity. It was simply Bradley in Paris, not a touring Englishman. One accepted the fact at once. The customs officials, the cab-drivers, the hotel-keeper treated him not as a tourist, but as a resident—if asked, they might have guessed him a journalist or an artist. Jacob—his method marks the contrast—tried to "get the atmosphere," he tried to feel and appear French, and failed for sufficient reasons. Yet after five years in Paris, Jacob might have passed for a Frenchman. Bradley would have remained Bradley after fifty years of Paris life.

As a background to Bradley, remains the city of Paris as she appears in July, overrun with tourists; the American element most pronounced not by virtue of numbers so much as individuality. The travelling Englishman, his reputation notwithstanding, may pass unnoticed in France, he has not the self-assertiveness of the American abroad, and the Englishwoman is merely insignificant by the side of her American sister. But Paris, herself, retains her individuality despite the aliens who hang on her skirts, and she was more typically French in face of the invasion when Jacob first saw her, than she is now with her English shops and restaurants.

Jacob recalls chiefly a memory of splendid buildings seen from open places, or framed by the avenue of a prospect; of extraordinarily wide roads, and architecture that had a quality of originality which was new to him. He remembers, dimly, many museums visited in the company of an explanatory Bradley who appeared to know them with a comprehensive thoroughness; and he remembers more vividly the detail of pavement cafés, and the restaurants on the other

side of the river in which they generally dined. With Tony in Paris, Jacob would have spent much money, but Bradley was a strong restraining influence. "There's no need to throw your money away, in order to see Paris," he explained, and made good his statement. In other ways, too, Tony would have led Jacob in other paths, and even in present circumstances he was tempted to adventure. On one occasion he broached the subject to Bradley. "You do whatever you like," was the answer. "I don't mind, only don't ask me to join you." Jacob understood clearly enough that it would make no difference to Bradley, but he preferred, nevertheless, to retain his friend's esteem—and, perhaps, his own.

It was, on the whole, a brilliant and entirely satisfactory holiday. Yet when Jacob returned to the office on the Monday morning which marked the beginning of another fifty weeks' daily attention to the profession of architecture, he felt that he knew Bradley no better, no more intimately than before. He found himself reflecting that Bradley was an "awfully good sort" and "inferentially clever," but he found himself, also, beginning to assign the first boundaries of Bradley's limitations. He was not selfish, exactly, no, nor wrapped up in his own affairs—he never spoke of them unless interrogated—yet, what was it? he was so self-sufficient—one never got any further.

Jacob was not the true type of hero-worshipper; he sought a return. He had not realized this in his relations with Bradley, till after the Paris holiday.

Outwardly the friendship remained unaltered. But Bradley understood the difference, and was not sorry. He did not wish to become involved in any intimacy, it might interfere with his work.

3.

"This will interest you." Bradley handed Jacob a letter. There was no hint of enthusiasm or excitement in his voice, and as Jacob opened the letter and saw the printed address, "Municipal Offices, Cross Street, Birchester," his heart sank—"another failure," was the thought that leapt to his mind,

and he felt as if the failure were his own. He read on before speaking ; perhaps, another second premium had been awarded, —the second premium in this case was £100.

“ ‘ *Re the Municipal Offices Competition.*

“ ‘ DEAR SIR,

“ ‘ We beg to inform you that we have been advised by our assessors . . . (names given) . . . of the above competition that your designs have been approved as the best of those submitted to us, and are, therefore, awarded the first premium of £250.’ ”

“ ‘ By Gad !’ shouted Jacob, forgetful of other lunchers, “ ‘ I congratulate you. I *am* glad.” There was no questioning the genuineness of his enthusiasm. An old man at the next table, who had sat there every week-day for over forty years, scowled over his paper ; he disapproved as strongly of this indecent display of emotion as any member of the Carlton might have done in other circumstances ; the circumstance of the Carlton Reading-room, for instance.

“ ‘ All right, old chap, keep cool,” replied Bradley, continuing his lunch, “ ‘ you haven’t finished yet.”

“ ‘ Why—surely . . .’ began Jacob, and fell to the further perusal of the letter.

“ ‘ We must remind you, however, that, according to the terms of the competition agreed to by you, the first or any design is not necessarily accepted for the carrying out of the work, and as your name is unknown to us or to our assessors, as that of an architect in practice in London, we must ask you to furnish some evidence of your practical qualifications before publishing our award. . .’ ”

“ ‘ I say, is that usual ?’ asked Jacob.

“ ‘ No ! Birchester,” returned Bradley.

“ ‘ Miserable blighters !’ said Jacob, and continued :

“ ‘ It is advisable under the circumstances that you should meet the Advisory Committee as soon as possible, in order that they may arrive at a decision in the matter, and we should be glad if you could make it convenient to call at these offices on Thursday afternoon next at 3 o’clock.’ ”

The document was signed by three members of the Advisory Committee, notably by George Beane, Mayor; it was evidently the composition of some clerk who had served his articles in a lawyer's office.

"Thursday! That's to-morrow," commented Jacob. "You're going, of course."

"I have acceded to the command."

"And, good Lord, you've been sitting next to me since half-past nine, and never given me a hint."

"Don't say anything about it in the office, yet," said Bradley. "I have told Morley, of course, but I asked him to keep it quiet."

Jacob drew a long breath, and gazed through the person of the forty-year habitué opposite. "Good Lord," he said in an awestruck tone, "I say, what does it feel like, old man?"

"I haven't got the job yet," remarked Bradley quietly. "Have you finished? Come on!"

The habitué, whose scowls had been so ineffectual, was greatly relieved by their departure. To him, the success of the young seemed slightly profane.

Thursday was a day of penance to Jacob. He had besought Bradley to send him a telegram as to the success, or otherwise, of his interview with the committee. "They probably won't arrive at any decision till after I'm gone," said Bradley. "Well, wire me what you think will happen," urged Jacob, and Bradley had agreed.

Jacob was false to his trust on that Thursday. Mr. Morley was very much in the office, and "kept bobbin' in an' out," as old Eckholt said. Nevertheless Jacob found great difficulty in keeping his attention on the full-size details of mouldings he was making for the mortuary of the North-Western Hospital, and he was so full of Bradley's mission to Birchester that, at last, he could keep it to himself no longer. Under a pledge of secrecy he confided the facts to old Eckholt.

"He'll be lucky if he gets the job," said Eckholt. "They'll be very chary of giving it to a young man like Mr. Bradley."

"Oh! *surely* not," protested Jacob. "He's so jolly clever."

"Cleverness don't go for much," replied the old man. "They want a man who's had practical experience."

"Well, good Lord," said Jacob, impatiently, "however is anyone going to start in practice at that rate—it's like saying that no one must go into the water until they've learned to swim."

"It's a very big job to start with," said Eckholt.

"Whatever is the good of having competitions, then?" asked Jacob.

"They get all the best ideas," replied Eckholt, "and then get their own architect to carry them out."

"That's a bare-faced swindle," protested Jacob.

"There's a lot of humbug about 'em," said the old man.

"I soon found that out."

Jacob was aggravated, he could hardly control his temper. "Pessimistic old fool," he thought to himself; aloud he said:

"I'll lay you ten to one, Bradley gets the job."

"I never bet," replied old Eckholt.

Jacob shrugged his shoulders.

At a quarter to six a telegram arrived for him:

"All right. Bradley."

"He's got it," shouted Jacob, regardless of office propriety.

"How do you know?" asked old Eckholt, pausing, towel in hand—he always went down to wash precisely at a quarter to six.

Jacob thrust the telegram upon him.

"H'm!" said old Eckholt.

"Oh! sucks for you! you old fool," said Jacob, rudely, as soon as the old man had left the room.

4.

There is no precise material from which an exact account of that momentous interview between Bradley and the Committee can be reconstructed, but in Jacob's mind there remains an impression of the scene, partly created by Bradley's own report of the proceedings, partly romantic. It has, indeed, the essential qualities of the romantic. The hero, however

modern, has those heroic gifts of courage and craft which have dignified the adventurer from the days of Odysseus. There is, too, a one-eyed giant to be overcome, and though he appears under so unromantic a name as George Beane, he is not less powerful than the giants of Homer's imagining. His one eye is fixed upon a protégé whose designs have not been placed by the assessors; but what of that? Beane was Mayor of Birchester, and he believed that he had the Committee under his thumb. The protégé, too, was his son-in-law. "You leave it to me, my boy. I'll fix it," the giant may have said in private—nepotism is not unknown even in the municipal councils of our own days. The irony of the affair lies in the fact that George Beane was a building contractor. Also, he was an essential pillar of the Church; he had been a pillar of the Methodist Connexion before he turned Beane and Co. into a limited company.

The other protagonist had nothing to support him but his wit, backed by a comprehensive knowledge and a cool determination to win. The casual observer,—says the commercial traveller who sat opposite to the hero in the train,—would have detected none of the qualities necessary to fit this quiet man for the Homeric struggle. The casual observer took him at first for a brother bagman, with sample baskets in the van. He saw a fair-haired man with a trim moustache, and gold-rimmed spectacles that did not disguise the expression of keen, rather small blue eyes under brows that drew together and were separated by one strongly-marked vertical line, almost to be spoken of as a cleft. He was dressed well, in frock-coat, top-hat and patent-leather boots—what was good enough for Paris or London, was not good enough for a committee of tradesmen in a big provincial town. He carried his clothes well, he was neither too short nor too tall for them, and the clothes were neither soiled nor new—only his gloves were new. "A first-class round for some big house, old-established, might be connected with the firm," was the casual observer's summary; but he was biassed, he thought in his own groove. He may be forgiven for not perceiving the Homeric qualities.

Undoubtedly Bradley recognized the leader of the Committee from the outset. Beane was not in his mayoral robes, but he bore the stamp of the "boss"—a man of middle height, somewhat sparsely bearded, with a face which showed that his money had not been made in the shop, and square thick hands—Beane had started life as a stone-mason. "That's the man I'm up against," was Bradley's first impression, he told Jacob so much and also that he guessed Beane, at first sight, a builder.

The parley began with broad, simple questions from the assessors; gentlemen both, and willing enough to pass this aspirant to Birchester honours if he appeared competent. They were soon satisfied, the elder boasted, later, that even in the first brief exchange of civilities, he recognized a man who would make his mark.

Then the giant enters, already uneasy, but determined to expose the ignorance of this "cock-sure young jackanapes" from London. He is a practical man, this Mayor, and is not tired of so describing himself; he enters the field with a confidence begotten and bred during a long experience of the unpractical architect. Unhappily the subject is not matter for an epic, it is not a world-story, it is too technical. Beane was a progressive man, if he had been rigidly conservative in building matters, he might have made a better showing. He believed in modern appliances and modern methods—he led off with what was then a modern material in construction, he tried to pose Bradley on the uses of steel-construction.

Only a week before Beane had had a prolonged argument with his aspiring son-in-law which had had a bearing on this very subject—and had left the young man protesting that steel-construction was outside the architect's province, it was a matter for the engineer. Mayor Beane felt confident that he would disgrace the whipper-snapper from London in the face of the Committee, by a few questions on this practical point. The word "practical" must needs recur in speaking of Beane—it was his talisman.

So he fired his first question and being just one fraction disconcerted, reverted to a habit of past days and, in the question, spoke of rolled iron joists.

Bradley answered the question with fluency and added as a rider, "Of course there is no object in using a rolled iron joist when one can use steel, which is cheaper."

"Cheaper, eh?" sneered Beane, realizing his mistake, but setting a trap.

"Dearer weight for weight, certainly," said Bradley, "but cheaper to use, when you take the scantling into account."

The lay members of the Committee did not understand why, but they saw a point was scored against the Mayor.

It was but the first of many. Bullying had no effect. Bradley was calm, self-contained, competent. In practical matters it seemed that he had as much knowledge as his builder examiner, and when it came to theory he almost had the giant interested. It was only by an effort that Beane remembered his son-in-law, and all that his son-in-law would connote should Beane and Son win the contract for the Municipal Offices, in fair and open tender.

The senior assessor interposed at last with "Really, Mr. Mayor, I think we are quite satisfied."

If there had been one point bungled, the giant might have made material out of it, but he was beaten, he had not a leg to stand on. He had but one vote in a committee of eight, and he had been so confident of his own ability that he had hardly troubled to canvass his fellow-members. The son-in-law must necessarily be kept in the background for the moment, and he had said little to his colleagues beyond sneering at the possibility of adopting some young jackanapes from a London office, to carry out so big a job. Experience was what was needed, practical experience, and doubtless Beane, of Beane and Co., had had no fear of demonstrating before the Committee that any London jackanapes had not the essential recommendation. Major-General Sir Henry H. Barrow-Fayne, the only co-opted member of the Committee (the assessors had no vote), had heard the Mayor's anticipatory description of the first premium-winner, and Sir Henry spoke of the memorable encounter ever afterwards as the story of Jackanapes and the Beanstalk. Sir Henry's was a county family more famed for solidity than wit, and this *jeu de mots* had quite a vogue.

Beane's last stroke was unfortunate, and finally alienated the sympathy of his fellow-members.

"I suppose you'd like that premium paid in cash?—You'll be wanting the money to set up your own office, likely?"

Sir Henry and the two assessors winced visibly.

"I was going to suggest," replied Bradley, overlooking the insult, "that if the work is entrusted to me, the premium should be merged in the commission. The premium is merely by way of being a guarantee of good faith."

"No! No!!" It was a general murmur.

Beane was a practical man, with plenty of good, sound common-sense and he knew when he was beaten. Moreover, he was Mayor and he meant to lead, he had no intention of being in a minority of one.

"Well! I'm satisfied if you are," he said, addressing the Committee. To Bradley he was generous. "You know your business better than most architects I've come across, young man, and you may take it from me that I have had a practical experience."

"Yes. I inferred that," was Bradley's reply, and Sir Henry and the two assessors smiled.

Thus the confident expression of victory transmitted to Jacob was fully justified.

To Jacob, the great story of Jackanapes and the Beanstalk furnished an object-lesson in dream pictures. He remembered his conversation with Tony on the subject of Grover's dismissal by the ancestors of this very Birchester Committee, and he remembered how he had constructed an idealized version, in which he had, himself, figured as the competition winner, and had been unanimously approved by virtue of certain qualities of his—not specifically realized. Now the fact outdid his dream at every point, but instead of an idealized Jacob Stahl, there appeared the real person of Owen Bradley, whose opportunities had not been greater than Jacob's own. The lesson to be noted, however, was less the fact that Bradley had certain qualities which were leading him on to success in his own line, than the fact that for the best construction of dream-pictures, certain practical knowledge was required. "If one

had to write that story, now," reflected Jacob, "it would be necessary to know many things. I am so vague in my dreams. I must study detail. I must learn construction." He had a choice of two corollaries. One must study detail for the purpose of writing romances, or one must write only of that one knows from experience. Jacob inclined to the belief that there was a possible compromise which included both alternatives.

5.

The fact of Bradley's success could no longer be hidden from the office, and congratulation was the only overt expression of feeling; but no genius for observation, nor subtle comprehension of human nature, was needed to appreciate the underlying envy which everyone attempted to disguise in Bradley's presence. Even Mr. Morley himself, making small jokes to the effect that he would have to look to his laurels, was not free from jealousy; though as he had just been appointed assessor for a contemplated competition, he could not suggest,—as did many members of his staff, in private,—that "luck" was the ruling principle that governed the award in these matters.

Old Eckholt displayed the general opinion with more honesty than his colleagues.

"Well, you're one of the lucky ones, Mr. Bradley," he said. "I'm sure I congratulate you."

But Jacob, who was present, had a word to say; he was, as Bradley was quick enough to notice, the only one who attempted in no way to belittle the achievement.

"You're bound to be 'lucky,' Mr. Eckholt," said Jacob, "if you have genius and persistence—they're very rare qualities." This little speech had been prepared in anticipation, there had been no question that the opportunity to bring it in would be afforded.

"Oh! Mr. Bradley quite deserves it, I'm sure," was the old man's repartee, which still begged the main question, and left Jacob grumbling that that was not the point.

Bradley's leave-taking was not long deferred. George

Beane might have proved a stumbling-block to Bradley's acceptance by the Committee, but he was a most useful asset when it came to practical affairs. No unseemly delays were to throw discredit on Birchester's Corporation, when a building undertaking was in hand under the management of that expert, Mayor Beane. The site had to be cleared and the house-breakers set to work. "We will make the excavations and the foundations a separate contract if you like," suggested Bradley; "it will save a lot of time."

George Beane openly expressed his admiration for Birchester's new architect, and took all the credit for the appointment. "He knows his job," repeated the Mayor, "and that's rare enough among architects."

Inwardly George Beane was wondering how he would fare when it came to the question of tenders. He decided not to enter for the foundation contract. "Come Christmas, my term of office will be over, and I shall have a freer hand," he meditated. "Likely I'd better resign—temporarily—from the Council, when I get the job."

Meantime Bradley had his hands full. There were all the contract drawings to be got out for the quantity surveyor. He had begun working on them the night he returned from Birchester; his notes, tracings, and memory furnished sufficient material for pencil outlines; the prize drawings were still on exhibition at the Town Hall. There were, too, all the arrangements to be made for taking and furnishing an office and for engaging a staff. The office was to be in London. It had been suggested that he should move to Birchester, but Bradley had resolutely opposed that suggestion. No field smaller than London was big enough for Bradley. Mayor Beane had made no attempt to alter Bradley's determination in this respect; possibly Mr. Beane was of opinion that, should he win the contract, he would sooner that this well-informed, young architect should not appear too often on the site.

There proved to be no lack of money for the accomplishment of these things. The thought had occurred to Jacob, picturing the economies of the Stockwell lodging, that Bradley might be glad of a loan. There was Aunt Hester's little

legacy, practically untouched, if Bradley cared to use it. He might if he liked make a business transaction of it and pay interest.

But when Jacob, tentatively, inquired whether finance offered any difficulties, Bradley replied that he had £2,000—partly saved—for this emergency. "I knew I should want it, one day," said Bradley quietly. Jacob admired the principle, but he was disappointed in that he had not been enabled to offer even this little assistance. . . .

When Bradley had gone, the office seemed very deserted. For two weeks Jacob shared the room with old Eckholt, who was no companion, though he talked more now than when Bradley had been there. Jacob wondered whether the old man had not been slightly in awe of Bradley's superior knowledge. It had occurred to Jacob that his old office companion, Bennetts, might care to make application for the vacant place on Mr. Morley's staff, and he wrote a friendly letter making the suggestion. But Bennetts had been admitted into some kind of partnership with Mr. Baker, who had been suffering from diabetes and less able to look after his outdoor work than he had been ; so Bennetts thanked Jacob for his thought, but refused the offer.

Jacob had wondered whether he might not be offered a place in Bradley's new office, but no such offer was made. "I suppose I am not good enough," he thought bitterly, remembering Bradley's advice to drop architecture in favour of literature, should a reasonable opportunity present itself. The bitterness was more or less justifiable. Bradley was marching on to success ; he wanted no avoidable handicaps and he wanted every second of his time ; he had none to spare for friendship just then, and Jacob, guessing this, and anxious to avoid putting himself in a false position, did not press his society on his translated friend. Bradley was still admirable, his qualities were splendid, but he was no longer a hero. Jacob had now definitely assigned the boundaries of Bradley's limitations.

After a fortnight a new assistant came to fill the vacant stool. He was a middle-aged man with a pointed beard that was

streaked with white. He had once been in practice for himself and was on the descending path, a fact which he denied in secret, and attempted to hide in public by an assumption of superiority. He was rather deaf and spoke little, but he let it be understood that he had only accepted the berth temporarily, to oblige Mr. Morley. No companion, this, for Jacob.

There remained Leigh-Weston and his two companions in the next room, and Jacob contracted the habit of spending some of his time with them when Mr. Morley was safely out of the way. He even went home with Leigh-Weston on one or two occasions and invited him, in turn, to Great Ormond Street, but the acquaintance did not ripen. . . .

Time went by and Jacob, wrapped in his books—he was a steady and capable reader by this time—almost forgot the attractions of human companionship out of office hours. In the office he had made steady progress. He was a trusted draughtsman now, his tracing days were quite done with, and often he forgot that he was not in some sense a success—by contrast he was a success in the office, there were three or four new assistants now; juniors to him. At the end of five years with Mr. Morley he was earning £2 10s. a week. With his private income he was comparatively rich, quite rich enough to indulge his taste in books. He had over four hundred now, and wanted a new bookcase.

One day, about six months after the great competition, Jacob met Bradley in the street.

“Hallo!” said Bradley, “why have you never been to see me?”

“Thought you were too busy,” replied Jacob.

“You weren’t far out,” said Bradley, “I have been pressed. I’ve got two more jobs, besides the Birchester building, in hand.”

“Good man!” answered Jacob.

“But I shall be freer in a month or two,” went on Bradley.

“We must have an evening together.”

“Thanks! I should like it immensely.”

“Still at the same address?”

“Oh yes! I’m not thinking of moving.”

Bradley was evidently in a hurry, but Jacob had one more question to ask. "I say," he said, "did that old blighter, the Mayor, get the Birchester contract?"

Bradley laughed. "No! Beane's tender was the lowest, but one, and he used all his influence to get it accepted, but I didn't want him as contractor, I don't think he was straight."

"So you hoofed him?"

Bradley nodded.

It was a fitting sequel to the story of Jackanapes.

BOOK V

LOLA

CHAPTER XXIV

AN INTRODUCTION AND AN ENGAGEMENT

1.

"It's the people that fetch me. My dear Lola, do look at that woman coming in! All over bits. Where did she collect them?"

"You always meet some of those appalling people at a reception of this sort."

"I haven't the very dimmest notion what the reception's for."

"Wild Birds' Protection Society, isn't it?"

"I thought it must be something wild. Here are some of the very wildest birds coming in now. They're all moulting, or moulted, not a feather on them; no wonder they want protecting. Where *do* they come from?"

"Oh! the women are simply appalling."

"They amuse me. I must imitate that old bird over there, when I get home. I'm dying to do it now."

"Don't! I shall laugh, and we shall be turned out in disgrace. One is not supposed to be amused. It's all very serious."

"The men are not nearly so interesting. They haven't got that scallywaggy look the women have."

"No! Some of them look quite decent."

"I'm rather sorry for that lost-looking little bird, over there in the corner."

"Trying to appear absorbed in the water-colours?"

"Yes! He is quite lost. When he came in, he didn't know the Duchess was receiving, and he cut her dead. Never even looked at her! He walked on, sweetly innocent that the Duchess was ready to shake hands with him and that he had given her the very coldest of shoulders."

"How funny! He looks rather nice."

"Is he English, do you think? His hair's so dark."

"Irish, I should say. His eyes are blue—rather a nice blue. I noticed them when he passed just now."

"He looks as if he'd been ill. Do you notice how he leans on his stick?"

"Isn't he a little lame? What would you guess he is?"

"Oh! Literary, my dear."

"M—yes, perhaps! He doesn't look hard up."

"Or an artist—possibly."

"He looks too much like a gentleman."

"That's nothing; he might be an Academician."

"Too young."

"I think you're right about his being lame. There's something not quite right about his legs—I can't make out what it is. Doesn't it strike you that they are just about one size too small for him? He's quite a well-developed man above the waist."

"Yes! I like the lameness. It gives him a *distingué* look."

"He's trying to work up an interest in the pictures this side now. He certainly looks very lost, lorn and lonely, my dear. What a pity we can't take pity on him and make him get us some tea."

As the subject of discussion passed the two women, the less vivacious, addressed by her companion as Lola, looked up at him under her eyelashes. There was the suspicion of a smile in the look, a smile of encouragement; but the eyelashes—they were quite distinctly a feature—were dropped again almost immediately.

The man hesitated—it was a barely perceptible hesitation—and passed on.

"A very shy bird, my dear."

"My dear Sally, he could hardly come up and speak to us."

"Why not? We've all shaken hands with the Duchess. Isn't that sufficient introduction?"

"You said he didn't shake hands with her."

"I forgot that. Oh! no, it wouldn't do at all. I shouldn't dream of knowing him under the circumstances."

"I don't know. It's rather distinguished to cut a Duchess."

"My dear, don't you feel as if you could peck a little seed?"

"I suppose we shall have to go and forage for ourselves."

"It's a pity our nice man was so shy."

The tea-room was overcrowded. The visitors evidently found tea more interesting than the exhibitions of the Society of Painters in Water-Colour, whose premises were lent for the purposes of the reception. The two women peeped in, but decided that the "birds were too wild."

In a room beyond, which they investigated with a faint hope of finding further provision for tea, they saw the nice man, almost alone, still studying art.

"Let's sit down and look bored to the world," suggested the woman addressed as Sally. "He must be able to see we're starving."

Her companion smiled. "I could do anything for the sake of tea," she said.

The student of water-colours noticed their entrance. "I wish I had the pluck to speak to them," he was reflecting, "but they would probably be offended. I don't know, though, why they should be. I'm such a hopeless idiot in these things. I've no self-confidence to carry the thing off." He turned round and looked in the direction of the two women. They were sitting down, but they were not looking at him. They appeared so entirely unconscious of his presence in the room, that he allowed his glance to rest upon them for a moment. One of them was dark and rotund—"not pretty," decided the man, "but she looks jolly—amusing, rather a good sort, I should think. The other . . ." He could not decide about the other. She was very slight, her eyes were of rather a deep blue, she had brown hair two or three shades lighter than her eyebrows and eyelashes, which were not quite

black. She wore her hair dressed low in the neck. This was not the prevailing fashion and it gave her a look of intellectuality, the look of a woman who "did something." She had on a loose dress of some lavender-grey material, a large black hat and a black feather boa with a hint of bronze-green in it.

"Interesting," was the word that came first. "She might be literary, or artistic; or an actress," was the further verdict. "Something a little French about her—perhaps it's the way she uses her hands when she talks." The word "interesting" came back; it seemed conclusive.

"Oh! he's very shy, my dear," said the "jolly-looking" woman. "He'll never dare, unless we give him most marked encouragement."

"Wait till he comes past," suggested she who had been labelled "interesting."

"My dear Lola, I had no idea you were so daring."

"I'm not. I'm dying for tea, and we can't go till we've heard some of the speeches."

Sally yawned ostentatiously. "Speeches?" she asked.

"Oh! we must. He's coming. Back me up. . . ." Then in a louder voice, "The arrangements are perfectly disgraceful. It's absolutely hopeless for two women to get tea; the way those people crowd and push is perfectly appalling."

The man paused, quite perceptibly this time. He was carrying his hat but he somehow conveyed the idea that he would have liked to raise it; his bow had an air of incompleteness, as of one unaccustomed to bowing.

"I—I don't know whether I could be of any use," he said, with some hesitation. "I might be able to get some tea for you—perhaps."

"Oh! that's very kind of you," said the jolly-looking woman rather coldly. "I'm afraid you won't find it an easy matter."

The other woman smiled. "We're just dying for tea," she said.

The man hurried away, evidently intent on the business of tea-getting. At first sight it seemed a hopeless task. The buffet was besieged, and the tables were being served by

waitresses who never stand by a man on such occasions. Boldly to attack the buffet seemed almost an impossibility to the lone man of this occasion. He foresaw the necessity for something approaching a physical struggle. To bribe a waitress was, also, probably the wrong thing to do, he thought; moreover, it was doubtful whether tea was served in that other room; to secure a table in this one was impossible. He hesitated, inclined to make a dash for freedom and seek the safety of Piccadilly. Why had he been such a fool as to offer to do a thing that he was obviously incompetent to do? He took three steps towards the outer room and safety, and was met by Fate in the person of a leisurely waiter, returning from his duties of attention to the party of the Duchess—served with decency, separated from the crowd.

"I want tea for two," said the nice man. "For two ladies. They are in the room through there." He indicated the exact position.

The waiter paused on the verge of an excuse, but relented when he found the proffered tip was a half-crown. The aristocracy always commanded his respect, and the imperious demand and the willingness to pay for conveniences, evidently placed this man above the heterogeneous crowd of wild-bird lovers clamouring at the buffet.

"I will wait for you," said the nice man, thereby solving a difficult problem for himself—to return with a mere promise of tea and await the oncoming of the waiter involved a period of awkwardness, and if the waiter proved faithless, what then? While he waited, he looked into the small gallery through the hinge of the door and noted that the two women were now the only occupants of the room. When the tea appeared—a special tea second only to that of the Duchess—he indicated the position of the ladies to the waiter, and walked back into the larger gallery. He was debating a question of tact. He had solved the first problem by ordering tea for two only. He had not forced himself upon them. He must avoid that. He felt that he could not now wander back into the small gallery. He was conscious of a wish to make the further acquaintance of that person he had labelled as interesting,

but even more of a wish to make his way out into the safety of Piccadilly. He compromised by deciding to make no further advances. It was for the two women to acknowledge his services, if they desired his further acquaintance. Yet here was the promise of an adventure. He had not adventured for so long—furthermore, this adventure was of an entirely new kind.

"He's not coming back," said Sally, as the two enjoyed their tea in the luxury of the quiet little gallery. "He evidently does not wish to make our acquaintance."

"Rather nice of him, though, wasn't it?" replied Lola.

"Nice, but not flattering."

"I don't know. I think it is rather flattering. If we meet him we must thank him."

"Of course."

Sally seemed content with tea; Lola looked up more than once in the direction of the door which led to the buffet, and presently she ventured the remark that she thought the nice man was interesting.

Fate would not leave the nice man alone on this afternoon, and ordained that he should, by the purest accident, find himself seated immediately behind the two women during the progress of the speeches. In an interval, she who had attracted his chief attention turned and saw him. He bowed slightly and experimented with a society smile.

"So very good of you," said the interesting woman, turning round. "We enjoyed our tea immensely. We are very grateful."

The plump woman turned, also, and smiled her acquiescence in these statements.

"Such a beastly crush, wasn't it?" replied the nice man. "I was lucky enough to commandeer a waiter. There was only one."

Both the speeches! A long thin man with a sandy beard was on his legs, and looked good for an hour, and the new acquaintanceship was beginning so auspiciously. He had done the right thing for once and had replied to her thanks with a passable commonplace. "Commandeer" was rather a good word to have used.

The tall speaker was tedious. The woman in front did not turn her head again; nevertheless the nice man found her more and more interesting. He was lost in a day-dream when the sound of applause waked him to the fact that the speech was over at last. The two women in front had evidently had enough; they were preparing to go. What was he to do? It was not Fate that helped him this time. The two women went out quickly, without turning round—another speaker was on his feet—but the feather boa which the interesting woman had been wearing was left hanging, most conspicuously, over the back of her chair.

The design was obvious enough, but not to the nice man, who attributed the left property to luck. Regardless of the opening sentences from the platform, he collected the boa and made for the exit. He met his two acquaintances half-way down the stairs—they were returning in search of the lost boa.

"You are playing the part of Providence to us, this afternoon," was the greeting he received.

"Really? I thought Providence was looking after me," he said, and then wondered if he had been too bold. The plump woman was looking at him with coldly inquiring eyes; she appeared to be summing him up, but her companion evidently found no cause for offence, for she went on:

"It's abominable the way they manage these affairs, isn't it? I do think they might take a little more trouble to do the thing decently."

"Yes, it was very badly managed," he said, and found himself quite naturally walking with the two women towards the entrance.

The woman with the boa turned to her friend as they arrived on the pavement of Piccadilly. "You're coming home with me, Sally?" she asked, and receiving a reply in the affirmative, she turned to the nice man and murmured something about a hansom. He didn't catch her actual words, but she seemed to address him familiarly, as a friend, he thought. Hansoms were abundant and he stood by while the two women got in.

"Will you tell him to drive to Upper Woburn Place,—

number 27A ?" she said, and then added : " Perhaps we may meet again. So many thanks."

The nice man stood with lifted hat as they drove off. He had her address, and it seemed to him that she had intended something more than a polite expression when she had said, " We may meet again." There had been something in her tone, in her look. . . .

2.

Jacob's leisure was restricted. During the week the call of the office held him during the greater part of the day. But the day following the reception was a Sunday ; he was free to follow up his " adventure," as he thought of it,—if he dared. The unfortunate part of it was that he did not know the interesting woman's name. He couldn't call.

That Sunday morning found him perturbed. He could not settle down to read. For the past two years and a half, he had been growing into a habit of loneliness and nothing had interfered to disturb him. It is true that in omnibuses and trains he had frequently looked with passing interest at women, and wondered whether some day he might not meet an affinity. At twenty-seven he still believed firmly in the theory of an affinity and had decided for many reasons that his first love had not filled the description. Wherefore he had regarded many pretty women with earnest attention—often to their embarrassment—and wondered whether this one or that one was destined to play an important part in his life. But his dreams remained dreams, he merely wondered and left the initiative to Fate, or the lady favoured at the moment with his attention, and neither had so far taken up the challenge. There had been possible acquaintances, any number of them, but they had all belonged to another class, waitresses, shop-girls, grisettes. With these Jacob had made one or two tentative experiments. He had advanced to the confidence necessary to hold conversation with the Dulcies and Mauds of City restaurants, and there had been occasional excitements in the way of mild flirtations with previously unknown young women in the Parks, on Saturday or Sunday

afternoons. That was all. The experiments had gone no further. Always some detail, usually the Cockney accent, stood between him and this feminine flotsam. The old experience with the confectioner's young lady at Pelsworthy was repeated in different forms. If the teeth of these chance acquaintances were presentable, some other defect was in evidence, hair, complexion, figure or an ensemble of untidiness. Greatest bar of all was their intellectual standard. Jacob looked for someone who could share his thoughts on one's relation to the nebula—none of these had heard of the nebula. When it was explained to them, in patiently elaborate language, they probably said, "Oh! Fency! 'ave you ever been to the fireworks at the Crystal Pellis?" This was not companionship; and after two years' rigid celibacy, his sexual passions no longer urged him.

On this Sunday morning he was perturbed by the cor-
plation of his loneliness; it had not presented itself to him so strongly before. He was conscious of a desire for the sympathy which no man can give. In his thought of the interesting woman he had seen at the reception, she figured as an audience. "If I could but meet the right woman," he reflected, "I might do something even now. I shall never work without some inspiration." In visions, the woman in grey seemed to be of the type which would furnish inspiration and sympathy, a charming and satisfactory audience. She looked clever. The friendship might be ideal, but it was difficult to see how it was to be brought about. In any case there could be no harm in a visit of inspection. There was no law, ceremonial or otherwise, which prohibited a walk down Upper Woburn Place. One might be returning from St. Pancras Church, for instance.

Jacob dressed himself for ceremony, and took a prayer-book which he unearthed from a dusty retreat behind books more frequently referred to.

He arrived at St. Pancras Church by devious ways, Judd Street and the Euston Road, and beguiled himself until the worshippers were actually leaving the building. In these pretences he was nothing if not thorough.

Number 27A, Upper Woburn Place, displayed an "apartment card" in the fanlight; there was nothing to differentiate it from its neighbours. No sign of life was visible. Jacob passed hurriedly, but he slowed down as he came into Tavistock Square and took counsel with himself. Should he return? Could he summon up courage to loiter in the vicinity? He decided that he could not, or, at least, that it was not the right thing to do.

Lost in speculation, head down, he nearly collided with someone going in the opposite direction. He apologized before he recognized that Fate had continued the work so well begun. After all, the coincidence was not remarkable, and, as it was, he had nearly missed seeing her.

She on her side was no less surprised. She had not seen him coming. "How extraordinary!" was her salutation.

Jacob stood, his top-hat still in his hand, abashed, blushing, speechless. It was so unexpected, he was so unprepared. The "How extraordinary" seemed an echo of the "Quelle bêtise" of long years ago. How little he had changed in the interval!

"I—I was coming back from St. Pancras Church," he stammered.

"I've been to St. Albans," replied the woman—she was in black this morning—"it's so much more interesting. St. Pancras is so triste, don't you think?"

Here was, indeed, a topic—it was the meeting seem the most ordinary thing possible, explanations were unnecessary, the acquaintanceship was taken for granted—but what an unfortunate topic! He knew nothing of London services; he had never been inside St. Pancras Church. He prayed for the courage to give a complete explanation. Instead he digressed.

"Yes! I think all Church services are—are triste"—it was a good word—"as a matter of fact I never go to church."

She raised her eyebrows with a look of appreciative interest. "This morning is a grand exception?" she asked.

"To be quite honest, I didn't go in." He smiled.

"And the prayer-book?" she said, indicating his manual.

"A disguise," replied Jacob. This woman was drawing him out already.

She laughed. "I managed to recognize you, nevertheless," she said, and then: "Do you live near here?"

"Quite near. Great Ormond Street. It has its advantages. So little traffic, you know."

They were forming a mild obstruction to the south-bound stream of ex-worshippers from St. Pancras. Jacob replaced his hat and, quite naturally, they began to walk back together towards Upper Woburn Place.

"Yes, I find this rather noisy sometimes," she said in answer to his last remark, "but there are no 'buses, thank goodness."

The conversation had become uninteresting, but they kept to the topic till they reached number 27A.

"This is your house, isn't it?" asked Jacob.

"Yes."

In the pause that followed, both were struggling with the same problem, and both were hesitant to take the initiative. The quicker brain spoke first, regardless of the convention of masculine priority in these affairs.

"You must think me a terribly unconventional person," she said, hurriedly, "but I think there is so much unnecessary ceremony in these things, don't you?" She smiled again.

"Oh! Rather!" replied Jacob. "But, really, it hadn't occurred to me that there was any particular unconventionality. Of course, we haven't been introduced, but that's awful rot, really, isn't it? I mean, if we were so very keen on finding a mutual acquaintance, it's quite likely we might discover one."

"Yes. Quite! It's very silly."

"May I introduce myself? My name is Stahl."

"Stahl?" repeated the woman.

"Yes, it sounds beastly German, doesn't it? But I have never been in Germany. My mother was Irish."

"I adore Irish people," she murmured. "My name is Wilmot—Mrs. Wilmot."

"Wilmot," repeated Jacob, sotto voce.

"I have some friends coming in to tea this afternoon," she went on, "if you would care to come."

"Thanks. Yes, I should like to very much."

"*À bientôt*, then," nodded Mrs. Wilmot, and let herself into Number 27A with a latchkey.

"Mrs. Wilmot," repeated Jacob to himself. "She's married, then." He wondered if he had made a good impression.

3.

A moderately clean maid opened the door to Jacob, and introduced him suddenly into the clatter of voices and crockery, with the loud announcement, "Mr. Stoll." His hostess disengaged herself from a group, and came forward to greet him. She gave him the impression, at once, that he was a favoured visitor, to be received with enthusiasm. She helped to disembarrass him of hat, stick, and gloves, and brought him over to a seat near her at the tea-table. So far as he was in a condition to observe anything, he observed that she was completely at home, self-possessed; also—he had not defined it before—that she had something of the grand air. She introduced him to someone sitting next to him, a fatigued-looking woman with pale eyes, loose fair hair, and an unusually Grecian nose. There were ten or twelve people in the room, and Jacob was slightly distracted by their conversation. There was an untidy, fat, clever-looking man of about fifty, deep in the recesses of an armchair, who seemed to be attracting general interest. Jacob would have liked to hear what the man had to say, but the woman to whom he had been introduced, insisted on talking. He found she was criticizing the Academy of the year. Jacob had not been to the Academy, but he had bought the illustrated book which gives one a fair idea of the most noteworthy pictures, and he tried to appear intelligent by showing that he was acquainted with the compositions she criticized; the question of colour, he avoided—he thought, dexterously. By degrees they slipped from pictures to books.

"What are you two so interested in?" broke in the voice of Mrs. Wilmot.

"We are discussing 'The Green Carnation,'" said the fair woman.

"Reincarnation, eh?" put in a small, clean-shaven man, who was standing on the hearthrug, "my dear lady, why bother your head about the unprovable?"

Jacob would have corrected the mistake, but the fair woman accepted the challenge thrown out.

"Because it is only the unsolvable that attracts me. I love the mystery of it."

"Men find all the attraction of that kind they need in the study of your sex," said the man on the hearthrug. "Every woman is insoluble."

"Cairns is a cynic," put in the man from the armchair. "He regards woman as a badly stated proposition."

"No, as an excellently stated proposition which it is entirely beyond my capacity to understand," replied Cairns.

"But why a proposition?" asked Mrs. Wilmot.

"Because she is neither an axiom nor a postulate," said Cairns; "she is certainly not self-evident, and I defy any man to take her for granted."

Jacob was relieved to be excused from further conversation with the fair woman, whose name he found to be Miss Fermor; he wanted to listen to the man on the hearthrug. Cairns' face interested him, it was keen, vigorous, yet deeply lined round mouth and eyes. "A man of experience who looked rather more than his age, perhaps," thought Jacob, noting the grey in Cairns' thick hair; a barrister or a diplomatist, was his guess at Cairns' profession.

"But aren't you ever interested in theories of a future existence?" persisted Miss Fermor.

"No!" replied Cairns tersely.

"But it makes such a difference," explained Miss Fermor.

"Pooh! Don't believe it," said Cairns. "The ideal of a future state makes no difference whatever in the life of the average man or woman. No one really believes in it—at least, they never act as if they do."

"There may be heaven, there must be hell," ventured Jacob, taking his first hand in the conversation.

“ ‘Meanwhile there is our life here,’ ” said Cairns, completing the quotation. “ And that’s the point of the whole thing.”

“ The amusing thing about this conversation,” said Jacob, gathering courage, “ is that it began with a misunderstanding. When you asked what we were talking about, we said ‘ The Green Carnation,’ which you translated into metempsychosis.” He was rather proud of the last word.

Mrs. Wilmot laughed, as did, also, the fat man in the arm-chair. Jacob felt that he had scored a distinct point, but Cairns refused to be diverted.

“ It is such a waste of time,” he went on, “ perplexing and tormenting ourselves with guesses as to a thing about which there is not a single scrap of evidence, and which has no bearing on our present actions.”

“ You, a positivist, Cairns ? ” asked the fat man.

“ No ! I’m nothing—except a single-taxer, that’s my religion,” answered Cairns.

It occurred to Jacob that this was another aspect of the Eric attitude. Eric had certain interests, Cairns had others, that was all, though Jacob had not the least idea what a “ single-taxer ” might be. He learnt the true inwardness of that proposition before long, however. Cairns had the stage, now, and he talked well. The conversation narrowed down. Cairns was in the position of a lecturer ; subject, however, to interruptions, many of them beside the point. Jacob, absorbedly listening, found himself being addressed by Mrs. Wilmot.

“ Such a clever man, Mr. Cairns, isn’t he ? ” she was saying.

“ He is a splendid speaker——”

“ Is he a—Socialist ? ” asked Jacob.

“ Oh ! yes.”

“ Are you ? ”

“ I think everyone *must* be who sees the wretchedness of people’s lives in London, don’t you ? ”

“ I don’t know that I’d thought of it in that way,” said Jacob, who had never thought about it at all.

Everyone was smoking, including Mrs. Wilmot, Miss Fermor,

and an elderly young woman with a pince-nez and prominent teeth, who occasionally shot unreasonable questions at Cairns.

"Do you believe in land-nationalization?" asked Mrs. Wilmot. She and Jacob were a little out of the main stream of argument, and it was possible to talk. The sofa on which they were sitting had been drawn back across the corner of the room under the window, they were secluded in an eddy.

"I have never really considered the idea," replied Jacob. He had read Herbert Spencer, but had overlooked the practical deductions of Henry George.

"I don't think *I* am quite convinced," murmured Mrs. Wilmot, smiling sympathetically. Her smile made Jacob feel pleased with himself in some incomprehensible manner. It was a smile that flattered him and seemed to admit him into confidence, a smile at once admiring and intimate.

"But Mr. Cairns is so keen on it," she continued, "that one can hardly help believing him."

"Is he a barrister?" asked Jacob.

"No! He's on the Stock Exchange."

"Is it rude of me to ask these questions? I am so interested."

"Oh! no!" A simple reply, but the tone and look conveyed that nothing Jacob could do would be amiss. There was a clear implication of, "I'm only too eager to answer *any* questions of *yours*." He wondered; the thing was utterly incomprehensible, but it was very sweet. They seemed to be sharing a secret, the rest of the company were outsiders.

"And the man in the armchair?" he continued.

"That's Guy Latham," was the reply. Guy Latham seemed a name one ought to know.

Jacob racked his brain. "Oh!" he ejaculated, and paused, as one on the verge of remembrance.

"Henry Latham's elder brother, you know," prompted Mrs. Wilmot, mentioning the name of a popular stage favourite. "Guy acts, too, but he writes. He's very clever, but he has never made a big success."

"Plays?" asked Jacob.

"Chiefly. He adapts for his brother, very often. But he wrote a book called 'Little Utopia.' I dare say you've never come across it."

"O—oh!" A prolonged and rising oh! significant of sudden revelation. "Yes! I have read it. I thought it awfully good. But I have been labouring under the delusion that it was *Henry Latham* who wrote it. Very stupid of me."

Their attention was diverted for the moment by sudden vehemence on the part of Cairns.

"My dear lady," he was saying to the rabbit-faced woman in eye-glasses, "this is one of those things that you can never see by halves. It's like one of those pictures. Here is a wood—puzzle, find the cat. You turn it upside down, hold it every way, and you see nothing but a drawing of a wood. Then quite suddenly you see the cat, and for the life of you you can't look at that puzzle afterwards without seeing the cat first. In this question of private ownership, you've only got to see the cat once, and you'll never change your opinion afterwards. The cat's there, all right, all the time, but you've become so used to the idea of only seeing a wood that you can't see the cat even when it's pointed out to you."

If Mrs. Wilmot was bored, she did not show it. "He's very convincing, isn't he?" she said to Jacob, and made him feel that it was solely for his benefit that Cairns was lecturing.

"I must read this man, what's his name? Henry George," replied Jacob. "I am ashamed to say I never heard of him before."

"Ask Mrs. Wilmot!" interrupted Cairns, laughing.

Jacob had not heard the point referred to his hostess, but she apparently had been quite equal to the task of attending to two things at once. She seemed to take the reference seriously.

"Yes, I see Mr. Cairns' point of view. I think I've seen the cat—but I often wonder if I shouldn't be conveniently blind to its existence if I had property of my own."

"Ha! ha! Bravo! bravo!" laughed Cairns, "that's just the point. The moment a question of this sort touches our own pocket we become 'conveniently blind.' In other

words, we *refuse* to acknowledge the intrinsic justice of any proposition which would involve our own loss. And women are so intensely practical that they can never see a theory on broad lines. They want an application of it at once to some case in their own experience. If you talk to them about the land question, they think of brother Tom, who has got a freehold in Kent, and say: 'But I don't see why Tom should give up his land for the sake of a principle.' Good God! It's this very devotion to private interests which is responsible for all the misery."

Jacob found it all intensely interesting. It was an entirely new atmosphere for him. He stayed as long as he could, but the rabbit-faced woman was evidently waiting for him to go, and when at last all with this exception had taken their departures, he became suddenly alive to the fact that he might have overstayed his welcome. He made his apologies, and explained his protracted visit by the intensity of his interest.

Mrs. Wilmot accompanied him into the hall. "We must try and arrange a quieter visit," she said; "I generally have a good many people on Sundays."

"Oh! I should like that, immensely," said Jacob eagerly.

She smiled at him, that same half-intimate, half-admiring smile. "Would you care to come to tea on Thursday?" she said, "there will be only Deb here, then."

He understood "Deb" to be the rabbit-faced woman. "Thursday?" He hesitated, remembering office obligations.

"I'm not quite sure whether I shall be able to get away."

"Perhaps some other day, then." The tone indicated a sudden fall of temperature, it conveyed the suggestion of "Don't come if you would sooner not."

"You see," explained Jacob, anxious to put things clearly, "it is a question of getting away from the office."

"Shall we leave it open, then?" asked Mrs. Wilmot, as she shook hands. "It won't make any difference, you know, if you find you *can* come at the last moment."

Arrived in the unfriendly atmosphere of Upper Woburn Place, Jacob called himself a fool. He had been rude, distinctly rude. Bother the office! Good Lord! what did the

office matter ? Of course he could get away for one afternoon. If Morley were in, it meant asking him, that was all. But when the invitation had been given, his mind had been looking at it, as at a secret adventure. He had wondered whether Mr. Morley would be away, so that an escape would be possible. "I don't believe I shall ever grow up," reflected Jacob, on his way towards Holborn. He was surprised to find that it was nearly eight o'clock. . . .

Despite the chill at parting, he was greatly elated, excited with his afternoon's experience. These were the kind of people he ought to know if he ever meant to set up in private practice. Cairns had shaken hands when he said good-bye, and said : "We shall have to convert you." Jacob was quite willing to be converted to nationalization ; indeed, he was more than half converted already.

When he had eaten his modest dinner at the Italian restaurant in Holborn he always favoured on Sunday evening, he found himself looking at the world with a new interest. He had something to live for, something recognizably attractive. The dull routine of office would be enlivened for him during the next few days by the knowledge that he would see Mrs. Wilmot again on Thursday. She was the sun round which moved such informing satellites as Cairns and Guy Latham. Jacob was ever ready to swing into a new orbit. Mrs. Wilmot was a fascinating woman, he had never met anyone like her before, and she seemed, for some utterly unaccountable reason, to have taken a fancy to him. It was an amazing circumstance, utterly without precedent—at least— No ! there had been that equally incomprehensible case of Madeline Felmersdale. But she was a girl, a child, shut up in the country. This was a mature woman—Jacob guessed her at thirty—and, by the way, married. It occurred to him that there had been no sign of a husband. Yet Jacob didn't think she looked like a widow ; possibly because he associated the idea of widows with caps and weeds—even young widows. The husband might be away, or she might be separated from him. Bother the husband ! On reflection, Jacob didn't believe there could be a husband. He put aside

the thought of obstacles, and returned to the original theme of his reflections. Was it possible, conceivable, that for some extraordinary and utterly unaccountable reason, Mrs. Wilmot had taken a fancy to *him*, the unimportant, unattractive Jacob Stahl? He denied the possibility, but looked forward eagerly to Thursday. Life was worth living again.

4.

"Deb" was one of those kind-hearted, hero-worshipping, well-meaning, blind people who never fail to put in an appearance when they are least wanted. It is a rule of their kind to accept all invitations of the reigning hero, in order that they may carry on the ceremonial of worship, spoken or tacit; wherefore the inference that Deb was incapacitated on the occasion of the Thursday tea-party at 27A, should certainly have occasioned Mrs. Wilmot a certain amount of uneasiness. Nevertheless, after a polite wait of ten minutes or so, the hostess displayed no overwhelming anxiety on behalf of a non-appearing Deb, a callousness which calls for remark, since Mrs. Wilmot was well acquainted, not only with the habits of the type, but with the invariable rule of this particular representative; and she must have known that an invited Deb could only be deterred from putting in an appearance by some intervention amounting to "an act of God"—as the insurance policies say.

Jacob, unlearned in the habits of type or representative, sat in momentary anticipation of an intruding personality in a pince-nez. She formed the staple of his conversation during the ordained wait of ten minutes or so. He invented plausible excuses for her, beginning his sentences with "perhaps" or, to vary the monotony, with an occasional "possibly." Even after the introduction of tea, his mind appeared to be so obsessed with the absent visitor that he reverted to her at every pause. He seemed to have conceived an overwhelming desire to meet Deb once again.

Curiously, this evidence of nervousness on his part found a reflection in the conversation of Mrs. Wilmot, who might

have been judged superior to such a weakness. She did not display the same apprehension as to possible fates which might have befallen her friend, but her fluency on subjects of similar unimportance was equally marked. She was, however, the first to recover. The stage was marked by the elimination of Deb.

"She won't come, now," said Mrs. Wilmot, with an air of finality; "she said definitely that if she were not here by a quarter to five, I was not to expect her."

The faulty psychology escaped Jacob, who could not know that Deb was never definite unless it were in her acceptance of Mrs. Wilmot's invitations. Had there been the least possibility of Deb's acceptance, she would have scrambled in at the last moment—seven o'clock would have found Mrs. Wilmot still expectant on ordinary occasions.

However, for the purpose of conversation Deb was eliminated. Mrs. Wilmot chose the new subject. Her theme was books—not the "books, books, books" of the Eric *ménage*, but a light hovering over current fiction, varied by a flickering swoop at the best-known classics.

Jacob found himself fully competent to take a hand in this game. He, too, hovered and swooped, and the number of books they both knew far exceeded the number of those known exclusively to one or the other. In the latter class they exchanged notes, and made memoranda of certain works which the other "simply must read."

This was very entertaining, but it led nowhere. Jacob could not say exactly what brought about the introduction of the nebula, but it was soon in the forefront of the conversation, and Jacob was expounding at length—for the first time in his life—his conception of the meaning of the universe, more particularly in its application to the evolution of Mrs. Wilmot and Jacob Stahl. From the purely physical aspect of development he soon turned to more ethical speculations, his *cui bono?* anticipating the very spirit of philosopher Caddles' "What's it all for?"

Mrs. Wilmot was an ideal listener. Her attention never flagged for an instant, and she was always ready to prompt

him with a relevant question when he hesitated, self-consciously, on the verge of apology for being a bore. The apology was always anticipated. In face of his listener's absorption, it was impossible for Jacob to conceive for a single instant that he could be a bore.

Not since Aunt Hester died had Jacob had such a listener, and Aunt Hester's intelligence was not on a level with that of Mrs. Wilmot. To be understood so sympathetically, so completely, was an experience bewilderingly pleasant—it was ecstasy. Jacob had not known that he could talk so well.

The epitome of his satisfaction is contained in a sentence.

Necessarily he had narrowed his conception of the universe down to a single group of atoms. Illustration of the ethical question had involved the choice of 's own experience. Almost without knowing it, he had begun to talk of himself.

"I have never had a chance," he said. "I have had no opportunities for learning. I have never mixed with the right people."

"One would never know that, if you didn't say so."

That was the sentence. The bare record of it is unconvincing. Jacob saw the expression, heard the tone, was conscious of the atmosphere which gave sublimity to the words. That sentence, with its concomitants, put him on a pedestal; the utterance of it expressed that the speaker regarded him not only as an intellectual god, but—in some curious way it seemed to count for more than mere intelligence—as a member of the *élite*. No one would ever guess that he had not mixed with the right people! He had been persistently neglected and underestimated, it was only, now, for the first time that someone had appreciated the fact that he was, indeed, fit for any society. Flattery could go no farther, and this expression was so obviously sincere.

His—or more probably *her*—sense of drama acknowledged this pronouncement as the climax. Jacob found himself conscious of the astounding fact that it was after seven. His leave-taking was not deferred by polite expressions, but it was so warm that no doubt could be left in the mind as to the complete success of his call.

"You *must* come on Sunday," said Mrs. Wilmot, "and—stay to supper. Possibly Mr. Latham or Deb will be staying, too. Will you?"

"Thanks. Yes, I should like it of all things. It is very good of you." His enthusiasm was evident.

But that was not all.

There was a handshake at parting,—on the very threshold of the open door,—postponed to the last moment that no banality should mar the effect by anticlimax. It was no ordinary handshake. There was a warm pressure given and returned, and then the hand of Mrs. Wilmot lingered, almost fondly, for a perceptible fraction of a second before it was withdrawn—lingered with the suggestion of a caress. Her eyelashes were down. Jacob could not see her eyes, but there was romance in the very rapidity with which Mrs. Wilmot closed the door. It had an air of purpose. He might have fancied that she wished to conceal from him the evidence of emotion. Her manner of closing the door completed Jacob's apotheosis.

5.

Jacob speculated little as to Mrs. Wilmot's circumstances. He had little material upon which to found speculations, but that in itself would not have deterred him. The truth of the matter is that circumstance was regarded as no more than a halo, the central figure was so dominant that the setting was neglected, save in as far as it served to heighten the relief of the portrait. The halo may be pictured as expanded to surround the whole figure. Mrs. Wilmot appears framed in a circular rainbow of vague circumstance. But Sunday was to be devoted to a certain amount of work on the background. The artist was an able one, no other than Cairns; his detail, however, did little more than give value to the colour of the rainbow.

Jacob was occupying the same quiet corner on the angled sofa. He had been the second arrival at 27A, and had for some five minutes been practically a listener to the conversation of Mrs. Wilmot and Miss Fermor, when Cairns arrived.

Miss Fermor was on the subject of art, again, and though an attempt was made to include Jacob in the conversation, his contribution had been a very small one. He had the feeling that his appearance had caused an interruption—even Mrs. Wilmot had been a shade less effusive, less confidential in her greeting.

"I want you to talk to Mr. Stahl," Mrs. Wilmot said to Cairns on his arrival. "Miss Fermor and I have to talk shop for a few minutes. You will forgive us, won't you?"

Cairns had a look of melancholy this afternoon—he looked as if the struggle with the world were too much for him. He sat down by Jacob, produced a cigarette-case automatically, and began to smoke without asking permission of his hostess. Jacob would never have thought of smoking before tea. He thought it a little casual of Cairns.

"Plucky little woman," said Cairns, letting his inhaled smoke straggle out with his words.

"Mrs. Wilmot?" asked Jacob.

Cairns nodded and breathed smoke.

"I—to tell you the truth, I don't quite know . . ." Jacob hesitated; he felt an instinctive disinclination to explain his manner of meeting Mrs. Wilmot.

"Oh!" commented Cairns absently, "thought you were an old friend of hers." His expression was one of the deepest melancholy.

"No! I'm afraid I can't say that."

Silence followed. Cairns seemed content to sit and smoke. His attention concentrated on some object beyond the limit of ordinary human vision.

"Difficult job for a woman who has had no particular training to make her own living." Cairns' remark was addressed to the opposite wall.

"Yes, I suppose it is," replied Jacob politely.

"Difficult question how far we are justified in not fitting women for some definite occupation. Personally I see no reason why a woman should not have the same training as a man!" Cairns was still addressing the wall. His conversation seemed rather in the manner of a spoken reverie than an

attempt at politeness. He continued: "Take Mrs. Wilmot, for instance, when her husband died she was absolutely unfitted, probably, to earn her own living. I believe she had a pretty bad time of it. She could draw, of course, and paint—but there was no market she knew of, in which she could sell her talent. She had to learn practically all over again what she did know, before she was any good for her present job."

"What does she do?" asked Jacob.

"Drawings of fashions, corsets, petticoats, feminine fripperies generally, for the printers and process engravers and advertising agents. She's a free lance, of course, but I believe she makes a pretty decent thing out of it. It means a lot of running about, getting orders and drawing the things at the shops, and Lord knows what, but she's got a regular market. Still, I fancy she gets rather used up towards the end of the week. Doesn't look strong, does she?"

"N—no," I suppose not, assented Jacob, who had not noticed that Mrs. Wilmot was anything but robust so far as health was concerned.

"Too thin," commented Cairns.

"Yes, she is very thin," said Jacob, making another discovery.

"Difficult question," mused Cairns, apparently reverting to his first speculation on the training of women.

"Did you know her husband?" asked Jacob.

"Oh Lord! no. I've only known her five or six months."

That was all the detail Jacob had for his background. It seemed sufficient. It threw the figure into relief. Jacob was warmed to a new feeling. Hitherto he had regarded Mrs. Wilmot solely with admiration, now he added a desire to protect her from the hardships of making a living. Cairns had said she was a "plucky little woman," the phrase conveyed the idea of a descent from luxury and high society to the hard necessities of badly-paid labour. Mrs. Wilmot was a martyr and unprotesting. There had been no word of her own difficulties on Thursday—she did not boast her own pluck. Certainly Jacob wanted to protect her.

This Sunday afternoon was not so brilliant as the last.

Only Deb and Jacob stayed to supper, and Deb babbled unceasingly—her conversation did not interest Jacob in the least. As a visit to Mrs. Wilmot, that Sunday must be written off as a failure, save inasmuch as it admitted him to the weekly freedom of 27A. That was her last word. "You won't wait to be asked any more, will you? I am at home *every* Sunday."

It was a day to be looked forward to all through the week. Jacob had had some idea of spending his summer week-ends on the river. He had even made inquiries as to the cost of a Canadian canoe. This plan was quite forgotten.

6.

This week an irruption came before Sunday. It came on Friday in the shape of a letter. The manner of it was simple enough :

"DEAR MR. STAHL,

"I have a ticket for a private view of Fletcher Williams' water-colours at the Grafton Gallery on Saturday. If you would care to come, will you meet me at the Gallery at 3 o'clock ?

"Yours very sincerely,

"LOLA WILMOT."

The handwriting was artistic, large, but not too large. The capital G's showed an appreciation for line, their backs formed the subtle curve of a cycloid. These things did not appeal to Jacob—he thought the writing "pretty," and on second thoughts "refined"—but the matter of the letter was cause for elation. Even Saturday this week was to be glorified. He replied at once, carefully, expressing his delight. When he came to the subscription he paused. Had she said "very sincerely" ? He referred to her note, and observed a peculiarity about the signature. All the note up to and including "Lola" was in black ink, ink which had been left to dry naturally, the Wilmot was faint, evidently written in later, and blotted at once. Had she carelessly signed her Christian name only, and remembered later that the conventions required the addition of a surname ? or—paralyzing

thought—had she hesitated? Had she sat for an uncertain five minutes wondering if she dared to send the note with so intimate a signature, and then modestly dashed in the surname, perhaps with a blush?

Jacob remembered Madeline at the spring, he remembered the thought that had suddenly flashed into his mind, "Did she expect him to kiss her?" He had experimented with the ghost of a kiss, and found he had been right. Was the experience to be repeated? Did Mrs. Wilmot expect—what? The thing could hardly be defined. Did she anticipate a possibility of warmer relations, of a possible engagement, marriage even? The idea was too wildly improbable, but he carried it with him to the office, where he arrived twenty-five minutes late. He played with the idea as he worked, and reflected on it at lunch-time. Furthermore, he brought it home with him, and gave it precedence over the ideas of Mr. Henry George.

His attitude towards the idea was one of paralyzed wonder. The word "wonderful" indeed was uppermost in his mind. Mrs. Wilmot, for instance, was quite wonderful. It was the idea that entranced him, not the question as to whether he were in love with Mrs. Wilmot. She was so vastly superior to him in every way that the thought of aspiring to love her had not crossed his mind. Yet, it was indeed human, yes, even if she had condescended to find something that attracted her in so relatively unworthy a person as Jacob Stahl, it only made her the more wonderful. . . .

The private view was crowded, and the arrangements for tea little, if any, superior to those of the Wild Birds' Protection Society.

"Shall we go somewhere quieter for tea?" was a question which presented itself.

Mrs. Wilmot consented to become Jacob's guest—he owed a return of civilities, he was already in debt for three teas and a supper—but she suggested the rendezvous out of her superior knowledge of the resources of Bond Street, London.

The precise locale is unimportant. The tea-shop selected by an informed Mrs. Wilmot was one of those delightful,

ephemeral ventures which were more plentiful then than now. It was a place where one might enjoy the luxuries of ease and quietude. It was the excess of quietude, the chief recommendation from the point of view of certain people, which unfortunately killed those ventures. If only tea-shops could prosper on the custom of two people at a time. . . . These vile economical questions kill comfort as well as romance.

Another advantage of the basement luxury—the furnishing was elaborate and comfortable—was that after tea Mrs. Wilmot could smoke. She confessed that she was “dying for a cigarette.”

The conversation flowed easily over the subject of the afternoon’s exhibition. From art as a general topic, with Jacob as an attentive listener, a confessed neophyte, to the degraded form of art which was Mrs. Wilmot’s profession was a natural transition. No less natural was the development of the still more personal theme. Jacob fell upon the discovery that Mrs. Wilmot was “loneiy.”

“But you have so many friends?” he protested.

“Friends? Oh! acquaintances, yes. Do you think they count for very much?”

Jacob, practically friendless, was inclined to think they did, but he compromised with “N—no. Perhaps not.”

It seemed that Mrs. Wilmot’s only relation was an unsympathetic mother living at Eastbourne. There was a hint of strained relations; the reason, vaguely, a lack of sympathy. Jacob received the impression that Mrs. Wilmot’s mother disapproved of her daughter’s plucky and truly admirable struggle to make her own living.

“One does not get much sympathy,” said Mrs. Wilmot.

Jacob, a little troubled, was wondering what she expected him to say. Or do? He forced an opening—experimentally.

“I want you to tell me something,” he began, and lowered his voice, became intent.

She returned his gaze for a moment, and then looked down.

“Yes? What is it?” The manner of it was a murmur, not entirely free from self-consciousness.

“In that note you sent me,” said Jacob, “did—did you sign only your Christian name, first?”

Mrs. Wilmot's eyes were noticeably downcast. If Jacob had but known it, she was trying to blush. She said nothing, but her hand wavered in his direction.

There was no one else in the room. Jacob took the hand and held it. The warmth of his pressure was returned.

"Is it possible that you like me, a little?" he ventured. "It—it seems too wonderful."

The eyelashes lifted for an instant like the shutter of a camera. That and the pressure of a responsive hand were sufficient answer.

Jacob had passed the gate through the bars of which he had peeped into wonderland. How perfect and desirable a place it appears when glimpsed through an opening, much too small to permit of ingress!

CHAPTER XXV

A PARENTHESIS

OUR acquaintances do the most incredible things. In life people are so disgustingly inconsistent, and give the historian unnecessary trouble—which is one reason why history, serious, conscientious history, is so uninteresting. The serious historian, who has to make some sort of a decent job out of his delineation of the character of, say, Henry V. or Queen Elizabeth, must start with some good working assumption to the effect that they had a character to begin with, and he must try to pretend that they were consistent within decent limits, and conformed to the rules laid down for the type. At the last resort he may describe them as being "contradictory characters," but this is a mean evasion. The trouble which lies always in wait for the historian has been put aside once and for all by the dramatist and novelist. They recognize the fact that were they to take their characters from average human beings, their plays and books would be derided. It has become a convention to draw the exceptions, the consistent characters, good, bad, or indifferent, who do exist in actual life, rare birds to be brought down at sight by the

literary hunter. For the rest the depicter of types may study at first hand, preferably not too closely; afterwards he may bring his imagination to bear upon his creations, he may use his genius to make his characters consistent enough to pass muster as human beings in the eyes of his readers. But credible, at least, his characters must be.

To Jacob, Mrs. Wilmot appeared fairly incredible. He had seen her from a certain point of view, and her admission of a marked penchant for his society—to put it modestly—did not fully harmonize with his picture of her. He had to fall back on adjectives of amazement—he had told her plainly that she was wonderful, and she had not appeared to resent the implication.

To Cairns, man of experience that he was, the explanation was simple enough. Stahl was a good-looking man, and she had fallen in love with him. No more than a charcoal sketch this, however; get Cairns in the mood, and he might consent to give a little value to half-tones. "Lonely," he might say, "and past thirty, even a pretty woman, if she has to work for her living, may not be too particular in her choice. Flattered, too, no doubt. Wonderful the power of flattery on women. Stahl was down in the dust before her."

To Deb, hero-worshipper and confidante, the thing was explicable because she had an explanation at first hand. "My dear—I don't know, I was swept off my feet. It is one of those things one can't explain. You know, from the very first moment I saw him, at that reception, I wondered, "Is that man coming into my life? I dare say I have given way to the feeling, but why shouldn't I?"

Deb echoes with a new touch of disapproval in her voice: "Of course not! My dear, why on earth shouldn't you?"

Mrs. Wilmot, not to be checked by any tone of Deb's voice, reverted to her first phrase: "You don't know what it is to be swept off your feet so completely . . ."

"Oh! my dear Lola, indeed I do . . ."

"Not in the way *I* mean." Mrs. Wilmot was dramatic, she gave point to her statement by tightening her grip on the elbow of her chair.

"I've never been in love with any *man*, if that's what you mean, my dear." Deb was too polite to sniff audibly, but she conveyed the impression of a sniff so vividly that Mrs. Wilmot dropped her tragic attitude for the moment, and said:

"You needn't be sniffy about it, dear, I've told *you* before anyone."

Deb understood well enough, though possibly she doubted the seriousness of Mrs. Wilmot's intentions. Deb had seen her friend "swept off her feet" on other occasions.

The person who does not understand why Lola Wilmot made such marked advances to Jacob Stahl is a critical person with an inordinate passion for labels. He does not figure in this story, and no further description need be given of his habits, but he has a drawer, or a glass jar, or a guard book, into which he fits his specimens, and prominent among his labels is one which bears the classification "adventuress." This person has proved conclusively that Mrs. Wilmot could not have fallen in love with Jacob Stahl. For this critical person, busy among his classifications, the label "adventuress" has a very definite signification. The specimen is, inferentially, a bad woman with a past, striving to regain a footing in society, or a bad woman with a past pursuing her passion for badness, but always ready to snap at the one and only bait which really appeals to her—hard cash in sufficient quantities. She has, it is true, the potentialities of an effective death-bed repentance, and she may be checked in her badness by the intervention of an "innocent child," the more innocent and childlike the better. But to allow an emotion for a nice-looking boy with a private income of £120 a year and no prospects in his profession to influence her life seriously, when *she* has claims to beauty—"Pooh!" says this critical person, "a most inconsistent character," and he takes down his cuttings, and exhibits the type "adventuress" in convincing print. It is useless to demonstrate that Mrs. Wilmot is not an adventuress according to his definition, he has made up his mind, and you cannot argue with him.

There is one other person to take into account. Her explanation to Deb should be compared critically, with her

other explanations; but these are so various that they tend to confusion—one may stand as an indication of the rest, it was made much later, briefly, thus, “My confounded cussedness.”

CHAPTER XXVI

MARRIAGE

1.

THAT the course of true love never did run smooth is an adage, the universal truth of which may be proved by the evidence of romance. Indeed, the truth of the adage was established from earliest times,—*pace* the love-affair of Jacob and Rachel—even in the polygamous community true love was hindered. Laban was the ancestor of the modern commercially-minded father of fiction; the type remains, armed with other, if no more effective, methods. From the days of Laban onward, the pages of romance may be searched in vain for the one grand exception. Smoothness is of no account in romance, it stands for the unromantic; a fig for the love that never overrode an obstacle, such love cannot be proved true, any evidence afforded by biography notwithstanding.

But in this thing Jacob—the modern representative, not he of the bigamous proclivities—made no application of the wide knowledge he had gained from the reading of romance. He should, surely, have argued that the love which ran smoothly could not conceivably be true. He did not argue; he drifted, blissfully. When we come to the practice of life, as opposed to the exercise of theory necessitated by the offer of a choice between alternatives, we are little guided by the historic wisdom of the novelist.

Jacob had a perfectly blissful fortnight. He dreamed at the office, saw Mrs. Wilmot every day, made progress in the small intimacies of love, listened with respect to Cairns and Guy Latham, cursed the intrusions of Deb with her banal commonplaces, and, generally, floated on clouds of glory.

He never doubted that he was deeply and truly in love.

He had read of a test, and this one test he applied. "Did the beloved ever jar one's susceptibilities, be it never so slightly," he had read, "she was not the affinity." It was a psychic test, and made application of the principle that in this great world there was but one perfect mate for every man and woman. It remained for every man or woman to seek the twin-soul who would be recognizable by the test specified. No time limit, however, was given for the occurrence of the first "jar," and Jacob, finding none in the first fortnight, was satisfied that the affinity was found. His feelings differed in many ways from those he had experienced when he had made love to Madeline, but that was to be expected. Briefly—it was different.

Only once during that blissful fortnight did he ever question the sincerity of his passion.

It was a Sunday evening, eight days after his declaration. He had stayed to supper, and, Deb being absent, he had remained on in Upper Woburn Place till nearly eleven o'clock. When the last parting had been made, he found himself walking through Tavistock Square, conscious of a feeling of relief. He wanted solitude, to think of his love-affair, dream of it, glorify it into a vision of perfection, instead of wanting to act it in the presence and with the help of his affinity. The consciousness should have given him pause, but it seemed such a small thing in comparison with the wonders he was experiencing. It is true that he had never suffered such an experience in the days of Ashby Sutton; there the desire was to be with Madeline always, never to leave her; but, again, that was different—how and why he did not stop to analyze. The inwardness of that feeling of relief was explained by a condemnation of his own peculiarities. He was dreaming again. Definitely this thing must end, it was time for him finally to emerge into the world of realities.

He soon learned that he was to receive very able assistance in the emergence, and the knowledge was gained at the cost of some loss of glory. He had to learn that the clouds which had upborne him were artificial; and in process of deflation, moreover.

The day was once more a Sunday, the fortnight was passed, a very quiet Sunday without visitors. The engaged couple had time to discuss their own affairs and prospects, a subject that had been treated with scant attention so far. Lola was becoming acquainted with the inwardness of the architectural profession. To give point to his description, Jacob picked out Bradley as an example of the difficulties of progress towards private practice.

"Why don't you go in for competitions?" asked Lola.

"It's so utterly hopeless," replied Jacob.

"But why couldn't you do what Mr. Bradley did?"

Jacob winced inwardly, but, remembering that he was a hero in this house, and that heroes can do no wrong, he struggled towards sincerity. A man of Jacob's temperament seeks always to be loved for his faults rather than for his virtues, though always he has an eye to an interpretation of those faults at least as sympathetic as his own.

"No!" he said; "I haven't got Bradley's powers of application."

"But how do you expect to begin in private practice, then?" Lola's tone was not quite sympathetic. Jacob *qua* hero was a little inclined to resent it.

"Influence, I suppose, is one way," he said. "One ought to know as many people as possible. People who may know other people who may be going to build."

"And as a preliminary you have shut yourself up for the past, how many years? and known no one. Oh! my dear Jimmy."

"I suppose I'm built that way." "Jimmy" was still complacent.

"But you mustn't be built that way. You must wake up."

Jacob quite agreed with the theory of this pronouncement, but he would have preferred that the statement should have come from himself.

"Waking is a painful process, sometimes," he said, striving for an acceptance of his faults.

Mrs. Wilmot's eyes narrowed, and her mouth—it was not a good-tempered mouth—set firmly, with the least possible

projection of the under-lip, which had none of the attractiveness of a pout. It would have been obvious to Deb that Lola was recovering her foothold.

"Oh! my dear Jimmy, you will have to be shaken if you talk like that."

There was no mistaking the definiteness of this attitude. Jacob realized that it was time the rôle of hero was put on one side, but he still looked for sympathy.

"I suppose it's a question of temperament," he said, hesitating. "Of course, I realize that I must do something, but . . ." He left an opening for a fond completion of his sentence. He had, in two weeks, become used to fondness.

"You haven't the energy to rouse yourself."

"It isn't a question of energy, exactly." Jacob's tone was argumentative, now. Positively he was being bullied.

Lola judged her limit to have been reached for this occasion. She came over to him and sat on a footstool at his feet. "Oh! my darling old dreamer," she said, "how are we ever to get married, if you won't wake up?"

"I will wake up, darling," responded Jacob, repentant, "you must help me."

That was the first of many conversations on the question of ways and means.

"Why don't you ask Mr. Bradley to help you?" was one of Lola's suggestions.

"I don't know! I don't care to, altogether," was Jacob's answer.

"You must care to!" was Lola's reply. The clouds were becoming sagged; the process of deflation distinctly perceptible.

"Must?" echoed Jacob, with a look of perplexity. He had a rooted dislike to the word.

"Well, how on earth do you expect to get on if you won't do the simplest thing?"

"N—yes," said Jacob, and then: "I don't quite see what Bradley could do exactly."

"He might pass on some of his work to you. You said he had more than he could manage."

"I don't expect he would do that."

"Why not? You were a great friend of his."

"You see, I haven't got an office."

"Why not start one?"

It may seem a trivial suggestion, but it set a ball rolling that was to alter the whole course of Jacob's life. He did not grasp the possibilities for a moment.

"Without any work in hand?" he asked, as though that were final.

"Oh! my *dear* Jimmy"—Lola's tone was kind, if emphatic—"you must see that you are arguing in a vicious circle. You can't get work because you haven't got an office. You can't start an office because you haven't got any work. That sort of thing can go on for ever."

Jacob awoke to the fact that, according to precedent, he was patiently awaiting the performance of a miracle.

"Well! What do you suggest?" His tone was impatient, he appreciated his *fiancée's* logic, but not her attitude towards himself.

"Why shouldn't you start an office?"

"And leave Morley's?"

"You must make a beginning. You must show initiative."

"Isn't it taking a tremendous risk?"

"If you failed, you would be no worse off. You could go back to Morley's or take some other position."

The idea was beginning to take hold.

"I've never thought of it before," he said, with the first symptoms of enthusiasm he had displayed.

"Oh! you dreamer!" replied Lola.

They fell to the discussion of plans. It was all so easy. Jacob had a balance of over £300 at his bank; more than sufficient. Before he left that day he had promised to call upon Bradley, and they had decided to look about for suitable quarters for an office—it was settled that the office was not to be in the City. Why not an office and house combined? Then Jacob would not have to be away all day, when they were married.

2.

The idea of independence, once formulated, began to take an increasing hold on Jacob's mind. He was an amateur of life, unpractical, and lacking in ambition. He regarded the idea from one point of view only—it was a new adventure, and the more he thought of it, the greater the possibilities it seemed to hold. He allowed his imagination to run ahead of all probabilities, and, meanwhile, he found material for dreams,—the real basis he always looked for—in the work of setting about the practical business that was necessary.

At times he had qualms as to his qualifications. There were many details of practical architecture with which he was unacquainted. He was no judge of materials, for instance; at least, not of actual materials on the site—he had some theoretical knowledge of faults to be avoided. He had copied specifications for Mr. Baker, and he remembered vaguely such facts as that timber was to be well-seasoned, and “free from all defects, sap, shakes; large, loose or dead knots.” When the qualms came he put himself through a mental examination, and was, generally, rather well satisfied as to the result. When he found a self-imposed question that he could not answer, he looked it up in his books on building construction. He decided that when he had an office of his own, he would have a practical library at hand to which he could refer at all times. He bought several books at once from Mr. Batsford's, and read parts of them. It was all hopelessly amateurish, but not notably more unpractical than much of the serious business of life which passes muster.

Fate was favouring him at this time—making large promises, egging him on.

He had a very satisfactory interview with the great Owen Bradley, whom he had not seen for more than twelve months.

The great man was engaged, so said the clerk in the outer office, but he would take Mr. Stahl's name in, and he did, written on a piece of paper. Jacob had forgotten his cards.

Bradley came out at once.

“My dear fellow, awfully glad to see you,” he said, “but

I am checking a list of extras and omissions with the builder and the quantity surveyor. Did you want to see me about anything particular?"

"Yes, I did, rather," said Jacob. "But if . . ."

"Let me think," interrupted Bradley. "Look here, can you come round about half-past six? I shall have finished then, and we can go and have dinner somewhere."

"Thanks very much. Yes, I should like to."

A wonderful man, this Owen Bradley, so self-confident, so certain in knowledge, so completely efficient. Jacob thought of that reported examination of the bill of extras and omissions. The builder would get no certificate for unaccredited extras out of Bradley, thought Jacob, but if J. L. Stahl, architect, was called upon to adjudicate such matters?—he wondered if there were any work dealing more particularly with this important subject.

At half-past six Bradley was "very nearly finished," and at a quarter-past seven he was actually free. Jacob saw a man he judged to be the builder, come out looking rather depressed.

"Was that your builder?" he asked Bradley, as they went down together to Bradley's club.

"Yes. That was Wilcox, the senior partner of Wilcox and Wilcox, you know. They built the offices at Birchester."

"He looked as if you'd been taking it out of him, rather."

"One must be pretty hard. It's a question of which of you gets in first. He wanted me to have dinner with him, so I was very glad to have an excuse."

"Doesn't do, I suppose?"

Bradley shook his head. "One can't be too careful," he said.

Jacob made a mental note that he must never in any circumstances accept anything from a builder.

During dinner they spoke chiefly of technical matters. Jacob was genuinely interested in Bradley's experience, and plied him with questions which Bradley was not unwilling to answer. Later he even paid his guest the compliment of saying:

"You seem to have got a better grip of practical matters than you used to have."

This was in the smoking-room. It was an opportunity, and Jacob took it, somewhat shyly.

"Do you think so?" he said. "I'm glad, very glad. The fact of the matter is, I'm thinking of starting in practice for myself."

"Good for you. What jobs have you got?"

Jacob blushed and explained. Incidentally he broached the topic of his engagement, and received congratulations.

"But about this office of yours?" asked Bradley, returning to essentials. "Isn't it rather a risk?"

"Nothing venture," suggested Jacob. "You see, there's no hope of getting any work until one has an office."

"Quite so," assented Bradley. "But what about prospects? You must at least have some prospects."

Jacob was uneasy. Bradley made it so difficult to ask him for work.

"Well, I'm trying to meet as many people as possible, you know," he said. "Mrs. Wilmot, my *fiancée*, has a lot of friends, and we think . . ."

"Are they the right kind of friends?" put in Bradley. "Friends who have the money and inclination to build?"

"One never knows," said Jacob, and then desperately: "I was wondering whether you ever had an opportunity of—of passing on any jobs—little jobs, of course, too small for you to bother about."

Bradley pushed his spectacles on to his forehead, and looked out on to the twilight Embankment. It was still early in July, and the lights in the smoking-room were not turned on. Bradley was very short-sighted, and when he wished to consider a question he preferred the semi-obscurity afforded by partial blindness.

Jacob sat silent awaiting a reply. He was not short-sighted, and the picture of the Embankment, as it appeared at ~~that~~ moment, was one of the memories which always remained vivid to him.

"Yes," said Bradley at last, replacing his spectacles and looking earnestly at Jacob, "I could and I will."

"That's awfully good of you, old chap. I should be tremendously grateful."

"And . . ." Bradley paused, he had not yet spoken the thought which had caused his hesitation. "And, if you are not sure about any technical matters, you'd better refer them to me till you feel your feet a bit."

This was a glorious report to bring to Lola. Jacob could not wait till morning, and made a very late call—it was after ten—at Upper Woburn Place.

"I like Mr. Bradley," was Lola's comment.

"He's an awfully good sort," agreed Jacob with enthusiasm.

"But why need you consult him? Why are you so pleased about that part of it?"

"He's had so much experience," said Jacob.

Lola looked at him, inquiringly. "My dear boy," she said, and this was the first time she had so addressed him, "you must learn to have more confidence in yourself."

Jacob felt as he walked home that the fine edge of his pleasure had been blunted. He would gain confidence in time—hang it all, she needn't be always lecturing him about it.

3.

Fate was evidently in the mood, for on the Sunday following the visit to Bradley, Cairns came in, very bright and full of vigour. It seemed that he had made a successful coup on the Stock Exchange, and when he heard of his friend's new venture, he said at once that he had always intended to build himself a little place in the country—on the Chiltern Hills, or Surrey, perhaps—and that now was the very time to start.

Cairns had ideas about the construction of houses, revolutionary ideas such as Jacob had never heard of.

"All this business of emptying slops, carrying them up and down stairs, and such nastinesses," said Cairns, on the hearth-rug in his favourite attitude, "nothing of that sort in my house."

"But how . . . ?" began Jacob, taking the point as being a personal one, though the remark had been addressed to the company generally.

"How?" interrupted Cairns. "What could be simpler? You architects, like other professional men, let your minds run in a groove. Now, why not fitted basins with a tap? Why carry water about and spill it all over the place? Once sanctify a thing by custom, it doesn't matter how absurd the thing is, and that thing has to stay. Wash my hands in a fixed basin, when I've always been accustomed to one I could knock over and break? Turn a tap to get water, when I've always been accustomed to struggle with a great unwieldy jug that slopped the water all over me when it was too full? Oh! no! not for worlds! Why, my dear fellow, my father never had a tap or a fixed basin in his house, and he lived to eighty-seven. No, thanks, not for me, I like the good old-fashioned methods. Good God! it's wonderful, simply wonderful."

Cairns had lived in Australia for many years, and his expletives were sometimes rather forcible. He had many other ideas about the designing of houses which he explained fully, while Jacob made mental notes, but he did not on this occasion condescend to any practical details beyond the suggestion that Jacob should get out some plans. The accommodation even was not settled, as when this point was brought forward, Cairns launched forth on the subject of hospitality, and explained how he should keep open house, not only to his friends and acquaintances, but to certain waifs of the hedgerows. Cairns was in great form that afternoon; incidentally, however, Jacob did learn that Cairns was a widower with three children. It seemed that this house of his was going to be quite an important job.

Lola was enthusiastic about it after Cairns had left, but she had one practical suggestion to make. "Don't wait for him to bring the subject up again. He told you to get out some plans. Couldn't you start some sketches at once?"

"I've got absolutely no information," pleaded Jacob, who had been delighted at Cairns' suggestions, but was quite

willing to postpone any actual work until his office was an accomplished fact.

"Oh! you've got heaps of information," said Lc'a. "Didn't you listen to all his ideas? He is so original."

"M—yes," said Jacob. "But I don't think his ideas, some of them, are very practical. What about that annexe for tramps, for instance?"

"I shouldn't bother about that," replied Lola. "He'll probably have forgotten all about it by next Sunday."

4.

Lastly, Eric turned up with practical assistance. Eric's assistance, when given, was always practical.

Lola had not been introduced yet. In fact, it was not until after the scheme of the private office had been mooted, that she learned of Eric's existence.

"Haven't you *any* friends or relations?" she had asked, when they had been going through a list of possible people who might be of use.

"Oh! There's Eric, of course," Jacob had admitted, and the necessary explanation had followed.

The conclusion of it had been an implied rebuke administered in a kind form.

"Oh! you dreamer! Fancy dropping such a brother as that. Why, he must know heaps of people, useful people! Darling, when will you learn to be just a little practical? Have you never even written to tell your brother that you are engaged?"

Jacob had to confess that he had neither seen nor written to Eric for quite a long time, months, many months.

"He'll think you're ashamed of me," said Lola.

"Oh! Great Scott, no, he couldn't think that. I'll write to-night," said Jacob.

Mrs. Eric left cards during the week. Lola was out. "I will write to Mr. Cairns and the others," she said to Jacob, the same evening, "and we'll go over to Hampstead on Sunday."

Jacob wondered what Eric and his wife would think of Lola, not what Lola would think of Eric and his wife. It was a curious inversion, the significance of which did not occur to him.

For once Jacob had the felicity of being the important person in the West Hampstead *ménage*.

Lola was a social success. She seemed to impress the Eric Stahls by her ease and manner. The conversation was kept away from technical subjects, and in all others Mrs. Wilmot was quite capable of maintaining her superiority. Mrs. Eric drew her out on the subject of art, and Lola on this topic was obviously the teacher, and not the taught.

It is true that there was a slight chill when Eric took his brother off to the study for the usual smoke.

"Who was her first husband?" was the inevitable question.

"I haven't the least idea. I have never mentioned the subject," was Jacob's answer; as an afterthought he added: "I've an idea that it was not a very happy marriage."

"Was he well off?" asked Eric.

"Very, I believe."

"But Mrs. Wilmot has no private means."

"No—none."

"How do you suppose that came about?"

Jacob shrugged his shoulders. "I can imagine possible reasons," he said. "He may have been living up to his income, for instance."

"About this office of yours," said Eric later; "do you think your prospects justify you in taking it?"

"Absolutely!" returned Jacob, and gave a glowing account of Cairns' and Bradley's promises.

"H'm!" was Eric's comment, after he had put various questions. "Bradley seems all right—I'm not so sure about Cairns. On the Stock Exchange they are millionaires one day, and paupers the next. However, I think I can put a little work in your way. It's not a big job, but every little helps."

It transpired that Eric had an option on a small property of something over an acre in Putney, a neighbourhood which

was not then completely smothered in bricks and mortar. "The house is rather a wreck, at present," explained Eric, "but the garden will be delightful. Doris and I feel rather suffocated here, sometimes. I should be glad if you would go down and see the place, test the drains, and report on it. Professionally, of course. I expect you will find that we shall have to spend three or four hundred pounds on the structure. We haven't absolutely decided, but I think it is probable we shall take it. Doris seems keen on it, and it will be her speculation. As a speculation, by the way, there's little doubt that it will be profitable. Property is going up in those suburbs, as I dare say you know."

Jacob did not know, but he nodded with assurance.

"Everything seems to be coming our way," he said to Lola, on the way back to Upper Woburn Place, but he was very distinctly doubtful as to his capacity for testing the drains and estimating the repairs necessary at the house in Putney. He had had no experience in that kind of work. He would have found it much easier to design a hospital.

But all this work which was pouring in upon him necessitated hurrying forward the matter of taking an office. He must leave Mr. Morley at once. They decided this that very Sunday evening. And there was a house to let in Bloomsbury Square. £130 a year was a big price, of course, but with such prospects it was not too much. It was no good to take too small a place, and then be obliged to move again. They need not furnish the top floor at first. It was decided to inspect that house.

Only one thing more, the delicate question of a date for their marriage. Why should they wait? Lola was very sweet about it. When they had agreed that the end of August was not an impossible time, and that the ceremony should be a very quiet one, Lola said, "You can leave all those stupid arrangements to me, darling, you will have your hands very full."

Jacob agreed with this last remark, and after making the necessary expostulations, he consented to the unusual arrangement of leaving all negotiations to the future bride.

"You're sure you don't mind?" he asked more than once.
"Quite sure. Of course not! Why should I?"
Really, she was very unselfish.

5.

Jacob was not inquisitive, but he had a genuine eagerness for knowledge, and one department of knowledge that he explored whenever a chance afforded, was that which contained the human facts of life. He liked to hear real stories of individual experience, and more than once he gave Lola an opening to confide something of her past history, not because it might in any way concern himself, but because he thought it might be interesting. But Lola never responded. The only answer he had ever received was "I can't speak of that time," and she had tightened her grasp on the arm of her chair with exactly the same gesture as she had used when talking to Deb. It gave the effect, this gesture, of the necessity for great self-restraint; those whitened knuckles, the tensivity of the whole attitude, implied that the speaker was on the verge of some outbreak of grief, that she must succumb if she did not keep a very firm hold of herself. Her eyes, too, looked as if they might, in another moment, brim with tears. With it all there was something chastened in the look and pose, something which might have been expressed in words such as, "I have been through the mill, I have suffered unspeakably, but I can go on—I am not beaten." Jacob was much affected on this occasion, and had the feeling that he had been rather brutal in putting too pointed a question.

He did not, however, scent any mystery, then; he was not looking for mystery, but he thought of these things in his own rooms sometimes, and sometimes he speculated as to what the trouble could have been. Had her husband been a brute? In some undetermined way that was the impression he had received.

Another curious thing was that among all Mrs. Wilmot's many acquaintances, there was none who had known her for more than three years at the most. Deb, with three years,

seemed to have established a record. Yet, at times, Lola referred, casually, to people she had known in earlier years, people who seemed to have occupied more important positions in the social world than those members of the semi-Bohemian circle who appeared on Sunday afternoons.

"Don't you ever see any of those people, now?" he had asked on one occasion, when she had been speaking of older friends, and Lola had shrugged her shoulders. "I've no time to keep in with them, now I have to work for my living," had been her reply. The answer did not seem quite satisfactory, when Jacob added it to his other causes for speculation.

Then, once, when they had been buying furniture together for their new house in Bloomsbury Square, there had been an incident.

They were walking down Oxford Street, in high spirits, both very eager on the game of bargain-hunting, matching their knowledge and skill against those of antique furniture-dealers who spent their whole lives in defending themselves against the cunning of just such customers as these.

They stopped to look in at a window.

"I say that's rather a jolly gate-table," said Jacob, pointing eagerly. "I wonder how much they want for that. Shall we go in and . . ."

He stopped abruptly, for Lola had suddenly laid a hand on his arm, a hand that gripped him tightly enough to hurt.

"What's the matter?" he asked, and, turning to her, he saw that her face had grown very white. She was not looking at him, but at a tall, broad-shouldered man with a brown moustache, who had been gazing into the same shop-window. In her eyes was a look of fear and appeal, the look of the trapped animal facing its giant trapper.

Jacob turned hastily towards the stranger, the first thing in his protecting mind was that the big man had in some way insulted Lola.

"Oh! come away." Lola's tone was urgent.

"But . . ." remonstrated Jacob.

Lola was biting her lip, her grip on Jacob's arm was compelling; she positively dragged him away.

Jacob, still reluctant, looked back over his shoulder. The tall man was watching them, smiling; a cold, sarcastic smile.

"What's the matter, darling?"

"Wait till we get home," she said.

When they were back in Upper Woburn Place, the explanation was not entirely satisfactory.

"It was dreadfully silly of me," Lola said, "but that man was so exactly like—like Edgar."

"Your husband?" asked Jacob.

She nodded. "It absolutely appalled me for a moment," she said after an interval.

"You, you couldn't have—cared for him very much?" said Jacob.

"Hated him!" she replied in a low tone, with a vehemence and viciousness that startled Jacob.

The incident closed tenderly. Jacob came over to her. "Do you know, I am rather glad to think that you didn't care for him very much," he said.

"Dear thing," replied Lola, and they finished the day in the manner of lovers.

It was afterwards that Jacob reverted to the explanation. It accounted for everything except the man's smile; it had been a smile of understanding.

Lastly, Jacob could not help speculating sometimes as to the inwardness of the relations between Lola and her mother, Mrs. Fane. Now that Lola was to be married again, the earlier reason assigned, that Mrs. Fane disapproved of her daughter's method of earning a livelihood, had surely lost its cogency. Certainly it had been decided that, for a time, Lola should continue her work, and add to their small income, but if she were married there could no longer be any question of impropriety. Jacob had the impression—all his talks with Lola on this subject had been so indefinite—that Mrs. Fane was, perhaps, old-fashioned, not abreast with the times which had accepted the independent woman. Mrs. Fane might disapprove of a widowed Lola, living alone, and earning a livelihood by what doubtless appeared to her mother as strange

means, but—Jacob went back over the old ground. It was, at least, odd that Lola had not even written to her mother.

All these causes for speculation might have keened Jacob to a sense of the necessity for resolute inquiry, a decided and ruthless cross-examination of Lola. There were two reasons why that stage of inquiry was never reached, ignoring the fact that, had the stage ever been reached, Jacob would never have had the determination to conduct such a cross-examination.

The first reason was that he did not think clearly or consecutively. If he had written down his causes for speculation and studied them, he might have been roused to a condition of more potent wonder, perhaps of anxiety. But his thought was formless, a series of disconnected pictures that took shape and colour according to the mood of his imagination, and not according to the influence of any desire for logical sequence. Such facts as he had were not compared, collated; they were isolated save in so far as he did press them imaginatively into one all-embracing enclosure. This enclosure figures the second reason.

It was by way of being an inclusive explanation, thus:—Lola had been very unhappy in her first marriage; she had suffered, terribly; she wished therefore to forget all the circumstances. Under such conditions Jacob, also, would have wished to put all unpleasant associations behind him, would have struggled to forget. Mrs. Fane was included as a circumstance; it was possible that she had arranged Lola's first marriage. Mrs. Fane was probably an unsympathetic woman (damning description), and had sided with the late Edgar Wilmot—of odious memory.

6.

During the second week in August Jacob received his customary half-yearly dividend for £61 11s. 9d.—less income-tax—and it occurred to him that he might as well take out his pass-book and see how he stood in account with his bank. He had taken the house in Bloomsbury Square on a three-

years' agreement from the end of September. As a consideration, he had been allowed occupancy from the half-quarter; the consideration on the landlord's side had been relief from doing any structural repairs. The agreement was not with the Bedford estate, but with the leaseholder. A sum had been allowed for redecoration, but it was quite inadequate to cover the cost of Lola's scheme, a scheme which was nevertheless being carried out.

Jacob set himself to calculation. There were so many items. House furniture (they had adhered to their resolution not to furnish the top floor), office furniture and fittings, the extra expense on the decorator's estimate, lawyers' fees, personal expenses (Lola liked him to dress well, and he had opened a new account with a West-End tailor), the expense of the forthcoming honeymoon (they had decided on Paris), and his wedding present to Lola, a cheque for £50, to say nothing of a few minor presents that he had given her and the engagement and wedding rings.

Jacob found his balance, counting his dividend, amounted to £271. That figure astonished him, for it intimated that he must have spent just over £100 in the past six weeks—including that wedding present, of course—that was a big item. He set himself to estimating the future cost of the other items he had enumerated. At first he estimated liberally, then he came to the conclusion that there must be some mistake, and went through the items again with more care and greater regard to accuracy. Finally, a third time. He had intended to pay all the accounts at once, but he saw now that he must reconsider that intention, for, according to the final estimate, such a proceeding would leave him overdrawn some £25 or so at the Bank. And he and Lola would have ordinary living expenses for six months, would have to pay wages and the first quarter's rent due at Christmas, to say nothing of rates and taxes, and Lord knows what else; and at the end of the six months there would be a dividend of £61 11s. 9d.—less income-tax. Jacob came to the conclusion that £300 was not such a big sum as he had imagined. He also came to the conclusion that there was nothing for it

but to sell a certain amount of stock. His investments were earning $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.—well, he might sell stock to the value of, say, £650; that would reduce his income by the odd £20 a year, which would make practically no difference. By Jove! he would have to work. Meanwhile, he wrote to his solicitors at Pelsworthy, and requested them to set about the sale of the stock. This done, he felt greatly relieved. With another £650 at his back he could face the future in a hopeful spirit; by the time that was spent, he would be making a decent income. One more conclusion—he would not worry Lola with all these financial details. She had never questioned him about money matters, why should he trouble her? She had had trouble enough in her life. Furthermore, she might not approve of his selling that stock.

His last thoughts before going to sleep turned on the necessity for practical work. There was that job of Eric's and the plans for Cairns, neglected for the moment in the rush of so many immediate concerns. But Eric and Cairns had both understood his explanations. There was no violent hurry. Eric and his wife had decided to buy the Putney property, it is true, but they had no intention of moving before the spring. But when Jacob came back from his honeymoon, he would have to put his back into it, and, by Jove! he would. Everything being thus comfortably settled and arranged for, Jacob slept the sleep of the consciously righteous. He was adventuring right out on to the sea of life, now, and he found the promise of the voyage most inspiring.

7.

This chapter of Jacob's experience closes with a farewell word of advice and the shadow of events forthcoming.

The farewell was to the offices of Mr. Ridout Morley at the end of July. The staff subscribed to give him a wedding present, but that was nothing but an embarrassment. The thing he remembered was the unexpected good-bye of old Eckholt. Jacob had always regarded the old man as a pessimist, he had expected to hear him depreciate any promise of

success in Jacob's enterprise, but instead came a few words of kindly advice, beginning :

"Well, I'm sure I wish you every 'appiness, Mr. Stahl," and then : "The great thing in practice, in my experience, is never to give yourself away. So long as you stick to it and take trouble, things can't go very far wrong, and at the worst it's only the builder as knows. Keep in with your builder, and he'll see you through, even if he does make a little extra out of it."

Jacob shook hands warmly with old Eekholt and thanked him, the advice seemed good. It was only the genius, such as Bradley, who could afford to be so independent with builders, and never accept so much as a dinner from them.

The shadow was unrealized at the time by reason of Jacob's ignorance of certain technicalities.

Jacob signed the certificate first, and after Lola had, also, signed, the copy was taken and handed to the bride, who took it and stowed it away hurriedly in a little bag she was carrying.

From the church (they had been married by special licence), they drove straight to the very tea-rooms in which they had first arrived at an understanding. They had taken the whole of the smoking-room for the afternoon, and had invited their friends thither for the little reception which was to mark the event. In the cab Jacob said,

"May I look at the certificate ? I've never seen one."

Lola hesitated and looked at him, a question in her eyes, the shadow of a determination on her face.

"Yes ! You may—if you like," she said slowly.

As Jacob looked at the certificate, his wife watched him closely, came a little nearer to him, slipped her hand through his arm. Her face was pale, but the determination was evident in the set of her under-lip.

"I say, how quaint !" said Jacob. "Why are you described as 'single and unmarried'?"

"Because I've been married before," replied Lola quietly.

"But why not a widow ?"

There was silence between them for a moment, and then

Jacob folded up the certificate with a laugh and gave it back. "Oh! Lord! these legal Johnnies do find some quaint phrases," he said.

The shadow of the determination on Lola's face was passing away. "Yes—they are funny," she said, and then, "Don't mention it to anybody."

"Why not?"

"It's a superstition, that's all."

"Oh! all right. Of course I won't. I say, do you realize that we are actually married?"

Lola heaved a long, deep sigh of relief. "I am beginning to realize it, darling," she said.

The little reception was quite a success. Cairns was in great form, and had a remarkable argument with Eric on the question of land-nationalization.

CHAPTER XXVII

SINGLE AND UNMARRIED

1.

THE importance of to-morrow cannot be over-estimated. In the animal world there are but foreshadowings of that wonderful conception; and those are gross—a watering at the mouth and eager eyes induced by a sight of the quarry; nevertheless, signs of an imagination, a present enjoyment of pictured satisfaction that may never be attained. In that primitive anticipation lies the germ of the wonderful to-morrow—it is only a question of extension. To-morrow, be it noted, contains all. To span the gap of a period of unconsciousness is to scale the fences of eternity; to live in the to-morrow is to live beyond the bounds. But the animal, dripping saliva, points a tedious moral; in two words—leap quickly. It is the practical application, you must flesh your dreams, oh! dreamer.

The last cigarette, smoked in complacency, while Mrs. James (or Jacob) Stahl is being allowed the twenty minutes of solitude she demands to prepare herself for the luxury of

sleep, this last, deliberate cigarette has been dedicated to to-morrow, without ritual or determinations, almost without intention. As an institution, it began on the very first night in Bloomsbury Square, when a slightly harrowed Jacob solemnly put away from him thoughts of small disagreements, of incapacities involved in the testing of drains, and all such insistent facts of life, and floated in a dream eternity of unrealizable to-morrows.

This last cigarette is Jacob's nepenthe, and has a sequel which is not yet.

His nepenthe enabled him on this first night in Bloomsbury Square to forget the inferences of a three weeks' honeymoon in Paris, inferences that had deepened the gloom of the train journey from Newhaven that morning, and had been strengthened when the Stahls arrived at a home that had not been prepared for their reception; or not prepared to the satisfaction of Mrs. Stahl; the effect is the same.

Certainly the home-coming had been inauspicious.

Arrangements had been made which implicated the agency of a still faithful Deb, in connection with a retained charwoman and a promised cook and housemaid, all engaged to put in an appearance some three days before the Saturday that heralded the return of master and mistress. But the cook proved faithless—she was never heard of again—and what the charwoman and the housemaid could have been doing for those three days, it puzzled a tired but still dynamic Mrs. Stahl to tell.

"Everything's filthy," was her pronouncement, and she persistently disregarded Jacob's expression of optimism which embodied the spirit of the amateur actor's certainty that "it would be all right on the night." Indeed, the night was come, and even the phenomenon of an evaporated cook, however amazing, did not excuse the leaving of a dustpan on one of the drawing-room chairs. "Everything's filthy," Mrs. Stahl had repeated, when the new housemaid had been summoned upstairs, and a demonstration had been made with an indignant forefinger on the mahogany of the beautiful revolving bookcase, the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Eric Stahl. That one could

write one's name in the dust was demonstrated conclusively, and the fiery zigzag executed by Lola, conveying the idea of a lighted and exploding cracker, may have stood as a symbol for the autograph of the indignant house-mistress.

Jacob, on the hearthrug, with the reminiscences of a September crossing from Dieppe still strong upon him, had wondered how the housemaid would take it, what the housemaid would think. As a woman, this housemaid was not unattractive, dark-eyed and dark-haired, but these attractions seemed to weigh not at all with her mistress, who regarded the maid, evidently, in the light of an inefficient machine—the appearance of the machine in this particular application was beside the point.

The housemaid had a spirit, too.

“I dusted it this morning, mum.”

“Before you swept the room, or after?” This with intense scorn.

The maid had bridled, but she stood convicted of having progressed by an illogical sequence. “I’m sure, if I don’t give satisfaction . . .”

“Don’t be impertinent!” Lola had blazed, and Jacob had cleared his throat, but before he could interpose the maid had gone. “Bounced out of the room and slammed the door,” reported Lola, to Deb’s amazement. Deb had thought her a “nice, willing girl, if not clever.”

To be faced with a household without a cook, and with a maid fully conscious of the fact that she would leave at the end of the month, was a hard beginning—certainly inauspicious.

Jacob had been hot and uncomfortable. After the housemaid had bounced and slammed, pointing the last detonation of a very capable firework, he had been uncomfortable but pacificatory, anxious to remove impressions—but the smell of gunpowder remained. Doubtless he might have proved more successful with the maid, but no opportunity had offered of using his influence in that direction. All this had happened before breakfast. It was the distinct culmination of honeymoon relations, and even honeymoon relations had not

been all-powerful. There had been times when an active bride, intoxicated with Paris shop-windows, had resented the lassitude and lack of enthusiasm displayed by a husband not over-interested in the jewellers' exhibitions in the Rue de la Paix. On one such occasion the word "indolent" had come to the surface. It is not a word used to designate the heroic.

These things explain the need for nepenthe. That last, deliberate cigarette becomes a ritual; worship to the great god of dreams, the creator of all-blissful and perfectly impossible to-morrows.

2.

The three years that followed the return to Bloomsbury Square, were years of development, but the story of them is not to be told in detail. Here and there a scene stands out, representing a milestone, perhaps; here and there is a scar to be accounted for, but the intervals that mark long, slow progress, intervals of months or a year, these must be passed by, only their influence is to be remembered.

According to precedent, it was the early days of married life that were most full of significant detail. There was, for instance, a scene that pointed the set of the road which these two were to travel, a scene that occurred three weeks after the return from the honeymoon.

The Sunday "at homes" were resumed in the new quarters, on a larger scale. Printed cards were sent, dropped on to the breakfast-tables of the remotest acquaintances, business acquaintances of Lola's, acquaintances of Jacob's whom he never thought to see again; it was a hunt for names among the byways and hedges, but with a difference—there were to be no scallywags, the byways must be select as Curzon Street; the hedges were those of private gardens, and the hunt was conducted on the garden side.

That third Sunday had been a success in its public aspect. "I say, what a crowd!" remarked Jacob.

Lola—just returned to the drawing-room after speeding the departure of the last straggler—shut the door with decision.

"Your manners are simply appalling," was her reply.

Jacob, serenely unconscious of offence, was too astonished for words. He looked his amazement, trying to catch the eye of a wife, who lighted a cigarette with unnecessary vigour, threw the match into the fire, picked up a book, walked angrily across the room, sat down and began to read, all without a single glance in his direction.

An intense silence followed, during which the turning of a page of Lola's book—and she seemed to be reading incredibly fast—sounded like the crepitation of musketry.

"I haven't the least notion what you mean?" He was somewhat afraid of the sound of his own voice.

The intermittent musketry practice terminated with a volley—the book was slammed with a horrible crash.

"Well, I think 's about time you learned, then!"

"Learned what?"

"You leave me to wait on everyone, while you stick in a corner with Mona Fermor, and never stir a finger." The answer had the air of being consequent on her first complaint, the intervals of hush and of question and answer had been obliterated evidently; but to give point to the accusation, she closed on the keynote "Your manners are simply appalling."

Now, Jacob had been trying to be polite. He had picked out Miss Fermor and tried to entertain her, because he had seen her sitting neglected in a corner. He did not care for Miss Fermor, her Grecian nose made no more appeal to him than her Rossetti mouth, and her conversation bored him. His attentions to Miss Fermor were by way of being a noble act of self-sacrifice, and ten minutes had marked the limit of his renunciation. Furthermore, Lola had been surrounded with male helpers in addition to Deb. Every man, with the exception of Guy Latham, had been giving assistance. Jacob had a sense of justice, he was willing to admit a fault, but he resented blame when his intention had been innocent.

"I don't think you are quite fair," he began, and, neglecting a sound of contempt from Lola, which was more nearly a snort than anything, he went on: "I didn't know you wanted me to help you."

"Haven't you the least idea of manners? Surely you must know that it isn't usual for the host to wedge himself up in a corner, and let his wife wait on everyone." This interruption to Jacob's speech was tempestuous.

Jacob was still puzzled. He couldn't understand the reason for the outbreak. "But you had Cairns, and Leigh-Weston and Snell and all the others to help you," he persisted.

"Oh! can't you understand that you were the host—that it was your proper place to entertain people. . . ."

"I was entertaining Miss Fermor. . . ."

"Yes, you needn't tell me that."

"She was one of our guests."

"So far as you were concerned, she might have been the only one."

"Oh! come, that isn't true." Jacob inevitably took the wrong line of defence, that sense of justice urging him. "I certainly did not talk to her for more than ten minutes."

"Don't be a fool!"

"Certainly not more than ten minutes," repeated Jacob.

"Oh! you make me sick. Why tell lies about it? You know perfectly well that you hardly spoke to anyone else."

"Oh! rot!" exclaimed Jacob, with vehemence.

"You needn't shout at me, though I suppose I might have expected you would; you seem to have no conception of the instincts of a gentleman."

She had been trying to wound him, deliberately, and, now, she had succeeded. His face grew hot and his lips trembled, but he held himself in; he paused for a moment, and then made for the door. He did not mean to slam it, certainly not so hard, but the thing happened, and nearly drowned the final sentence: "And it is quite time you learned."

Supper was conducted in horrible silence. Jacob preferred to eat his cold beef without mustard, sooner than ask Lola to pass him that condiment. He felt it an act of daring when he asked her in as level a voice as possible, if she would have any more beef. The temperature of her tone in replying might have kept the beef fresh for a voyage.

After supper they read; that is to say, Jacob sat with an

open book held in front of him, and mechanically scanned page after page, but the sense of the words never penetrated to his brain. He was going over and over the scene of the afternoon, and when he remembered a former apotheosis—that "One would never have known"—he was almost ready to choke. He endured it for an hour, and then he let the book fall in his lap.

Lola was looking at him with a smile

"You might know what a jealous little beast I am," was the explanation she offered.

"But, Lola darling, Miss Fermor of all people. I can't stand the woman."

"You looked so absorbed."

"I expect I was bored to extinction."

"But, anyway, you ought to have helped me with the tea."

"I'm sorry. I won't forget next time."

Yet he was glad when the reconciliation was over, he was glad when she went to bed and left him to his last, deliberate cigarette. He paused before lighting it to reflect on her thinness. She was not a satisfactory person to—to nurse, and she had no passion, she was not reciprocal, she didn't stir him, she . . . He realized what he was thinking, and lighted his cigarette hastily. It was curious that his dreams that night were of Madeline; a slightly improved Madeline, who walked with him through an impossible to-morrow.

3.

He had told Lola about Madeline, in the early days, in that first blissful fortnight. After that first serious quarrel, he had good cause to regret the indiscretion. His often-repeated, "I was a fool to tell her; good Lord, I *was* a fool!" represents a futility, for even as he protested his foolishness, he knew with certainty that he would tell again in similar circumstances, that it would be impossible for him to refrain from telling.

The question had been direct; asked if there had ever been another woman in his life, his reply had, necessarily, been in the affirmative. There were a dozen reasons for admission,

and only one for denial, and that one was unrealized by him, though he may have felt a moment's doubt as to his wisdom in confessing.

The reasons for confession were manifold, but two will serve. The first was his difficulty in the telling of an unprepared lie; it came harder to him, now, than it did in the Ashby Sutton days. In those days there had been other motives. An honourable lie to defend another person seemed admirable, and even a lie which involved ingenuity became endowed with qualities, it had the attractiveness of literature. Faced with a frank question demanding the answer "Yes" or "No," if he had lied, his "No" would have had the full significance of "Yes."

The other reason was one of vanity. To confess a blameless life would have seemed to him a confession almost shameful, certainly derogatory. He envied the man who was adored of women. He figured the attractions of such a man as essentially virile, and was the more ambitious to win the flattery of adoration, because he believed conscientiously, and without self-deception, that he had none of the qualities admired by the other sex. It is evident that in the first flush of success, when he had found a woman to administer the flattery he had yearned for, he could not have made an admission which would, in his opinion, have lowered him in the eyes of a woman. His confession of early conquest had been, indeed, a boast, and the facts had been subtly transfigured; an aspect, this, of the ingenious, constructive lie which was not difficult. Of Miss Mason and her kind he had not spoken—fortunately, no question had been asked—there was nothing admirable in these things, there had been no conquest.

Moreover, Madeline was the daughter of a baronet, and was, now, a Countess. This was to brag, indeed.

He had been a fool, there was no denying it, but one reason for bitterness, albeit a contradiction, was not known to him. Lola had not believed him. That there had been something, she believed, but not all he had boasted. Lola Wilmot was a student of society, and the name of the bewildering Lady Paignton was well-known to her. Madeline was a famous

beauty, and she had a reputation. (In the clubs men wondered why Paignton stood it.) "Not a nice woman," would have been Deb's verdict, but Lola had a sneaking admiration for so splendid a sinner, Lola's own defections having been by no means splendid. Over all, there shone the glory of the coronet which imparts a special virtue not corruptible by immorality. In Lola's mind there could be no connection in thought between Madeline, Countess of Paignton, whose amours knew no limit of ambition, and Jacob Stahl, sometime architect's assistant, whose father had been something in the City ;—the old disguise had served to cover the shameful admission that Hermann Stahl had been a mere commercial traveller. Lola Wilmot had taken too much for granted before she committed herself, and afterwards, perhaps, it had been a case of *faute de mieux*, complicated by that "confounded cussedness."

These things have a bearing on future quarrels, but not so great a bearing as Lola's great *coup de main*. It was a master-stroke, this, which evidenced great capabilities, genuine talent in the misrepresentation of facts, a genius for the comprehension of character. It put a weapon in Lola's hands that quelled and subdued Jacob, a master weapon of diabolical ingenuity.

4.

This weapon came into use almost by accident.

It was at the end of October, when they had been married some two months, that the great and never-to-be-forgotten scene was enacted.

Jacob had been reading a novel, a harmless book enough, with an excellent moral, but the author with a commendable eye for realism had explained for his own purposes the signification of a phrase which he had occasion to use. It was no less a phrase than that used in our church registers (the lay official is more candid) to describe the condition of divorced persons, namely, "Single and unmarried." The novelist had used it as a heading for one of his chapters.

They were sitting in the drawing-room after dinner. When

Jacob read the chapter heading he smiled, and was on the point of reading it aloud for Lola's amusement, when he reflected that she had shown signs of being in an uncertain temper all day, and that it would be a pity to disturb her now that she was keeping so quiet. She, also, had a book in which she was interested. So Jacob read on.

He read the novelist's explanation twice, very carefully, and then his heart went thump and stopped, and then thumped again so loudly that he thought Lola would hear it. His first feeling was one of extraordinary excitement; he was in the middle of a wildly exciting adventure, cast for a big part in a real drama. This strange thing had happened to him, of all people, he could hardly credit it. He dropped his book and stared into the fire, but Lola did not raise her eyes.

But to this feeling there succeeded a realization of the facts of life. He had been duped. This woman he had married had lied to him, deceived him. He tried to be very angry and resentful, but that ethical sense of his began to dominate him. She must have had some good reason. And, lastly, a desire to be fine overtook him—a reversion, maybe, to his first feeling for the theatre—a desire to be splendidly forgiving, broad-minded, humble, condescending, gracious, heroic, and magnificently self-sacrificing all in one. He continued to gaze into the fire, revolving these things.

And, at last, Lola became conscious of a feeling of tension in the atmosphere. She was sensitive to atmospheres. At first she was a little uneasy, restless, and then she looked over the top of her book at Jacob staring into the fire.

"Jimmy," she said sharply, "what are you dreaming about?"

He started slightly, turned, and looked at her.

She read something unusual in that look, and dropped a hand on to the arm of her chair.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, and Jacob could see that she was frightened.

"It's nothing—really," he said, and stretched out an arm, leaned over, and offered her the book he had been reading.

She took it in silence, and read the indicated paragraph.

Jacob returned to his contemplation of the fire, it was an act of delicacy.

Lola watched him for an instant intently, shrewd analysis in her eyes, watched him with the intent eyes of a prize-fighter looking for his opportunity, then she came and knelt by him, buried her face on his shoulder. Jacob put an arm round her, and said: "Tell me all about it, dear."

It was the one thing in the world she had no intention of doing, but she told him a masterly story, inconsecutive, full of gaps, without detail or confirmation, but, to him, so completely and finally convincing.

It began with a fact. She had been married at twenty. That was the only statement which was quite truthfully represented. To please her mother—Edgar was well-off, and she had not disliked him. The preliminaries were a trifle obvious. The remainder was chiefly innuendo.

"We didn't quarrel exactly, but—he was brutal, there were other women—soon, and I knew he was tired of me. He wanted to get rid of me. Oh! it was hell, hell. My mother never believed me, she sided with Edgar. I had to bear it all alone and pretend. I had to pretend to our friends that I was happy. Once I tried to commit suicide. Look!" She raised her head for a moment, and showed him a straight scar under her chin.

"Good God!" murmured Jacob. He had never noticed the scar before, a little white line, possibly two inches long across her throat.

She dropped her head again. "And then," she went on, "there was a man Edgar threw in my way. He did it deliberately. He wanted to be rid of me, and the man was sorry for me. There was never anything between us, we were only friends, but it was so easy to compromise us, and I didn't care—I wanted to be free, then, even though it meant poverty and disgrace. The case was not defended. No one ever contradicted the lies they told about me." She was crying now, in a state of complete emotional prostration. The story she was telling had taken hold of her, her imagination made it all real. She was the injured innocent, she did not complicate

her rôle by bitterness, rave of revenge or kill the verisimilitude of her simplicity by any art of the theatre. In her quiet grief that seemed to bear no malice, she was supremely artistic and convincing.

"What became of the man?" asked Jacob.

"He wasn't well-off. He had no money to defend the case. I hardly saw him afterwards. He was very bitter against Edgar, and it put him against me. I believe he thinks it was deliberate on my part, too; that I used him to get my freedom. It is difficult for you to understand how utterly careless I was about it all, but nothing seemed to matter just then, only that I should be alone and free."

There was insistence on that anxiety to be away from her husband. No accusation was made, but the unspoken suggestion left a deep impression. When Jacob, anxious on this point, asked a question, she shuddered. "I can't speak of that," she said.

What a subject for pity she had become! How evilly treated! What remained for Jacob but to make amends for all that cruelty; to give her peace and love and a little joy in life? That was become, now, his one reason for existence. How could he ever again reproach her? He must endure, and endure silently, whenever he suffered misunderstanding from her; he must remember how much more cruelly she had been misunderstood.

"You have had a rotten time, darling, but it will be all right now," he said.

She clung to him a little closer, and was bitterly sorry for herself.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" he asked presently.

"I meant to. I know I ought to have told you," she said, she was all humility this evening, "but oh! if you only knew how I hate any reference to the subject, you would understand how I have put it off and put it off; and then I began to hope it need never be mentioned."

"I understand!" said Jacob. "We won't ever refer to it again."

It was a happy evening in many ways. If only that mood

of humility had stayed, there might have been a hope for them, but it soon evaporated. Lola Stahl had gifts, great gifts; she could deceive others and deceive herself; but she could never make any man happy nor find true happiness for herself. The curse which had been laid upon her was the instinct to kill the thing she loved, to kill the love she desired by irritating it to death. Her emotionalism, her insincerity, her posing, and her intense egotism were the outward signs of a shallow woman who longed to be deep; and she achieved the appearance of depth; but by complexity. She was not clever enough to see that it is only the single-hearted who are capable of great emotions. The greatest of Lola Stahl's troubles had never weighed upon her; her greatest grief had been compounded of emotionalism and false sentiment; the outward aspect of it had always been her chief concern, even when she was alone.

"Just one more question," said Jacob. "It's the last."

She nodded her acquiescence.

"That man we met in Oxford Street; was he . . . ?"

"Edgar," she nodded. This, also, was a true statement. After a long pause, during which she sat still at his feet, holding his hand, she said:

"Promise not to make me think of it again!"

"I promise—faithfully," returned Jacob.

5.

The determination to work, made in Great Ormond Street when faced with the necessity for the liquidation of capital, was put to the test on the first Monday after Jacob's return from Paris. It is probable that the start might have been postponed to Tuesday or Wednesday, had it not been for Lola, who assumed without question that Jacob would start work on Monday. He had essayed enthusiasm. "There's an awful lot to be done," had been his form of submission.

A quondam dining-room had been devoted to the uses of an office. It was on the entrance floor, and easy of access for clients; and for any travellers who might be attracted by

the brilliance of the new brass plate. This room had been satisfactorily fitted for its new purposes. A drawing-table had been fixed in the window, a long brown wood slab that reached from wall to wall, canted slightly towards the room and fixed at a height convenient for one either to stand and work, or to use the tall stool. In the middle of the room was a great pedestal table with edges shot, and inlaid with a hard wood slip to take the head of a T-square and guarantee a reliable right angle. The pedestal which supported this table was filled with long drawers capable of receiving a double elephant sheet laid flat. Only two drawers out of twenty were filled as yet. One contained "cartridge," and the other "Whatman"; the other eighteen drawers would presently be labelled with the titles of the various jobs executed by J. L. Stahl, Aroht. & Surveyor. On your right as you looked out into the Square was a bookcase of capable dimensions, containing at present some hundred and fifty works on technical subjects; the majority of them bought within the past three months. For the rest, there were the usual furnishings. On the walls were hung T-squares of various sizes, set-squares, curves, and a centrolinead which Jacob had not yet learned to use, but which he had bought because he meant to make his own "perspectives," with Lola's help. The only other mural adornments were two engravings in oak frames which did not represent architectural subjects. In one corner, badly placed for light, but there had been no other place for it, was a big roll-top desk, with a revolving chair, and against the walls near at hand were three other chairs designed for callers. It was at the desk that Jacob intended to sit when interviewing his clients.

Into this rather bleak room, in which he was to spend so many long hours, Jacob came with Lola at half-past nine on that first Monday morning. They decided that it looked business-like and professional. Everything had been provided, all the receptacles designed for various necessities and conveniences had been filled. Office note-paper, paper-fasteners, foolscap, pencils, indiarubber, drawing instruments, elastic bands, pens . . . a whole catalogue of little things,

were all in their proper places, nothing remained but to sit down and begin.

"I won't interrupt you," said Lola, and went out.

Jacob sat down at the open desk and prepared to begin.

The trouble was to know just how to start. Bradley's jobs had not come in yet. Eric's job must be visited and measured, and the drains tested. (Jacob had bought a book on drainage.) For Cairns' job he had, as yet, no particulars. Obviously, he must begin by writing letters to Bradley, Eric, and Cairns. This was soon done. What next? He might, of course, get out some sketches for Cairns, but what was the good? It would be a waste of time. If Cairns wanted plans to talk over when he came, there were any number of designs in the *Builder* and the *Architects' Review*, and he had five years' bound volumes of those journals. He took them down and went through them, marking the position of any plans he thought suitable with slips of paper.

At a quarter past eleven he found himself yawning.

"Oh! Lord, this won't do," he thought. "I'm just getting through the time as I did at Morley's. I wish to goodness I had something definite to do." It was the old trouble of lack of initiative. He found it so hard to make work for himself. "Those drains of Eric's," was his next thought. "I'll go down to Putney as soon as I hear from him." He took down the book on drainage, and prepared himself to make a comprehensive study of the subject, but the book was technical and not very comprehensible. The yawns were not stifled by his study of drains. Nevertheless, it tided him over till half-past twelve, and then he went upstairs to report progress.

Lola had been out shopping, and was full of her own affairs. She did not ask many questions, and Jacob's report gave the impression of a fairly successful morning.

The first two days were in some ways the worst, and were not truly representative. The end of the week was brightened by two expeditions. The first to Putney, on Wednesday, when he had the good luck to find a moderately competent workman to assist him in the work of testing the drains. The workman's practical experience and Jacob's theoretical know-

ledge were combined to put the drains of Eric's future residence to a severe test by water, a test to which they were by no means impervious.

"'Er leaks somewheres," was the workman's verdict on nearly every length examined, and Jacob, after repeated questionings as to whether the workman was sure his "plug was holding," was—perhaps a little reluctantly—forced to admit that "'er did leak somewheres."

"They'll all 'ave to come up," was the verdict of labour, and in Jacob's report there was a rider to the effect that the system was not above criticism; bell-traps, a liability to siphonage—practically exploited—and unventilated lengths of drain were commented upon. Jacob was proud of that report—it was practical, and showed competence; moreover, it led to a triumph.

Eric, the hard-and-fast, replied with what was almost an insult, however carefully worded. Would Jacob object to Eric's taking a second opinion? The report involved an expenditure far in excess of the sum originally estimated. Eric did not want to incur that expense unless it was absolutely necessary. The letter implied, though it carefully avoided stating, a doubt as to Jacob's competence. The old attitude, of course. Eric would never believe that Jacob could do anything properly.

The expert opinion called in was undoubtedly reliable, none other than the sanitary surveyor. There was a four-handed conference at the house at Putney between the surveyor, Eric, Jacob, and the competent workman, who had been again engaged by Jacob to perform necessary and somewhat unclean duties. The surveyor, who took nothing on trust, and gave careful attention to the fixing of every plug, had no objection to employing Jacob's workman. The second testing was exceedingly thorough, but the result of it detracted little from the matter of Jacob's report, now in the hands of the surveyor. The little that was clipped was elaboration, the result of Jacob's experience of hospital work in Mr. Morley's office. The surveyor hesitated a little, and thought some of the recommendations were, perhaps, unnecessary. But he

spoke to Jacob as to a brother-professional, and was interested in hearing of the precisions involved in drains that carried infection.

It was a complete triumph. For the first time in his experience Jacob was able to put his brother in the background. Eric's opinion on these matters was worth nothing, and when the conference was concluded, Eric was almost apologetic.

"I hope you didn't mind our consulting the surgeon," he said. "You see how matters stand." And after Jacob had denied that there was any cause to complain -- as things had turned out, he was quite satisfied -- Eric implied that he would have complete confidence in leaving everything concerning the structure of the Putney house in his brother's hands.

This was splendid, but there were many practical difficulties still to be struggled with, and the competent workman, though he received a substantial acknowledgment, did not receive certain credit that was due to him. If Jacob had visited the Putney house with an incompetent workman on that first occasion, it is doubtful whether those defective drains would not have been passed.

The second expedition in that first week was to Bradley, and the outcome of it was not quite so encouraging.

"I admit it's a beastly job," Bradley said. "But you will have plenty of time to give to it, and my fellows are full up."

"Yes, I have plenty of time," replied Jacob, with a feeling of doubt as to whether that were all that would be needed.

The beastly job was an alteration to a certain building in Old Broad Street. There was a great wandering basement, shut off from daylight, now partly partitioned off into sample rooms, and partly devoted to lumber; this had to be cleared, some daylight admitted if possible, old columns and floor supports re-designed, a new staircase planned, and the whole generally improved and redecorated, so that it might serve the purposes of a restaurant. On other floors, further clearances had to be effected. In brief, the old wandering, unlettable place had to be reconstructed internally without touching the shell, so that it might be turned to profit and bring in a rental of over £2,000 a year. Bradley was quite

right, it was a beastly job, nothing straightforward about it. When Jacob took home the rough plans, he had really no idea how to set about the work. And there was no credit in it. Bradley appeared as the architect, if Jacob took the commission; only the work, not the client, had been passed on. There was one consolation, Bradley would be responsible, and would not pass Jacob's designs until they were approved. Nevertheless, Jacob had to demonstrate his competence to Bradley, and he doubted his ability. This was before the triumph of the four-handed conference, which served to put new heart into him—for a time.

The work of Cairns hung fire. In the first place, because Jacob felt that he had his hands full, in the second, because Cairns insisted that there was no hurry. He consented to look through some of the plans in the *Builder*, one Sunday, but he never came to figures or any precise information as to his own plans. He talked a great deal of detail, vaguely, but even the site was not yet decided upon. "You might look out for something," he said to Jacob concerning this question of site, and Jacob said he would, though he had no idea in what direction he was to look. "I don't care where it is," Cairns had said. "It must be high, I like hills; not too far from a station in a well-wooded country. I must have at least ten acres of ground, and don't forget to see that there is plenty of water."

It is not difficult to understand why Cairns' plans were shelved, and it is fairly certain that even the most initiative of architects would never have brought that genial philanthropist up to the scratch. Cairns' house was a castle, and its situation was unapproachable in the days before aeroplanes and dirigibles. This fact made it all the more unbearable that Lola, whenever she needed an accusation to bring against Jacob, always reverted to Cairns' plans, instancing them as an example of a splendid opportunity lost by indolence.

"The first Sunday I mentioned the subject, I told you to get out the plans, and not wait for further particulars from him," was a statement of hers which had a bewildering quality of truth, and it carried an implication that was

justified. Jacob knew that he had shirked, and all his protestations that Cairns never meant to build, did not excuse that first evasion.

With all his cleverness, and Jacob was clever in many ways even as an architect, it is easy to see why he failed. That lack of energy and initiative was the primary cause, among the secondaries were his lack of self-confidence, his incapacity to keep his mind on uncongenial subjects, and, finally, the spirit of despair and complete lack of interest which overtook him when domestic and financial worries fretted his mind and made him incapable of any act of concentration. It is that desperate state of mind which must now be recorded, it grew upon him after the second completed year of his married life.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ANOTHER ANODYNE

1.

THE pitiable mental condition into which Jacob declined during the third year of his married life, a condition possible only to a man of his temperament, yet in no way representative of his normal abilities, will be clearly understood by the scientific psychologist, the student of the normalities and abnormalities of mental functions under stress. But the critic of human actions and motives, whose judgment is based on his knowledge of literature rather than on his knowledge of life, will inevitably overlook the pathology of the case, and demonstrate, on *a priori* grounds, that Jacob Stahl was both culpable and incapable. The contradiction involved is purely metaphysical, and is put on one side by the critic whose name is Everyman—the word “man” in this connection denoting genus, not sex.

Indeed, the thing happened; it was inevitable that Jacob should suffer criticism—and condemnation. In some cases a shrug of the shoulders suggested the word “incapable,” in others the accusation was vocal, often lengthy, and “culpable”

was the essence and intention of the prosecutor, who also took over the functions of jury and judge. From the prosecutor's point of view, it was most unfortunate that he (the pronoun is asexual) could not, also, assume the supreme function of lawgiver, and so enforce the now futile sentence pronounced in the assumed capacity of judge. "If I had my way . . ." is the subjunctive full of significance, which hints at a perfect world; but the pictured Utopias are so various. If Jacob had had his way, for instance, it is hard to imagine that it would have led to the same ideal as that of his prosecutor. . . .

The shadow of financial trouble was growing darker every day, it was a shadow so all-embracing that all other explanations—save one—are unnecessary.

Bradley fulfilled his promise to the letter. After that first "beastly job" in Old Broad Street, which got itself carried out somehow, with Bradley's assistance, a real client was passed on to Jacob. The client's name was Catling, and he appeared at first to be so full of promise that Jacob engaged an assistant at a salary of £2 a week. Catling was intent on the development of a Northern suburb, his ideas were large, but his methods were practical. He had conceived the theory, even in those days of Queen Victoria, that the average Londoner prefers to live in a house that is habitable. Catling's suburb was to be designed; the houses were to be planned by an architect, and each and every one of them was to be considered in detail with a view to rendering them habitable. It is possible that the scheme might have been a success even in those days, but certain qualifications were necessary for the architect, qualifications which Jacob did not possess. Catling's architect should have been a practical man in the sense implied by George Beane, ex-Mayor of Birchester—that is to say, he should have understood the possibilities and uses of material with a view to economy. When it came to figures on Jacob's estimates, the scheme was unworkable. If you spend £1,000 in building a house, you cannot afford to let it for £35 a year in any case, and in Catling's scheme there was a sinking-fund to be allowed for. Catling came to the

conclusion that his scheme was an economic impossibility, and not one of the houses was ever built. The fee allowed for the drawings made, was miserably inadequate, but Catling beat Jacob down. Catling was a business man, and had other irons in the fire, also, his capital was limited.

Yet this scheme of Catling's kept Jacob occupied for more than a year. He was justified in building great hopes upon it, for if the plan had matured, it would have kept him fully employed and provided him with a sufficient income. The withdrawal of Catling marked the first coming of the shadow of despair.

And, meanwhile, that capital in the funds was evaporating at a most unholy speed. Lola had ideas about entertaining, and her ideas grew as her scope widened. "You must know people," she said to Jacob, and knowing them, in her sense, meant entertaining them. The Stahls' circle of acquaintances extended rapidly, but the anticipated advantages were still to seek. Jacob only garnered two very small jobs from all that circle. It is difficult to understand quite why it was that his connection did not grow, but, certainly one reason was Jacob's modesty. Even Lola could not teach him to talk about himself and brag of his professional attainments, and this part of the affair was left to him entirely. Lola herself, always avoided any form of advertisement; she had a pride, true or false, which took fright at giving any hint to her guests that some form of payment was expected for their entertainment. Indeed, it is probable that she allowed her social ambition to deaden her common-sense. She figured to herself that her part of the business was to entertain, and she did it thoroughly, and forgot that, so far as she was concerned, the entertainment was for a specific purpose. She had definitely given up her own work three months after her marriage. She was not strong enough to keep it up, she had said.

She must be forgiven on one count—Jacob did not confide his financial troubles to her in detail. He had never given her a clear statement as to his means before they were married. Afterwards he hinted difficulties at first, but he found that

conversation on these subjects always led to bickerings, and to the use by Lola of that unhappy word "must" in connection with Jacob's doings. As a result, he withdrew into himself, and bore his troubles in loneliness. His attitude after two years of marriage was, briefly, "Anything to avoid a row. I've got enough worries without that." Unhappily, rows were not avoidable; Jacob, fallen long since from the pedestal of heroes, was now become one of those unfortunates who can never do anything right. Lola's methods were the more cruel in that they were so subtle.

2.

A day which definitely marked the deepening of the shadow came one May, when Jacob was just thirty years old, and had been married for nearly two years and nine months. They had been to a theatre and to an "at home" the night before, and Lola's temper had suffered because she had been over-tired.

Lola did not come down to breakfast, which was a relief, but another and equally depressing companion shared Jacob's meal. It arose like a genie out of the small compass of a letter, and, having arisen, filled the world—Jacob's world. The letter contained the information that £800 alone stood between him and financial failure.

He withdrew into his office to think things over, not because he liked the office—he had grown to loathe it and its associations—but because he was afraid that Lola might be down at any moment.

He sat down at his desk, and began to draw idly, meaninglessly on a piece of paper, first capital letters and grotesque heads, and then disconnected curves and lines. His thoughts were running round in a vicious circle, thus: "Something must be done, we can't go on like this. Only £800 left, it won't last us another year, not much more than six months at our present rate. Good Lord! I have been a fool. I must tell her. She must understand the situation, now, while there is still something left. We might let the house furnished. I

might get some regular work. But I must make a clean breast of it, and then . . ."—he shrugged his shoulders—"then there will be an awful shindy." He pulled down the corners of his mouth, and became intent on the accurate drawing of an entirely meaningless curve. "Shindy, shindy, shindy," he repeated aloud, and then printed the word in capitals on the paper in front of him. "Oh! my God! I can't face it," he said, still speaking aloud, and he got up from his desk and began to pace up and down the room. The sound of a step overhead warned him that Lola was up. He took a sudden, desperate resolution. He had been through this half a dozen times in the past three months; he must act. Lola must know. He went upstairs before his resolution had time to cool, and found Lola criticizing housemaid's work in the drawing-room.

"That new girl is a perfect siut," was the greeting he received. "She hasn't touched this room this morning."

It was always a case of "that new girl" in Bloomsbury Square. Mrs. Stahl did not keep her servants.

"Hasn't she?" replied Jacob wearily.

"You can see for yourself that she hasn't," said Lola indignantly. "Will you ring? I must speak to her."

The occasion was not well chosen, but Jacob knew that a really suitable occasion might be difficult to find. He was desperate, this morning, his mind was revolving to the tune of "only £800 left" out of over £4,500, in less than three years. Where had it all gone?

"Never mind the maid just now," he said. "I want to talk to you."

She scented trouble, instinctively. "Oh?" she said, and in the interrogating ring of the monosyllable there was the sound of disapproval. "Well! Don't be too long over it. I've some shopping to do before lunch."

Jacob was half inclined to play the coward, but he nerved himself now as he had nerved himself eight years before, when he had faced the tyrant of Elmover. This was not such an ordeal as that had been.

"It's about money," he said. "We shall have to draw in

a bit." She was about to speak, but he hurried on. "I heard from my lawyer this morning. He tells me that I have only eight hundred pounds of capital left. What will happen when that's gone—candidly, I don't know—I really don't know."

"What?" It was not a request for a restatement, but a criticism—a sharp, incisive, brutal, slightly vulgar comment.

Jacob could not fail to gather the import of that curt, fault-finding "What?" He fixed his mind as he always did, when a quarrel was impending, on the thought of how Lola had suffered during her first marriage. Her first husband had been a brute. Jacob was determined she should never be in a position to bring that accusation against him. "I'm sorry," he said, meekly (far too meekly!), "but those are the facts."

And you kept me ignorant of the fact that we were living on our capital? Oh! . . ." She shrugged her shoulders with a gesture of hands and arms, and turned away to the window. Her contempt could not have been expressed more plainly.

"I wanted to save you worry," explained Jacob, keeping his temper

she snorted, politely. "Save me worry?" she repeated. "Do you think I haven't worried, when I have seen how you've let your chances slip by?" She spoke with her back to him.

"What chances?"

"Every chance that's been put in your way!" She turned to him, "From Mr. Cairns' house onwards."

"Let's leave Cairns' house out of it," begged Jacob. "What else was there?"

"Oh! you muddled that work of Mr. Catling's in some incomprehensible way. Got him out estimates for about twice as much as he wanted to spend, and then let him off for about a tenth of what he ought to have paid you."

"You don't understand these things," said Jacob. How could he go into the detail of that affair of Catling's? There was so much to be said, but it would be so useless to try to say it. She would take him up on the first point, and escape the main issue.

"I think I understand—perfectly," she said.

The worst of it was that she did understand up to a point, and Jacob had been fool enough to confide in her within limits. He remembered that in a generous mood she had sympathized with him when he had lost Catling's work.

"I really don't think you can say I threw away my chances with regard to Catling," Jacob returned to the chief of the side issues with which his wife was obscuring the question of rash expenditure.

"Of course you did." There was contempt in her face, and tone. "You slacked and muddled; you know it yourself perfectly well."

If only there had not been a grain of truth in the accusation, he might have had an efficient answer, but she was so infernally clever, so diabolically subtle in her attacks. She misrepresented, but her very misrepresentations had so much sting.

"I don't see that it is any good abusing me," said Jacob. "You have done that often enough. It won't mend matters."

"There is only one way to mend matters, my dear Jimmy; you must pull yourself together, and be a little less indolent."

"Oh! Good Lord! What am I to do?"

"Why didn't you go in for competitions? Wasn't that how Mr. Bradley got all *his* work?"

"I'm not clever enough!"

"It's rather a pity you didn't tell me you were a fool before we were married."

"I think it is," replied Jacob quietly, and then, to cover up the significance of his saying, he added, "You soon found it out."

"What do you mean by you think it is? I suppose you've been regretting it for some time. Well? Why don't you get rid of me? It won't be a new experience—for me." She put a world of meaning, bitterness, and misery, into that "for me." It was unfair, it was not justified, but, as usual, it reduced Jacob to feebleness.

"My dear Lola, don't talk like that. I have never given you the least cause—in any way."

"You've been very forbearing, I know, but you have even given up pretending that you love me."

It was true, damnably true, and he knew it. He had tried so hard to go on pretending, tried in his own thoughts even, but all his trying had been useless. He did not love her; she had killed his love, if he had ever had any, killed it slowly, deliberately, remorselessly, and, now, she adduced the fact that he no longer loved her as evidence against him. Of all the uses of her weapon, that weapon she had wielded so cruelly ever since her confession, this was the one that wounded him most. Curiously, it aggravated him at the same time. If he loved her no longer, whose fault was it?

"It's not a case of pretending," he protested. "You know I haven't altered," but there was no conviction in his tone, no warmth.

"You are quite right," she said. "It's not a case of pretending. You've even given up doing that."

Jacob sat down and buried his head in his hands. He foresaw the ending of this discussion now. She had made it impossible for him to return to the money question without bullying her. He had merely given her another cause for complaint against him. And, presently, it might not be for two or three days, there would be a reconciliation. How he loathed those reconciliations when he was brought lower than the dust, and then forced to pretend—to pretend he loved her. Yet what could he do? this must go on and on, always. It would go on when they had been driven from Bloomsbury Square, and he had found work as an assistant in some architect's office, and Lola, perhaps, if her pride would let her, had taken up her own work again. Yes, it would go on; it must go on. Her first husband had been a brute—Jacob must do his best.

"Very well," he said wearily, after a long interval of silence. "Have it your own way."

"My own way, indeed!" She had won and meant, now, to have full value for her victory. "There isn't much chance of my having my own way unless you make up your mind to work, instead of wasting your time, mooning about the place."

"Oh! go on!" put in Jacob. "You've said it all before."

"And you never take any notice! Why don't you ask Mr. Bradley to give you some more work?"

"He hasn't any to give away at the present moment. I can't go on pestering him."

"I suppose he's sick of your incapacity, if the truth were known."

"Very likely."

"Don't sit there like a dummy agreeing with everything I say. Why don't you try and behave like a man?"

"I wonder what you would say if I did?" He had another thought in his mind, and he looked at her directly. He hardly ever looked at her when they were quarrelling.

"I can't imagine the possibility," she retorted.

Jacob got up and walked slowly across the room. There was only one way to treat such women as these, was the thought in his mind. She would respect him, perhaps love him, if he were brutal. But her first husband had been a brute! *Had he?* For the first time Jacob began to doubt that assertion.

"Where are you going?" asked Lola sharply, as he reached the door.

"Hell, I think," replied Jacob, and he heard her laugh scornfully as he went out. He shut the door quietly and deliberately.

3.

He did not go to hell immediately, not even to that little private hell of his downstairs which had become so populous. It was full of devils, that room. Since the assistant had gone—he had been dismissed when Catling's work failed—Jacob had shrunk more and more from facing the first morning entry into his office. He would postpone beginning work when it was possible; only the choice of the harder alternative—Lola's reproaches on his idleness—drove him to that retreat. And then the usual struggle began. The physical nausea which overtook him at the thought of effort, the

physical distaste he felt towards any exercise of brain and imagination. It was all so hopeless, so useless. Lola had killed his faith in himself. He had no diversions, even. To write, or try to write, was waste of time in Lola's eyes. To read was waste of time. He did nothing; he was afraid to read surreptitiously in the office, for fear of Lola's intrusions. She had formed a habit of dropping in upon him unexpectedly "to see how he was getting on." So he had to work, had to make work, had to pretend to work, and at night he felt tired out, though he had accomplished nothing, though there was never anything to show for all his misdirected energy. For energy was expended, however uselessly, and energy of the most draining and exhausting kind. He was like a nervous, fretful horse set to uncongenial work. The draught might be light and the road easy, but the driver jagged his mouth, whipped and fretted him. He had worked himself into a nervous sweat, and every touch of the whip roused resentment. If he had been coaxed and fondled, he would have put his weight to the collar readily enough, proud to show his paces. As it was, he threw up his head, jibbed, shied, and yet tried to demonstrate that he was working. The load remained almost stationary, but the nervous prostration of the animal that drew it was greater than if he had dragged the load across England.

Jacob must not be judged by the philosopher's index, his case was pathological. He had come to believe in his own incapacity, and, mentally, wrote the story of his failure. He pondered over the parallel case of inertia in the negroid races, and came to the conclusion that it was due to the failure of some brain function.

The time had soon come when the thought of suicide presented itself as deliciously attractive. He planned a dozen means of exit, some of them ingenious, by which his parting might be achieved with little effort and with little pain. It was a strange form of altruism which restrained him. He did not consider suicide as an act of cowardice, to himself he believed that he owed nothing, but he felt that he had a responsibility which he could not neglect—his care of Lola.

He did not hate her ; he had not that sublime egotism which induces the nourishment of hatred—sublime egotism, or madness of other kinds. Jacob, even at this moment, was too sane to cherish any persistent ideal of hate. The passion may have blazed in him for a moment when she jarred his most sensitive nerves, but it evaporated rapidly when he was alone. In truth, he was sorry for her. He blamed that brute of a first husband, who had distorted her mind. She could find good in no one. Deb was laughed at behind her back ; Cairns was criticized, unkindly ; Guy Latham's weaknesses were handled without mercy ; Miss Fermor was openly despised. All these criticisms on his acquaintances hurt Jacob. At first he had attempted to stand up for them, but that method had led to unpleasantness. He had fallen into a habit of agreement to avoid the terror of a row—and subsequent reconciliation. She always displayed a weakness for reconciliations, later. It was this trait that set him to framing excuses for her. She had been warped, she had suffered—whatever happened, she must not suffer again at his hands.

All these thoughts, and many other allied thoughts, passed through Jacob's brain in the short time which was occupied in going downstairs. He loitered, it is true. In the hall he paused and looked doubtfully at the closed door of his office. A shaft of May sunlight was piercing the fanlight of the hall door.

He was wearing a blue serge suit that morning. He looked at the hat-stand, paused, took down his bowler, and went out into Bloomsbury Square.

It was one of those rare May days, still and clear, which give a foretaste of summer far more delicious than summer itself ; days which are full of impossible promise, days in which to dream of a to-morrow impossibly romantic.

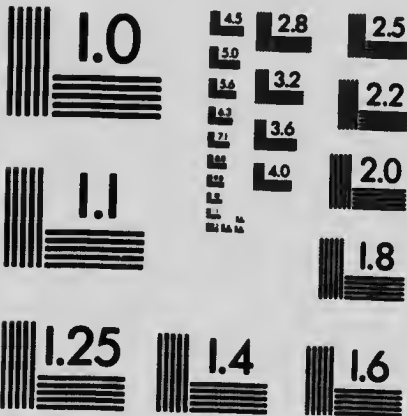
Jacob made for Oxford Street, and bought a straw hat. "The first day of summer," said the shopman, and Jacob agreed with him.

He was going to spend the day in dreaming. This is the sequel to that last deliberate cigarette. He had but one refuge :—to forget. He would forget for a whole day, put



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his life away from him, go out into the quiet and peace of the country, and let the consequences go hang.

He went to Burnham Beeches, selecting a train at Paddington, haphazard, as he had done years before at Ashby Sutton. But this day was not marred by afternoon rain nor excess of claret. He wandered and lingered, discovered the beeches after what seemed to him a very long walk, and had lunch there, a very primitive lunch, for the season for Burnham Beeches had not begun, and the provision for tourists was elementary—but he had it at a trestle-table in the open air, and was satisfied. He drank ginger-beer. Then he idled among the beeches, and played romantic games with an imaginary companion. Later, he drifted eastward over the common, and at five o'clock found himself at Stoke Poges, where he made acquaintance with Gray's churchyard, and was disappointed. He had always associated the "Elegy" with the churchyard at Ashby Sutton, which hung on the side of a hill, and had a fine prospect of meadow-land falling to the distant river. He was very tired when he reached Slough, but restfully, physically tired. His mind had had a much-needed rest from worry and aggravation and the compelling necessity for effort.

But as the horrible train bore him back towards the grime and odour of London, the shadow from which he had escaped for a few hours loomed darkly on the horizon. It was a London shadow; he visualized it as a great, impenetrable pall of smoke which was not smoke in anything but appearance, it was the shadow of a million fearful crimes. Never had there been any shadow like this over him in the country. The thought of his misery at Ashby Sutton, after the perfidy of Madeline had been made clear to him, was a joy, a thing of beauty, compared to the depression of the shadow. His misery then had been clean, romantic, country misery that had a quality of beauty—the sort of misery one could enjoy, in which one could, to a certain extent, luxuriate.

But this shadow! It was—to use Lola's word properly for once—appalling.

It was in the train that he made up his mind definitely.

When the £800 were gone he would go out of the world quietly, by one of the ingenious ways he had devised.

As he put his latchkey into the door of the house in Bloomsbury Square, he braced himself for the coming scene. "This time she really has some excuse," he reflected, and, illogically, decided that on this occasion he would not stand being bullied.

He found Lola in the drawing-room, reading.

"Where, on earth, have you been?" she asked, laying down the book.

He went over to her and drew a chair near to hers.

"In the country. Burnham Beeches," he said, quietly.

She looked at him inquiringly.

"All by yourself?" she asked.

"Yes, all by myself. Most certainly all by myself. I wanted a little peace and quiet." She was strangely calm, he thought. He was almost sorry, he felt in the mood to hold his own.

"Poor old boy," said Lola, soothingly, laying her hand on his. "I'm afraid you've been dreadfully worried lately. But it will all come right." As an afterthought, she added: "But you might have taken me with you. It has been such a glorious day."

"I thought you didn't care for the country," said Jacob.

"I *love* it—sometimes." The accented word was delivered with emotion, and the qualifying adverb hardly depreciated the quality of her enthusiasm.

There was silence for a few moments, she was still holding his hand, and then she said: "What did you do?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," replied Jacob. "Just loafed and mooned and dreamed."

"It's very pleasant to do absolutely nothing, sometimes," returned Lola, softly.

The genius of the woman! How perfectly she realized her limitations! With what consummate skill she bided her time! Her instinct, so sure in some things, so utterly false in others, had told her, even as Jacob entered the room, that this was an occasion when she would be defeated if she attempted to bully him. He was master to-night, and she

would allow him to exercise his mastery if he had a wish to be master. But in her apparent abdication she gained control, she did not lose it. He was master to-night, and knew it, but he had put another fact on record against himself, a fact which she would not scruple to use at some future time. He had not only wasted a whole day in loafing, mooning, dreaming, but he had gone off and left her in suspense, without a word. Later he would learn that she had suffered agonies that day, he would learn that he, too, had been a brute.

Dimly he was conscious of all this, as he sat, his hand resting quietly under hers. But he made no use of his vision—he was inclined to blame himself for having gone out alone. It had been a little brutal. He must make amends by working, really working to-morrow, though the very thought of it brought a feeling of deadness and heaviness. He sighed !

How well Lola knew Jacob—in some ways. How little he knew her in any way at all.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE INDISCRETION OF CAIRNS

1.

CAIRNS had dropped out of Mrs. Stahl's visiting list. He had not been to Bloomsbury Square for more than a year. Jacob had frequently deplored the fact ; he liked Cairns, who had been the means of effecting a change in Jacob's political opinions. In the old days—the system of chronology marks a change of mental attitude—Jacob had been a Conservative. He had accepted the principles of Conservatism as he had accepted the inspiration of the Bible. Radicals and atheists, people like Bradlaugh, were anathema. Even when he had learned to doubt the inspiration of the Bible, he still went on accepting the principles of Conservatism, and he would have been fiercely indignant if anyone had ever accused him of being a Radical, it appeared so obviously to be a term of

reproach, it had none of the ripe, aristocratic savour that attached to the old-fashioned term of Whig. He always pictured a Radical as being unwashed.

Cairns had helped Jacob over another barrier. He had helped him to think for himself in politics, as Bradley had helped him to think for himself in religious matters. Jacob was not converted (or perverted); he did not change his opinions, because he had not held opinions of his own before, but had quietly accepted the opinions of his teachers: he merely developed, and the generosity of his temperament, which admitted readily enough the necessity for equality of opportunity, and the undercurrent of optimism which ran through him, could only result in his becoming Liberal in politics. In his own words, he "wanted everyone to have a chance, and he wanted to see the world progress." It was another aspect of his adoration of success. He even wanted the world to succeed, and this feeling was genuine, it was a part of himself. But as regards the detail of policy, the passing of this or that measure, he was comparatively indifferent. It was the broad lines of policy which interested him, not the minutæ.

Because he was so eager for the success of the world, he missed Cairns, who was an interesting and fluent speaker, and an optimist, also, even more pronounced in his optimism than Jacob. Jacob liked to hear Cairns talk; he missed him.

"I wonder why he never comes, now?" he said to Lola on one occasion.

Lola had signified her contempt for Cairns by a gesture. "I've asked him two or three times, and he's always had some excuse," she said. "I'm not going to run after him. If he doesn't want to come and see us, he needn't."

"I wish he would turn up again," said Jacob.

"He has probably found some new friends who are more interesting," replied Lola; it was quite plain that she was not going to bother her head about so insignificant a matter.

Jacob thought she was unfair to Cairns, but he did not say so. About a fortnight after that excursion to Burnham Beeches, Jacob met Cairns in the street.

"Hal-lo," said Jacob with enthusiasm, "I thought you had gone back to Australia."

Cairns shook hands cordially enough, but he looked slightly distressed. "I've been frightfully busy, my dear fellow," he said, with a preoccupied air. "How are you getting on? How's your wife?"

"Oh! all right," returned Jacob inclusively. He would not admit that everything was all wrong, but he did not wish to lie in detail. "I say, why do you never come to see us, now? It must be over a year, since you've been near us."

"Nonsense! Impossible! I must try and get over next Sunday," said Cairns, but he said it without enthusiasm.

For a moment Jacob was half-inclined to let him go, but he wanted companionship of the kind which Cairns could give him, and he put the inclination on one side.

"Are you doing anything particular just this minute?" he asked. "Couldn't you come and have tea somewhere?"

Cairns was one of those generous, kind-hearted, slightly emotional, undependable persons who always wish to please, and who find a genuine pleasure in generous acts, if they do not involve too great a sacrifice. He was popular with everyone. He achieved popularity with little effort. It was unlike Cairns to hesitate when he was thus flattered by the expressed wish for his company; he found his happiness in being generous. But on this occasion he did hesitate. He looked at his watch.

"A quarter to five?" he said, and paused as though making a mental calculation as to his engagements.

"Do come and have tea, there's a good chap," insisted Jacob. "I've been rather in the blues, and there is no one who can put heart into me better than you can."

Cairns pursed his lips and looked at Jacob keenly. "In the blues, eh?" he said. "Money troubles, or domestic worries?"

"I'm not going to bother you with my affairs," replied Jacob evasively. "I only want to have a jaw, politics, anything you like!"

"Come to my club!" said Cairns.

2.

There can be no doubt that Cairns was imprudent, it has already been noted that he was not dependable. When in funds, he had been known to lend five hundred pounds to a man in trouble, with little or no chance of ever seeing his money back. He had been generous, the action in many ways had seemed fine. It is true that every one of Cairns' friends heard the story, modestly told, artistically told, in a way that threw the limelight on to the troubles of the man to whom the money had been given—it was, obviously, a gift—but even if Cairns had not hidden his light under a bushel, it could not be denied that he stood to gain nothing but the appreciation of his friends. The gift earned him no financial, or even social, advantages. The giving of it had been an emotion which gave Cairns real pleasure.

Another man might have spent the money on a more selfish hobby. This matter of the five hundred pounds is very typical of the man.

When Cairns saw Jacob Stahl's unhappiness—and he drew him out on that subject with little difficulty—Cairns made him a gift of certain knowledge, a giving which must be condemned as imprudent.

It came about very simply. Over the tea-table Cairns initiated the imprudence.

"Why in the blues, old chap?" he asked genially.

"Oh! I don't know," replied Jacob. "Things generally."

"Married life not turned out such a brilliant success as it promised?"

"Oh! I don't know," repeated Jacob, a little uncomfortable. Already he had the feeling of being disloyal to Lola.

"My dear fellow, you can trust me. I saw how things were going a long time ago."

"What? How?" asked Jacob.

Cairns made a French gesture. "My dear fellow, I know the signs. Good Lord! I've been through it all."

"Been through what?" asked Jacob, still on the defensive.

"The trouble of being tied to a woman who can never leave

one alone. There's only one way to treat them, my dear fellow, trust me, I have had experience. If you don't put your foot down, once and for all, your life will be a perfect hell."

"But how could you guess?" said Jacob, throwing up the sponge, and making the great admission.

"It's the type," replied Cairns.

"But you don't know everything," replied Jacob. "There are such complications in this affair."

"Go on, out with it!" said Cairns encouragingly, "you will feel a lot better afterwards." Already Cairns was tempted to be imprudently generous.

"You see, she . . ." Jacob felt that in omitting the name, he made his disloyalty something less shameful, "she had such an awful time during her first marriage. Her husband was an awful brute, and that makes one so sorry for her. I feel that I must do something to make up, you see."

"Hm!" There was a great deal of meaning in the sound, which cannot be expressed in writing. "Hm!" And then, after a slight pause, Cairns, having wavered, gave rein to his temperament, indulged his taste for generosity. "Did your wife tell you that her first husband was a brute?"

"Yes! That is . . . Oh yes! definitely."

"You know he isn't dead?" Possibly Cairns anticipated that the sentence would be dramatic. Jacob received it with a slightly heightened colour and lied loyally.

"Of course. I heard the whole story long ago." He intended, and left the impression, that Lola had confided all particulars before their marriage.

"You've never met him, I suppose?" Cairns still had a minor theatricalism in waiting.

"No! not to speak to. I saw him once. In the street."

"Tall, rather handsome man with a dark moustache?"

Jacob nodded. "Why? Do you know him?" he asked.

"My dear old chap," Cairns' tone had become affectionate, paternally affectionate, "I met him in business about fifteen months ago, and, to tell you the truth, that is why I haven't been to Bloomsbury Square for so long." This time he made his hit.

He had been his own master for so long that the thought of office slavery was become repulsive.

Sometimes he thought : " If only I were alone, I shouldn't mind."

CHAPTER XXX

RECRUDESCENCE

1.

JACOB had often dreamed of Madeline—not only in his waking thoughts. The picture of her had frequently been presented to him in sleep, with that vividness which is beyond the attainment of the conscious imagination. Many times he had waked with a memory of her so enthralling that it had been pain to realize she was separated from him by something more than alienating distance. Many of these dreams were foolish, involving the usual absurdities, but the waking impression was always the same—a longing for her presence, no matter whether his dream had been one of repossession, or the more usual one of the interference of some incomprehensible obstacle. In these dreams Madeline was sometimes married, sometimes a widow, but generally he dreamed of her as she used to be among the old surroundings. He woke to long for the old days returned, and tried, vainly, to revive the ecstasy of the dream by an effort of his waking imagination. After he and Lola occupied separate bedrooms, these dreams recurred more frequently. It may have been that he slept deeper, or it may be that our dreams are affected by the near presence of another sleeper.

In those days Jacob still clung fondly to a few of his old superstitions, and he tried to deceive himself into the belief that these dreams were premonitory. Whenever he could make an opportunity he went into the West End; Bond Street, Regent Street, or Piccadilly. On Sunday mornings he and Lola used often to go to Hyde Park for Church Parade, but he was never rewarded by the least glimpse of the celebrated Lady Paignton.

The months that followed the "great scene," as Jacob labelled it, were in some ways more endurable than the years which had preceded that determining episode, but happiness was far to seek. He had given up hope of happiness, it had become a question of whether the state of being was more, or less, endurable.

Lola, that strangely adaptable personality, had apparently acquiesced in the conditions which were becoming established by habit. She bullied him less, she went out less, she entertained less; she was more like the woman Jacob thought he had married. His chief dread, now, was the return of sentimentality. While that was fended off, he found life just endurable despite the increasing gloom of the financial shadow which lay over him. But the thought of any re-establishment of the old relations between himself and his wife, was utterly repugnant. He did not hate her, but certainly he did not love her. Sexually, she attracted him not at all; as a friend, she was insufficient, too wrapped in the contemplation of her own personality, her own ambitions and despairs. Moreover, he did not trust her. A friend one has learned to distrust is a friend no longer; mutual trust is the only basis for friendship.

As the months went by and Christmas approached, Jacob was forced to the contemplation of the need for financial reconstruction. He put it off till the new year. In January his assets, including commissions due to him, were under £200. He had practically no debts. If they had not been living more economically during the past seven months, the smash would have come sooner. In looking back, Jacob used to divine the finger of Fate in many apparently unconnected events. That chance meeting with Cairns, for instance! A matter of seconds would have made the difference; he and Cairns would not have met, and Jacob's life would have taken another course. He sought to find Fate kindly in its interposition, but all the good that resulted he found in the gathering of experience. That became his philosophy. "Oh! well, it's experience," he would reflect, and hope, blindly, that Fate had a purpose in store for him, a purpose which involved a man tutored by such experience as he had suffered.

One morning towards the end of January, he decided that the life he and Lola were living must go on no longer. They must let the house in Bloomsbury Square, furnished. They must go into rooms. They must do all the other things he had foreseen must be done one day. It would be misery; it would be almost disgrace; it would be failure; but the thing must come. If it were postponed much longer they would be absolutely penniless.

As was his custom on these occasions, he decided to take a lonely walk in order to brace himself for the ordeal of acquainting Lola with the trouble and with his proposed remedy.

It was a clean, frosty morning, with a keen North-East wind that kept the air clear. Jacob climbed on to the top of a 'bus, and rode down to the Marble Arch. He intended to walk through the Park, but the Park looked bleak and deserted, so he decided to face the wind and walk home instead. However, when he reached the top of Bond Street, he changed his mind. The wind was so bitter when one faced it. Bond Street presented itself as a refuge.

He was a little below Grafton Street when the unanticipated, the unexpected happened to him.

Its first appearance took the form of an almost unnoticed victoria, with a dashing pair of bays that passed him, and drew up at a shop a few paces ahead. The footman who got down to stand by, while the occupant of the carriage alighted, and to open the shop door for her, stepped rudely in the direct line of Jacob's advance. Jacob, slightly petulant, took the inside of the pavement to avoid him, and started directly at the alighting occupant of the victoria. One of the lessons he had learned from Cairns was to despise those whom he had once spoken of in a boyish phrase as the "great ones of the earth." His thought, as he stepped round the mannerless footman, was: "Who is this person that needs the whole pavement of Bond Street?" He was distinctly resentful. He would have liked to be a little rude to the aristocrat who drove in a victoria with two horses and two servants.

He stared straight into the tawny eyes of Madeline Paig...

2.

She was a lovely thing to stare at. Any man might be forgiven for staring long and assiduously. She was dressed in dark furs, which gave value to her brilliant colouring. The small bonnets of those days did not hide her magnificent hair. The drive in the cold air had not heightened unduly the natural warmth of her complexion; indeed, she had a complexion which never lost its beauty and clearness. But the chief impression she gave was of her superabundant, glorious vitality; she was feminine, essentially feminine, and she was so buoyant, so eager, she had such a zest for life in her eyes, in her every movement.

Jacob caught his breath and stared like a fool. He forgot to raise his hat. And Madeline, one foot on the step of the victoria, paused and returned for a second his wonderstruck gaze.

An inspiration came to Jacob. He was the first to speak. He raised his hat and smiled. "Quelle bêtise!" he said. It had been a catchword between them in the Felmersdale days, a reminiscence of their first meeting. But inwardly he quailed. She might cut him.

"My dear Jimmy, where did you spring from?"

She, too, had been taken aback for a moment, but her recovery was quicker than his, and she greeted him, now, as if they had parted a few days before, parted as friends or acquaintances, and not with bitter recriminations and insults.

"Come in and help me choose a wedding-present for Nina," she went on quickly. "I haven't the least idea what to get for her. She's not like the ordinary person."

Jacob found himself following this vision of loveliness into an elaborate shop. He had had his revenge on the rude footman. The idea presented itself strongly to him as that menial deferentially held the door open.

"Now, do be helpful," said Madeline to Jacob, as she settled herself in the chair brought forward by a most deferential shopman. She loosened the furs at her throat, and pulled back the heavy cuffs of the long coat from her wrists.

"Give me something to go on," replied Jacob, striving after perfect self-possession, though he was trembling, and thankful for the chair which had been thrust upon him. "Who's Nina going to marry?"

"Oh! a parson, of course. That's why I'm here instead of at a Jeweller's. Diamonds and things are much too giddy for Nina."

Jacob looked round the shop for inspirations. The motive of the place was leather. Leather in a thousand forms, from the daintiest of gold-bound fripperies enshrined in the glass cases of the counter, to the vision of solid and substantial portmanteaux which could be glimpsed down the vista of a skylit show-room in the rear. A wonderful shop, such as can be found only in the great cities. Here was every article a man or woman could wish for, and yet none that had not the essential material of leather incorporated in some detail of its manufacture. Still, no inspiration came to Jacob from his regard of all this superabundance, and the very superior person behind the counter who had displaced the almost equally superb assistant, was waiting graciously for my lady's orders. His superior presence embarrassed Jacob. The man was so deferential in his manner, it seemed impolite to keep him waiting, and he did not proffer the usual question: "About what price?" It was a hint that Jacob had been waiting for and expecting. But this shopman had the air of serving royalty; he did not apparently dare to begin a conversation. His place was to answer questions.

"You're not t'inking!" said Madeline. "It isn't fair. Oh! do buck up. This shop's so hot." She threw back the furs still more from her throat. Jacob was conscious that she was regarding him with interest. He ceased searching the recesses of the shop with his eyes, and met her look. He was hoping secretly that the shopman was not offended by her candid criticism of the heat of his shop.

"I'm the most hopeless person at things of this sort," he said apologetically. "I can't think of anything but the hackneyed dressing-case."

"Oh! that's all right," replied Madeline carelessly, "but

anything decent runs you into such a heap of money." For the first time she threw a look to the shopman, and released his tongue.

"We've a very nice dressing-case at sixty guineas, my lady," he said, "if you would care to see it?"

"Do you think Nina's worth all that?" asked Madeline of Jacob.

"Depends on the point of view," ventured Jacob. "Hadn't you better ask her fiancé?"

Madeline smiled. "Perhaps I had better ask Arthur on this occasion," she said.

Jacob inferred from her tone that Arthur was Lord Paington. "Anyway," he said, "you'll admit that I'm hardly in a position to make a valuation of Nina's merits."

The superb assistant who had been displaced, but who had been hovering in the vicinity, had sped away in answer to some mysterious sign made by his superior; a slight movement of one of the hands; almost imperceptible. The assistant returned now, and deferentially laid a dressing-case on the counter.

"We may as well look at it," remarked Madeline, and it was instantly opened and displayed in all its magnificence.

"Doesn't look bad, does it?" said Madeline, examining some of the gold-mounted fittings. "It's rather small, of course."

"Yes, my lady. It's what we call a medium-size," said the shopman.

"Of course, Arthur will be ratty about it, but I must give her something decent," said Madeline to Jacob, and she shook her head as though trying to shake off the heat of the shop. "Come along," she went on, rising, "it's stifling in here."

The assistant, in answer to another imperceptible sign from the expert behind the counter, was already at the door, and before Madeline was fairly on her feet the expert himself was, also, in the front of the shop. He bowed them out with grace, and without initiating a single observation. Jacob had never shopped in this style before. Madeline was, indeed, now among the "great ones of the earth." There was no question

of payment or of whether the "things were to be sent." My lady expected her will to be understood even when it was not expressed in words. The marvel of it all was that the expert behind the counter had such a perfect comprehension of her wishes.

3.

Jacob stood and watched Madeline enter the victoria. He assumed that the adventure would go no further than this. He had no intention of forcing himself upon her. They had not shaken hands, so casual had been their greeting, and he did not expect her to shake hands with him, now. He could not rid himself of the impression that she had condescended in speaking to him. The old relations were dead for ever. The thought of them gave him no sense of familiarity with the woman he saw under these new and strange conditions.

"Come along! What are you dreaming about?" She was making room for him beside her in the victoria. She did not ask him whether he had anything else to do, any other affairs in hand. She merely said, "Come along," and made room for him.

Jacob hesitated. It was not the thought of Lola which restrained him, but his shyness. In the past three years and a half he had lost much of his nervousness. He could talk with assurance, be perfectly at his ease with his visitors in Bloomsbury Square, or when he went out to the house of an acquaintance with Lola. But this was different. The mere sight of Madeline seemed to have taken him back to his boyhood again. When he talked to Eric all his learning seemed to fall away from him, and now, when he met Madeline, all his assurance and training in the usages of society seemed to have disappeared in like manner. Was it not probable that Madeline still regarded him as a raw country youth, even as Eric regarded him as an ignoramus? The truth was that neither Madeline nor Eric held the opinions of Jacob with which he credited them; but because he believed them to hold these opinions he descended in thought to the level of the estimate he imagined Eric and Madeline had formed of him.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Madeline with a touch of surprise.

"I'm afraid I can't come, now," replied Jacob. "I've got some work I ought to do."

"Bosh!" returned Madeline and held the rug back for him to enter.

"Are you married yet?" she asked him as the bays danced off down Bond Street. Jacob had no idea where they were going.

"Yes. I've been married for over three years," he said.

"Living in London?"

"Yes! I've got a house in Bloomsbury Square!" It still seemed rather a wonderful thing to Jacob that he should have a house of his own.

Madeline passed it by as a matter of no importance. "Have you been in London long?" was her next question.

"I came up a few weeks after—after the last time I saw you," he said. "I've been in London ever since."

She certainly did not wince at his reference to that episode in the Elmover spinny, but she looked at him with a smile half interested, half quizzical.

"You soon got tired of the country?" she said.

"After—after *that*. Yes," replied Jacob. It was very like the beginning of a flirtation.

"Did the country lose its attractions after—after *that*?" she asked, imitating him.

"Well—of course," replied Jacob. He was near her, touching her furs. This was more real than his dreams, yet something was wanting.

"Why 'of course'?" she laughed. "After you had done with me for ever,—you told me you had, you know—what did it matter?"

"No! It was you . . ." he began and then stopped. He realized suddenly that they seemed to be drifting back into the old relations. Friendship between them could never be possible. And Madeline was the Countess of Paignton, now, and he was a bankrupt architect married to a wife he did not love. The thing was absurd.

"Don't you think I had better get out here?" was his conclusion to the interrupted sentence.

"No! Why? Come and have lunch. There'll be nobody there who matters, only Arthur and his sister."

Lunch? It was a paralyzing suggestion. He was about to refuse unconditionally, but the victoria, which had pranced into Berkeley Square, drew up before one of the houses, the door of which flew open as if by magic and revealed the figure of a dignified butler backed by two footmen.

"Oh! . . ." he began. He was genuinely scared.

Madeline touched his hand under cover of the fur rug. "Do come," she said, looking into his eyes.

4.

"Come upstairs and see Arthur," said Madeline imperiously as soon as they were in the hall. Jacob found himself almost miraculously stripped of his hat, stick, gloves and overcoat, a man to every article, he believed. He was led, still resisting mentally, up a wide staircase. It seemed wide after the staircase in Bloomsbury Square, and the stair carpet was inches deep in pile; it felt like soft moss under his feet. It seemed to typify the whole atmosphere of the place to Jacob. He wanted to walk on tip-toe, though it was obviously unnecessary; he wanted to move quietly and mysteriously. This place was more dignified than any ordinary church. Once in Paris he had wandered into the church of La Madeleine at the commencement of high mass. The impression he had received on that occasion was the one he received now. He was awed, and inwardly he was cursing himself for a fool and trying to remember something of Cairns' dissertations on the feebleness of the British aristocracy.

Moreover he had lost Madeline. She had sped upstairs, once she had made sure of him, at a pace he could not emulate. When he reached the first floor he was confronted with three doors. One of them was open, and he heard Madeline's

voice. He ventured in timidly and nearly slipped on a highly polished parquet floor.

A short, withered-looking man of between forty and fifty was lying back, deep in the recesses of an armchair drawn up to the fire. He was not impressive in appearance, a little man noticeably bald, with short stumpy features, their stumpiness accentuated by a ridiculously large, dark moustache.

"Oh! Arthur!" Madeline was saying, as Jacob paused at the doorway, "we must do the thing decently." It was evident that she had had time to explain the nature of her Bond Street purchase while Jacob was tremblingly ascending the stairs.

It is not difficult to be easy and nonchalant in imagination; Jacob had done the thing a hundred times, but in the present situation what could he do, decently? Madeline was balancing on the back of a chair, her face away from the door. She couldn't see Jacob and had probably forgotten all about him for the moment. Lord Paignton was staring moodily into the fire and had his profile to Jacob. For all intents and purposes Jacob was intruding on a family quarrel, a listener to things that Lord Paignton would probably not wish to confide to a bankrupt and utterly unknown architect from Bloomsbury. Should he cough? He did better by good luck. Near the door was a fine Hepplewhite bookcase with a glass front divided into lozenge-shaped panels. Jacob took four steps into the room and turning his back on the disputants began to examine the titles of the books. It did not matter that he could hardly read the titles, it was an occupation.

"My dear girl," Lord Paignton was saying, "surely you can distinguish between doing a thing decently and doing it recklessly. . . ."

"Oh! all right!" broke in Madeline. "Send the thing back when it comes and get some rotten thing, yourself. I don't care, anything's good enough for Nina and her old archdeacon or whatever he is. Oh! by the way, I brought someone back to lunch. . . ." She disengaged herself from the tilted chair on which she was swaying and turned round. "Oh! there you are!" she said to Jacob. "Here! this is

Arthur, you know," and to her husband she proffered the information that this was "Jimmy Stahl," no more. After this introduction she went out of the room with a rush, saying as she went that she was going to "get her things off."

Jacob had made some kind of a bow when his name was mentioned. Lord Paignton had hitched himself a few inches forward in his chair and nodded. There was nothing for Jacob now but to go over to the fire and make conversation until Madeline returned. He had never spoken to an Earl before, and despite all the dissertations of Cairns, Jacob's early impressions were strong upon him. He could not for the life of him help regarding Lord Paignton as a superior creation. To be nonchalant at the moment was clean beyond him.

"Beastly weather!" muttered Lord Paignton. "Sit down, won't you?"

There was nothing for it but the weather. Jacob prophesied snow with desperate certainty. He was pricking himself on to be emphatic. Lola had always told him that he was too apologetic, venturing opinions as if he expected them to be contradicted.

"Yes! Shouldn't be surprised," replied Lord Paignton without enthusiasm.

A brief silence followed. Jacob was considering and rejecting a list of subjects; they were all either too banal or else referred to the things one did not talk about in society, if the precedents afforded by fiction could be relied upon. He tried to appear unconcerned and sat well back in his chair.

"I suppose you didn't notice whether the Birchester by-election result was out?" asked Lord Paignton.

Politics! This was one of the barred subjects according to fiction, but barred or not it was a straw, and Jacob, drowning in embarrassment, grasped at it eagerly.

"No, it wasn't out when we came in," he said; "but it's a cert for the Government, don't you think?"

"X— says not," replied Lord Paignton, mentioning a prominent member of the Opposition. "He was speaking

down there and I saw him at the Club last night. He seemed quite sure we should win the seat."

Plainly Lord Paignton was on the other side in politics. That was to be expected. But how could a mere reader of the *Daily Post* argue with a man who met ex-Ministers at his club, and spoke of them as one might speak of Jones or Brown. Still conversation had to be made. Jacob took the easy course.

"Really!" he said. "That's very interesting. No doubt having been down there he would be able to gauge the feeling of the constituency?"

It was poor stuff, but it served to pass the time till Madeline should reappear. The conversation resolved itself into a series of questions and answers. Jacob could, at least, frame intelligent questions, and he stuck to the game with pertinacity.

5.

Lunch furnished other embarrassments. There were so many different kinds of wine and a separate glass for each. He was a little uncertain which glass should be used. This was at the outset. That difficulty was solved for him by the butler. Jacob began with hock and stuck to it. No one urged him to try a change, but he had been prepared to say that he preferred to keep to one wine, to hint that it was a peculiarity of his.

Then there were so many dishes. They came at him from the sideboard without making any preliminary *début* on the table, and the menu was in French and very few of the words on it were intelligible to him. However, he studied it carefully and worked on the principle of accepting two courses out of every three. He soon found that it did not matter if he left half. No one protested, and the footman was always ready to take his plate away. He ate a good deal of bread.

As to conversation, he was saved by Lady Alice Crawley, Lord Paignton's sister. She was a harsh, somewhat untidy-looking woman of fifty or thereabouts, with a thin nose

utterly unlike her brother's snub. Madeline had mentioned the fact that Mr. Stahl was an architect and Lady Alice was an enthusiast on architecture. It is true that the style she admired was classic—she seemed to know Rome and Athens intimately—and frequently posed Jacob with questions as to examples of which he knew no more than the names; it is true, also, that she assumed, at once, that Jacob must have studied architecture on the borders of the Mediterranean, but he contrived to "keep his end up," as he would have phrased it, and the duologue between him and Lady Alice formed the staple of conversation during the meal.

Nevertheless at the back of his mind was the consciousness that he was really "out of it" all, that he was only pretending, and that his pretence must be patent not only to Lord Paignton and his sister but, also, to the servants. And he did not pretend to himself that he was enjoying this plunge into the circles of high society, his chief wish was to be away in some place where he could be free. He hated the restraint that was being imposed upon him.

6.

After lunch Madeline snared him. Lord Paignton went to his club, nodding a casual good-bye. Lady Alice had disappeared.

"Come into my room," said Madeline. "It's much cosier there."

Jacob followed her up to the second floor, a little scared. "Her room?" He wondered what she meant by "her room."

He found it was a sitting-room and was conscious of relief. He was a little bewildered. Madeline was so unexpected.

She drew an arm-chair up to the fire and indicated another for Jacob. "Now let's be snug for a bit and talk of old times," she said, and passed him a silver box of cigarettes.

There was nothing subtle or incomprehensible about Madeline. She was a lovely animal with a synthetic brain; purely creative; the process of induction was unknown to

her by experience. She lived fully, she outraged the feelings of her sister and her sister-in-law, and she defied her husband. "You're going too far," he had said recently, and she had replied that "he had his remedy." He had, and he was disinclined to use it. His first wife had died childless. Madeline had given him a magnificently healthy heir. But it was not only for the boy's sake that he shrank from divorcing Madeline. His own life had been far from a blameless one, but Madeline had been a new experience. He loved her passionately and hated her viciously by turns, but even in his periods of hate he could not reconcile himself to make a gift of Madeline to some other man. For that was what divorce proceedings implied. If Madeline had had ambition she might have won a far more distinguished title than that Paignton had given her. She might, and probably would, climb higher even now if Paignton gave her opportunity. So he undertook a course of self-deception and resolutely shut his eyes to facts. The men at the Club were welcome to their own opinions—he was Paignton, and he had a record. This sort of thing could be lived down.

At the present time Madeline was bored. She was filling in a fortnight waiting for the frost to give. She and Paignton had waited in Leicestershire for two whole weeks with the ground like iron, and then, at her suggestion, they had come up to town. She wanted something to do. The sight of Jacob had suggested an excitement. He revived old memories, and when Madeline was a little sick of new experience she was quite willing to live an old one over again—if she could *live* it. She had no weakness for sentimentalities or abstract romance, but if she were cast for an historical part she could play it with exuberance though her reading might appear modern. Moreover, Jacob appealed to her as he did to many women, though he was sublimely unconscious of the fact. If she had ever been sorry for anyone in her life, she had been sorry for him. Her present attitude was a blend of open-handed, careless generosity and the miser's desire for possession. If any excuse can be found for her, it must be found in the fact that she never analyzed her own motives or criti-

cized her own acts. She seemed to be merely progressive, to have contradicted in her own person the law of reaction. Her life represented one cumulative diastole, the systole when it came was rapid, intense and final.

The *tête-à-tête* was interrupted before Jacob was half through his first cigarette. The door was flung open and a small red-haired boy of between three and four years old burst into the room like a whirlwind. He made straight for his mother and scrambled eagerly into her lap, crying, "Hide me, hide me!"

"Oh! you little beggar!" laughed Madeline. "Don't wriggle so!"

"Nurse is coming. Hide me, hide me!" persisted the heir of the Paightons.

The nurse, indeed, had arrived. She was standing demurely at the open door, waiting for her instructions.

"Oh! she's there!" grumbled Lord Arthur Crawley, catching sight of her. "Why didnt you hide me?"

He was a vigorous, handsome little fellow, Jacob thought. He was wearing a smocked overall which was now all round his neck, exposing a pair of splendidly sturdy legs clad only in the shortest and loosest of knickerbockers. That common strain introduced by Lady Felmersdale had done something for the blood of the Paightons.

"Shake hands with Jimmy, you rude little beggar," said Madeline, "and get off my dress; you're making a nice mess of mummy's dress."

"Who's Jimmy?" asked Lord Arthur, regarding Jacob with a childish stare.

"A friend of mummy's," replied Madeline.

"Oh! Didn't see you. Howdy do?" Lord Arthur tumbled off his mother's lap and shook hands with Jacob. "Never seen *you* before," he added, partly in explanation. Then he turned to his mother. "I'm goin' to stay here," he announced.

"Oh! no, you're not, dear," said Madeline, and at this hint the nurse advanced into the room.

"I *am*, I *am*, I *am*," shouted Lord Arthur vigorously, and

as the nurse made a tentative movement towards him, he hit at her outstretched hand with his clenched fist. It was quite plain that the nurse was afraid of him.

Madeline solved the problem. She took him up in her arms and carried him out of the room, not with any show of anger, but with a definiteness of purpose that overruled the will of the child. He submitted almost quietly. His only protest was a marked tendency to wriggle. The nurse followed, and for a few minutes Jacob was left alone with his thoughts.

The incident affected him strongly. The picture of Madeline as a mother would not harmonize with the picture of the Madeline of Elmo. He was inclined to attribute many virtues to her as a consequence of his sight of the little heir of Paignton. This not sentimentally, but because he had a fixed set of ideas connected with the ideal of motherhood. It was another version of his original attitude towards Lola—he had not been able to picture her as a widow because she did not wear widow's weeds. So now his habit of mind compelled him to regard Madeline in a new light. She was a mother. It seemed to follow as a natural consequence that she was therefore devoted to her child, that she would never do anything that could bring disgrace on that child's name. This was another of those many rules of life that were broken for him by experience.

7.

"He is a little devil," remarked Madeline when she returned. "And that woman is frightened to death of him. He bit her a few days ago—really badly—in the arm, but she adores him all the same. Of course he can do what he likes with her. We shall have to get an older woman."

This little speech confirmed Jacob's picture of a maternal Madeline. It put her still further beyond his reach, but it added a new charm to the many.

For quite a long time the conversation turned on the vagaries of Lord Arthur Crawley. Then Madeline became conscious of the approach of boredom. They were standing still, a thing she could not endure.

"Do you ever go down to Ashby Sutton, now?" she asked.

"I've never been since my aunt died," replied Jacob.

"Oh! yes. I heard of it. I'm sorry. I hardly ever go down now. Mother's getting worse. You know. There is nothing to be done, I'm afraid." The speech was very reminiscent of the old days, and they soon fell into other reminiscences.

"You needn't pretend you were so cut up," said Madeline in reference to a reminiscence of Jacob's, and for the life of him he could not help saying what he did. She listened readily enough. He was so splendidly in earnest; his love-making was such a contrast to the facility of the many she had known.

"It isn't a question of having been 'cut up' exactly," said Jacob. "That happens to anyone. You see, you definitely shaped my life. I know I've married, but it doesn't count in any way. It never has counted. No one could ever, possibly, take your place. I have never even dreamed of anyone else as I have of you. . . ." He hesitated. He felt that he had gone rather far.

Madeline was looking at him quite seriously. "It is funny," she said—her phrases still retained something of the schoolroom flavour, "but do you know I feel rather like that about you."

"Oh! Madeline! Not really?"

She nodded, still holding him with her eyes.

He leaned forward out of his chair, and then, growing bolder, he got up and kneeled beside her. She put her hands on his shoulders.

She still had a faint line of wrinkles across the bridge of her little, straight nose, the result, probably, of hunting before Christmas. Never, surely, did any woman have such a skin as hers.

He was within touch of the irradiance of her vitality now. It wrapped him round and intoxicated him. He hung on the verge of realization for a time that seemed immense. He could feel the warmth of her skin. He drank in her beauty with his eyes. He inhaled the perfume of her individuality.

Then very slowly he bent his head towards her and touched

her cheek ; it was just such another kiss as that he had first given, by the spring on the common.

It may seem an odious comparison, but the rites he had paid were very similar to those he had omitted at the Wheatsheaf, when he had earned the contempt of the Wheatsheaf's landlord.

He stayed. They had tea together. He was reckless now of every opinion.

Before he left, Madeline had said she would call at the house in Bloomsbury Square.

Lola would be gratified, thought Jacob, and she would never suspect. . . .

8.

He found Lola in the drawing-room entertaining one of their newer friends, a certain Frank Reade, a young man of private means who was reading for the Bar.

Jacob was so engrossed in his own affairs that he did not perceive any signs of embarrassment when he entered ; nor did it occur to him that a visitor who had dropped in to tea did not usually stay till a quarter past seven.

"Where have you been all day?" asked Lola quite amicably.

"I met Lady Paignton in Bond Street and went back to lunch with her."

It was a startling announcement, and Lola's eyes showed that she was startled, but she had no intention of allowing Mr. Reade to think that the circumstance was unusual.

"Oh! Really?" she said. "Was Lord Paignton there?"

"Yes, and Lady Alice Crawley—his sister, you know."

"I say! It's a quarter past seven. I must be going," put in Mr. Reade. "I had no idea it was so late."

When he had gone Lola turned to Jacob.

"Well?" she said, and there was a world of meaning in her tone. It revived memories of the days before the "great scene."

"She's coming to call to-morrow," said Jacob.

Lola shrugged her shoulders. "I shan't be at home," she said. But she was at home.

CHAPTER XXXI

CRISIS

1.

THE intrusion of Madeline still further postponed the financial crisis, but it was accelerating another crisis which Jacob did not foresee. He had entered on this, the most wonderful of all his adventures, in a spirit of recklessness. As a background for future dreams it was magnificent; as a present experience it was a perfect anodyne. He could forget his miseries in Madeline's presence. The memory of earlier expedients—the last, deliberate cigarette or the excursion to Burnham Beeches—made him scornful. He was only just beginning to live, he thought, and forgot how many times before he had made a beginning. Only one dread overhung him for the moment—a change of weather. He knew that when the frost broke, the Paigntons would be off to Leicestershire. Madeline had warned him. It is true that they would be returning to town at the end of April, but he had an instinct that his footing would be different in the season, if he had a footing at all. This was a quiet interlude. In May, Lady Paignton would have too many calls on her time to pay much attention to a Bloomsbury architect. He realized that, even in the full glory of Madeline's condescension. He knew quite well that he was out of it. Lord Paignton had taken the place of Sir Anthony, a person to be avoided whenever possible, to be conciliated by Madeline, a person whose movements made the difference between heaven and hell. When Lord Paignton on one occasion went away for three days, he left the gates of heaven set wide open behind him, and Jacob entered with less hesitation than might have been expected.

Lola's attitude was not one of patient resignation, and yet her resentment had no effect as an impediment. Jacob never saw her before lunch, and when he was at home to that meal, she was always quiet, subdued; she asked him no questions

as to his plans. It was at night that she became active. Then her reproaches were full of sting and bitterness. The subject she avoided every morning was freely aired any time after dinner, if Jacob chanced to be in. He did not suspect that there was anything deliberate or purposive in these tactics; he was too engrossed to analyze his domestic relations.

Madeline's call had hardly been a success, but Mrs. Stahl had had the satisfaction of knowing that a brougham with a coronet on the panel had paraded before her door for three-quarters of an hour. Jacob's prophecy had been fulfilled; it had been snowing.

Lola had been very gracious, effusive even, and Jacob had wondered what Madeline would think of her. Madeline had made herself very much at home, and had insisted on a visit of inspection to Jacob's office.

There had been a return call—Lola had insisted—but Lady Paignton had not been at home. Mrs. Stahl had a marked vein of snobbishness in her disposition. If she had conceived it possible that the Paigntons would be added to her visiting list, she might have suffered in silence, but she understood the situation perfectly. Her husband might go to Berkeley Square in Lord Paignton's absence, but Mrs. Stahl would not be invited. Lady Paignton's call in Bloomsbury Square had been nothing less than an insult. Lola's mouth and eyes grew harder when she was alone; and more and more chastened, sweet and resigned when Mr. Reade happened to call. Frank Reade had exactly the same opinion of Jacob Stahl that Jacob Stahl had had of Edgar Wilmot.

And still the frost held.

It was, now, more than a fortnight since Jacob had met Madeline in Bond Street.

2.

One morning in February, Jacob, who studied the meteorological conditions with an earnestness such as had never been equalled by the very keenest of sportsmen, fancied his morning

tub had less sting than usual. He returned to his analysis of the weather from the bath-room window.

This was the third morning of fog. The country had been rejoicing—that part of it which was not intent on getting in a few more runs that season—in a hoar-frost ; still, cloudless days, perfect weather for skating where the ice was protected from the direct influence of the sun. In London these conditions had produced miserable days of cold darkness and oppression. Yet on this morning the fog, as seen from the bath-room window, was less stagnant than it had been. Jacob in his dressing-gown was distressed ; he dreaded any change. He threw up the window and peered into the darkness. Undoubtedly the fog was moving. He caught sight, now and again, of the outline of bleak trees in the Square ; a silhouette of intensely black outline against a dirty orange background. As a view it was reminiscent of an amateur negative. The movement seemed to be coming from the south-west. “ Damn it ! it does feel warmer,” said Jacob, scowling. “ If the wind comes from the south-west I’m done.”

He dressed hurriedly and went out on the doorstep while he waited for breakfast. There was a film of ice on the lower steps, but the fog was undoubtedly drifting from the south-west and the air had less bite. After breakfast he went out and investigated the conditions in the Square gardens. The ground was like iron, but the fog was lifting. There was even a gleam or two of sunlight—the first for three days. Jacob found the gardener pottering about in a small shed among the bushes.

“ What’s it going to do ?” Jacob asked anxiously.

The gardener straightened his back and looked round the Square doubtfully. “ Couldn’t say, m’sure !” he ventured. “ Fog’s lifted.”

“ Yes, I can see that,” replied Jacob.

“ Shouldn’t be surprised if it turned to rain,” surmised the gardener, and was slightly startled by Jacob’s vigorous response. It was an expression he had copied from Cairns.

At a quarter past twelve he had a telegram. “ Come about four. M.” That was all right.

It was undoubtedly thawing when he went to Berkeley Square, but he thought this might be due to the effect of sunshine, though the sun had shone intermittently only in the morning, and for the past three hours had been completely obscured. He took a 'bus for economy's sake, and sat on his favourite seat behind the driver.

"Well, this is about the end of it, I fancy; thank God!" said that individual.

"What makes you think that?" said Jacob, who understood that the remark had reference to the weather.

"I come from the country, I do," replied the driver. "I knows the signs. Three white frosts and then rain, that's 'ow it goes in my experience. We shall 'ave rain afore night—thank God!"

Jacob did not join in the driver's psalm of thanksgiving.

Madeline met him with news which sounded good at first hearing.

"Arthur's gone down to the country!"

"For long?"

She nodded.

Jacob looked at her inquiringly. "I suppose I ought to pretend I'm not glad?" he said.

"I'm going to-morrow!" She said it as one breaking ill news.

"Oh! Maidie! Why? Where are you going?"

"We had a wire from Melton, this morning."

"But the frost won't be out of the ground for days yet."

"Depends whether we have any rain," she replied. "But it isn't only that. Arthur and I had rather a scene this morning. I promised I'd go."

Jacob was not content to accept this pronouncement as final. He protested.

"Well, let's make the best of to-day," prevaricated Madeline.

Before he left, however, he had wrung a promise from her. She would not go until the day after to-morrow unless it rained.

As Jacob walked home, he felt the first drops falling. By the time he reached Bloomsbury Square it was pouring.

"Oh! well," he sighed, as he let himself in, "I suppose I must be thankful for small mercies. I've had to-day."

He found the drawing-room in darkness. He supposed that, contrary to precedent, Lola had gone to bed. He lit the gas and found that it was nearly eleven o'clock. He was just about to put out the gas, when he saw a letter on the table. He picked it up, and found that it was addressed to himself (J. L. Stahl, Esq., was the superscription) in Lola's handwriting. It was sealed heavily with black wax.

"Going to slang me in writing this time for a change," was his thought as he opened it. He had once before had a letter from her since they had been married, which had said "certain things" she had felt she "could not talk about." This letter was apparently in the same strain; the opening seemed familiar enough. It began directly: "I can't stand it all over again. I have tried, you don't know how hard, but you see to forget that I've been through it all before."

"Oh, Lord!" sighed Jacob.

The letter continued to expatiate on the well-known theme, laying all the blame upon Jacob, and implying that the Cairns story had been a fabrication from first to last. It was not till he had nearly reached the end that Jacob was startled. "So I have come to the conclusion that I cannot stand it any more. When you read this I shall have gone. Do not try to follow me. You will not find me. You can think I am dead if you like.—LOLA."

Jacob tossed his head wearily. "What's the game, now, I wonder?" he thought. He went to Lola's bedroom and tried the door. It was not locked. He opened it a few inches and then knocked, loudly. There was no answer. He struck a match and saw that the bed was unoccupied, and the beginnings of fear began to shake him. Suppose she had committed suicide, after all? He lit the gas and fell to an examination of the apartment. There was no silver on the dressing-table. That fact was significant, and he threw open the wardrobe. It was empty, the chest of drawers, also.

He shrugged his shoulders, turned out the gas, and went to his own room. She had not committed suicide, then, not

even left the threat of it over him. That was a relief, but he was conscious of a feeling of intense sadness. It had all been such a failure. "Poor Lola! she had not been altogether to blame," he reflected; "he had not done all he might have done. And he had been unfaithful at the last. Perhaps, after all, she had been more sinned against than sinning. She had always said that no one understood her. Well, certainly he had not. He ought to have tried harder."

Well, it was all over; to-morrow he would pay off the servants and set about trying to let the house furnished. He would have about a hundred pounds in cash when the immediate calls upon him were settled. There would be a half-year's rent due in March, but that could wait. Yes! he must set about letting the house. And then . . .

He threw up the window and looked out. The rain was falling steadily. He would not see Madeline again for a long time. He might never see her again. He had noticed a slight change in her during the past few days. To-night she had yawned several times after dinner, and her good-bye (she had known it would be good-bye) had not been satisfactory.

Oh! Lord! What was the good of it all? What a failure he had been—what a complete, miserable failure! Oh! for sleep and forgetfulness!

CHAPTER XXXII

SETTLEMENT

1.

JACOB awoke next morning to an immediate consciousness of disaster. He felt that he must have dreamed disaster all night, though he could remember no detail of any dream. He found that it was a quarter to eight and he had not been called. He verified the fact by looking outside his door for hot water. As he turned back into the room to ring the bell, he heard the housemaid coming upstairs. "They know," was his

thought, and "they" must be paid a month's wages and sent away as soon as possible. But what was he to do? He must find somewhere to stay, and he must find work. As to the first necessity, it seemed to him that a boarding-house would involve least trouble. There were so many things to do—all of them distasteful. And first he must tackle the servants. What should he say?

He spoke vaguely of "circumstances" to the housemaid, but he was sure that she put the worst construction on his indefinite phrases. She looked sorry for him, apologized for being late, and had the air of moving in a house of tragedy. When she left the room she closed the door very gently as if someone were ill upstairs. He had decided that "they" should stay till Saturday. He must have time to pack and to find rooms.

After breakfast the cook appeared. He had heard from Lola that she was "an abominably rude woman with an appalling temper," and he anticipated some kind of a scene when she came in. He knew it was the cook before she entered, because she knocked. He was agreeably surprised to find her a motherly, generous person. She avoided any allusion to Mrs. Stahl, and explained that she had "just come to say don't bother about the 'ouse, that'll be all right. Me and Jane'll put everything straight for yer before we goes. And can't we 'eip yer with yer packing?"

"I should be awfully obliged if you would. It's very good of you," said Jacob.

He was quite touched by the gentleness and consideration of cook and Jane.

While he was looking over some of the rubbish that might be burnt, he came across the drawing of the priest's door of the church at Ashby Sutton. After a long survey he decided to keep it as a reminder of unfulfilled determination. Moreover, he had been working on that drawing at the time when he first came to know Madeline. "Curious that that drawing should never have been finished," he thought.

2.

He would not go near Eric, Bradley, or Ridout Morley, and his search for work was little more than a pretence. He had found a boarding-house in Torrington Square that was cheap, if not over clean, and in his poky third-floor bedroom he completed the work of the little £1,500 house he had on hand. He fancied that his client guessed that his architect was in trouble, but the client was a good fellow who professed himself perfectly satisfied with all the details of his house, and paid his architect's commission in full some time before it was due. The builder was settled with by the end of March, and then Jacob found his time completely free.

He made another feeble attempt to find a place as assistant. He visited the offices of two or three architects known to him by name only. He was received politely and a promise made that Mr. Stahl's name should be remembered if a vacancy occurred, but he did not build on these promises, and the prospect of earning money seemed as far off as ever.

He had let the house in Bloomsbury Square, furnished. He had had luck there, as he had found another architect, just starting in practice, who had been willing to pay £4 a week.

"You might, perhaps, care to sell the furniture at a valuation, later on?" suggested his tenant. Jacob had vaguely answered that perhaps he might. He still had faint hopes of a miracle.

And during those long, dreary two months he looked in vain for any news of Lola. She did not write, and neither did he meet her in the street nor hear any news of her. He thought at first that she might have returned to Upper Woburn Place and to her original work, but as the weeks passed and he did not hear from her, he put that idea away from him. If the running away had been some "game like the sham suicide business," he thought, "she'd never have kept it up as long as this." Yet he had no suspicion of the real facts of the case. He had no suspicion concerning the integrity of Frank Reade.

At the beginning of April he found that he had some £40

left after he had paid the six months' rent of the house in Bloomsbury Square. His tenant paid monthly in advance. He had the satisfaction of knowing that the house was off his hands. The incomings from it slightly exceeded the rent, rates and taxes, and he could at any time transfer his lease to the new tenant, and sell the furniture at a valuation. He was at ease on that score, but he must find work. He sighed, he was feeling run-down, nervously worn out, depressed, useless, suicidal.

At last he decided that he would enjoy one more fortnight of life ; he would go right away into the country and " think things over." He must find new energy, he was drifting hopelessly, he was losing his pluck and his pride, degenerating ; he was coming within sight of the condition of that grateful man to whom he had once given a shilling on the Embankment.

He had never been to Cornwall. It was an expensive journey, but it sounded so remote. He closed his account with the Bank one morning in April, and on the next day he took train from Waterloo with one handbag on the rack, and £33 in notes and gold in his pocket. He had left his heavy luggage in Torrington Square, and arranged with his landlady to keep his room for ten shillings a week until his return.

As the train steamed out of Waterloo Station *en route* for Padstow, he peered out at the roofs and smoke of London, and wondered whether he would ever see them again.

That was a point which he had decided to settle within sight of the sea.

EPILOGUE

THE EARTH-NOTE

HE wrote the epilogue himself, but he thought of it as a prologue, and perhaps he was right. Nevertheless, it is, also, an epilogue.

He did not commit his prologue to paper, but he phrased much of it in his mind. His mind was singularly clear that morning.

He was sitting on a step of rock, the top step of a short natural ascent. Behind him the cliff rose for another eighty feet or more, in front of him it fell sixty feet into the sea. He had come down the valley to the point of the western arm of the cove that the natives call "Live'-re." (The spelling is phonetic. The "i" is short, as in the verb.) On his right was the U-shaped cove that ran back a hundred yards or more into the cliff, a cove walled by dizzy heights of rock, and entered only by one perilous-looking path which he had not dared to venture upon. On his left lay the valley and the bluff beyond, indifferently skinned with grass, through which broke rough bones of granite. Down the valley careered a tiny, impetuous stream that tumbled at last on to a table of rock and slipped down forty feet into the sea. At the foot of the bluff a tumble of rocks reached out into deep water. And before him rolled the Atlantic; there was no land in that direction for 3,000 miles.

There had been a storm out on the Atlantic some time during the previous twenty-four hours, and though the wind was now blowing mildly in harmony with the passing brightness of the April day, the rollers were coming in with sullen, deliberate force, barking deep-throated with hoarse protestations as they burst on the pinnacle of rocks at the foot of the

outstretching bluff. And sometimes below the baying and bellowing of the sea, the spatter of falling spray, and the medley of indistinguishable sounds that made a running accompaniment to all the clamour of separate, recognizable over-tones, Jacob could hear a deep, low boom that reverberated on a lower note than the lowest mutter of thunder. He fancied to himself that this occasional reverberation was the earth-note, the tonic of the very world itself, beating out below the crash of sea and rock. It was a note he had heard as the fundamental note of extraordinary gales; perhaps, then, too, the whole shell of earth had been shaken until it resounded to the full keynote of its structure. . . .

He was happy that morning; the sight and sound and smell of the sea had brought back life and vigour. As he sat on his lonely seat of rock, with only the sea for company, he had a vision of himself in relation to his whole past life.

Surely some directive force must have been behind all the curious coincidences of his existence, from the concurrence of trifles that had upset him from his perambulator down to the present hour. He had had experience! The thought came to him as new. He had not realized in the happening quite all the experience he had gained. He had known two women intimately. . . .

Madeline! His feeling for her was a kind of ache of regret. He guessed that she was lost to him again, and lost for ever. Perhaps she was his affinity, but in this incarnation the directing force had ordained that she should go through her world experience with blind eyes, seeking ephemeral pleasures and missing the stay of lasting satisfaction. Poor Madeline! He still had an ache of longing for her presence, but she lacked something of perfection even in his eyes. He could not continue to love the inconstant. He sighed for Madeline.

And Lola? Pity was the only thought in his heart for Lola. She was cursed, ridden by the fierce devil of her own egotism, and so—incapable of giving even the temporary love which Madeline could give. He did not sigh for Lola: he merely pitied her. Her case was hopeless. He would have liked to help her; he would have been delighted to learn that

she had found some approach to happiness, but he never wished to see her again. . . .

But what of all the other personalities who had figured in his experience? Had they found satisfaction—happiness? What of Bennetts, Tony Farrell, Bradley, Cairns, Eric? Did he envy any of them? No! He doubted if one of that five, for instance, was capable of the joy he was experiencing on this morning of April sunshine, as he looked out over the tumult of the sea and listened to the occasional reverberation of the earth-note. After all, every one of them was intent on self-seeking. Each of them was generous in his own way, capable of fine emotions, no doubt, but they were all wrapped in the small affairs of life; their outlook was very limited. Was any one of them adding to the knowledge of the world? could any one of them echo responsively to the boom of the earth-note? . . .

Ah! well, it was easy enough to analyze, but what could he do? He felt in tune with the eternal forces that morning, but when the influence passed, would he not fall back into feebleness? What was it he was so proud of being?—Even his mood of exaltation could not suggest of "having done." "Nothing," he answered to the sea—"nothing. But the time has not been wasted. I have had to learn in bitterness, but I have not lost my ideals. They cannot be spoiled by any human action, by any slight, or cruelty or indifference. My ideals stretch out beyond the limits of this little world, they reach out towards the eternal values."

As he set his face inland to the tiny hamlet, the ragged cluster of cold stone cottages that make up the village of Trevarrian, he made up his mind that his satisfaction could only be found in literature. "I must make a living somehow," he thought, "and I must read again, and I must learn to write."

With a face that still glowed from his passing vision of the eternal values, he faced with eagerness the outset of a new life. . . .

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