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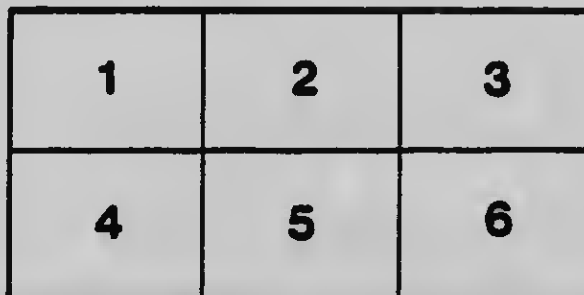
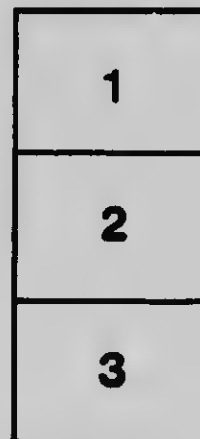
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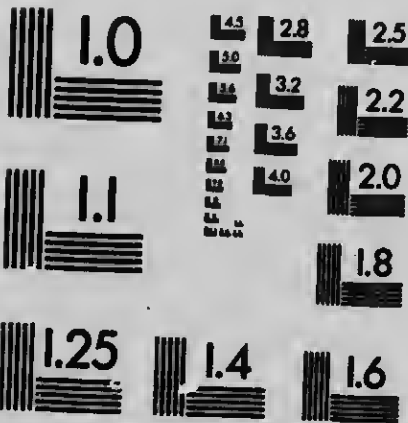
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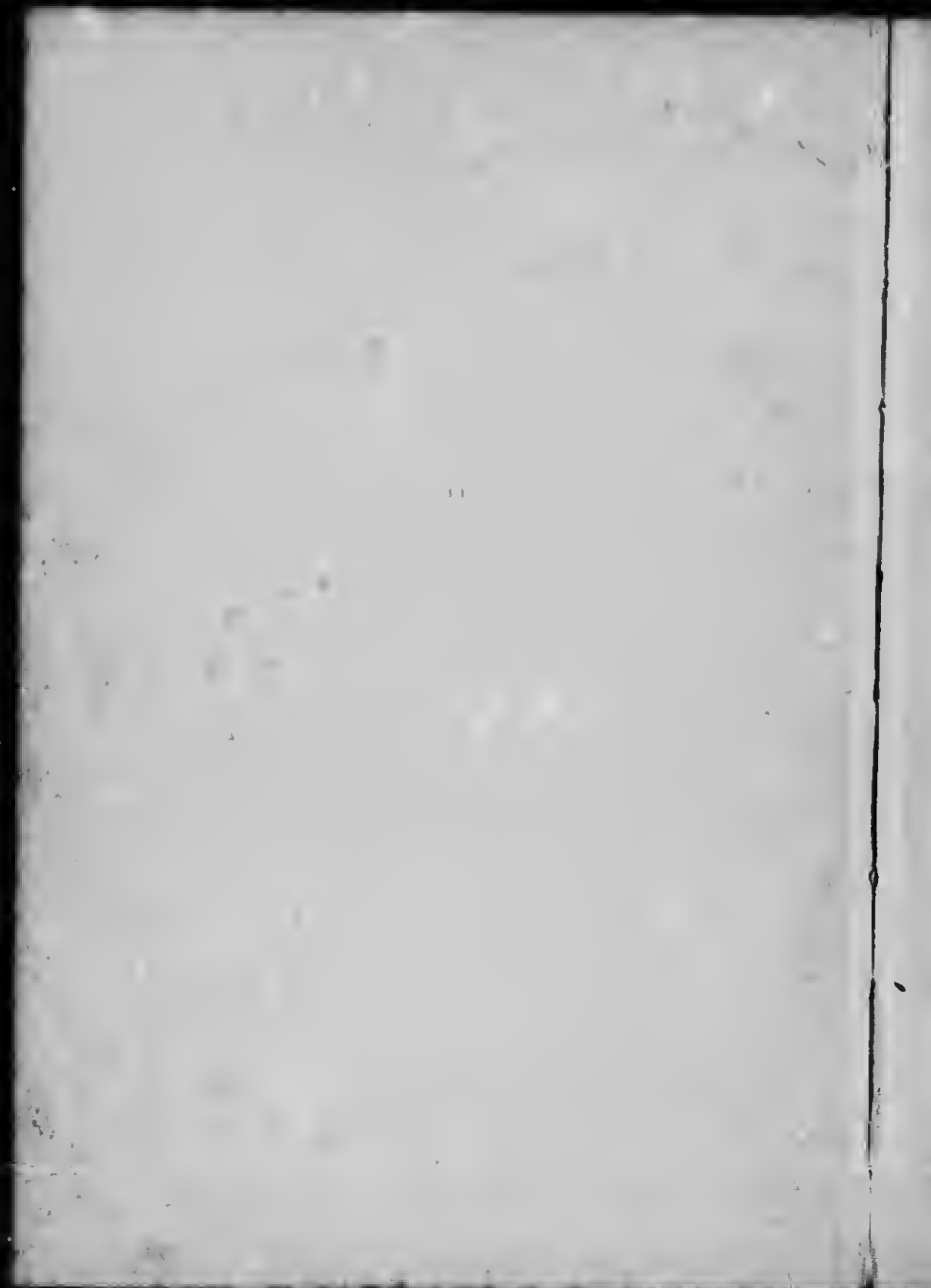
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CHAPTER I

THE LADY IN THE BROUGHAM

ONE wet evening in the late spring of the year 1905, a well-hung, one-horsed brougham was drawn up outside a church in the neighbourhood of Pimlico.

Inside this buff-lined and deep-padded carriage, with her hand holding the window strap, and her gaze fixed upon the lighted interior of the church—which, striped by the rain, could be seen through the open door, with its red curtains swinging in the draught—was a handsome woman of fashion approaching her fortieth year.

Her hair was of a dark brown; the small eyes—dusk-lidded, and close under clean-pencilled brows, which did not curve but were straight and almost met together—were reddish-brown and darkly lashed; her nose, which was neither thin nor finely chiselled, sloped to a slight upward tilt; her lips were full and strong and even masculine. The shadows about her eyes and the clean-drawn eyebrows so low in the forehead gave the chief note of her countenance.

Even when the dark veil which she was wearing was removed, this lady presented an astonishingly fresh and juvenile appearance; for she was so delicately

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enamelled and so skilfully rouged as to deceive even the closest scrutiny ; but for a certain harshness of her lips, and an arrogant expression habitual to her eyes, she might well have passed, even in the light of day, for a woman scarce thirty years of age.

She was elegantly rather than splendidly dressed in soft black taffeta, with rich furs over her shoulders, and some old Mechlin lace bound tightly round her tall throat. She wore a dark hat, which curved over her face and was trimmed with two black ostrich feathers. In her ears, which looked strangely whiter than her cheeks against the rich colouring of her hair, she wore two deep red rubies. At her breast was pinned a single diamond ornament, and in the ample sable muff which rested on her lap was fastened a bunch of violets, which filled the little carriage with perfume.

The congregation had left the church. No one was to be seen in the dreary street. The only sounds there were the long rustle of the rain and the metallic jangle of the horse champing his bit. Through the open church door, the lady in the carriage saw an old woman going slowly and wearisomely through the pews, arranging hassocks, and putting straight prayer-books and hymn-books which had been used by the congregation in their devotions. As the lady watched her, this shabby old woman presently raised herself, holding her side, as though in pain, and bobbed her head in a somewhat grudging good-night to a person who was evidently just then leaving the church. The lady in the carriage loosened the window, and held the strap ready for lowering the frame. Then, as the figure of a man suddenly darkened the doorway, and emerged through the porch into the wet street, putting

up an umbrella as he came, the lady let down the window and leaned slightly forward from her seat.

The man who came from the church was the curate of the parish, a small, pinched man, with a lined and sallow face, whose eyes appeared to be ceaselessly and restlessly describing the circle of his large spectacles. His lips wore an habitual smile, and the end of his nose moved when he spoke, after the manner of a rabbit's. He had large ears, which stood away from his head and a thin neck, which was thickly corded and stood clear of his wide collar.

As soon as he perceived the carriage he was curious, and peering into it under his umbrella, and perceiving after a second inspection that the lady inside was indeed summoning him, with his hand raised to his hat's brim, and with a smile on his lips, he hurried to the carriage door, evidently not averse from the excitement of adventure.

"I should like to speak to you," said the lady; "perhaps you will let me drive you to your lodgings?"

He recognized her as the beautiful and unknown woman who had been faithful for the past month to his weekday services. He had been curious from the first moment to discover who she was, and had even questioned the clerk and the sidesman on the matter. It was in his nature to be curious, especially where women were concerned; and not often did a woman of fashion—he liked to think in this case, perhaps a woman of title—come to the shabby Evangelical church in Pimlico.

"Will you tell the coachman where to drive?" she asked, and made room for him at her side.

While he was speaking to the coachman, she leaned her head to one side and studied his face with shrewd

eyes, which appeared to be soon satisfied with their examination ; the man presented no difficulties. When he entered the carriage, and while he was closing the door, the lady drew from her muff a little book of Roman Catholic devotion, and held it prominently in her gloved hand. The curate, sitting back in the carriage, and eyeing his companion over the edge of his spectacles, noticed this book, and his eyes glittered. The scent of the violets and the indefinable charm of the woman's presence were grateful to him.

" I have seen you in church " he said, as the carriage moved away through the rain on noiseless wheels, " but I do not think I have had the pleasure of meeting you before ? "

" No, we have not met before," she answered.

" May I ask your name ? " he inquired presently, nervously fidgeting the galloon of the window strap.

" For the present I would beg you to leave my identity undiscussed," she rejoined. " Some day it may be useful for the cause I serve to reveal myself to you, and in that case you shall surely know who I am. For the present, and our time is brief, I should like to talk to you upon another matter."

Her voice was low and musical ; and although she spoke in a tone of superiority which somewhat nettled him, the voice itself produced a pleasant effect upon the clergyman's senses ; he became aware that his own voice unintentionally, unconsciously, was softening to her tone.

He appreciated the luxury of the little carriage, filled with the perfume of the violets ; even the music of the bell on the horse's collar, and the comfortable yielding of the springs as the brougham dipped to a crossing, ministered to his mind. But above everything

else, he was gratified—it was the man's nature to be so gratified—by the sense of mystery which breathed from the lady at his side. If she had declared herself to be some powerful member of aristocracy, who had come under the fascination of his preaching and desired to make her confession to him, it would have flattered and pleased him; but to veil her identity, to hide her name for the sake of some mysterious cause, this was more than flattery; it was an excitement that acted like wine upon his senses.

"Madam," he said, striving to recover his composure, and to appear wholly at his ease, "I am here to listen to you. Pray speak; with the assurance that I never break the seal of a confidence."

"My first mission," began the lady, in her calm tone of superiority, which was as much intellectual as it was social, "is to thank you for the improvements which have been effected in the services since you came to this parish. Those of us who have the interests of the Holy Church very near to our hearts, and for whom I am now speaking, are grateful to you for the reforms you have introduced. We know that you are out of sympathy with the dreadful Evangelicalism of your vicar. We know that the changes you have introduced are inspired by the catholic spirit. Some of us feel that you are acting wisely in bringing about these changes in a gradual manner; but there are others—people, too, of great influence—who think that you might with advantage to the Church move somewhat faster in a direction which is more definitely Catholic. It is—if you will allow me to say so—to sound you as to your sympathies that I have requested this conversation. If you are satisfied with the changes you have already made—" The lady shrugged her shoulders.

"God forbid!" exclaimed the curate, fervently, anxious to overcome the almost maternal superiority of his companion's attitude.

"I am grateful for that contradiction," said the lady quietly. "If you are not satisfied, if you would go further in your work, there are those who will assist you. That is my object in speaking to you. Indeed you have already said enough. From this moment a certain society of ladies, devoted to the best interests of the Anglican branch of the Catholic Church, will be working secretly at your side. Your task will become lighter. The opposition of your vicar will be broken down. You will find yourself supported in every movement of the campaign by a society so strong, so resolute and so devoted, that the Protestant reactionaries in your congregation will be obliged to yield. I need say no more."

The curate, whose eyes were shining behind their spectacles, was silent for several moments. Then he turned to the lady at his side, and smoothing the window strap as it lay across his knees, asked in a voice which could not conceal his excitement: "Will you tell me if you are a member of the Church of England, or——" He paused, and by a movement of his eyes indicated the book of devotion on the lady's lap.

She turned and met his gaze with a smile, the first he had seen in her eyes.

"That is a dangerous question," she said—"for the present. Let me satisfy you with the knowledge that I am devoted to my country, and my country's Church."

"That is what the Protestants say!" he exclaimed.

"Are you not a Protestant?" she questioned, with an amused surprise, palpably affected.

"If I knew exactly where you stand," he said, "I might tell you something which would clear from your mind for ever any doubt as to my sympathies. It is painful to me that you, who are so devoted, should have any misgiving as to my sincerity."

The carriage stopped at the curate's lodgings.

"I think I know what you mean," said the lady quietly, and with the same note of indulgence in her voice; "there are many English Churchmen who are now not afraid to cherish the great ideal of Reunion. It gratifies me to think that you are, perhaps, among their number."

He was nettled by the composure and the sense of aloofness with which she had received his last bold effort to stand upon her own level.

"Reunion!" he exclaimed; "why, surely it is only the Dissenters and the most Protestant of Evangelicals who do not aspire ultimately to corporate and visible Reunion with Rome. You know me as the curate of a church which has long been the despair of advanced Ritualists; you think of me as a man more or less enlightened, who is merely struggling to remove a few of the intolerances of an antiquated vicar in a deplorably Anglican parish. I assure you, madam, I am something more than that."

"You interest me immensely," she said, for the first time dropping her tone of studied superiority. Then in a voice which expressed almost reverence, she asked: "Is it possible that I am striving to assist a priest who is already supported by secret agencies?"

He had his fingers on the ivory catch of the door handle. At last he had won this mysterious creature's

respect. He was full of enthusiasm for his own importance.

"If you will accompany me for a few minutes," he said, "I can convince you of my sympathies. There are martyrs in the Church to-day, madam, as there were of old time. Will you come?"

For a moment she paused, and he watched her. "Will you come?" he repeated, opening the door, and setting one foot upon the step.

"Martyrs in the Church?" she questioned to herself. "I think I understand that."

Then slowly and deliberately she placed her hand on the flap of the pocket in the carriage door, lifted it and put in her hand. Once more she paused, and the man watched her with a greedy curiosity. She drew half-way up from the pocket a gold-edged book, locked with a clasp, and paused again, deep in thought.

"No," she said presently, letting the book slip back, "not yet. But I will come in; I will learn how far I may trust you."

He smiled as he handed her from the carriage; his nose twitched, his eyes glittered; the little soul of the man was made proud.

CHAPTER II

FATHER VESEY

THE room into which the clergyman led his mysterious visitor, turning up the gas in the chandelier over the table as he did so, was one of those dismal apartments which are the purgatories of London lodgers. It was not loud and alive with a pretentious vulgarity which screams at one in jarring discordances, but in the meaningless and colourless character of its poverty it was inert, dumb, breathless, soulless—like a face without eyes. The long centuries in which art has laboured to utter itself and the soul of man struggled to give form to his dim perceptions of the beautiful, were to this room in modern London as if they had never been.

The walls of the room—which seemed to be entirely without air, as though it had long ago been suffocated by the accumulation of its own dust—were hung on two sides with a dust-coloured paper covered with grey-blue flowers. At one end was a great spread of folding doors, putty coloured: and at the other end were two windows over which were drawn coarse white curtains of cotton lace. The floor was covered by a carpet in which red and yellow lines described over a dark blue ground various conflicting and harassing figures which resembled the

intricacies of a maze. Over the mantelpiece was hung a photogravure of Raphael's Madonna di Foligno, and on the mantelpiece itself, which was draped with a serge of faded maroon, was a gaudily painted wooden crucifix of French manufacture. In the fireplace was a Japanese fan. A little crazy marble-topped dinner wagon, with turned pillars supporting its top shelf, a stamped flower for its panelled ornament, and with a mirror at the back, stood dejectedly against one of the walls. Over a small American desk was a bookcase filled with black-covered and gold-lettered volumes of ecclesiastical literature; and before it was a small revolving chair of cheap fumed oak, evidently a new purchase. Beside the fireplace there was one comfortable and low-seated armchair, on the seat of which rested the biography of a French Jesuit, with a paper knife keeping the reader's place between the leaves; with this exception the chairs were all of severe Victorian design, with saddle-back upholstery. About the room, chiefly on the marble-topped dinner wagon, were vases of German porcelain standing on thick mats of dyed wool. Nowhere was there a flower or even a dried leaf.

The lady who entered the room was struck by its coldness, its gracelessness, its ugly penury. She had never before seen the life of London in so forbidding an aspect. This room was not savage, it was not destitute; it was lifeless, it was a coffin. Accustomed as she was to the softness and luxury of refinement, it was difficult for her to conceive how a mind could exist and keep its poise in an environment of this order.

The curate's supper stood on the table, under the gas chandelier. Some one had brought the little

japanned tray from a downstairs kitchen, set it there, and departed without one thought of the person for whom it was prepared. There was a film over the cocoa, the cup was streaked with the splashings of the journey upstairs, the spoon was filled with these same drying splashes, and the three lumps of sugar in the saucer were stained with them. In addition to this dismal cup of cocoa there was squeezed into the little japanned tray the half of a sixpenny Madeira cake and a thick cut-glass dish of sugar biscuits. It looked as if the meal had been placed in a coffin for the spirit awaking hungry on the Day of Judgment, even as pagans slip coins into the cold hands of their dead.

Averting her eyes from this distasteful supper tray, the lady's gaze was caught by a dreary party of tired flies wheeling round and round the coloured cast-iron weights of the gas chandelier. She shuddered, and sat down in a chair near the table.

Father Vesey, to give the curate the name by which he will be known through this story, laid aside his overcoat, and let down the cassock which had been tucked up over his hips. He was partially bald, and to his own delight was chiefly bald in that very part of the hair where the Roman Catholic priest is tonsured. His nose was long and flexible, his mouth wide and covetous, the restless eyes behind their spectacles advertised slyness and cunning rather than adroitness and sagacity. He was—in a word—a small man, a creature who might impose upon men more eager to express their own capacity than to appraise his value, but never upon a woman. Power, strength, energy and profundity of any kind were entirely lacking in him. He was what he was out of an almost girlish pleasure in secrecy, underhandedness and mystery;

a little man with a taste for plottings and stratagems.

"Tell me who you are, or at least what society you represent," he said, "and I will tell you what I meant when I described myself as one of the Church's martyrs."

The lady, placing her ruff upon the table, raised her eyes to his and fixed them upon him. "I already know what you meant, Father," she said slowly.

"Then, why have you come to me——" he began, pleased with the change in her tone; but she interrupted him, speaking in the same slow and measured manner as before:

"When I came to you I did not know. But now I know. The news which I shall carry back to my society will gratify them. For one thing, it will relieve the society of its intention to assist you, and enable it to concentrate its efforts on other and even more Protestant parishes."

"Forgive me," he interrupted; "but whether you have apprehended my meaning or not, you are wrong in supposing that I do not need support."

She kept her eyes fixed upon his, magnetizing the weak creature with her gaze, and made answer: "It is the weakness of our campaign that the secret societies in England are secret even from each other. I cannot understand how you should lack support, if indeed you are one of the martyrs."

He drew a chair to the table, chiefly that he might for a moment remove his eyes from her, and sat down with an elbow resting on the table's edge, his hand supporting his head. "Will you tell me what you understand by that phrase 'one of the martyrs'?" he asked.

"I am so sure of my intention, in spite of the per-

plexity you cause me," she said, "that I will answer your question. There are men, Father, and women, too, who are so devoted to the holy interests of Mother Church that they consent to remain nominally outside her borders in order that they may bring erring souls into the one true fold; such men, and such women, are martyrs."

He nodded his head. "Such a man am I," he said dramatically.

"Yet you need support?"

"My society is a scattered one, each man fights his own battle."

She leaned suddenly forward, laying her arms upon the table, and looking deeply into his eyes. "If I could trust you," she exclaimed eagerly, throwing away her calm reserve; "if I only knew that I could trust you!"

"You can trust me," he said, getting up. "What is it you would tell me?"

"No!" she whispered. "I dare not."

For a moment he looked at her, cunning and suspicion in his eyes; but her gaze seemed to satisfy him, and he turned away exclaiming: "You shall trust me, my daughter, I am a priest."

He drew a bunch of keys from his pocket, and went to the desk in a corner of the room. For one moment a smile flickered at the woman's lips, but it vanished quickly, and she sat with bowed head whispering: "If I could only trust you; if I could only trust you!"

Father Vesey opened the desk. On the ledge rested a despatch box, with a small silver padlock. He unlocked the padlock, opened the box, and fumbling among the papers presently drew out a small pamphlet.

He brought it to the lady at the table, and placed it in her hands.

As soon as her eyes rested on it, she looked up at him quickly. "Are you, indeed, the secretary of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus?"

He inclined his head proudly, the small eyes glittering behind the spectacles. "I am the author of that secret tract," he said quietly. He was getting upon terms with this proud and mysterious woman.

"Then you work with Father Severn?"

"You know about us?" he asked with surprise, once more humbled by the lady's omniscience.

"Father Severn has our best wishes," she replied quietly.

"You are acquainted with the Society of Nicodemus?" he demanded.

"I know of two or three of its most vigorous members," she admitted, watching him closely.

She did not guess how this reply would sting the cunning and inquisitive priest, but as she saw his lips twitch and his eyes wince, she was quick to take advantage of her mistake: "The society, at any rate, is to be commended for its admirable statemanship; the concealment of its secretary's identity is an achievement in diplomacy. Let me tell you," she went on, "that there have always been three or four members of my society to affirm that you were more than a ritualist; but in spite of our many sources of information and our trusted representatives in the Holy City, the fact that you are actually with us and are, moreover, an official of so important a society, has not been discovered by us—has not, I should rather say, come to our knowledge."

His sallow cheeks flushed for a moment and his eyes

shone. "I am content to suffer," he cried earnestly ; "I do not ask for applause, for notoriety, for the fame of a moment. I work for eternity, and I work slowly and in secrecy. You say I have introduced reforms into this parish, but you complain that they come slowly ; yet, do you consider, that while these reforms come so slowly and yet so certainly, my vicar has never guessed for a moment that I am even a ritualist, and the richest members of the congregation actually believe that I am opposed to advanced Churchmanship ? Father Severn—with all his brilliant gifts—is suspected. He could not enter this parish. The Evangelicals name him, quote him, denounce him. He is openly on the side of Ritualism, and therefore he is checked at every turn by this very boldness of his tactics. But I, madam—I can go into the stoniest places of Protestantism and plant there, in the name and under the shadow of that wicked pervert, Martin Luther, the blessed seed of Holy Church. What says Faà Di Bruno ? 'Nicodemus was a disciple of Jesus Christ in secret. Newman, Ward, Manning—what did they do but fling themselves off the ship and save themselves ; but we, madam, labour rather to save the ship and bring her into the harbour of God's almighty safety than seek the selfish security of our own peace of mind. The Society of Nicodemus is a society of martyrs, a society of patriots ; for the sake of our country's salvation we remain among members of a schismatic Church whose Thirty-nine Articles—forty stripes save one !—odious as they are, we are willing to bear upon our backs for the greater glory of the true Church's ultimate triumph."

"Pray do not think," the lady said, in her most caressing tones, "that I presume to question either

your loyalty or your patient and long-suffering method of conversion. The fact that you are a member, even the secretary, of so pious a body as the Society of Nicodemus satisfies me, humbles me. But though I reverence your martyrdom, and am truly humbled by your long-suffering, I am so accustomed to work with people of supreme and even autocratic influence that it is impossible for me not to hope for swifter action on the part of your society. If I were to tell you the names of people in the society with which I work, you would be astounded, and you would condone this impatience. The courts of Europe are open to us; royalty, aristocracy, wealth, support and inspire us. In the pocket of my carriage there is now at this moment a book containing names which would convince you that the movement among women is widespread and far-reaching."

"May I fetch it?" he inquired eagerly, remembering how she had hesitated about this book in the carriage.

She considered. "I think not. At any rate, not yet."

"You can trust me," he said. "I will be secret as the grave."

"The unlocking of that book," she wavered, "involves crowns and powers—the politics of Europe."

His eyes glittered, and he licked his lips. "Still you can trust me; I am a priest."

"Later you shall know," she said; "there is no hurry. We are now working for a unity among the secret societies. A letter may reach us from Rome any moment which will enable my society to approach yours and to attempt at least some co-ordination of our efforts. All the secret societies should work

together : this secrecy should concern only the common enemy."

"Show me that book," he pleaded. "I am secret, but I am curious."

She smiled. "You deserve some reward, Father, for long martyrdom; but the opening of that book is a matter of European moment. You might fling out of your window all the secret papers of your society without disturbing the balance of political power even in England; but one page of my book made public—one page!—and Europe would be in flames. Do you think—to suggest only one side of our society's work—that the women of France have been doing nothing under the tyranny of an atheist government?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the priest, "that is the kind of work for which I long—political work, the action of Catholic diplomacy upon the governments of nations. Give me that work to do! Try me, test me by what power you will; I shall prove faithful to the last breath in my body."

"I have no doubt, Father, of your devotion. It may be that we can even entrust you with some of the skeins of our diplomacy. But let that promise suffice. Another day you shall visit me, and I will tell you more. For to-night—well, it is late." She rose from her chair, and took her muff from the table, handing him the secret tract at which she had scarcely glanced.

"It pains me that you cannot trust me even now," he answered, tossing the tract upon the table. "I have disclosed to you my association with the Society of Nicodemus; you have not even told me the name of the society with which you work. It is true that the Society of Nicodemus may

seem small and insular to you, but after all it works with the blessing of the Holy Father, and it is converting Protestant England."

She put out her hand, and laid it upon his arm. "Far be it from me to disparage the least of the societies working for Mother Church. I have pained you, and I am sorry. If I have discouraged you, I have sinned."

"You have not discouraged me," he cried; "but you have given me a zest for larger work."

She stood looking at him. "You can be secret?" she demanded slowly.

"I have told you so."

"To no one—not even to a member of your own society—will you disclose what I say?"

"I promise."

She watched him closely, and then sat down again in her chair. "You may bring me the book," she said, picking up his tract again.

"Thank you, thank you," he said, and went hurriedly to the door.

"Do not arouse the suspicion of my coachman," she cautioned him; "and pray tell him that I shall come in a minute."

The door was scarcely closed before the lady was at the window, and had drawn a corner of the curtains aside. Her carriage was not at the door; in the distance she could see its lights as the coachman turned the horse at the corner of the street. The front door had not opened when she let the curtains fall back in their places, and moved quickly to the open despatch box on the desk. With deft hands, scarcely disturbing a paper in her search, she felt through the contents of the box, and drew out at last two small manuscript books. She opened first one and then the other; after a

glance at their contents, she slipped one of the books back into its place, and going back to her seat at the table, concealed the other in her muff. Her face was hard and cold and merciless ; if she had seen at that moment its reflection in a glass, she herself would have been startled and horrified.

When Father Vesey returned, the mysterious woman was idly turning the pages of the pamphlet which he had given her to read, a tract of his own on the Monophysite Controversy. She raised her head as he entered the room, and said with composure : "The arguments are well stated ; you are a clear thinker as well as a skilful diplomatist."

He handed her the book, and she, taking a key from her breast, suspended by a thin gold chain round her neck, unlocked the clasp, and opened the book carefully at a certain page.

"I will show you three names," she said ; "but they will satisfy you" ; and rising from her seat she held the book so that he might read.

"Her Royal Highness —— !" he gasped. "Is it possible ?" he cried.

She shut the book. "You have promised to be secret."

"Yes."

"To-morrow I will come again."

"You will tell me no more ?"

"No more to-night."

"Not even the name of your society ?"

"I cannot."

"Your own name ?" he pleaded.

"It was one of the three."

He became suddenly pale, and stared at her. "Are you—— ?"

She stopped him. "Discretion, Father, is the first virtue of the wise priest, but even before that comes the concealment of curiosity and surprise. Do not forget that you may yet meddle with the politics of the world. Will you put me into my carriage?"

Humbled and subdued, but dreaming wild dreams of the future, the crypto-Papist followed the mysterious lady down the steep stairs of his lodging-house, and watched her drive away.

When he returned to the room he was conscious of a perfume there, a delicate odour, and the sense of a woman's garments.

CHAPTER III

MRS. REVINGTON'S MUFF

FATHER VESEY—drinking his cold cocoa and imagining himself the Richelieu of modern Europe—would surely have conjured up visions of a less satisfactory nature had he been able to watch the mysterious lady's behaviour as she drove home—where was that home? he wondered—in her little buff-lined carriage. For as soon as the brougham was out of the street, she had drawn the stolen book from her muff, turned its pages by the light from the shop windows, and finding at last, under the title of "original members," the name of John Brooke Lister—followed in red ink by the letters C. of W., through which a fine pen had been drawn, and then by the letters B. of W.—she had sat back with a smile of such quiet malicious triumph as would have shocked the most Jesuitical of Papist eyes.

"Surely," she said to herself, "a lady's old visiting list never caught before so valuable a book as this!" She slipped the stolen book into her muff, and dropped the locked visitor's list—a few names of which had so affected Father Vesey—into the pocket of the carriage door. "I give thanks to Bridge," she reflected, as she sat back with a sigh of grateful relief; "it trains one in an admirable sagacity. A clumsy person would

have stumbled twenty times. I stumbled once, when I hurt Master Reynard's modesty; but I turned the very stumble to my advantage. The book is mine! I had expected to get it in a month, in a fortnight, in a week. I have got it in an evening—in half an hour!"

But her adventure of this single evening—an adventure destined to influence the lives of many people besides Father Vesey and herself—was not yet at an end.

On arriving at her flat in Sloane Street, where she dismissed her carriage, she found, on letting herself in with a latchkey, a most unwelcome visitor sitting in a morning room with the door open. This was a man over middle age, short, fat, red-faced and sandy-haired, with a look of commercial self-contentment in his shining countenance and small blood-shot eyes. He took a cigar from his mouth and waved his hand to her in a familiar way; then he got up from his chair in a leisurely fashion, setting a tumbler of whisky-and-soda on the table as he did so. He wore a sandy moustache, and close-clipped whiskers; the thick eyelashes of his small twinkling eyes were reddish. Like so many short corpulent men he carried himself with an exaggerated uprightness, and walked with something of a swagger.

Just behind him, hanging in an old ivory frame on the green walls of the little room was a painting in pastel of the famous portrait of Edmund Revington, by Watts, which now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery.

"Well?" she said coldly, entering the room, and not giving him her hand. "What do you want? Have you been waiting?"

"On my honour, half an hour," he answered, turning

towards her an ear into which was fitted a little silver tube. "The man told me you had gone to church. What is the game? Why do you go? Tell me."

"Because it does me good," she said, not troubling to raise her voice, as was her custom in speaking to him. She went to the table, picked up two letters which waited her there, and moved a little away from him.

"There, then; it doesn't improve your Bridge," he objected, following her movements and always turning to her his artificially-aided ear. "How much did you lose last night at the Barkers'? By Jupiter, how much?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Excuse me," she said, taking off her gloves, "but I must read my letters." She left her gloves and muff on the table, put back her veil, and went with the letters to an arm-chair by the hearth.

"I've come to take you to the Keyzers'," he said, beginning to meddle with the ornaments on the mantel-piece; he was always fingering other people's property. "You have luck at old Sammy Keyser's; something in the air, I take it! Dash me, you're awfully lucky at old Sam Keyser's."

"Not to-night," she answered, opening one of the envelopes.

He made her repeat her refusal.

"Nonsense," he said. "It will do you good. The night's young yet. I will wait for you."

She raised her eyes and looked at him. "I am not going out to-night," she said quietly, and returned to her letter.

"You'll think better of it when you've read those letters," he answered good-humouredly; "one of

them is from the little girl I see. How is she ? There, then ; she must be getting up in years. You and I are old stagers, dash me if we aren't."

"I wonder you didn't open it," she answered, without looking up.

He laughed to himself and went to a side-table to replenish his glass.

"Read this !" she cried, and tossed a letter on to the table. "It is your doing."

"The one with the coronet," he said, taking his hand from the syphon. "On my honour, I have a reverence for coronets."

He was still smiling, in his lazy, good-natured, self-satisfied way when he came back to the table with his tumbler. He pulled some eyeglasses from his waistcoat pocket, balanced them on his nose, and read the letter :—

"The Countess of Durley presents her compliments to Mrs. Revington, and informs her that she is in no need of assistance in organizing the Albert Hall Bazaar in aid of the County Hospitals.

"The Countess of Durley wishes Mrs. Revington to know that she is surprised that Mrs. Revington should presume to offer her services, in however humble a position, to one who still treasures as a sacred memory the name of Edmund Revington."

When he had read the letter, he let it fall on the table and laughed. "Testy !" he said, and took his eyeglasses from his nose. "What does it matter ? A mere nothing. The size of London is a most comfortable thing ; no one is anybody. What does it matter ? Nothing matters !"

"Your doing," said Mrs. Revington, for this was the lady's name.

"Never mind," he answered, grinning at her out of his little pig-like eyes, and rubbing his whiskers; "I'm going to give you the opportunity of hitting back at your old friends. I'm starting a society paper; a scorcher, I assure you. You shall write for it. I want you to write for it. It's coming out soon. What do you think of the idea?"

"A paper to advise spinsters in Stock Exchange transactions?" she asked.

He laughed. "On my honour, a social and political paper. A general election is coming. Do you understand the argument?"

She shrugged her shoulders again. "Will you pour me out a glass of hot water?" she asked, and opened the other envelope.

He did as she asked him, and she took the glass from his hand, receiving it in a handkerchief, without thanking him, her mind engrossed in the other letter which she had now begun to read.

"On my honour, I believe you are getting to love your daughter," he said, with a chuckle, going back to his chair at the table; but she took no notice.

He sat down and watched her.

The man who sat smoking in this lady's room was one of London's modern financiers, a Mr. Spencer Purvis. He floated companies, some of which were honest, and he had dealings with solicitors, all of whom were rogues. He had one office near the Stock Exchange, where, under the name of a company, he sent out circulars telling innocent people that an investment of £20 would result in an income of £80 a year, and so on in a humorously ascending scale. He kept, in fact, what is known as a bucket shop. Beginning life as a second-rate clerk in a stockbroker's office, he had

speculated secretly with such success that when he was only a few years off thirty, he was his own master with an ample fortune at his back. Then he became known as a financier. People came to him from every quarter of the globe with ideas for the promotion of companies. He did well out of this business, and when a scheme failed it was always found that the bucket shop had relieved him of his responsibilities. By the time he was forty "Purvis" was a name familiar to newspaper readers. Men said of him, "He will appear at the Old Bailey one day"; but while other financiers of the same character went into penal servitude, he was still found flourishing in his liberty. Everybody knew that he was a rogue—the very street-boys knew that—but no one could ever say exactly where his roguery became criminal. The law watched him and waited.

His name had been talked about in London for some five years, and he was squeezing his way into the gambling sections of society, when the event occurred which in some way may be regarded as the hinge on which this story turns. His wife, a good and quiet soul, who in the first flush of her fortune had been blind to certain new and ugly tendencies in her husband's character, at last rebelled against his gross and depraved life. She brought an action against him for the divorce of their marriage. To the consternation and horror of society it was discovered that among the names of music-hall singers, actresses, and women notorious for their vulgar lives, there appeared in this sordid and dreadful case the name of Mrs. Revington, the widow of one of their choicest spirits.

She was innocent. The evidence was conclusive

on that point, and the judge had animadverted with just reproof on the useless and wanton introduction of her name. She had borrowed money from Purvis—large sums of money—to pay her gambling debts; she had accepted jewellery from him for services which she rendered him in his social ambition; but so far, and no farther, had she fallen from self-respect.

He had scraped acquaintance with her at a race meeting, introduced by an impecunious peer whose name he had found useful in his early days on the front page of prospectuses; but her husband and friends were unaware of this acquaintance, and at that time they seldom appeared together in public.

But, a few months before this terrible exposure, Edmund Revington—to the horror and confusion of his world—had thrown himself off a steamer crossing from St. Malo to Southampton, after visiting his daughter in Normandy. Everybody in society at first imagined that he had been driven to this dreadful act by the unhappiness of his married life, Mrs. Revington's lack of sympathy in his aims and ideals being notorious. She was frowned upon by London's Intellectuals, and the condolences offered by Edmund Revington's friends were cold and rebukeful. But when the horrible scandal of the Purvis divorce appeared in the newspapers, so soon after his suicide, this cold and reproachful attitude of the superior world changed instantly to a ban of the most austere and relentless nature. Here, they declared, was the cause, clear and indisputable, of Edmund's suicide. The shame and degradation of the coming proceedings—the odious thought that he might even have profited unconsciously by the money presents of this vile financier—had clearly unbalanced his mind, and he

had destroyed himself. What mercy could they show to this woman, this woman who had been unable to appreciate the fineness of Edmund's spirit, and who, by sheer vulgarity of mind, had unseated that noble reason from its throne? None; clearly none. To countenance such a woman would be to condone sin, to imperil the traditions of dignified society, and to make light of virtue and honour. She was driven out from the society of her equals, ostracised and banned, shunned like a pariah.

In this way Mrs. Revington—one of the most beautiful and distinguished of London's brilliant women—was driven out from the aristocracy of the Intellectuals—from the refinements, the graces, and the dignities of aristocracy—and forced to take up a permanent position in that society where she had often dallied for a little, but had never rested—the noisy, boisterous, and headlong company of feverish souls who, with little culture and with no moral restraints, loudly advertise themselves—their photographs, their private doings, their dresses and their entertainments, the property of every newspaper reader—as the queens and leaders of London's social world.

When she found herself forced to live permanently with people whose society she had only tolerated for her own ends, Mrs. Revington came more and more to hate and detest them. She attended race meetings, played bridge and baccarat, and went every year to Monte Carlo. But all the excitements of such an existence could not dull the edge of her desire for the old world, with its friendships in foreign courts, and its intimate knowledge of European thought and diplomacy, and its general tone of the first rate, the highest best of international society. She began to hate the

memory of her husband, for he had been the cause of her expulsion from this stately easeful world. And, indeed, it had been Edmund Revington's attempt, soon after their marriage, to draw her into a metaphysical mysticism and to turn her almost Roman mind into the gentler channels of Greek idealism, that had first made her rebel. She was young then, her spirit floated with the animal satisfaction of life, and her mind, heavy with the fumes of admiration offered to her in every drawing-room by ambassadors, statesmen, artists, men of letters, and great churchmen out of every country, she resented this other-worldliness of her husband, this preposterous fad of spirituality. The books which he brought her to read—the works of Myers, Sidgwick, and Gurney—irritated the cold logic of her mind, and she tossed them all aside with an intellectual disdain. His friends, too, began to irk her, his dinner parties to bore her. She associated more and more with those women of her set who were looking through the closed gates of their quiet pleasure towards the noisy playing-fields of mammon, and then one day she opened the gate and passed out for an excursion. She returned again, but day by day she broke loose to join for an hour or two in the games and dances of that corybantic crew, and with every fresh truancy she tarried a little longer. Then came, as we have seen, the disaster of Edmund Revington's suicide, the unpardonable scandal of the Purvis divorce suit, and then the gates were closed against her for ever, and she was an outcast. Yes, she told herself again and again, Edmund Revington had driven her to those rash experiments which had ended in her downfall.

Her income was not a large one ; her extravagances were prodigal ; very often she was reduced to the

extremity of debt. On these occasions Mr. Purvis came to her rescue. In her first resentment at society's treatment of her, she had continued the intimacy with this financier, refusing his offer of marriage, and treating him with a coldness which forbade anything but the utmost respect on his part. She might have obtained the money she needed from educated men, more or less her social equals, who were only too willing to figure as her admirers in the noisy circles she was now driven to affect ; but she preferred to take it from the vile little city financier, because he had never ventured to insult her with an impossible admiration. He, at least, demanded no interest on his money. She asked, and he gave ; and always he was as punctually polite as her own banker. Mrs. Revington was one of those beautiful women almost entirely without passion. Men loved her, hoping some day for that extreme ecstasy of triumph when they should see a tenderness in her eyes, and hear a caress in her voice ; for she was a woman whose loveliness was cold and proud, and who therefore promised, when she did love, one of those grand and sublime passions which are as rare, says Balzac, as a masterpiece ; a woman beautiful without regularity of feature, and enravishing without the softness and wanton graces of the coquette ; a woman whose beauty, men of the world well knew, would be transfigured with an unimaginable fire of devotion, an almost maternal yearning and caressing tenderness, when she surrendered her soul to a lover.

It was upon these cold and almost disdainful terms, then, that the intimacy still subsisted between Mrs. Revington and the rich financier. However much he might appear at his ease with her in private, and

however vilely he might boast of this intimacy among his few friends, in public he was always her most polite and obedient servitor. She was still useful to him, socially ; she could still open doors for him which might otherwise have been closed against his reputation ; and perhaps, in his heart, he cherished his one claim to the respect of decent people in the almost frightened admiration he entertained for the cleverness, the cold intellectuality and the distinguished manner of this beautiful and arrogant creature, banished from her proper place in the world, but moving in a lower circle like a fallen queen, mindful of her past greatness and jealous of the homage due to her.

Mrs. Revington must in time have come to loathe even the best of the people with whom she now wasted her existence ; it was in her proud and disdainful nature to detest the lowness and vulgarity, the trivial cynicism and flaunting gracelessness of what Milton would have called this "Cyrenaick rout." Year by year a desire in her heart to return and recapture her position in the old world intensified ; she had no desire to amend her own life, but she rebelled against exclusion, and she began to hate more and more, as she saw it more clearly, the odious second-rateness of those people among whom she was condemned to pass her days. But a stronger reason was to grow in her heart for an escape from her position and a return to an accepted place in the nobler world.

Thrown by the increasingly irksome commonness and depravity of her new associates more and more upon herself, Mrs. Revington had begun to take an interest in her daughter. This child was living in Normandy, receiving her education at the hands of an ex-French priest, a distinguished writer of anti-Catholic

books, specially chosen by Edmund Revington. Mrs. Revington occasionally went over to visit her daughter, and every visit endeared the child a little more to the mother's heart. Then her letters always set the mother thinking tenderly of the child. They were letters of a singular and haunting charm, like the journal of Eugenie de Guérin or the thoughts of Pascal. She had inherited her father's genius for spirituality, for complete detachment from the common stress of modern life. She had "l'onction, l'effusion, la mysticité." The colours of the world, its odours and its thousand breaths, its sighs, its whispers, and its thunders—all that this coloured, sonorous and tangible globe offers to the senses of mankind, were the occupation of her thoughts and the ministers of her happiness. In one word she was an artist. She caught from nature an ecstasy which she could find neither in labour nor society, and she went to that fountain early and late for her sustenance. The white mists of dawn, lifting from dew-drenched fields, and moving, like some slow-drawn curtain, woven of silence and cold, past the still, dark, purple woods, and ascending gradually to the brightness of the mountain tops, till they caught the tinge of fire and melted into the tender blue of the morning skies, seemed to her as if they ever lifted with them her young-eyed soul, and carried it in an orison of adoration to the very presence and truth of God. She would wait through the darkness and angry desolation of a stormy sea, standing in loneliness under the shadow of some tall cliff, with the spray in her face and the wind roaring past her ears, till the vision came of a Figure moving on the waters; and then with the words, "Peace, be still!" whispered in her soul, she felt again the sense of the Everlasting Arms under the

fabric of the universe. The hot summer noons, spent beside a brook under the cool branches of flowering chestnuts or scented acacias, filled her with a quiet joy in the anticipation of eternal existence spent in serene contemplation of creative power. But, most of all, she loved to wander far afield at evening, through deep dim woods, or by the side of hedgerows, picking wild flowers as she went, hearing as an obligato to her thoughts, which were all of God, the cooings of pigeons and the songs of birds happy at last after the day's long hunting; to hear those songs mingling in a choric hymn of grateful peace with the bleatings from distant wattled cotes, the call of cattle moving through lanes to byre and homestead, and the lullaby tinkling of some chapel bell. Then it was that her spirit rested even from ecstasy, and the abiding calm of the mystery which she believed to penetrate and interpenetrate all material appearance, flooded the chambers of her soul with the peace which passeth all understanding.

Of how deeply her daughter contemplated the gift of life, or of how profoundly she was stirred by the majesty and satisfaction of nature, Mrs. Revington was certainly not aware. But she saw in her child superiority and originality, she realized, with her own worldly interpretation of it, the delicate fineness of the child's character. And she loved her well enough, even now, to hate the thought that this lovely little creature, all milk-white and dusky-brown, should be condemned to a life such as she herself was condemned to live, an existence banal, empty, stupid and common.

She loved her daughter, but with the only love of which she was then capable; a proud love, a jealous love, a love which had only the child's material well-being in its perspective. She thought of her future—

her future in London. She thought of her frocks, her hats, her gloves ; planned her appearances in public places—Ascot and the Opera ; considered whom it would be possible for her to marry ; worried her brain about marriage settlements, and the social value of the establishment that would come to her child ; and with these thoughts, she gave herself up to a plan of campaign whereby this so loved daughter should come at last to take up her unquestioned position in the society to which, by birth and genius, she had the right of entry.

The letter which she was now reading quickened this worldly affection for her child. The girl told of how M. Vermut, the ex-priest in Normandy, had given her to read a French translation of one of her father's books, and of how, almost frightened by the gift, she had gone to her favourite wood, and there read the dead father's volume with all the intensity of a spiritual awakening—

“ It seemed to me,” she wrote, “ that I was listening to my father's voice for the first time, and that he was telling me to believe thoughts of his, which have always been thoughts of mine. I was conscious of his presence, and could almost feel his hands stroking my hair as I read the words he had written, his breath upon my cheek. I was moved more than once to tears. I could feel that his ghost was by me in the trees. It was as if the parent whom I so little knew and so seldom saw, was suddenly given back to me. Priceless, inexpressible gift ! I assure you, my mother, I could scarce breathe for enchantment. I did not read the book ; I *listened* to my father talking. Every word was as if it were spoken. And will you understand me when I say that my *j. j.* was so quiet and

tranquil that I could follow his argument even while I *felt* his presence so near me? I have never read the book which his book is written to confute, *The Martyrdom of Man*, and I am sorry to say that I had never heard the name of its author; but I could feel that my father was soothing the wounds and tears of that unhappy Winwood Reade, and was proving to him, by Nature's struggle to express joy, that the pains and tortures of life are not the rightful interpretation of this beautiful universe. Do you remember these words of his? "Nature's immemorial and unceasing effort to express Joy is the comfort which most satisfies the soul eager for ampler powers and greater knowledge after death. Those who point to the pains and martyrdoms of life and cry out that there must be compensation for the striving and dying souls of men, argue from their own conception of justice, and do but rest their hopes upon a dangerous negative; but *we* who feel throughout Nature some deep and mystic vibration, like a chord of music struck again and again by a master struggling to realize in terms of sense his own spiritual conceptions of Joy, *feel* (and in feeling only is there true existence), that in the universe, from which the emotions of this globe can never be divorced, there is an eternal effort towards Happiness, an endless struggle after Satisfaction. They are assured, these happy ones, that the path of God's progress leads ever away from travail and lamentation to the mountain-heights of a Pleasure undreamed by man. Of a truth may a soul, who has once perceived the significance of this struggle to attain Joy, cry from this beautiful earth to the silences of Him who inhabited eternity: 'I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness'."

Oblivious of her unwelcome guest, Mrs. Revington read this letter from little Silvia far away in Normandy. At one moment, when her child touched the keys of memory, her thoughts turned backward to the husband whom she had never loved with any devotion or with any admiration, the husband to whom she had always stood in the love-destroying attitude of a critic ; and at another moment she was wondering how it would affect her child's affection if it ever came to her knowledge that the father whose love had come as a new thing into her life, destroyed himself for shame of her mother.

While she followed the child's letter, and harassed her mind with the reflections it suggested, the financier sat at the table, now studying her face with puckered lips, now stretching out his legs, and contemplating his shoes, now lifting his cigar to his lips, and now fingering her gloves on the table. As he sat in this drowsy state of mind, his hand wandered to Mrs. Revington's muff, and he began to finger it just as he had fingered her gloves, her letters, and her china. He first stroked the fur, then picked at the violets, and afterwards put his hand into the warmth of the muff. Without thinking of what he was doing he pulled out two books. The smaller one, to his amusement, he found to be a book of religious devotion ; he slipped it back into the muff with a laugh which the lady did not hear. He opened the other book in the same careless and uninterested fashion ; but this time he became interested. He had seen the word "secret," and the opening page was adorned with mystical signs and symbols. He sat up in his chair, and bent down his head to read.

The rules of the Society were headed by a prayer

addressed to the Virgin Mary for the health of "Thy servant our Pope"; and this petition was followed by a prayer for the sons of Nicodemus, "who serve the True Church secretly in the darkness lingering from the Reformation." He read a few of the Rules of this Secret Society, turned the pages, and glanced over the names of its members; and then, raising his head, glanced cautiously at Mrs. Revington. She was still reading her letter. He lifted the book, slipped it into the pocket of his dress coat, and then stretching his legs again, began to smoke with the old cheerful serenity on his fat and shining countenance.

Mrs. Revington folded her daughter's letter, and put it back in the envelope. Then she raised her eyes and looked for a moment with half-closed critical eyes at the picture of her husband.

"How's the little girl?" inquired Purvis, leaning forward. The sound of his voice recalled her to the world.

"I am not going out to-night, and I am afraid I cannot ask you to remain," said Mrs. Revington, looking up from her chair with the glass of hot water still held by a handkerchief in her hand. "I have letters to write. You will excuse me."

"You are disagreeable to-night, on my honour, yes!" he objected; but he himself was now anxious to depart.

"When can I see you again? I have important proposals to make to you. The paper is to be a big thing; I assure you. It is a serious proposition. A general election is coming. I am in the mood for ambition."

"I will do what I can to help you," she answered.

"I will write and tell you when you can come. Forgive me if I ring the bell."

He got up from his chair, put on his overcoat, and took his hat from the table.

"I shall go to the Keysers' for a couple of hours. I want cheering up, I assure you. You have depressed me to-night." He gave her his hand—a hand that was always hot and moist—and as her fingers touched it for a minute, she shuddered.

"You think too much of that little girl of yours," he laughed. "Don't worry. She'll never hear anything about you till she's experienced enough not to care."

Mrs. Revington's eyes hardened. She got up from her chair, and turned her back upon him.

"Good-night," she said, as the man opened the door.

"Good-night," replied Purvis, putting on his hat; and he went from the room.

As the door of the flat closed, and the man drew the bolts and fastened the chain, Mrs. Revington, holding the tumbler of hot water in her handkerchief, went to the table, set the glass down there, and took up her muff. She was thinking of how she intended to save Silvia by means of the secret Society of Nicodemus. She came out of her reverie as her hand lifted the muff. She pulled out the little book of devotion, hastily and impatiently, and felt again in the muff. Then she looked on the table, and on the floor. For a moment she was puzzled and her wit was numbed: then she recovered herself. "I must have dropped it in the carriage!"

She dared not think that she had lost it.

The bell of the front door rang; she went to the threshold of the hall, waiting for her servant.

"There is some one at the door," she said; "I think it is Wilson," naming the coachman.

"It's Mr. Purvis, I think, ma'am," answered the

man ; and as he spoke the visitor's fingers drummed impatiently on the glass panels.

Mrs. Revington advanced into the hall as the man undid the fastenings of the door, and stood there, waiting.

Purvis entered, holding a book in his hand.

"I've come back all the way up these stairs, probably for nothing," he said. "Have you dropped anything?"

"Yes," she said, eagerly extending a hand, "I dropped a book."

"The cover of a book," he corrected, watching her closely. "I found it on the stairs."

"The cover!" she cried.

He lifted his hand and gave her the empty cover of the book he had taken from her muff.

"I don't suppose it's of any value," he said, "but it seemed strange to see it lying on your stairs. That's all there is of it."

"It was only an address book," she said, making a great effort to control herself. "But thank you for coming back. Good-night."

As the financier went down the stairs he said to himself, with quiet satisfaction. "Now I know that the book is worth something; and now she will never suspect that I took it. Cunning!" He emerged into the street, called a hansom, and drove away to play bridge at the house of a German Jew.

As for Mrs. Revington, she sat down biting her lips, a cloud of despair in her eyes. She had plotted, she had manœuvred, she had lied, and she had even stolen, in order that she might recover her place in the world, her place and Silvia's; and now in the very moment of her success the assurance of triumph had been snatched mysteriously out of her hands.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECRET SOCIETY OF NICODEMUS

A PARTY of clergymen was assembled in a bare and cold room in a Church House belonging to a Mission in South East London. On the gloomy walls of this barrack of a room there was one picture, hanging over the concrete mantelpiece, an engraving of the same portrait of Edmund Revington, a pastel of which hung in his widow's morning-room in Sloane Street.

The clergymen stood about in groups of twos and threes, talking and whispering together in the manner of men who have not met for some time, and who are rather awaiting the opening of those proceedings which have brought them together than finding interest in the present conversation.

They were men of various ages, and different types of countenance. One or two of them were habited as monks; the majority of them were in the ordinary dress of an English clergyman. The greater number, perhaps, were men between thirty and forty whose lean faces and pointed features proclaimed them to be lovers of cunning and stratagem. There were others, however, of a stronger and more resolute personality, men with broad brows, firm mouths, and shrewd penetrating eyes. And there were a few—chief among this

number being Father Lacey, a very old and distinguished man with thin white hair and benevolent eyes—who suggested the sweetness of mysticism and the purity of asceticism.

These clergymen formed the Inner Council of the Society of Nicodemus, and they were there awaiting the coming of their Master, Father Severn—who was also at the head of this particular Mission in South-East London—and their Secretary, Father Vesey, already known to the reader.

A physiognomist would have declared that here was gathered together a band of men with a natural aptitude for treachery and a mental capacity for slyness and mystery. They did not suggest dangerous conspirators or violent enemies of established order, but rather little-minded men content to practise slyness and treachery for the gratification which such conspiracy brought to their senses. It was easy to see among them the men who were Romanists for love of coloured vestments, elaborate ritual, and all the more childish and effeminate aspects of religion; easy, too, to detect the men who found prurient pleasure in such books as *The Priest in Absolution* and who had an itching for the sensual secrets of the Confessional; but it was plain to the eye that the majority of these Church of England clergymen who were all Roman laymen, found their pleasure in the mystery and secrecy of their work, and not in the goal to which they were labouring; that is to say, while they enjoyed the work of plotting for Rome under the wings of secrecy, and in the shadow of mystery, they would certainly have found the life of a Roman Catholic curé, doing the humble work of his Church openly and honestly, dull and vexatious.

"I had a curious point to decide the other day," said one of the priests, who spoke pedantically, with repeated emphasis, gasping at the close of his periods, and who had the habit of biting his lips and clasping and unclasping his hands behind his back as he spoke. "A lay-brother told me that he had gone to Mass at St. Albans, and that, arriving early, he had thrown himself upon the grass, presumably to rest himself, and that while lying in this recumbent position he had plucked a few blades of grass and, without thinking of what he was doing, had placed these blades of grass in his mouth."

"Ah! I see," exclaimed the other; "a very interesting point; pray continue." Another priest joined them, attracted by this exclamation, and curious for fresh gossip; the first part of the story was repeated for his benefit, and the narrator then went on with his tale—

"Before he realized what he had done, my young friend began to chew the grass. But coming to himself he was horrified at the thought that he had broken his fast, and having no priest by him to decide the matter, he forebore to approach the Eucharist, and returned home."

"What was your decision in the matter?"

"Well, I questioned him pretty closely as to the time the grass had been in his mouth, and so far as I could gather from his answers he had expectorated the grass quickly, and had not swallowed any of his spittle. In that case, I told him, that he might without sin have gone to Mass."

"I think you are right," said the priest to whom he had first spoken; "but it is a nice point. It would all depend, of course, on the swallowing of the spittle."

If he had not done that, I do not think he had broken his fast."

"I found myself in a really very awkward position, last week," said the priest who had joined them; "it was concerning the Eucharist in the case of a sick person. I had carefully followed the instructions in the *Ceremonial of the Altar*, and had administered the Viaticum and Extreme Unction according to the instructions laid down for us; but when I proceeded to follow the injunction, '*Wash your fingers, and let the sick man drink the ablution,*' the nurse who was standing by interfered, and said that she would report my action to the doctor. I told her that it was a solemn practice of the Church, and it was a matter for the patient to decide. She would hear nothing of it, and actually knocked the vessel out of my hands, spilling the contents upon the floor."

"You were unable to save any of the ablution?" questioned one of the other priests.

But the answer was not given. At that moment a little door at the end of the big bare room opened quickly, and Father Severn, wearing a Franciscan habit, and followed by Father Vesey—who paused to bolt and lock the door—entered the room.

"Greeting!" he said, almost under his breath, acknowledging the low and respectful murmur of welcome from the priests who now all faced towards him, with a curt nod of his head. He walked quickly to the chair at the head of the long table in the centre of the room, drew it back sharply, and motioning with his hand that the assembled priests should be seated, himself sat down and laid his papers before him.

Father Severn—the Master of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus—was a huge and burly man, forty-four years

of age, of a full and striking face, which was bronzed and greasy, and having the stubborn black hair on his bullet-head clipped close to the skin. His shoulders were high, his neck short, his ribs wide, and his arms of an unnatural length. His skeleton must have resembled that of an anthropomorphous ape; the skull was inclined forward, the jaw-bones were massive, the ribs distended, the arms of great length. And yet there was in the bronzed, puffy, and greasy face of the man some extraordinary manifestation of power which lifted him as an intellectual being high above the ranks of normal men. He was a handsome man, a man of mark, a man who would stand out from a crowd. The eyes were close-set, small, vigorous and emotionless: the iris was of a dark chocolate colour with a faint rim of grey-blue running round it like the blurred edging of an onyx: the deep line, starting up between the eyebrows, and dividing the temples, declared an uncommon power of intensity and concentration; and the projecting chin, with its division in the centre like the scar of a dagger, manifested an equal capacity for labour and effort of the most exacting kind.

He was a man who felt neither emotion nor tenderness. In spite of the grossness of his body and the heaviness of his countenance, he was entirely devoid of carnal appetites. He had no vices, and practised without displeasure a most rigorous asceticism. And as he was free from the emotions of human nature, so also was he free of the religious emotion, the *passion spirituelle*, the exaltation and the ecstasy of Devotion. To him the pretty lights and the coloured vestments, the glittering ceremonial and the stately pageants of Catholic ritual, were but the toys and playthings which

the Church whom he served flung to her children still in the nursery. That Church was to Father Severn not a mother but a machine; and he was one of its engineers. He had the watchful, far-seeing, mechanical and circumscribed mind of an engineer. Wheels to him were more than genuflexions, and the throb of the engines more than the sprinkling of many altars. Of God—if he ever thought at all—he had the same feeling as the engineer of a ship may have concerning the designer of the vessel. God never interfered. He had done His work, and had withdrawn. The governance of the world was in the hands of men; it was for men—men who had the faculty of governance—to rule it and control it masterfully. He had become—of course, in secret—a member of the Roman Catholic Church, because he saw in that organization the perfectest machinery for governing men and women. The idea of liberty was repugnant to him; law the very breath of his nostrils. He sought the governance of men and women from an ecclesiastical throne because he believed that in an age of democracy only religion could succeed in exacting that measure of obedience which makes governance tolerable. He desired a better world, a cleaner world, a stronger world; but far more than he hated and detested those who broke the laws of God and lived lives of abomination, did he hate, detest, and scorn the Protestants who hindered the True Church in its mission, and the timorous Ritualists who still clung to the tattered garments of the Reformation.

“There is something of importance to communicate to the Inner Council,” he said, in a voice that was almost a growl. He kept his head down as he spoke, turning over, with strong hands, the scattered papers

on the table. Then he raised his head, and looked at his fellows : " The book of membership has been stolen from Father Vesey's papers."

At first, so abrupt was the announcement, the priests did not realize the nature of the intelligence. There was a slight stir. Several of them turned pale ; most of them began to express anxiety. For a moment there was a buzz and murmur of conversation, but it ceased directly Father Severn looked up from his papers to speak again. A priest sitting on his right hand leaned forward and asked him something in a whisper, but Severn silenced him with a frown, and an impatient motion of his hand. Looking down the table he said—

" Father Vesey will now tell what there is to be told about the matter. Questions can be put to him afterwards." Then he leaned over the table and resting an elbow on his knee and gnawing the top of his thumb between his teeth, gave himself up to a scrutiny of the papers before him.

Father Vesey related what the reader already knows, concealing the impatience he had felt to obtain the mysterious lady's book from her carriage, and giving himself the credit for a great deal more secrecy in the matter of the affairs of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus than Mrs. Revington would have been able to substantiate.

For five minutes after his statement he was beset with questions on all sides from a body of men now thoroughly excited and anxious. The bare room, with its walls of cheerless grey, its ill-planned deal floor, and its dusty windows which looked upon the slates and tiles of surrounding slums, became now the scene of consternation and alarm. Father Severn still bent studiously over his papers ; but Father Vesey, stand-

ing up at his side, white and guilty, was the centre of a storm and a crisis. Men—fearful of exposure—called their questions loudly, rapped on the table, shuffled on their chairs, got upon their feet, talked and argued among themselves. Father Vesey was not only questioned angrily; he was upbraided and denounced with energetic indignation. Only Father Lacey, the old white-haired priest, with his beautiful ascetic face, appeared to be unmoved; he sat with his chair pushed a little way back from the table, one thin leg crossed over the other, his hands folded in his lap, a serene smile in his eyes and upon his lips.

In the midst of the clamour, Father Severn looked up suddenly from his papers, pressed Father Vesey back towards his chair, and held up a finger for silence.

"There is no reason," he said, "for consternation."

"Quite so," cried the old priest. Then he added quietly, "It is surely unreasonable to resent an incident which enables us to achieve our dearest wish—immediate, constant, and open communion with the True Church."

"It is even more unreasonable," said Father Severn, frowning upon him, "to suppose that desertion is necessary."

"I do not know that," answered the old man mildly. "If, as I suppose, the list has been stolen by some emissary of the Protestants for the purpose of unmasking our position, it were undignified in us to wait for the moment of exposure."

One or two of the priests cheered this sentiment, but the majority—loath to give up their mystery and secrecy, even while they feared exposure—looked towards Father Severn hoping for light and comfort from him.

"It is the merest surmise," he said, "to say that the book has been stolen for purposes of exposure. There are other hypotheses."

The old priest, whose countenance still wore its seraphic smile, contented himself with a slight shrugging of his shoulders.

"It is natural for you," said Father Severn, "who are an old man, to desire that your personal devotion to Holy Church should be known. For us, who are younger, whose determination to win England, by the only means which ever will win her, is unabated—public communion with Rome means treachery and desertion. We do not leave the ship so easily."

"I was not counselling individual action," replied the old man. "Individual acknowledgment of allegiance to our Mother the Church brings with it the displeasure of His Holiness. That we all know. But we are assured that when the hour comes for the Society to declare itself openly and before men—"

"That hour is far off!" interrupted Father Severn angrily.

"It may be," answered Father Lacey, with a sigh; "but a discussion of the possibility of that hour soon striking its summons, is, I take it, the object of this meeting; and what I have said has been said only to that end."

"Perhaps," said another priest, addressing himself to Father Severn, "you will suggest your own theory accounting for the theft of the book."

But Father Severn still kept his gaze on the old priest.

"Why should we declare ourselves before the unmasking, which you contemplate with such natural pleasure, actually occurs?"

"I hold it would be more dignified to do so," answered Father Lacey.

"Why more dignified?" demanded Father Severn.

"If you will allow me to hold an opinion, because a declaration of our true colours *after* exposure will wear an aspect of cowardice which will distress many of those whom we have learned to love in our congregations."

"Is it not our pride that we forget and sacrifice our own personal feelings for the ultimate triumph of Holy Church?" asked Severn. "Are we to consider the distress of a few people when the conversion of England is our object? Shame! Exposure! Is it shame when a man clings to a sinking ship? Is it exposure when a man is struck down at his post? The whole character of this Society, blessed by His Holiness and prayed for by the devout throughout Europe, is its complete abnegation and uprooting of personal predilection and its unalterable, its unshakable, devotion to England."

"You are right; you are quite right," cried the old priest, the smile gone from his face; "for the moment I forgot the utter holiness of our cause in the gladness with which I hailed the possibility of my own personal peace. Yes, England must be saved; you are right. Quite right."

Father Severn bent again over his papers.

"Very well, then," he said, his voice quiet and composed once more; "now we will talk business."

"May I first ask what your own supposition——" began the priest who had asked the same question before.

"We will talk business," said Father Severn. "Our object to-day is to reconstruct the book of membership.

That book contained the rules of the Society, and the list of members. You have all seen it at our meetings. I now have to draw on your memory. While I read out what I can remember of the rules and as many of the names of our seventy-four members as I can recollect, you will kindly correct me where you think me to be wrong and aid me where my own memory fails. Father Vesey will write down what we say, and a new book of membership will be prepared, of which I shall ask the Council to give me permission to be the future guardian."

He then lifted one of the papers from the table, and began to read, while Father Vesey with a fountain pen wrote hurriedly at his dictation.

"The book opened," read Father Severn, sitting back in his chair, his eyes bent upon the paper in his hand, "with its title—*Sancta Societas Nicodemi*, and was adorned with designs of the 'Zoplum Cross,' which all of us now wear openly as a badge of our membership, and the medal which we carry secretly for our freedom in Catholic countries. It then followed with the prayer for the Pope, the prayer for the Sons of Nicodemus and the quotation from *Catholic Belief* 'Nicodemus was a disciple of Jesus Christ in secret; but he presented himself to our Lord. Begin then by presenting yourself to the Catholic priest, to be instructed and received into the Church. After being received into the Church privately, if weighty reasons in the judgment of your spiritual director justify it, such as loss of home, or property, or employment, and so long as these weighty reasons last, you need not make your Catholicity public, but may attend to your Catholic duties privately.' After that came the statement sanctioned by Cardinal Newman; 'There can be no valid Sacra

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ment administered unless the Priest add mentally what the Protestant Eucharist Service omits.' Then, if I remember rightly, there followed the prayer for the Pope, and the page turned, and we came to the *statuta*."

He paused for a moment, watching Father Vesey's pen rather than expecting interruption, and then began to read as follows—

"First: The Objects of this Society are to maintain and extend the Catholic Faith and Discipline, and to achieve in secret, with the blessing of our Holy Father the Pope, the conversion of England to the True Church. Second: The members of this Society groan at the sins committed by their ancestors in separating from the Catholic world, and love with an unfeigned affection the Apostolic See, which they acknowledge to be the head of Christendom. Third: The members of this Society are content to bear the terrible void which the isolation of their position in the English Church creates in their hearts, and declare themselves willing to labour in secret for the perfect unity of the Church in Christ. Fourth: The members of this Society are persuaded that the conversion of England can only be effected from within, and in this sure conviction are agreed to devote their lives to banishing for ever from the Church of England the bastard faith of Protestantism. Fifth: The members of this Society are the lowliest servants of their Holy Mother the Church, and will work for the unity of Christ's Church chiefly in parishes not yet affected by the Tractarian Movement as well as in the more hopefully ritualistic churches. Sixth: The Members of this Society, with the comfort of the Holy Catholic Doctrine of Mental Reservation, are content to read liturgies, to celebrate sacraments and to give their adherence to Articles of Religion contrary to the

Faith of the True Church and repugnant to their own views ; striving with a wise patience and an unceasing vigilance to deliver those among whom they labour from the curse of the Reformation. Seventh : And finally, the members of this Society do acknowledge as right and true the worship of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Gate of Heaven : the Invocation of Saints : the veneration of Images and Relics ; and do joyfully give their adherence to all those doctrines and all those Sacraments and Services of the Holy Roman Catholic Church which were delivered to Her in the beginning from the hands of St. Peter by the blessing of the Holy Ghost, and of which ever after the Popes have been jealous and tender fathers. Therefore the members of this Sacred Society of Nicodemus do hereby make Oath :—

I, N——, profess and promise to Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and to all the saints, that I will faithfully serve the True Church in secrecy and all diligence ; and I make promise never to divulge the proceedings of this Sacred Society all the days of my life. So help me God ! After that, I think," concluded Father Severn, tossing the paper from which he had been reading on to the table, and picking up a sheaf of others, " comes the list of members."

The notes were read over by Father Vesey, a word was added here, a phrase amended there, but in substance the Inner Council of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus agreed that the rules as dictated by Father Severn, the master of the Society, were true to the original. Then came the naming of members, a long and difficult proceeding. The first forty names were recalled easily, the next twenty with difficulty, the last

ten after some trouble, and then very slowly came another name, a second, a third, and then there was a pause.

Father Severn who had been gnawing his thumb during this tedious process of recalling names, here looked up from his papers with a frown—

“Well!” he exclaimed: “we all know the last name.” Then turning to Father Vesey he added—

“Put it down. John Brooke Lister. Original Member. Formerly Canon of Westminster. Now Bishop of Warborough. Married.”

“Is the future Archbishop of Canterbury still a member?” inquired one of the younger priests facetiously.

“Once a Catholic,” some one reminded him, “always a Catholic.”

“Can the master tell us,” asked one of the Council, “what exactly is the position of the Bishop of Warborough towards the Society he helped to form?”

“It is a position of fear,” answered Father Severn.

“He is no longer in sympathy with us?”

“He is afraid of us,” replied Father Severn.

After a moment the master turned to the priest who at the beginning of the meeting had asked for his hypothesis regarding the evanishment of the secret book, and said to him—

“In answer to your question, I think the Bishop of Warborough may have stolen the missing book.”

“Ah!” exclaimed all the members simultaneously.

One of them cried: “If it has only been stolen to be destroyed, we are safe.”

Another said, with a laugh, “We can afford to do without the Bishop of Warborough.”

“He subscribes to the funds!” said a third.

“ If we get his name at the foot of a few cheques we can dispense with it in the member’s book ! ” laughed a fourth. Then Father Severn spoke—

“ It will be necessary for all the former members of the Society in a general synod to sign the new book and to take the Oath afresh.”

Every eye was fixed upon Father Severn, and for a minute no one spoke. The Bishop of Warborough was a man of great wealth and a pillar of the English Establishment. He had helped in the days of his youth to form the Sacred Society of Nicodemus ; in the first years of its existence he had been its devoted servant, labouring for it night and day and supporting it with his great wealth ; then, as his mind broadened and his experience of life deepened he had felt suspicious of it, and gradually had become tepid in his attachment. Finally repenting bitterly of his connexion with these Roman Catholics, he came to the Society, announced his intention of marrying, and requested to be relinquished from his membership. The request was refused. A dispensation allowing his marriage was brought by his friend Edmund Revington, who was then a member of the Society, from Rome, and he was informed that once a member of the Catholic Church always a member. He had feared exposure and the consequent breaking off of his marriage. He remained a member of the Secret Society, unwillingly supporting its funds, and became, presently, first a Canon of Westminster and afterwards Bishop of Warborough.

“ He will never take the oath ! ” exclaimed a priest ;
“ never ! ”

Father Severn letting his eyes rest on the face of the old priest at the end of the table replied—

“ Yes, he will take the oath. He fears exposure.”

After a slight pause, looking away from the old priest, and permitting himself a smile, the master added—

“His son, I understand, is to be ordained presently.”

“But if you summon him to a general synod, will he come?” asked a priest.

“The day after to-morrow,” answered Father Severn, impatiently getting up from his chair and collecting his papers, “I am going to Warborough.”

CHAPTER V

THE BISHOP OF WARBOROUGH

IN the pleasant grounds of the Episcopal palace the Bishop of Warborough and his wife, Lady Harriet Lister, youngest daughter of that distinguished layman, the late Earl of Marlow—greatly assisted by the Bishop's chaplain, the Reverend Sutherland St. Clair—were entertaining a numerous garden party.

In the shadow of a tall yew hedge, which separated the pleasure gardens from the kitchen gardens, an Infantry band from the local depôt was playing comic-opera airs, interspersed with a little Wagner and a little Sousa. On the broad lawn, which had been shaven early that morning, and under the branches of cedar trees and flowering chestnuts, the company chatted and looked at one another, all dressed in their best and newest clothes. From one corner of the lawns came the pleasant sound of tennis balls struck sharply by taut racquets; and occasionally one of these white balls came bouncing under the trees, followed by a red and perspiring curate in flannels, who received it from the hand of the fat rector, who had stooped with difficulty, but assiduity, to pick it up, and ran off again with a laughing and breathless "Thank you." From another corner sounded the deeper note of croquet balls, driven by mallets, and clicking against each other, followed by cries of vexation and annoyance

from the lady players. For the most part, however, the large and summer-cheerful company preferred to sit at little white-clothed tables under the shadow of trees, or to walk to and fro on the lawns in slow and dignified state, talking sedately and listening to the band.

It was a party which admirably illustrated the social power of the Church of England. The early Fathers would have been amazed to behold its eloquent testimony to the prestige of modern Christianity. One could not help feeling, walking in those beautiful gardens, that religion is nowadays that most dangerous of things "a success."

The elderly ladies wore upon their smooth tresses those rich and maternal bonnets which advertise, not fashion nor yet art, but impeccable respectability and complete enfranchisement from worldly care ; bonnets, tied with broad and shining ribbons of watered silk under the chin, and trimmed with black velvet and white aigrettes, or else gold beading and sprigs of lilac. They carried black sunshades bordered with lace, and their voluminous dresses seemed to be all composed of those rich and stately printed silks, the material out of which is woven the very garment of propriety and worldly weal. New white kid gloves, just a little tightly encased their hands, and on their wrists were broad and shining gold bracelets, some of which were set with large polished stones of occult character. Their rustling radiant skirts dragged magnificently behind them as they paced to and fro on the green lawns, and from the handkerchiefs which they held in their gloved hands there breathed the pleasant, healthy, the almost Sabbatarian odour of eau-de-cologne.

The fresh-complexioned daughters of these ladies were more fashionable, and wore large pink and blue summer hats trimmed gaily, and in some cases almost rakishly, with flowers, while in their bright and frolic frocks, diaphanous chiffon lent a pleasing note of softness, witchery, and grace. The young gentlemen—most of them in new lavender waistcoats and new patent leather boots—carnations in their buttonholes, gloves upon their hands and canes under their arms, and, alas, with silk hats upon their heads—played decorous and subdued gallantry with these pretty young women. As for the older and whiskered men—the successful and weighty employers of the district—for the most part they stood, all unconscious of the band's music, talking business among themselves, with an ample spread of white waistcoat under their chins, their hands clasped behind their backs, old-fashioned tall hats, which looked too small for them, upon their heads—and honest plain leather boots, which looked too big for them, upon their feet.

Among all these people there was a liberal sprinkling of the clergy of the diocese, the Oxford rector as distinct from the Cambridge vicar, as the curate of Durham from the Deacon who signed himself A.K.C. They presented to the eye the agreeable spectacle of respectable and clean-living men, members of a flourishing Establishment, scholarly, enthusiastic, and vigorous. Here and there a face attracted the gaze by its sweetness or its sadness, but only in few cases had the spirit breathed the indefinable charm of its immortality into these regulation, or—should one say?—orthodox countenances. They were gentlemen, rather than saints. As their own wives would have said of such a priest, or such a deacon, "Mr. Thompson

is a very gentlemanly-looking man." It was their highest praise; and there one has, what Matthew Arnold liked to call, the *tone* of this party.

In and out among the Bishop's guests, always smiling in a high-bred manner, and repeatedly making use of that convenient conversational exclamation, "Really!" moved the tall, clean-shaven, and perfectly dressed chaplain, the Rev. Sutherland St. Clair. It was the universal opinion in Warborough that no party could ever really succeed without Mr. Sutherland St. Clair. He made things "go" so well. It was not that he played the piano particularly well, not that he was full of quips and anecdotes, not even that his conversation was charming or profound; no, it was because in his gentlemanly face, and his gentlemanly address, and in the fact that he had distant uncles in the distant peerage, and at least one more distant aunt at the infinitely more distant Court, there was something which reflected upon the society of Warborough a light of distinction and re-echoed a note of sonorous dignity.

And people felt at this particular garden party that it was too nice of Mr. Sutherland St. Clair to be bothering about them, fetching them strawberries and iced coffee, when everybody knew his heart was with the Bishop's daughter, Miss Violet Lister. While he was exclaiming "Really!" to them, and bustling about doing things for them, Miss Violet Lister walked about with her mother, simpering at her side, while Lady Harriet, superbly dressed, and followed by her Aberdeen terriers, was saying polite and pleasant things to her guests, and receiving at every halt in her progress, congratulations on the sunshine which had favoured her party.

Lady Harriet—who was strangely like Hoppner's portrait of Mrs. Benwell—was a most interesting study for a psychologist. In person she was tall and extremely thin, with snow-white hair brushed straight up from her forehead. Her little face—suggesting a precious bit of porcelain—was most delicately pink and white, with full round eyes, a thin nose, which was pinched to an almost imperceptible tilt at the end, and full lips—the upper all but touching her nose—which would have been beautiful but for a strange aridity which destroyed their colouring and rendered them harsh and cracked. She had a smile in her eyes, a welcome on her lips, and a generous friendship in her voice. She walked with a stoop from her waist, taking small steps that were almost a run when she went forward to shake hands with a person, and at those moments of greeting she was a ripple of laughter and a twinkle of smiles.

But to a servant who had done wrong, or to a curate who had displeased her lord, this smiling and gracious creature would show a face of inexorable stone, and eyes merciless with a severe and a most exacting displeasure. In an instant she could go from smiling greetings and handshakings of the warmest friendship, to this bloodlessness and godlessness of disposition. At her devotions, too, the pleasant smiling, human face was washed of all its colour and its kindness; her cheeks became like white marble, her eyes solemn and inhuman as a statue, and her lips pitiless as death. She would go, I mean, in the twinkling of an eye from the pleasant humanity of the good-humoured world, with its "Lord, have mercy upon us" and its "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us" to a place beside the Judgment Seat of

God, there to cry, "Depart from me, ye cursed," even as she imagined God Himself would say.

But on social occasions no one could have been sweeter and more grateful to good and happy people. And to-day, as she went to and fro among her guests, everybody admired her and followed her with their gaze. She wore a large heavily-trimmed hat of black and white lace, tied with black velvet strings, with one large ostrich feather running round its brim. The underside of the wide black brim was trimmed with the softest of white chiffon gathered at the edge with the black lace on the other side, thus exaggerating the delicacy of the pink and white complexion which it shaded. For the rest she wore a dress of white silk draped with black lace, and carried a handsome parasol in the same hand which held a little black fan suspended by a slight gold chain from her wrist. A stately, dignified, genial, and—in an old-fashioned manner—aristocratic figure.

Her daughter, Violet Lister, was a pale and feeble likeness of her mother, fuller of body but not quite so tall. It was said of her that she might have passed for a clumsy photograph of Lady Harriet; and, of a truth, she was very little more vivacious than a picture. It was true that she had a simper, and a little sneering smile which suggested that she might enjoy in her own secret fashion the bitter sweets of an ironical disposition; but one felt that she had never really looked into the face of life and smiled—never experienced the glowing pleasures and the feverish excitements of youth, and that her brain was too small, and her heart too cold, and the blood in her veins too thin and sluggish, for even her ironical disposition—if she, indeed, possessed that tendency—

to afford her emotion which could be described as pleasure. She represented that type of English girl, drilled by a martinet in childhood, and unable ever after to shake off the atmosphere of the schoolroom. One felt that even now, in her twentieth year, she might be practising her scales, conjugating Latin verbs, and drawing ridiculous maps. A smudged and blurred personality, a plant that had been too liberally watered, a photograph too long exposed in strong sunlight.

But to Warborough, Lady Harriet and Violet Lister were the crown and flower of womanhood. The eyes of men and women followed them as they walked, and the faces of their beholders were lit with pride and admiration; every one rejoiced in them. The band continued to play cheerful music; under the trees there was a subdued rattle of plates and spoons; the murmur of conversation increased; the rustle of garments on the hot grass went leisurely on; and in the midst of the throng passed the pride and the glory of this English town, Lady Harriet Lister, daughter of the late Earl of Marlow, and Violet Lister, beloved of Mr. Sutherland St. Clair, the crown and sceptre of the pageant, the goal and cynosure of every eye.

And yet there was one there more worthy of the public gaze—and, had they known it, a figure of the most tragic and dramatic interest—the Bishop of Warborough. He stood in the centre of the garden, giving audiences of two or three minutes to clergymen and laymen who approached him one by one from the wide and broken circle of black coats surrounding him. He was a big old man of dignified and stately appearance, typical of Anglican Churchmanship. He wore a large wideawake hat of the steeple-crown order tied up with episcopal strings; and over his apron there

gleamed a massive silver cross. His gaiters fitted without a crease, his boots were of the finest leather. The ponderous and massive pink face, finely wrinkled and but gently lined, was lit by two pale blue eyes set deep under high temples, with dark straight eyebrows drawn downwards to the upper lids. The lower lids of these pale blue, coldly-staring eyes hung a little loosely, showing white below the circle of the iris. The nose was firm and strong, the lips broad and compressed. The hair on his fine strong head was the colour of iron and snow, here thick and clustering and dark, there thin and fine and white. Beside his ears, running to the curve of the jaw, was a fringe of whiskers the colour of silver. He spoke in short sentences, quickly and to the point, his countenance seldom expressing emotion. He rarely smiled, rarely expressed a hearty enjoyment. One received from conversation with him the impression of a strong and capable administrator; a man devoted to his work, but not absorbed in it; a personality vigorous, but not courageous; energetic, but not enthusiastic. He had neither the pomposity which is so ridiculous in some bishops, nor that effusiveness which is so overwhelming in others; he was surrounded by an atmosphere of native dignity and natural solemnity.

He was talking now to a small middle-aged man, a local manufacturer, bending down a little to hear what he said, the fine white hands clasped behind his back.

"And so, my lord, you'll be having Mr. Paul back soon?"

For a moment the Bishop's face brightened—

"Yes, very soon," he said, straightening himself.

"We can't do without the children, can we, my

lord? As I was saying to my wife only yesterday, you can do without pianos and carriages and seven o'clock dinner, but you can't get on without the children; no, I'm sure you can't."

"True: very true," replied the Bishop.

"Mr. Paul, I suppose, will soon be getting ordained? It's two or three years now since he took his degree, I think. Well, there's no hurry. Young curates, my lord, aren't always as wise as they think themselves. Two or three years of foreign travel—so long as it doesn't make Roman Catholics of them!—is a very good thing for curates; at least, that's my point of view."

The Bishop straightened himself again, and muttering: "True, very true," looked over the gentleman's head towards another guest in the surrounding circle.

The local manufacturer expressed his pleasure at seeing the Bishop look so well, and raising his hat, went off beaming to find his wife and daughters.

The Bishop of Warborough's father, who had been dead now some twenty years, was one of those solid British merchants who are the admiration and envy of commercial foreigners. For nearly three hundred years the East Indian house of Lister & Brooke had piled up fortune after fortune, and seeking no admission into quarters of society higher than their own, had been content after the day's labour in town to reign as the local princes of villages some twenty or thirty miles out of London. Their money had never been dissipated in foolish marriages, nor invested in the harum-scarum schemes which occasionally ruffle the deep waters of English finance. Rich and increasingly richer, the family of Lister had gone solidly on their steadfast way, living, for the most part, lives of

the most upright probity, and doing their duty both in the City and in the circle of their acquaintances with a most admired devotion.

John Brooke Lister, the Bishop of Warborough, had been the first of the family to enter Holy Orders. Some members of the family had aspired to commissions in the Army, where they made very modest and courageous company leaders—one of them, Major Hugh Weston Lister, was at present staying at the palace—and others had gone to the Bar, where through marriage interest with solicitors, they succeeded in establishing themselves in moderate but safe practices. It was the eldest son of the late East Indian merchant, John Brooke Lister, who, going up from Marlborough to Oxford as a scholar of Balliol, found himself under the spell of Newman's preaching at St. Mary's, and announced to his satisfied father his desire to become a clergyman.

With his success as a preacher, especially when he became Canon of Westminster and married the youngest daughter of that advanced High Churchman, the Earl of Marlow, John Brooke Lister grew in the affection and the admiration of his numerous relatives. One by one, spinster aunts, living in Bournemouth, Cheltenham, Tunbridge Wells, and Bath, died and bequeathed their investments to him for whom their fingers had worked so many stoles and altar cloths, and whom they had been wont so fondly to call "our nephew, the Canon." Bachelor uncles, too, or uncles who had married and were without heirs, left their fortunes to the popular and earnest young clergyman. His mother, who had much property of her own, left the bulk of it to her eldest and her favourite son; and even when the old merchant, more just, but not less

affectionate than the others, divided his wealth in his will equally among his children, it was found that his estate had so flourished under his wise and far-seeing administration that the Bishop's fifth share represented a colossal fortune.

He had been one of London's famous preachers at Westminster, and one of the Church's most able apologists; his great controversy in the *Nineteenth Century* with Sir Frederick Mayor, the vivisector, brought him considerable honour from Christians all over the world, and lifted him into the very first rank of theologians. But when he was advanced to the See of Warborough, it was felt that favouritism and Court influence had made a mistake. To the surprise of the world, however, the organizing Bishop proved an infinitely greater success than the golden-mouthed Canon. All those administrative abilities and sound commercial faculties which he had inherited from his father and his ancestors, now had their scope and their opportunity. The diocese of Warborough became presently the pattern See of the English Church. Its affairs were administered with a resolution of will and a professional thoroughness of method seldom to be found in ecclesiastical affairs. Parishes felt themselves not isolated parts of a distant and amorphous whole, but intimate wheels of value in a machine which had now become the admiration of English Christianity. The Bishop's huge wealth enabled him to employ a host of earnest and capable clergymen in the Warborough Diocesan Society; and these eyes and hands of the Bishop went ceaselessly up and down the awakening See, organizing missions, encouraging incumbents, stimulating church workers, and inciting the laity. Gradually the diocese became compact. More services

were held every year ; and every year more Temperance Societies, more Bands of Hope, more Communicants' Guilds, more Needlework Parties, more Missionary Agencies, were established ; and as with this increasing activity and enthusiasm, this perfecting and modernizing of episcopal methods came a general and unmistakable improvement in the moral tone of the diocese, so, too, the commercial prosperity of that part of England improved by leaps and bounds.

The Bishop stood at the moment when our story opens as the most powerful and successful personality in the English Church, and the idol of his diocese. It was no secret that, if he lived, he would be the next Archbishop of Canterbury. He was a scholar, a wise administrator, a trained diplomatist, a friend at Court, a most loyal Churchman. And yet with all the increase of his popularity and the growth of his force and power, the melancholy of the Bishop had gone on steadily deepening with the years, until he was now one of the most silent and morose of men. For one thing he lived, and for one thing only, to lay his hands upon the head of his beloved son and admit him into the Church—there to consummate his own great work for Protestantism. The reader is already in the secret of the Bishop's melancholy, and can imagine with what despair and self-upbraiding he heard his name applauded and his loyalty approved ; and now he knows that this man, whose life had been blackened by the shadow of one foolish enthusiasm and shackled by the madness of one first step in treachery, possessed in his heart a single passion which enabled him to fight on with an undiminished energy and to keep his position in the world against all the assaults of his own conscience. He loved his son with a deep and a noble love.

As the Bishop stood with his back to the windows of the palace, surrounded by the circle of his admirers, each one eager for a minute's conversation with him, there was a sudden stir and ripple of excitement among the other guests in the garden. Husbands ran grinning to their wives, touched them on the arms, and bade them look; the purple-faced bandsmen, playing on, glanced over their instruments and stared: young gentlemen seated beside young ladies, raised their eyebrows and were languidly amused; clergymen paused with coffee-cups half-way to their mouths, and matrons with spoonfuls of pink ices almost at their lips' edge, stared with astonishment.

The cause of this moment's excitement was the arrival of Father Severn, accompanied by one of the lay-brothers from the Mission in South-East London. The Master of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus wore his russet Franciscan habit with the cords strung round his middle, the heavy hood hanging over his back, and the monotony of the colour broken by a curiously-shaped silver cross, which hung from his neck. He wore a small skull cap at the back of his head, and had his feet shod with sandals.

The lay-brother was similarly dressed, save for the Zophim Cross, but he struck an even more amusing note in the minds of the Warborough garden party. For, whereas Father Severn was a huge and monstrous figure, who could carry off his dress with a certain roughness of dignity, the lay-brother was so small and insignificant that he looked like a boy tied up unwillingly in an enormous sack. His face was very white, his eyes were very large, and his neck was like a guinea-fowl's. He walked with his cropped head drooping from this thin neck, as though conscious of

the amusement he was causing, and while he peered and peeped about him under the full curve of his eyelids, it looked as if the weak mouth were striving by sheer slackness to prevent a sympathetic and hearty smile. While Father Severn strode on before him, vigorously and powerfully, the little lay-brother, with his hands pressed together in front of him, trailed behind, walking with the most ridiculous assumption of religious piety that was ever the lot of self-conscious youth to counterfeit.

"Who is this person?" demanded Lady Harriet, with her lips in their least placable mood.

"I think," said the tall and thin Archdeacon, whose countenance was like one of Rodin's bronzes, "it must be one of the London ritualists."

"He is certainly extreme in his clothes," chuckled the Dean, who was short and fat, like a figure out of Rowlandson.

Mr. Sutherland St. Clair—the most ubiquitous and tactful of men—came hurrying to Lady Harriet's side.

"Father Severn has arrived," he said, smiling; "Will you come and receive him?"

The Dean and the Archdeacon exchanged courteous grimaces, as if they had been snuff-boxes, and entered into smiling conversation.

"Father Severn!" exclaimed Lady Harriet, suddenly beaming; for she delighted in celebrities.

"This is very interesting: I have never met him."

"Really!" exclaimed the chaplain.

They went down the lawn together, the chaplain presently going tactfully forward to inform Father Severn who it was that approached to greet him.

"Father Severn, I think?" he asked; and then added: "Lady Harriet is coming to meet you."

Father Severn raised his eyes, studied the face of his hostess for a quick moment, and then bowed roughly over her small hand.

"I am sorry to disturb your party," he said. "I have an important request to make to the Bishop. I took the liberty of coming without announcing myself."

"That was quite right of you," replied Lady Harriet, in her most genial and gracious manner, everybody's eyes upon her. After introducing her daughter, she asked if Father Severn would not take tea. No, he would not. Brother Tossell perhaps might be glad of refreshment. He was capable of finding it for himself. Lady Harriet—no one, he hoped—would bother about Brother Tossell.

"He must have his gift," laughed the chaplain. "Lady Harriet always has a bran-pie tub at the garden parties for the clergy and their lay-workers."

"Indeed," said Father Severn, without raising his eyes.

"Ah! here comes the Bishop," exclaimed Lady Harriet.

When he became aware of a certain stir among his guests, the Bishop had turned round and looked towards the palace. Beholding Father Severn a sudden darkness passed across his eyes and his lips tightened. The next moment he had excused himself to the guest with whom he was then conversing, and had moved off down the lawn to greet the distinguished arrival.

The Dean and the Archdeacon smiled together, and watched the progress of their Diocesan.

Father Severn bowed himself over the Bishop's hand as if he would have kissed it.

"You have taken us by surprise," said the Bishop.

Father Severn made no reply ; he never replied to self-evident propositions. "But we are glad to see you," continued the Bishop. Father Severn looked into his eyes. "You will have some tea," went on the Bishop, "and then you must let me have a little conversation with you. This is your first visit to Warborough, I think?" Lady Harriet inquired if Father Severn were stopping in Warborough, pressing him to stay at the palace ; but the monk replied that he was returning to London that night.

"I should be glad of a conversation with you, my lord," he said ; "I can do without tea." But the chaplain, who had already seated Brother Tossell at a table and set him to work on buns, ices, and sugar cakes, appeared at this moment with a cup of tea for Father Severn ; the monk emptied the contents at a gulp, returned the cup to the chaplain, and then, with a bow to Lady Harriet, made as if he would walk away with the Bishop.

"Perhaps," he said, "you will let me sit a moment indoors?"

"Come along," answered the Bishop. The band, which had paused for a moment, began to play a minuet of Bizet's.

Lady Harriet watched them go, and then turned to Mr. Sutherland St. Clair.

"That is a very able person," she said.

"There is no doubt that he's doing a great work among the masses," replied the chaplain.

"He looks as if he came from the masses," said Lady Harriet.

"He does, doesn't he?" replied the chaplain, with a tolerant smile, glancing everywhere with his eyes.

Lady Harriet began to walk away.

"I don't think I quite like him," she said.

"Really!" said Mr. St. Clair.

"I don't mean because he is a Ritualist. He strikes me as being a man who might be working out in secret repentance for some dreadful act in his early life."

"Apropos," said the chaplain, "I have just heard a remarkable piece of news. Mrs. Mannering's house in the Close has been taken for a year by that Mrs. Revington."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Lady Harriet, coming to a sudden stop.

"Mrs. Watson told me so."

"Oh, but it is quite unthinkable!" cried Lady Harriet, her face bloodless and hard. "That woman in the Close! Where is Mrs. Watson? Ladywell let to the assassin of our dear Edmund. There must be some mistake; it is impossible, it is insufferable."

Lady Harriet almost ran forward in her haste. As she took with the greatest hurry the chair which the chaplain brought for her to the side of Mrs. Watson, Father Severn turned to the Bishop in his stately library and watching him with the closest scrutiny announced—

"The book of membership has been stolen."

CHAPTER VI

THE LIE THAT SAVES

FATHER SEVERN informed the Bishop of Warborough that the membership book was lost, as soon as the library door was shut upon them and before they were seated. He made his announcement standing in the centre of the room, his books and papers under his arm, his skull cap clasped in his hands; and as the Bishop came forward from closing the door the monk's eyes, in their heavy, hot, and copper-coloured countenance, scrutinized the old man's face with the penetrating and expectant gaze of a barrister springing some deadly surprise upon a witness in court.

It was not difficult even in the subdued light of the library, with its repeated shelves and the darkening gallery running round its walls, to see that the announcement came as news, and dreadful news, to the prelate. The big old man stopped in his walk; the colour went from his cheeks; and his lips fell apart in an instant of apprehension. The quiet afternoon light, reflected from the grey cathedral walls through the tall transomed windows—for the library was situated so close to the cathedral as to form a little garden space which resembled Chaplain's Quad at Magdalen College in Oxford—revealed in the ashen and suddenly haggard face of the great Bishop a fear, a horror, and a despair

which no man could have counterfeited. He stood there gazing almost pleadingly at the huge and brutal figure in monkish dress, like a man who struggles to hope for comfort even from the physician who has just numbered his days. Father Severn, watching him with merciless eyes, became gradually troubled and morose. It was plain that the Bishop had had no hand in the stealing of the book. He turned away and moved to the hearth, baffled and thoughtful.

"How stolen," he said gruffly, "I cannot say; but stolen. It has vanished."

The Bishop came forward, walked to a high-backed armchair, and sat down, never taking his eyes from the monk's face: "What do you suspect?" he asked, slowly, in his deep and bell-like voice, his hands curving over the arms of the chair.

Father Severn turned to the mantelpiece, deep in thought, and his eyes were met by the eyes of Edmund Revington gazing at him from an oil-painting, a copy of the well-known picture by Watts. He started, and pointed at the picture.

"I suspect," he said, "the hand of a renegade; a man who has lost faith, and losing faith, has lost both honour and courage. Revington left us intellectually, but he remembered the character of his oath, and remained a member. There are others not so finely tempered as Revington. They would steal to free themselves."

The comfort for which the Bishop had been hungering now fell like dew upon his soul. If, indeed, the book had been stolen by a member of the Society who had repented of an early enthusiasm for the Papal See, then, it had been stolen to be destroyed, and now he himself was free at last.

"What grounds have you for this suspicion?" he asked, in a voice which manifested fear of disappointment.

"None," answered Severn. The little round head with its bristling close-clipped black hair, swung round, and the close-set chocolate-coloured eyes studied the Bishop's face with an angry insolence.

"Yet you entertain the idea seriously?"

"I can think of no other."

The Bishop drew a deep sigh, and passed a troubled hand over his white hair. After Father Severn had told him the story of Father Vesey's visitor—

"It might be the work of some agency seeking to expose the design of the Society," he said, fearfully.

"Obviously."

"You think that is possible?"

"It is certainly possible."

"If that should be so," asked the Bishop, his voice beginning to tremble, his fingers tapping on the arms of the chair, "would they give the Society notice of the exposure? Do you think they would come to you first?"

Father Severn frowned. "Why should they come to us?" he demanded. "No; they would spring the surprise upon the people; frighten this insolent commission which is examining priests on sacred things; and intimidate Parliament into reactionary legislation. Come to us! No: they would go to the mob."

"Can it really be possible that the Society's existence has been discovered?" asked the Bishop. "You yourself are notorious as an extreme High Churchman, but even your name has never been associated with a Society like this. Vesey, you told me, is discreet. Who knows about it? Who has heard about it?"

What jealousy or anger can it have roused? It is secret—secret as the grave.”

He had risen from his chair; and now began to pace the long room—a noble old man, with broad rounded shoulders, the rock-hewn head sunk upon his breast. Father Severn watched him under his darkening brows, and then sat down. “I don’t understand your alarm,” he said, gruffly, laying his books and papers in his lap.

“Are not you alarmed?” demanded the Bishop, stopping short.

“Alarmed! Why should I be alarmed?” retorted the monk, sitting back in his chair, and frowning upon the Bishop. He found pleasure in menacing the famous theologian who had successfully crossed swords with Sir Frederick Mayor. “I am concerned for the work of the Society, but for myself—why should I be alarmed?”

“I am alarmed!” cried the Bishop, answering the monk’s frown. He looked old, very old, but his deep voice was strong and resolute. “I am alarmed, not for myself, not for the Society, but for the Church of England. Your enthusiasm for Rome was once mine; as you know, I have outgrown it; as you know, I have only supported the Society in order to avert the calamity which would follow the exposure you have threatened of my complicity in this secret campaign; I am alarmed and I tell you that at all costs the whereabouts of the missing book must be traced immediately. If money can buy it, we must buy it back. If the Society does not take steps to discover the book, I myself will take those steps.”

He stopped, and began again to pace slowly to and fro in the room, his feet making a heavy and dead sound on the thick carpet.

"You can do nothing without the consent of the Society," answered Severn, watching him. "You can only act outside the Society at the cost of instant denunciation."

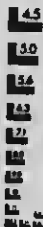
"You make rules as you go along!" said the Bishop angrily. He brushed his hand over his hair, and then drawing himself up, clasped his hands behind his back, and stood looking down on the monk.

"I am the master of the Society," answered Severn; "and the Society will be guided by me. Let me explain the position. As soon as we knew that the book had been stolen the sentiment of the Society was one of rejoicing; in the first shock of the news we experienced that wave of egoism, that wave of selfishness, which, for a moment, must always overcome the sacrificial instinct in the hearts of the most devoted children of Christ's Church in those hours when it seems that their deliverance is at hand. Do you understand that the Society, of which you are a member, and of which you were one of the most pious founders, consists of men who feel themselves, so long as they remain in the non-conforming Anglican community, as foreigners of Christ? Do you understand that the hour of their personal re-union with the True Church is passionately prayed for and hungrily desired by them? For us, then—faithful children of the Church—exposure can only mean personal peace of mind. We do not dread it. We are tempted by the Enemy of Souls to desire it. But such is the loyalty of the brotherhood that, at the cost of their own peace, they would delay the hour of their release in order that more souls in Protestant England may be brought to the feet of the Apostles. Alarm! We feel no alarm. If it is in the providence of God that this thing should come to pass, we shall



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go to our Mother, only sorrowful that the harvest of our labour is so small. But you," he cried, pointing one of his large crooked fingers at the Bishop, "forgetful of the noble ideal of your youth—and by your lack of sympathy and your coldness of heart helping to perpetuate the paralysis of disunion—you can only view exposure with terror and alarm, for it means to you personal ruin and social eclipse."

The Bishop's face could not be seen by Severn, for he stood with his back to the tall windows; but there was in it, as he listened to this indictment, the look of a noble soul caught in the meshes of a meaner mind and forced to listen to unworthy taunts—a look of scorn, contempt, and resentment, a look of dignity and yet of powerlessness.

He unlocked his hands from behind his back and came heavily forward. He sat down in a chair opposite to Father Severn, and met his gaze. "I have no intention of discussing my conscience—with you for father inquisitor," he said, slowly. His deep, solemn, big voice seemed to express the largeness of his mind and to rebuke the coarse cunning of his guest. "Enough is it," he went on, speaking slowly and measuring his words as he went, "that I repent of my connexion with the Society and dread the hour when that connexion shall be made public. You have forced me to remain a member of the Society. Knowing that I detest its methods and feel no longer an enthusiasm for its goal, you have yet deemed it worthy of yourself and your cause to force me to support its odious propaganda. Well, that is the position. Exposure, you say, will be welcomed by the Society, but it will be delayed as long as possible for the sake of your cause—the conversion of England to the Papacy. You know

my position, and I know yours. From vastly different standpoints we both dread exposure. Now, then, let me know what steps the Society are taking to discover this dangerous book?"

Father Severn found himself forced suddenly into an inferior position, but it was not in his masterful nature to accept such a tactic. "Before I tell you what I propose to do," he said, roughly, "I will make it plain to you why the Society insists upon your continued membership. We do not despair of a single soul that has once perceived, however dimly, the natural path of ecclesiastical evolution. One Church is the goal of all Christ's followers. That was at one time your desire. *It may be so again.* Over and over again you have told the world, even of late, that you foresee an ultimate reunion; and that aspiration, however weak and pale it may appear to devout believers, would alone justify us in keeping you to your young and untainted enthusiasm. But we have the hope that a few more years of our work will be sufficient to inspire you once again with all the fires of that old enthusiasm, and then, as a Bishop of the Protestant Church, perhaps as its Primate, how greatly will you be able to influence the mind of England. That is why we keep you to your oath. You will come back to us."

"Be so good," said the Bishop, "as to tell me what steps the Society meditates for the immediate recovery of the stolen book."

"Our first step is to meet in synod," returned Father Severn, watching the Bishop closely; "to sign, each man, a new book of membership; and to take, each man, the old oath of allegiance." He paused for a moment. "That is why I have come to you," he con-

tinued slowly. "I wish to consult with you on that matter; to fix a day."

"I asked you what steps you were taking to recover the book," said the Bishop, sternly.

"None."

The Bishop winced. "Your wisdom," he said, "only suggests an immediate composition of a new book—a fresh source of danger."

"There will be no danger this time," answered the monk; "the book will remain in my keeping."

The Bishop brushed his hand over his hair and looked away.

"Will you name a date that will be convenient to you?" asked Father Severn, opening a diary that lay in his lap. He drew out a pencil, and examined the point.

The Bishop looked at him. "That is for your convenience," he said. "I shall not attend."

"I could administer the oath here, with Father Vesey," retorted Severn; "but it would be more seemly, and possibly more useful for you, if you attended the synod."

The Bishop got upon his feet, and strode to the windows. "I take no oath," he said, over his shoulder.

"You have not thought," replied Severn, flattening out the open diary with his hand.

"I take no oath!" cried the Bishop. "I refuse. The old oath was taken in my youth. It was innocently and truthfully made. Now it would be a lie."

"Still you must repeat the old oath," said Severn.

"Do you presume," cried the Bishop, "to invite me to a blasphemy?"

"To a repetition of the oath made in your innocence," corrected Severn.

"You have my answer. I will take no oath."

"You forget," said Severn, softening his voice.

The Bishop started at this sudden change in the monk's manner.

"What do I forget?" he inquired.

"Your son, sir. You forget your son."

The Bishop's face whitened, became suddenly pinched and drawn about the nostrils, and a darkness passed across his eyes. He felt the blood freeze and harden in his veins; his body became death-cold. Any man but the monk would surely have pitied him at that moment. He stood in the centre of the room a figure almost as tragic as Lear bereft of his illusions; a father whose whole thoughts centred upon the child of his heart; a father transfixed with the sword of his purest and noblest affection; a father who would possibly dare to lie before God that his son might still believe in him.

Hard, mechanical, and rigorous had been the days of this old man. He had been bred up in something of a Stoic manner; taught to repress his emotions; encouraged to view life and its enterprises from what is called the hill of practical common sense—surely a grandiose title for what in general is but a huckster's rostra; and, moreover from his shrewd and judicious ancestors he had inherited a disposition in which all expression of deep feeling, all outward sign of inward emotion, appeared in the light of a vulgarism. Oxford had touched his religious emotions—hitherto Puritanical and cold—and had set them free—perilously, dangerously free, so that he had been driven, on this new tide of utterance, into the extravagance of a secret religious society, countenanced by the Pope—an act bitterly repented of, an act which for ever after made him sus-

picious of enthusiasm. His marriage had been in the nature of an arrangement, one of those passionless and well-considered unions of position with position common enough in human society through all ages, and seldom brought to shipwreck in the case of people strongly endowed with the moral sense. His brilliant work for the Church had been done coldly and without passion, the work of a statesman who sees no glory in a map and no poetry in the dusty archives of diplomacy. For his wife he felt a dignified affection; for those who worked with him, and did his bidding well, he had words of encouragement—calm, dignified, enthusiastic—and in all his multifarious and unceasing relations with the diocese he was a man administering affairs, overseeing machinery, and controlling forces which did not seem to him to be any more flesh and blood than the soldiers of France had seemed to Napoleon.

But into the life of this man there had grown gradually, and with all the stately leisure of Nature's patience, one of those sublime and lofty passions which transfigure the soul, and consecrate every thought of the busy brain, every act of the energetic mind. He had found his immortality in his son. He was one of those fathers who are content, nay who are glad, to bury all their own ambitions, and all their own dreams and yearnings in the career of their children. Who will attempt to measure the force of this beautiful love or—having stood in the sunlight of its superb selflessness—question the daring metaphor of Christ that God Himself is like unto a father? There is in such love all that we can conceive of God. Outside it there is only a darkening wilderness in which we wander with wounded feet finding loveliness trodden under the scalding heel of cruelty, and innocence scorched by the furnace

breath of lust. But in the heart of a father there is an infinity of love, clean of all selfishness, purged of all vanity, and holy in its victory over every ingratitude and disappointment. Beholding that love, and recognizing it here as the highest achievement of the human heart, have we not reason in the faith which bids us exclaim that a love so selfless and so sublime must be of the universe, must be out of God Himself?

There was in the heart of the Bishop, as there is in the heart of most strong men, a woman. Strong and manful as he was to the world, to his son he was androgynous—man and woman; brave as a man, and wise as a man, in the sacrifices he would make for his son; and tender and caressing as a woman in the infinite yearning of his devotion. He had shown but little affection to the child in its infancy, and himself had scarcely been aware of the love which animated him till the boy had come to him, morning after morning in the early dawn for his first lessons in the Latin Grammar. Then had begun a daily companionship between the great dignitary of the Church, and the little child with his mind flowing over with questions. Every day of this intercourse, brief and interrupted as were its hours, had fastened the child to the father's heart. He humbled himself to the little boy, and saw once more the clouds and the stars, the peaks of hills and the face of the waters, with the eyes of a child. In those hours when he was fighting bitterly and in an awful loneliness with his conscience, it was the child's society he sought to save himself from despair. Every night, with his candle in his hand, he entered the sleeping child's bedroom, and bowing himself there, would say his prayers to God, beside the boy's bed, holding one of his hands. Sometimes he would bury his face in the

pillow and gathering the sleeping boy to his breast, would yearn over him as mothers in the Revolution yearned over their children in prison for the last time. It was an inarticulate passion which then filled his soul, an unreasoning but beautiful adoration of innocence and purity. But when the hour approached for that dreadful parting of father and son, when the father must give his child into an alien keeping and permit other formative influences to exert themselves upon the plastic personality of his own dear child—for good or for evil—then it was that this passion became articulate and intellectual, became the man himself.

No father ever sent his son to school with such an agony as that which visited the Bishop's heart. The extreme purity and innocence of his child were precious to him beyond the utterance of language. To expose that rare purity to the rude shocks of life, to the perils and dangers of a public school, was a torture to his soul. His secret conversations with the boy at this time were sacred with the holiness of a love utterly beautiful and divine. The boy's soul responded to the yearning in the father's heart; he rushed into his arms, clung to him, and burst into a passion of tears, and, for the first time in their lives, father and son wept together. The mother never gave the boy what his young heart demanded; the father gave it in overabundance. They became almost a single soul. From that moment when they felt upon their faces each other's tears the two souls drew together, and became as one.

And this love had gone on increasing with the years; no longer wild and abandoned, no longer eloquent and passionate; but deep and abiding, steadfast and

enduring, like the love of God. To the father, the son was the object of his existence, the sum of his ambitions. To admit him to holy orders, to see him working as he himself had worked—ah, but with a free conscience! for the great English branch of the Catholic Church, making of the British Empire a power in Christendom before which Rome itself should appear parochial—was now the force and spirit of his existence. What he had done for a single see in England, that he hoped to do at Canterbury for the whole Church in England, and—after him—his son should consummate the work by making it to embrace the vast and scattered territories of England's empire. This was the old man's ambition; to which he clung with the tenacity of a miser; and not all the intimidations and menaces of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus, not all the dreadful perils of his equivocal position, and not all the harassing taunts and brutalities of Father Severn, oft repeated and never abated, had ever been able to deviate by the space of a wavering inch this supreme and sovran purpose of his life. His love for his son was a sublime passion in which were mingled the courage and fervour of the martyr with the fires and tears of a woman's sacrifice.

When Father Severn reminded the Bishop that he had forgotten his son, he knew very well that he was using his most powerful argument—his argument likeliest to a threat—and he watched curiously for its effect. The old man started as if a whip had been drawn across his face. His jaw fell, and his lips trembled.

"Yes," he said, in a voice of defeat, his massive head beginning to swing slowly up and down, "I have forgotten my son. That is true. He must be considered."

Father Severn turned the pages of his diary. "Any

day towards the end of next month would suit the Society," he said, studying the pages, "except perhaps the 29th."

"You ask me to take an oath," said the old Bishop, "in which you know I do not believe; you invite me to take the name of God in vain and to perjure my soul. Have you considered—mark me well—whose will be the crime?"

Father Severn never looked such questions in the face, and, constitutionally, he had the very smallest opinion of nicety of conscience in matters of policy. He was a man to whom truth and lies are weapons equally useful for carving a destiny. He would lie God into the minds of men, if it were possible to do so. As for this old man with the heavy white head and the troubled haggard face, shilly-shallying about a mere form of words, and striving to make him ashamed of this most wise and necessary proposal—as for him, the monk felt only an impatient irritability and a scornful contempt.

"Let us arrange the date," he said, tapping the page with his pencil. "If God is as merciful to my administration of the oath as He is to your—to your lukewarmness in the cause of His Holy Church, I shall endeavour to compete with you in the expression of my gratitude. For myself I have no fear. The consolidation of Christendom is my warrant. Let us arrange the day."

The Bishop not without difficulty had succeeded in living a life which, if not a lie, at least was a life threatened at every point with ruin by the utterance of truth; but now he was invited to tell a lie, to stand up before men and attest a falsehood, and his soul shrank from the infamy of that moment's act. There are some men

who can bear to live in the shadow of hypocrisy, but who would almost rather sacrifice their lives than utter one single lie. Certainly the Bishop would have faced his own ruin and destruction rather than take an oath in which he did not believe, an oath which travestied his most spiritual convictions; but beyond his own destiny was the opening career of his son—the child who was to consummate the mighty work to which he had given and consecrated his most fruitful years, and the faith of Abraham was not his. He could not sacrifice his son, his only son.

The Bishop knew well that if he made a public confession of his youthful enthusiasm for Rome his future could only lie in an idle retirement. His great work, the chief ideal of his days, would have to be abandoned. And how would all this publicity and exposure affect his son, whose life was just beginning? The boy would go through life a marked man—the son of a Bishop notorious for a great scandal. He could never survive it. He would always be suspect. The world's coarse thumb would be upon him.

The Bishop dared not sacrifice his son. The rich promise of the boy's brilliant intellect and the assurance of great things from his vigorous and tenacious personality, were the father's oft-anticipated joy in the years of his old age. It could not be right to sacrifice the future of this son by permitting the scandal of exposure.

Nay; it seemed to him in the midst of his wrestling that to sacrifice his own honour for the sake of his child was the final and the most triumphant act of immolation of which his love could be the hero. He caught at that idea, clutched the shadow of that consecrating subtlety, and determined upon his course.

"I will take the oath," he said. Then, as the tapping of the monk's pencil on the page of the diary angered and goaded him, he said:—"I will take it, not here and not in private, but in full synod, before all the members of your Society, where I may utter my protest against the force you have exerted upon me and where I may denounce the work of your Society. If there is any vestige of conscience left to that body," he cried, scornfully, moving a pace away, "they will rise and cry out against the blasphemy of which the guilt is yours and yours only."

Father Severn lifted the diary. "And what day will suit you?" he asked, quietly.

The Bishop, his face now suffused with colour and his blue eyes shining with indignation, contemplated the monk with contemptuous aversion. He was about to reply to him, pouring out fresh contumely upon the Jesuitical conspirator, when there came a knock upon the door, and the chaplain entered breathless and smiling from the garden.

"Pardon me, Bishop," he said, excusing his interruption; "but Lady Harriet asks me to say that the guests are now going. There is, of course, no need for you to bid them good-bye, but she thought perhaps you would like to know."

"I will come in a minute," replied the Bishop. He went to his table under the tall windows.

"I have been fortunate in persuading the Bishop to pay us a visit in London," said Father Severn, studying the chaplain.

"Really!"

"I hope he may add to his kindness by preaching for me."

"Your young friend in the garden," laughed the

chaplain, "is not so free apparently to make his own engagements! I asked him just now if he would like to say a few words to our Church Lads' Brigade this evening, but he told me that it was impossible for him to do anything without first asking your permission!"

"Quite so," replied Father Severn, eyeing the chaplain, with wonderment.

"You rule the lay-brothers with an iron hand then?"

"Certainly."

The chaplain smiled. "When he put his arm into the lucky-tub and fished out a package his eyes nearly came out of his head with excitement. We all laughed; really we did. And then he began to finger it, and turn it over and over in his hands; but he wouldn't open it. Lady Harriet said to him, 'Why don't you cut the string?' 'Oh, no!' he exclaimed, 'I mustn't! I must ask the father first. We are never allowed to open a parcel or a letter, or to do anything we very much want to do, until the excitement has worn off and we no longer feel a curiosity.' He told us that excitement is regarded as morally unhealthy. Is that really true? It amused us. Everybody laughed. We think he must be exaggerating the severity of the Order."

Father Severn only studied the chaplain's face this time; he made no reply. He looked at the smartly-dressed and carefully brushed young clergyman as a geologist might look at a lover carving his mistress's name in the face of a cliff, or as a poet might look at a foolish woman studying the Alps through a lorgnette. Then he turned away his gaze, and glanced over his shoulder at the Bishop.

"Any day, except the twenty-ninth, my lord," he

said, tapping with his pencil, "would suit the Mission."

"The twenty-seventh," replied the Bishop taking up his pen.

"Thank you. That will do. If you would preach in the evening we should be grateful, and I think I could get the Bishop of Southwark to attend."

"I will write to you," answered the Bishop, throwing down his pen. He watched it roll for a moment in its tray.

As Father Severn collected the books and papers in his lap, and got upon his feet, holding the skull cap in his hand, the organ sounded from the cathedral. The Bishop sat at the table under the windows, drumming upon the pages of his engagement book.

"You will come presently, Bishop?" asked the chaplain, at the door.

The Bishop nodded his head.

"Good-bye, my lord," said the monk, bowing towards the table.

The Bishop looked up, inclined his head, and turned again to his desk.

The door closed, and the old man rose slowly to his feet, drawing a deep sigh, his eyes staring sadly in front of him, his lips depressed with the sorrow of his brain. He did not pace to and fro in the room, but stood under the windows, his finger tips resting on the table, his eyes staring blankly in front of him.

The organ ceased, and the voice of the precentor chanting evensong came through the open window with the twitter of sparrows on the cathedral buttresses. The sudden swelling of sound as the choir took up the confession, the deep and sonorous Amen, the hush of the Absolution, and the marching cry of Pater Noster and then the triumphant strains of Magnificat—all

these sounds flowed into the shadowed library and rippled like shining water with a sense of far-off peace and some ineffable mystery, at the marge of the Bishop's soul. But when from those grey and lichened walls, through the coloured windows now beginning to burn with the fires of a westering sun, came the divine harmonies of Nunc Dimittis, the voices stealing gradually up to the very ache and sigh of desire for rest, the Bishop slowly upraised his ice-cold hands, covered his haggard face, and stood there like a statue in prayer till a sob shook him in all his fibres, and he sank into his chair, weeping without tears.

What magic is there in that hymn which softens the heart of the hardest and appeals with the most poignant tenderness to the soul of the spiritual? Read the words, analyze them, consider their origin, break them up and examine them till they appear no more than the weak weariness of a tired old man nodding upon the pillow of fading faculties, and still they will haunt the soul, and still they will mean more to the heart than all the majesty and pomp of the sublimest poetry. Perhaps it is that the thoughts of our innocence, the noblest and purest subliminal uprushes of our childhood, cling about the simple words like a subtle fragrance from the fields of memory. There are some words whose repetition seems to invest them with the mysterious power of hypnotism, so that we can make them mean to us an infinity of things which they themselves do not contain, and more especially is this the case of words linked with music and bound up with the rose-scented volume of childhood. The lines of a favourite poet, so soon as they become the property of the newspaper article and the motto of the birthday book, lose something of their glamour; repetition stales them,

brushes off the tender bloom of their graciousness and leaves them hard and obvious and dry ; but the chaunts and the hymns of childhood, the prayers and the collects of our boyhood—even when we have come to understand what they really mean and perhaps to disbelieve them—deepen their power over our emotions with increasing years, and awaken in our hearts at every repetition fresh and yearning memories of the most sacred and tender kind. Whatever our religious opinions, we never really cease to believe in the God whose love first visited our hearts in the hymn learned at our mother's knee.

When the chaunt died away, the Bishop raised his head from the table, and rose to his feet. While he bowed himself there he had seen his Calvary coming to meet him. In his ears there now sounded the faint rustle of prayers from the cathedral, and then a light wind, striking of a sudden and lifting from their rest all the bunched leaves of the trees in the garden, filled the room with one of those deep sighs of nature which well nigh break our hearts with the sense of her sympathy.

“ If it be possible, O my Father, if it be possible—” he cried, in a voice of deep agony.

But his Gethsemane was not yet reached.

CHAPTER VII

PAUL LISTER

ONE morning in the middle of July, soon after dawn, Paul Lister and his Oxford friend, Arthur Blount, a Fellow of All Souls, left the town of Caen, and going along the Cours Caffarelli followed the Orne in its beautiful windings through the fields of Normandy.

A heavy dew had fallen in the night, and the air now breathed the scent and freshness of an English morning. The face of the water, dark green, smooth, and placid, was only ruffled when a fish flashed dripping out of its deeps, causing ring after ring, widening and vibrating, to disturb its calm for a little moment. In that still and quiet tide, between its green banks and the overhanging branches of trees, was mirrored the host of cold white clouds which stood steadfast in the central blue. There was a great silence and an immovable stillness. It was a scene of repose, a scene without movement, more fit for sunset than for dawn, save that in the clean freshness of the air there was awakening rather than sleep.

The two men walking beside the river, snuffed the good air with a relish, after a night spent in feather beds in little rooms overlooking the stifling courtyard of their hotel, redolent always with the flavours of the

kitchen. They walked with their hats in their hands, the belts of their jackets loosened, their flannel trousers turned up above thick boots coated with a white dust.

Paul Lister was a young giant, heavy of shoulder, a little clumsy of limb, with a fine square fighting head covered with close-crisping light-coloured hair. Arthur Blount was a slighter and lesser-looking man, dark-haired, thin-featured, and prim, with an odd habit of glancing sideways over the tops of his eyeglasses whenever he smiled indulgently upon one of his little jests. His lips were fine and straight, the upper protruding; his voice was clear and his enunciation trenchant to the edge of pedantry. He well knew himself to be immensely clever; but it was with him a harmless little pose to protest the uselessness of academic knowledge, and to present himself in the light of a student of human nature, a man of the world. He played a little mild lawn tennis, indulged himself now and then with golf, practised swimming, and was truthfully something of a mountaineer and a great walker.

While his face was clear and serene—every mood of his disposition explored and known—Paul Lister, the bigger and the nobler man, looked out upon the world from a face already signed with the seal of perplexity and battle. He was a man marked out by Nature for her sternest conflicts—the conflicts of the intellect, the battles of the soul; those stern engagements of the human consciousness struggling to understand itself. A divine melancholy softened the vigour of his countenance. He might easily have been gross and well-liking, a boon companion, and a gay roystering adventurer; his face, but for the disturbed and uncertain condition of his mind, would certainly have been

a little coarse and brutal, and in time, perhaps, even sensual and heavy. But the melancholy in his eyes, blue like his father's, but smaller and darker lashed, and the brooding sadness of his lips, otherwise petulant and scornful, saved his strong and handsome face from the grossness of the voluptuary. He gave one the impression of a slow-moving but most thorough intellect, discontented with the beaten tracks of inquiry, and setting itself, in spite of its own obvious disqualifications for the quest, to discover its own fighting way to the peace of truth.

They had witnessed on the previous night, the anniversary of her execution, a torchlight procession through the narrow streets of the town to the house of Charlotte Corday, in the Rue Saint-Jean. The spectacle of those marching men and women, with their stern uplifted faces lit by the torches, a band playing songs of revolution as their shoes woke a dull thunder from the cobble stones, and that indescribable expression of exaltation which sanctifies the faces of French people in their moments of deep emotion, had fastened a firm impression upon the mind of Paul Lister. He had pointed out to his friend as they walked back to their hotel, torn and ancient placards on the walls, depicting the starving peasantry of France supporting on their bowed shoulders philandering soldiers and gormandizing priests; and coming out in the afternoon from the church of St. Etienne, and making their way to the Prairie, they had paused to see a host of beggars with their arms stretched through the railings of the barracks clamouring for scraps of food from the soldier cooks; and now this morning Paul's thoughts ran on the same subject and he debated with his friend sociological and political problems, and how religion might

be made to appear in the eyes of democracy without any shadow from the police court on its brow, without that fatal political hue which makes it seem the mere contrivance of privilege and licence, to be hated and suspected by the poor.

They were talking in this fashion and were now some distance from the town, when at a curve of the river there came to them suddenly the sound of a violin execrably played from a wood on the opposite bank. Paul Lister instantly covered his ears, and uttered a dismal howl of pain, while Arthur Blount, glancing at him over the edge of his eyeglasses contented himself with a smile.

"Give me a stone," cried Lister, looking about in the grass.

"I assure you I like this melancholy music," replied his friend, going forward again. "It is the undersound of every beautiful expression of Nature, it is the still, sad music of humanity! What does it matter, my dear fellow, if the sound come from a violin or from the unsettled mind of a philosopher; the discordance with the harmony of the universe is the same, and it is always there. It is man's contribution to the concert of Nature. You began it as soon as we had got upon the road, with your perplexed theology and your tangled politics; and now a beggar is taking up the same discordant strain with a fiddle. What does it matter? Nature cares nothing for either of you."

Lister caught his arm as they advanced and stopped him. "Look!" he said, with surprise in his heavy brows. "It's a girl!"

He pointed with his hand across the river, and Blount, his interest now aroused, taking the direction and arranging his eyeglasses, followed the line of the

pointing finger. "So it is," he said; "and pretty. Quite a pretty girl."

"Why does she play so vilely?" demanded Lister, losing his interest.

"If you had thrown that stone, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Blount. "Pretty, quite pretty: Grecian; a nymph out of Thessaly: a consecration of the dawn, my dear Paul; this is quite an event; let us sit upon this bank."

"Let us shout and bid her be quiet!" answered Lister, staring across the broad stream into the woods on the other side.

"On no account. A shout would startle her, and she would plunge into the thicket and be lost. We should never see her again; think of that! Listen, and I will propound the mystery. She is a charming young lady with unmusical parents, and in order to practise her scales in safety, she rises with the sun and comes down to these woods. Now, let us not interrupt so pious an undertaking. The sight of her, I protest, is delightful; and even the cockerel learning to crow is not struck dead by Apollo. All things have an inalienable right to learn how to make the noise which is most congenial to them. The young ass learns to bray, and the hyena practises the scales of its laughter. Be silent, then, and if you will not listen—look."

He moved away and leaned against the trunk of a tree, looking across the stream, while Paul Lister stood his ground in the open, and, with a smile of amusement in his eyes, watched the girl who was murdering for him with merciless hand the majestic quiet of the dawn. "If those are her scales," he said, "may I be dead and buried in a coral reef, before she gets to her pieces!"

"Hush, Paul, hush!" called Blount from the tree,

raising a finger, and not looking round. "Sympathetically heard there is something noble in this music. I protest there is; listen. It is not of the concert room; it is of nature."

Paul laughed, and straightening himself up, prepared to wait for the exhaustion of his friend's patience. He was good-natured enough to fall in with any such whim of the moment, and he well knew the amiable weakness of his scholar friend in matters affecting the heart. So he smiled, and stayed there.

The sight presented by the young musician, however badly she might be playing, was one of great rarity and singular charm. On a little swelling rise of green-sward, framed in on every side by the stately trunks of forest trees and over-roofed by the gay pageant of their green branches, with her face raised to the morning light, and playing as if unconscious of her surroundings, she could just be seen from the opposite bank silhouetted against that dim and misty background, with a glimmer of mystery all about her slight body and a suggestion of almost glory in the perfect oval of her lifted face.

She was small and slight, a mere child, with her hair braided, and tied with a dark ribbon behind her back. Her face was small and white, the eyes dark-fringed and luminous, the mouth small and tender to the point of weakness. Had she been nearer to the men on the opposite bank they would have seen that her hair was a dark brown, that her eyes, although large, were set strangely deep in her head and were of a grey colour; and that her skin was of that extreme delicacy of texture which can only be likened to fine porcelain with a light shining through it.

She was dressed in a loose serge gown of grey, with

a black sash round her waist ; the dress reached almost to her ankles and disclosed two feet of great beauty in thick shoes, which had evidently been made by a village cobbler. On the ground at her feet lay a large felt hat, a couple of French books, and the open case of her violin.

As Paul Lister looked at her, half interested at the spectacle, and altogether amused by Blount's gallantry, something in the little dryad's presence came out from her, crossed the river, and assailed his senses like a fragrance which suddenly stops the traveller as he winds between the hedges of a country lane. He did not know what had happened to him, but he forgot Arthur Blount, and felt at that moment an unaccountable desire to stay there and listen to the faulty music till it ceased.

"There is a mystery in her," he murmured, as if speaking to himself.

"She is perfect, my dear fellow," cried Blount from the tree. "*Amor et Deliciae!* These are the Pagan glimpses which make us less forlorn."

A desire to be nearer to her, to see her closely and face to face, visited Paul's mind. He drew a deep breath, which was almost a sigh, and looked about him for some means of crossing the river. Everywhere was quiet and stillness. No peasant stirred on the banks, no boat swayed at its moorings among the rushes, no sail could be discerned coming up the stream across the meadows.

"I wish I could get across," he muttered.

"She would fly at sight of you!" answered Blount. "Be quiet, do. As it is you are standing in the open where she may see your too material body at any moment, and fly."

Paul stood stiffly and resentfully, glowering across the river at the beautiful and mysterious sylph. He hated to be teased. Who was this girl practising her violin on the banks of the Orne? Clearly not a peasant, by the extreme refinement of her body; surely not a lady of the Norman bourgeoisie, by the coarse stuff of her gown and her obvious freedom from restraints. What was the clue to her mystery? He looked about him, but there was nowhere the sign of a habitation. A footpath certainly led up through the woods, but it rose and curled over the crest of the hill without conducting to a cottage. Nowhere against the trees could he discover a spiral of blue smoke, the red blur of tiles, or the shimmer of a casement. Trees everywhere, steadfast in the morning air; the broad face of the river everywhere reflecting trees and clouds; meadows lying everywhere without a shadow of movement across them: and a stillness everywhere, broken only by the girl's clumsy playing of her violin. He could hit upon no explanation, and stood there studying the girl in the woodland, half angry with her now for the perplexity she caused him.

"What do you make of it, Arthur?" he called, after some moments of this silence.

"Throw materialism to the winds, my dear Paul; a phenomenon," came the answer from under the tree.

Just then a noise in the distance caught the quick ear of Paul Lister, and looking back up the river he espied a tan-coloured sail moving slowly above the green fields of the river's bank; he knew then what the sound was, the creaking of rough oars in their grumbling rowlocks and the splash of the water as they dipped to the stroke. Now he would discover the teasing mystery. Impatiently he waited the boat's approach that he might question the sailors.

But just at that moment the girl ceased playing, and stood listening.

"Hist!" whispered Blount, "don't stir, or she'll see you."

She turned her head and saw the sail, then stooped to the ground, put away her violin, fastened the case, and gathered up her hat and books. As she raised herself again, she caught sight of Paul Lister on the opposite bank, and stood staring at him. The knowledge that her eyes were upon him sent a thrill through his body.

He could see, even at that distance, how her eyes, that were set so strangely deep in their sockets, grew suddenly large and startled, and how her lips, which were vivid scarlet, parted in a quick surprise at the sight of him. There was nothing in her expression of confusion or blushing coquetry. The young girl was amazed to see a stranger on the bank silently regarding her, and in the honesty of that amazement she sought for no concealment of her surprise nor abandoned herself to any petty panic of the senses. Stare for stare she answered him, and so for a minute they stood on opposite sides of the river, silently regarding each other. Then she removed her gaze, stepped slowly down to the river path, and reached the water's side just as the boat came into view round the curving bank. She did not look at Paul again.

"What a beautiful child!" he exclaimed, and wondered that he should have become so suddenly hot and parched.

"Don't move," whispered Blount. "She will come back with the boat."

"But what a beautiful child!" repeated Paul, following her movements with his eyes.

The sail of the boat flapped against the mast. An

old man in a stained linen blouse, with a knitted cap of faded red wool on his head, pulled laboriously at the oars. In the bows of the boat were piled a few boxes, a carboy bound round with basketwork and several crates; in the stern there were nets and hampers, with a little white dog sleeping upon them in the folds of the sailor's jacket, an arm of which hung over the side. The face of the sailor was the colour of red sand, and wrinkled like the workings of lace; he was little, round-shouldered, weak-eyed; an old man with large scarred hands, a jowl covered with grey stubble, and a mouth full of yellow teeth.

She hailed him with a shout that was music in the ears of Paul, and the old fellow, resting immediately upon his oars, craned himself round, and ducking his head to her, pulled off his woollen cap. They heard him wish Mademoiselle a good-morning, and saw him point to the little white dog, and laugh, as it woke up, stretched itself, and barked excitedly directly it beheld the young lady.

She inquired after the old man's granddaughter, and he replied that she had slept a little better that night, and with God's blessing would soon be out in the garden again. Then bending over his work once more he got the oars into the water and pulled slowly down the stream, she keeping pace with him on the bank.

"If she had only sung, my dear fellow, instead of scraping!" whispered Blount.

"Her voice is better than her playing," rejoined Paul.

"Better!" cried Blount. "Better!" He bestowed a smile upon Paul, and turned his eyes again to the young lady.

The little white dog, who was pacing restlessly up and down on the baskets and hampers, and whining impatiently, now caught sight of Paul, and began to bark at him viciously. The red cap of the sailor came round, and he glanced over his shoulder at the cause of this alarm. As the boat drew level with Paul, he rested his scarred hands on the knees of his old patched trousers, and stared suspiciously at the young foreigner under glowering brows, his lips drawn back, like a snarling mastiff, while the oars dripped into the water. But Paul only saw the mysterious girl beyond the creeping boat, on the other side of the stream, and she did not look at him at all.

The dog ceased barking, and the only sound as the boat glided by was the ripple of green water at her prow and the gentle beating of the hanging sail against the mast. From the resting oars of the old sailor the drops of water dripped through the sunlight into the river, like diamonds.

With a grunt of displeasure directed at Paul, the old man set once again about his work, and when the boat had got a little way upon her, he turned to the young girl and called to her.

"A stranger!" he said. "How they stare, those strangers!"

She nodded her head. "You have got a full load this morning," she cried to him.

"Yes, Mademoiselle, but I was the first boat away from the quai!"

She looked back, but without seeing Paul. "There is not a sail in sight," she said.

He chuckled with an ancient vanity. "Eh, they'll be an hour yet, those others. But, *mon dieu*, how these strangers stare!" he concluded, bestowing a

last angry scowl on the steadfast Paul. The boat followed the curve of the stream, and was lost behind a wooded hill.

Arthur Blount came out from under his tree. "Sixteen? Seventeen? Eighteen?" he queried. "I think, perhaps, seventeen. A French girl may be any age. She is a little gauche; no figure; no air; no note; and yet there is something charming about her. I imagine Andromache to have possessed something of her domestic magic: Wordsworth's Lucy, of course, was this French maid at every point. 'The sweetest thing that ever grew beside a human door.' Possibly—I wonder?—Charlotte Corday was like her. In any case, Paul, a most interesting girl. So diminutive, so *spirituelle*; better still, so unearthly and ethereal. And her voice! Music."

"I should have said she was fifteen—not seventeen," answered Lister, wondering why his voice was clouded, and why he did not care to look at Blount. He made to go on, but Blount stopped him.

"We must not appear to be following. Let us saunter. I should like to discover where she lives; what a triumph if we could find her face on a picture card—'*La belle Musicienne de l'Orne*'."

"Absurd, my dear chap," grumbled Paul Lister, and Blount laughed at him.

They tarried for a few minutes, and then continued their walk. But directly they had made the curve of the stream, they came once more, and suddenly into full view of this mysterious maiden. She was standing on the bank patting the dog, who had his paws on her knee, and watching the old sailor at his work of unloading. As they made the curve, however, she turned and entered a garden, the dog following her. The

boat was drawn up at a small landing stage, against a garden wall on the river's bank. In the centre of this tall red-bricked wall with its stone coping, was a handsome gate of wrought iron, and through the gate they looked into a garden crowded with herbaceous flowers, and planted with dwarf trees. On the verandah of the mansion, under a trellis of wisteria, seated in a large wickerwork chair, with several books in his lap, was an old French gentleman of huge dimensions, with a heavy, hanging, plethoric countenance, a mighty paunch and hands of a dazzling whiteness. As they came opposite the gate, he looked up from his chair, smiling at the girl who approached him, holding her violin case in one hand, the books under her arm, and waving to the old gentleman a flower which she held in the other.

At one of the windows, thrusting a mattress out into the sunlight and the air, was an elderly lady of benign countenance so exactly like the gentleman, in spite of her thinness, that there was no mistaking them for anything but brother and sister.

It was impossible to play the spy upon this scene, and our two travellers had to be content with the briefest of glances and then to pass on out of sight. The old sailor, unloading his crates and hampers from the boat, paused in his work to glower upon the foreigners, muttering to himself about the way in which these people stare. The dog ran out from the garden, and barked at them from the bank. And that was all. The girl did not look at them.

At the end of the garden wall they came into view of a little village on the hillside, with a church standing out from among the trees, and the bell of a convent ringing dolorously on the morning air.

They walked on in silence for a minute, and then Blount laughed lightly, and said that it had been a pretty adventure.

"I would give my eyes to know who she is," said Paul.

"Her father is a French gentleman with a taste for scholarship," replied Blount. "He lives a student's life, and like all country Frenchmen, is an early riser and the wise slave of an iron routine. He is a widower, and always wears black; his house is kept for him by a spinster sister, who cares more for linen and pots and pans than for her brother's books, and her niece's flowers.

"Not to worry him in his studies, Mademoiselle, his daughter—shall we call her Clémence or Falaise?—who has a taste for music, but unfortunately no ear, practises as far away from the house as it is decent for her to go unattended in the early morning. They live a quiet, uneventful existence, entertaining the Curé to dinner once or twice a week, sending jellies and wines to the bedridden peasantry, discussing the Review across the dinner table, and cultivating a gentle interest in the condition of their flower borders and the doings of their bees. There, my dear Paul, you have an epitome of the life led by Mademoiselle Clémence and her very good father, Monsieur Bochart."

Paul wished that his friend would forbear to chatter. He wanted to think. The strange beauty of the girl had made a deep impression upon him; he had caught from her, if not a rapture, at least a new impulse of spirit. Some subtle emanation from her personality, some telepathic tenderness of her mind, had crossed the river and infected his sensitive soul. He felt that he might learn from her, that she possessed some know-

ledge of which he was ignorant. He desired to see her again, above all things to hear her voice again—that exquisite voice. She had grown of a sudden, without effort or knowledge on her part, into the intimacies of his secret thoughts. It was with him, and in a lesser degree with his friend, as it is with many a man entering a crowded chamber and feeling of a sudden, without a word being spoken or a sign being given, that with one person there whose eyes have immediately caught his, it will be good to hold communion.

How come these sudden and wholly irrational sympathies of personality, we do not know; but it is certain that the business of life is largely made up of them. We do not wait to appraise the value of a person; we know almost at once whether we shall like him or dislike him, trust him or distrust him; and in the case of love—that most wonderful of all human sympathies—our hearts are made up for us instantaneously and irrevocably.

He is but little versed in life who makes ridicule of these sudden infatuations. Men and women seldom come gradually to love each other; one more easily grows out of love than grows in love. It is the sudden, the swift, the all-unexpected, undrilled, and inexperienced assault upon the heart which carries reason before it and fills the citadel of the soul with the flames of passion. Rosalind more often falls instantly under the spell of Orlando, than Posthumus grows up in love with Imogen. Nor is there anything more wonderful in this immediate recognition of kinship than a man who ponders on the inner life of humanity will find in nearly all the affairs of our day's work; for is it not by intuition, swift and unexplained, and not by reason, carefully trained and precise in all her

ways, that we determine our actions, choose our friends, gather our experiences, and conduct our passage across the world, shaping and moulding our character as we go ?

There was in Paul's heart for the girl on the banks of the Orne, such a yearning as entered the brain of Hazlitt, when he first beheld the lodging-house servant girl who afterwards ruled and broke his heart. We can no more express in words what that yearning is than we can describe in language a nocturne of Chopin. It is often irrational, and it is never logical. In some cases the scholar loves the dunce, and the lady her groom ; always where the passion is a great one, reason is defied. The seasoned amorist knows what he is after, and will either judge a woman as a cattle dealer judges an ox, or else declare himself infatuated with the scent on her handkerchief, or the heel of her shoe ; he can always give his friend Silenus a reason for his latest amour, over which they may chuckle together. But for beautiful characters, and souls conscious of a high rectitude and vaguely conscious of some unimagined destiny awaiting them, there is no language in these sudden accessions of passion to the brain. Dimly they perceive that their thoughts are tinged with fire and blown about on a whirlwind of unrest ; and darkly they conjecture that the hunger and thirst in their souls is for some communion of the spirit, some close and unbroken intercourse of the heart ; and only half consciously do they guess that the spell which is over them—mocked by the world and unacknowledged by psychology—is the clue to the mystery of human personality, the eternal passion of evolution working to the universal destiny, " the inconceivable oneness of souls."

As the day wore on, and our voyagers came to the scent of the sea and to their resting place for the night, the impression made upon the heart of Paul Lister by the girl of the woodland, deepened into a restless impatience and a sense of great spiritual disquiet. He sought for some excuse to retrace the day's journey. It was torture to him that the girl who had so deeply moved him should remain a mystery to him. And what made it harder for him to bear was the conversation of Arthur Blount, who rattled on about the women of various countries, pointing out how strangely the figures of women of different nationalities vary from each other, how the countenances of these different women express divergent attitudes of mind towards human affection, and how a Greek girl may be married at fourteen while an English maid is scarcely worth the admiration of the artist till she is twenty, and so on.

Arthur Blount could discuss in illuminating fashion most subjects that interest serious men, but a woman—particularly seen—always set him off upon his fad. In most cases, however, these interruptions were brief, and he returned to the subjects which were really congenial to the temper of his mind—the history of culture, the study of comparative religions, and the mystery of man's moral being. "Yes," he might say, for instance, "a woman with those eyes will never see life as Plato saw it, curious dark-shadowed eyes! they remind me of Verlaine's verses about the woman playing with the cat; but, as I was saying, the Roman Catholic is never at his best when you remind him of the period in which there were two Popes to his Church, and only one bunch for Peter's keys; and his distress, cor ing the uninterrupted flow

of Apostolic inspiration, is marked, distinctly marked, when you tell him of the Pope who sanctioned in monasteries an Eastern vice which is abhorrent to moral nations." And so he would continue, growing more and more serious, till another woman appeared who, by some particular characteristic, sufficiently attracted him to awaken his pose.

But it was his moments of serious conversation which became rare after the morning adventure on the banks of the Orne. He talked incessantly of the girl, particularly of her voice, which, he declared, was the most musical sound under heaven, and irritated Lister almost to the point of controversy by his perpetual comparisons of the sylph with other women in other countries who had attracted his admiration. In vain did Paul strive to direct the current of his enthusiasm into other channels. He drank to the girl at dinner, vowed that he would one day return and walk with her in the trees, and after dinner, when they were smoking their pipes, in the dark streets of the little town, he protested again and again that the adventure was one of those spiritual experiences whose memories are destined to be eternal.

Paul—who did sincerely feel all this, and more and more as the day advanced—longed for silence and loneliness. His soul was disturbed and his heart was troubled. The noble spirit in his healthy glowing body craved for meditation, or at least for uninterrupted dreaming; he wanted to be by himself listening to the flow of his thoughts, and letting those strange wanderers of the brain run to and fro bearing him whithersoever they would. A new star had swum into his firmament. He was ensorcelled by a spell of which he was ignorant. Into no form of words did he struggle to express his

sensations, with no argument did he endeavour to quell the tumult in his mind. Everything in his life, even the great trouble which had driven him abroad with Arthur Blount for nearly a year, was swept out of his thoughts by the magic of a fascination, and he was content that it should be so. He was in love with his disquiet and pain.

Perceiving at last the moodiness of his friend, Arthur Blount ceased his persiflage, and putting an arm through Paul's, said that it was time they should be going bedward.

"You are still unhappy, I'm afraid, about the duty that awaits you at home," he said, quietly, after they had walked a little distance. "The nearer we get to cruel work, the more harsh it seems."

"Ah!" cried Paul, with a start which was misconstrued by his friend.

"It is always so with imaginative people," continued Blount. "And they have their reward. They get over the worst before the actual battle begins. You remember what Bradley says about *Macbeth*? The woman, with no imagination, was a lion before the murder, and a mouse afterwards; the man, of imagination all compact, was a mouse before, and a lion after. It required the actual murder to make Lady Macbeth realize her crime; Macbeth himself had exhausted horror and repentance before Duncan went to his long home. You, my dear Paul, are committing your murder now; believe me it will not seem one tithe so difficult, not one jot so unpleasant, when you come to the actual killing."

"Still I must dread it," murmured Paul. "No father's heart may be broken without an endless remorse; and my father—well, you know what he is to me? I think him the greatest soul alive."

Arthur Blount nodded his head. "Perhaps," he said gently, "the heart need not be broken. Think over my proposal, that I should at least prepare the way for you."

"No," answered Paul. "The murder is mine. I am grateful to think that you will be with me at Warborough; but all of it—every stab," he said sadly, "must come from my hand."

"Perhaps you could delay it—another year or two," suggested Blount.

Paul shook his head. "Let us go in," he said. Then, as they reached the inn, "How soon shall we be in England!"

But that night, with his fighter's head upon the pillow, his face resting upon his clasped hands, he did not think of his father and of the bitter scene through which he must pass with him in a few days, but of the frail girl who had stood for a single moment looking into his eyes across the river. His thoughts were all of her, and when he fell asleep it was to dream that he was drowning before her eyes, and that in those eyes there was only a smile.

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. REVINGTON'S TERMS

LADY HARRIET said nothing that was uncharitable about Mrs. Revington, but there was not a lady of position in Warborough who did not know that a call at Ladywell would involve social consequences of a grievous order. Therefore it came about that when Mrs. Revington arrived to take possession of the little furnished house in the Close she entered upon a country which was passively but severely hostile to her.

Cathedral cities, in which the Bishop, or his wife, is the chief social force, have a natural antipathy for smart and brilliant people. Gaiety is suspected, a too fashionable coiffure is considered not respectable, and a reputation for irony or epigram is regarded as the poison-fruit of an unregenerate mind. It did not require the unfortunate association of Mrs. Revington's name with a deplorable case in the law courts to produce in the respectable minds of the Close a feeling of enmity against her; it was enough that her photographs appeared in illustrated papers, her name in fashionable paragraphs, and that her reputation as a racing-woman and a popular hostess of the modern London order, was announced week after week in the gossip of ladies' journals. That such a woman should invade the society of the Close was a mystery to War-

borough ; but although everybody was curious to see her, and even as curious to discover the cause of her appearance in their midst, yet it was agreed that no one should take the smallest notice of her or make the least inquiry concerning her daily life. Warborough, in a word, made up its respectable mind to go on with its orderly and unruffled existence as though there was no such person as Mrs. Revington living in the Close.

Mrs. Revington knew nothing of this when she arrived at Ladywell, nor indeed would she greatly have cared what these provincial people were saying about her ; she was too busy with her thoughts about the shepherd to care what the sheep were bleating ; it was the Bishop who had to be conquered ; Mrs. Tompkins and Mrs. Jenkinson might call or not, as they pleased. She was quite indifferent.

Something softened in the heart of Mrs. Revington when she beheld Ladywell. She had never been a bad woman, and she never could be a bad woman ; that was not her battle ; it was in the scales of destiny whether she should be a hard, embittered and an indifferent woman, or a woman gentle and gracious. There was no evil in her heart, as there was no vulgarity in her mind ; only an irritation, a sense of resentment, and a dark, angry, and discordant unrest. She was not at peace with herself.

So it was not unnatural that her heart should soften at sight of the little white brick house with its bulging bow windows of wood and its crumpled roof of red tiles, standing all by itself in a circle of green privet hedge at a corner of the Cathedral lawns. The mighty walls of the Cathedral, lifting their Norman towers into the blue sky, did not impress her, did not awaken any thought of tenderness or awe ; but the little cottage

with spires of blue delphiniums showing above the hedge, a great tangled and untidy mass of Japanese honeysuckle overhanging its porch, and with all its roses—crimson ramblers, and yellow tea-roses—strung upon wires or falling over rustic arches, filled her for a moment with some strange and ineffable sense of spiritual tenderness.

Warborough Cathedral, save where the Bishop's palace on the south side, with its fine garden sloping towards the river, ran at a sharp angle to its walls, stood clear of human habitations in the midst of wide and level lawns. At the side of the gravel paths leading to the various great doors, rose ancient and boldered elms, and here and there in the midst of the lawns, throwing dusky shadows on the grass, were yew trees of a great antiquity and one or two cedars of Lebanon. The houses of the Close ran round two sides of this episcopal triangle, with a road and a low corniced wall of mossy stone separating them from the green lawns. These dwellings were all of great charm—some very ancient, of Tudor stone that was almost black and covered with thick creepers; others of Georgian red brick, wearing behind their wrought-iron gates something of a French look, with their corniced windows, arched and heavily sashed with white wood, and their handsome panelled doors under carved porches; and others of a quieter and simpler style of architecture, two-storey dwellings of bricks that were painted white, with the heavy brass knockers and handles of their little front doors polished to the fine point of magnificence. Only at a single corner on the lawns—just where one stepped from the road through a break in the low stone wall on to one of the walks sloping to the cathedral—was there a house, and this was Ladywell

It seemed to be aware of its boldness, and to nestle down in its circuit of green privet, under the shadow of the great elm trees outside, out of sight of the proud and staring houses of the Close—a little gardener's cottage spared for its beauty when a clearing was made round the cathedral and those spacious lawns were laid down hundreds of years ago.

Mrs. Revington was received at the gate of the cottage by her butler, who exchanged glances with the maid as that excellent woman opened wide her eyes at sight of the unpretentious house. She stopped in the little garden for a moment to look at the flowers, delphiniums, roses, white milfoil, sweet williams, geraniums, candy-tuft, Madonna lilies, and valerian—and then entered the cottage and looked about her new possession. It pleased her at every point. The tiny drawing-room was filled with flowers in tall vases and wide bowls; the windows were screened by white silk with fine lace curtains at their sides; the furniture was covered with old-fashioned chintz; and the carpet was soft and of a golden hue. The butler had already unpacked some of her possessions and had hung her favourite picture by Lorenzo Lotto on the wall above the piano, her Virgin and Child by Bernardino Luini over a rosewood davenport, and had placed her photographs in their silver frames on the little Sheraton tables set about the room. Over the white wooden mantelpiece he had hung the pastel of Edmund Revington, with vases of Madonna lilies at either side of it.

"Silvia will be pleased," reflected Mrs. Revington, and took off her gloves to pour out the tea.

The difficulties of her position were great. She had come to Warborough to force the Bishop—that great social force—to receive her, and to acknowledge her

before society as a good woman. The weapon with which she meant to accomplish this victory had slipped from her hand almost as soon as it was grasped. She had only her assured knowledge of the Bishop's amazing association with a secret Catholic society, to aid her in the contest. If he denied the charge, and challenged her to produce evidence, she would have nothing to do but retire discomfited.

She knew very well that Lady Harriet Lister would not call upon her, unless driven to do so by the Bishop. That austere lady had known Edmund Revington, and the Bishop had been one of his dearest friends. Mrs. Revington herself had never encountered them, except to bow and pass on. The entire lack of sympathy between Edmund Revington and herself had divided the camp of their friends ; their lives had run on entirely different lines ; and the more Edmund Revington advanced and developed in his great work of revealing the inherent spirituality of all material appearance, the more did Mrs. Revington fall back into hedonism, and the more was she tempted to regard her husband, if not as a prig, at least as a fanatic. She had never known—and this is important to remember—the trend of his thoughts when he married her. Captivated by the beauty of the girl, and fearful of a more successful lover, he had courted her as the handsome, well-off, and aristocratic young man that he was, leaving his intellectual courtship of her to the happy years after their honeymoon. Perhaps it was not altogether her fault that those happy years never came. A beautiful girl trained in the modern fashion of society is not easily persuaded that there is a spiritual significance in the fun and frolic of her crowded hours. The last person to persuade her of this is the man who has kissed

her lips and abandoned himself to an adoration of her physical graciousness. Such a conversion most women fight against with the sword of resentment. To carry a lover to God is often the ambition of an erotic mistress, but to be lifted on to spiritual heights by the husband who has wooed her as a lover and would then divert his passion from her body to her soul, this is seldom the experience of a woman of the world.

It was in this manner that the Revingtons had drifted away from each other. He went more and more into the society of his intellectual equals and she more and more into the society of her social inferiors. At great and important functions of aristocracy she was at his side, but in the everyday commerce of London life they moved in different sets. So it came about that she but seldom encountered his friends, and he, never by any chance, hers.

Mrs. Revington took up the life which she imagined would be expected of Ladywell's tenant. She went every day to Evensong, and did a great measure of her own shopping in the High Street. She was constantly to be seen reading or sewing in her garden, frequently met in the art needlework shops and the library of the town, and she drove about in the afternoons to the various sights of the neighbourhood. She was well aware of the interest she aroused, and now and then had been conscious of scornful looks and skirts swept out of her way by the fine ladies of Warborough; but she appeared to notice neither the curiosity of the younger women nor the resentment of the older. It was apparent to her that no one would call at Ladywell, and she made up her mind not to wait for a late and therefore a suspicious victory over the town, but to conquer immediately.

She had three great reasons for this course of action. First and foremost, Silvia would soon arrive in England, and it was her determination that Silvia should find her in a secure position ; secondly, Spencer Purvis—on whom she was still dependent—was growing every day more insistent concerning her co-operation in the paper which was to assist him financially and at the General Election ; he might, she knew, at any time force himself upon her even in Warborough ; and thirdly, the disquieting mystery of the disappearance of the precious membership book on which so much depended, kept her in a perpetual anxiety and a continual anticipation of the Society's exposure.

One day in the latter half of July, after reading a letter which had just arrived from Silvia by the afternoon post, full of admiration for her father's books and of questions concerning him, Mrs. Revington made up her mind to give immediate battle to the Bishop. She dressed with great care and went to Evensong. As she went down the avenue, one of the quaintest ladies of the Close passed ahead of her—an elderly long-necked spinster, the lean tendons of her neck visible below the little grey chignon which was dragged upward by the elastic of her hat. She was dressed in a short shepherd's plaid skirt showing white stockings and flat-heeled black shoes, a black lace dolman, and a flat black mushroom hat tipped over her eyes. The contrast between her own perfect garments and the oddity of this old-fashioned spinster did not amuse Mrs. Revington, did not even occupy her thoughts ; she only felt that of all the fine ladies in Warborough this was the woman she would most like to know. She had an idea that Silvia would love this old maid.

She took her place in the choir, where cushions of

crimson velvet gleamed against the carved darkness of the stalls, and in the subdued light and the rustling stillness watched the worshippers arrive. Lady Harriet and Violet Lister came early, and passed between the tall and stately stalls with exalted faces to their seats near the presbytery. Some time after them came Major Hugh Weston Lister, the Bishop's brother, and a devoted musician—bald-headed and bronzed, breathing heavily through his nostrils, frowning and staring, with his eyeglass stuck painfully in his eye, his head on one side, his uncurled grey moustache reaching nearly to the end of his chin. As he came opposite Mrs. Revington, the middle-aged Major, almost pausing in his walk, bestowed upon her a stare which other people might have mistaken for defiance, but which she herself had half-gratefully come to recognize as one of curiosity and sympathy; in her battle with the palace she felt that she could count upon a staunch ally in Major Lister.

The sound of a murmured prayer from behind the stalls, followed by the Amen of the choir, reached the worshippers, and then the organ, with a dull reverberation, shuddering upon the air, broke gradually into some gentle voluntary which slowly filled the vast spaces of the great stone church with sweetness and tenderness. There was the sound of moving feet on the stone floor, the congregation rose, and then the choristers in their white robes came under the arch of the screen with its uplifted Rood, and entered the choir. The clergy, with vergers to guide the greatest of them, their heads bowed, and holding their mortarboards against the whiteness of their surplices, filed in behind the choristers, and yes—last among them—came the mighty Bishop, with his head raised but

his eyes cast down—a figure stamped with that mark of an ancient ecclesiasticism which is half royal and half academic, a figure of dignity and scholarship, strength and power, learning and dominion, one of God's most efficient administrators.

Mrs. Revington drew a breath of relief. He was there—and unequal as the contest might be—at least it would not be postponed till another day. She would confront that mighty old man, with his hard autocratic countenance and his rock-hewn head, and force him to make terms with her. Silvia's name breathed through her thoughts as the service wore on, and gave her a stimulus of courage; she paid little heed to prayer or canticle, yet she received from the sacred office some elusive suggestion of spiritual comfort which might have been envied by those who listened to every word, repeated every response, and joined in every hymn with the unimaginative piety which is born of routine.

When the service was over Mrs. Revington followed the little congregation into the nave—where Major Lister dawdled with his head upon one side scowling through his eyeglass, listening critically to the organ, and waiting for her to pass him—but as soon as she was out of the choir, she turned away into the north transept, and, out of sight of the people, behind one of the Norman columns, called a verger to her side. She gave the man a note which she bade him give immediately to the Bishop, as it was of great importance, and told him that she would wait there till he came with the Bishop's answer. Then, when he had gone to do her bidding, she moved a little further away and examined some of the monuments and brasses.

Corpora Sanctorum sunt hic in pace sepulta,
she read, and understood that all about her, laid in

peace, were the bodies of the pure and beautiful. The organ filled the splendid church with sound, and in through the green windows of the clerestory and the famous violet oriel above the great west doors, streamed in upon Norman stone and English oak the immemorial glory of the sun. The long aisles crowded with tombs and monuments, their walls heavy with brasses and hung with the rent, fretted, fading and blood-stained colours of battle, drooping from their shafts, were now misty and uncertain, powdered with the violet light. Crusaders, with their shields at their side, and having their feet crossed, lay in this mystic light sleeping on their tombs. Knights, with their faces worn away, and with rust on the iron swords laid across their breasts, slumbered there like soldiers dead at sunset. Pious women of Shakespeare's day, their hands folded in prayer, smiled in the softened radiance from their monuments against the wall. Strange and forgotten English names carved hundreds of years ago shone out in patches of colour from the flagged aisles, like dying roses striving to live another hour. The coldness, deadness, and gloom of these huge stone churches was drunk up by the sunlight, and the musty arid odour of ancient stone seemed to yield to a faint fragrance of lavender and rosemary breathing from the coloured air.

The woman, waiting there to fight a little social battle of vanity and manners, felt for a moment the spell and magic of antique time, and was subdued by that sense of the Everlasting which haunts these calm and majestic shrines of history and prayer. Her soul received the reproof of those dead saints sleeping about her, and for a moment she seemed to be listening to all the litanies of sorrow and agony, all the hymns of victory and praise, and all the wailings and lamenta-

tions which had ever risen from those walls of stone to the throne of God. Only for a moment—at the next minute she was wondering if the dead were not ashamed of their high-sounding epitaphs, and asking herself if worship had ever indeed been anything more than what it was at this day—a perfunctory performance offered to Mystery by little people born without capacity or inclination for sin.

Then she became interested in two American ladies, who with bags hanging at their sides from shoulder-straps, guide-books in hands, and invisible eyeglasses on their noses, were reading the inscriptions on the monuments and exclaiming at the beauty of the windows. Then she began to think of the wretched slaves who had sweated and died under the task-master's whip, rearing this proud church to the mercy and love of God. And then she was suddenly brought back to herself and her difficult task by the return of the verger. The man amused her by the manner in which he counterfeited the enunciation of a clergyman, dropping and misplacing his aitches and using words of unnecessary length in the subdued and reverent tone of a priest at the Miserere. He told her that the Bishop had read her letter, that his lordship was extremely busy that evening, but that if her message was one of really grave importance he would see her for a minute or two before the Lady Chapel. Mrs. Revington asked to be shown the way to the Lady Chapel; and the verger with a little bow, went on before her, led the way up the stairs from the transept, opened the iron gate at the top, and conducted her down the narrow aisle behind the presbytery and the sacrarium, and turning round at the back of the reredos, bade her to wait there till his lordship came. He continued his

walk at the back of the reredos, and turning the corner was lost to sight.

The organ ceased as Mrs. Revington, left by herself, looked through the rough wooden screen of Norwegian oak into the chapel with its elaborate altar and its many shields. Her eyes shone with a sudden satisfaction of artistic craving. Here was perfection, and what mattered it how many lives of slaves had paid the toll for it? The beautiful perpendicular work of the fine windows, the richness of the tracery, the noble columns climbing from their solemn bases, pausing at their deep-carved capitals, wrought by early English hands, and then branching out into the glory and exultation of the vaulting, filled her soul with rapture at the sense of human achievement, and joy in a gratification of the mind's most lovely dreams. Here was perfection, here in the little easternmost bay of this tremendous fane, hidden like a precious jewel behind and below the glittering reredos—where priests celebrated the most mysterious and elaborate rite of Catholic worship—hidden like a shrine for artists and men of letters who reach the Eternal through no sacrifice, but through the ecstasy and the triumph of beauty.

The sound of a heavy step approaching from the processional aisle on the south caught her ear, roused her from her moment's delight, and she turned from the screen just as the Bishop appeared round the corner of the reredos, carrying her letter in his hand. He raised his eyes, and scrutinized her face. There was no welcome in those cold steadfast eyes of pale blue, no courtesy and benignity in the severe lines of his countenance. Like a judge surveying for a moment the prisoner he is about to send to the gallows, the great Bishop regarded the beautiful woman standing

beside the Lady Chapel, and showed her neither pity nor human kindness only, law and judgment.

For a moment she flinched, and the blood ran cold in her veins. Intimidate this man! she might as hopefully seek to menace the north wind, or turn the rod of destiny. From the moment when he first appeared before her he had never taken his gaze from her face, and at every step of his approach it seemed to her that he was penetrating further into the secrecy of her soul and dragging out into the light of day the rags of her contrition and the tatters of her shame. She, thus naked and ashamed before him, was to break with her weak woman's hands into the impenetrable crypt of his mind and struggle to make him confess with those merciless lips of his that he was guilty of something of which she had no proof wherewith to confute him if he lied. Lie! yes, she felt that this old man would lie boldly and with a face of stone, knowing now that she was powerless to hurt him.

"You are Mrs. Revington?" he said, pausing before her. The deep voice seemed to awaken every echo in that deserted corner of the church. "You wish to speak to me?" For a moment the eyes dropped to the letter, but instantly were raised again to scrutinize her face.

She recovered her self-possession, and not trusting herself to fence with him, answered immediately: "Concerning the Sacred Society of Nicodemus."

She saw the shadow across his face, noticed that the freshness of his pink skin seemed to die out on the instant, and took heart of grace for the task which was before her.

"I can give you a few minutes," replied the Bishop, and his voice was without emotion of any kind.

"That should be sufficient, I think," she answered, looking at him under her level eyebrows.

"Will you kindly proceed?"

There was no gracious light in this part of the cathedral. All was cold and grey, silent and deserted. As her eyes wandered from the Bishop's scrutiny, Mrs. Revington saw on every side of her many an "In piam memoriam" and "Hic jacet," and a sense of the desolation of hopes and vanities once more overcame her. She felt ashamed to state her case—the case on which her whole life's happiness and her daughter's security depended—it seemed, in that awful coldness and stillness, and beside all those solemn mortuary chests and tombs of sullen stone—so trivial, so mean, so vulgar, and so base. And yet to a woman of her nature such a conviction of shame acts, after the first shock of its realization, as whip and spur to her enterprise, urging her into a resentful boldness and an angry determination to win. To be made to feel shameful is often a woman's first excuse for precipitate and dangerous courses.

"I need not say more," she said, raising her eyes to his, "than this, that I should be glad if Lady Harriet would call upon me, and grateful if you will allow me to do what little I can to assist the work of the diocese."

His brows clouded with mystification. "I do not understand your meaning," he said.

"Believe me I am trying to achieve my object without any painful preamble concerning the Society of Nicodemus. I wish to be received by you and Lady Harriet. I ask you to receive me. It would hurt me to put that request in any cruder manner."

He folded her letter between his fingers, his head slightly bent, his eyes still searching her face. "I

confess myself still in the dark," he said. "You want Lady Harriet to call upon you? Will you tell me for what purpose?"

"My lord," she answered, softening her voice, "I have a daughter. She has been educated abroad for many years, and has a singular charm, a great personality. In a few weeks she will return to England. It is my desire that she should find her mother in a society which will be congenial to her talents. About my own wishes in the matter, about my own weariness of the world, I will not speak; that would not appeal to you perhaps. But at least I should like you to know that Lady Harriet will not find me with the same tastes and inclinations which were objectionable to my husband. Need I say any more? I am venturing to put a little force upon you, but for a good end. If I desire that you and Lady Harriet should presently announce to the world that I am not the monster I have been painted, it is not to deceive the world. I am tired of my surroundings, and recognize the worth of those I threw away. For my child's sake, and for my own, I wish to return, and some one must open the door for me."

The Bishop had listened with marked attention to her words, twisting and untwisting the paper in his hands, and never taking his eyes from off her face. He had seen that under those strange low eyebrows that were without curve or arch, the eyes of the mother had softened as she spoke of her child with a genuine emotion. "I am still in the dark," he said, a little gruffly.

"On what point?" she inquired, a sudden hardening in her manner.

"Your right to make me society's doorkeeper," he retorted.

Mrs. Revington shrugged her shoulders a little: "I mentioned to you the name of a Society which I hoped might serve as my Open Sesamé."

His eyes flinched for a moment. "You mentioned the name of a Society," he said; "yes?"

She watched him narrowly. "Do I understand," she inquired, "that you wish me to be cruder?"

"To be more explicit," he corrected, with a little acerbity.

She shrugged her shoulders again. "As your lordship well knows, I think," she said, quietly, "the affairs of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus are secret."

The old man could not but admire the delicacy of this stroke. He began to appreciate the woman for herself and to fear her, as much for her own ability as for any dread knowledge she might possess concerning his secret. And yet he could not, he dared not, acknowledge to her for an instant that she held any power over him. The theologian who had met the great Sir Frederick Mayor in controversy tremble before the woman of the world! Edmund Revington had been a devoted servant of the Society; possibly among his papers she had discovered some reference to himself. But how much did she know? What documents did she possess? He must feel his way with her. It never occurred to him—solely because of Edmund Revington's close connexion with the Society, and therefore the extreme likelihood of her having discovered some of its secrets among his papers—that hers might have been the hand that had got possession of the membership book.

"I believe you are right," he said; "the affairs of the Society are secret."

"To speak about them is therefore dangerous."

"Yet you have approached the subject," he retorted.

"But with one who will respect the secrecy," she answered.

He was silenced for a moment. One of the vergers came round the corner of the reredos, looked at them for a moment—evidently anxious that he should let the Bishop know how time was passing—and then retired. The Bishop grew restive.

"Your husband," he said quickly, "was interested in the work of the Society at one time of his life."

"At the beginning of your friendship with him—yes," she replied.

"From the fact of that intimacy—which a scrap of paper might disclose—you appear to me to have reached some mysterious assumption which you consider will influence my judgment in a social matter. I am groping in the dark, and my time is brief, but I think I have stated your case."

"With accuracy," she replied; "but the scrap of paper plays the subsidiary part of a clue. It is from a book obtained by means of the scrap of paper that I reached not an assumption, but the knowledge which I have ventured to hint to you."

She saw him start. "A book!" he exclaimed. "Speak plainly, please. What book?"

"The book which contains the reasons of the Society's existence, and the names of its members."

His heart was labouring in his bosom, and he found it difficult to control his voice. "I understand," he said, "that there is only one such book in existence."

"I was not aware of that, but I can understand it," she answered.

"If I am rightly informed that book is kept in safe hand's" he said.

"Do you know Father Vesey well?" she inquired, with a smile.

"Tell me what you mean," he said, thickly. "It is impossible to stand talking here any longer. What is it you are proposing to me? Why do you mention this Society to me? And—and—where is that book?"

She met his gaze. "In my possession," she said.

He watched her for a moment, keeping silence, his eyes heavy, his lips full of bitterness and pain. The east end of the church was darkening; the steps of the verger walking impatiently to and fro, and waking dull echoes, reached them from the sacristy. The Bishop stood there looking at the woman, and she watched him without emotion, sure now of her purpose.

"That book is in your possession?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Do you know how much money Father Vesey would pay for its recovery?"

She frowned a little. "I have been talking to you about my daughter," she said, coldly.

It seemed to him that in this reproof she reminded him of his commercial origin, and by her proud coldness had suddenly taken a place above him, and aloof from his powers of comprehension. Yet abashed as he was—thinking then of his son, and of his own opportunity of freedom—he leaned his head nearer to her and said bluntly: "I will give you five thousand pounds for that book. Those are my terms. Beyond that we can discuss nothing. I offer you five thousand pounds for immediate possession of the book. Do you accept?"

"I forgive you," she said, haughtily. "But as you have rapped out your terms, so I will rap out mine."

"I give you a week, my lord, for Lady Harriet's visit to Ladywell."

With one proud look which enhanced the strength and character of her face, Mrs. Revington turned and left him. He watched her with astonished eyes, amazed by the sudden scorn and fierceness of her manner, and informed for the first time during this interview of the powerful and relentless mind with which he had come to grips. Then the horror of his position broke over his soul and overwhelmed him. As her figure passed out of sight, he felt suddenly giddy; he staggered a little, and stretching out his arms caught the pillars of the screen to the Lady Chapel, and steadied himself there, his eyes staring and straining at the altar. For a moment it was difficult for him to breathe, and a sensation of blood in his nostrils and his throat made him feel sick and numb. But not for long could that vigorous brain be dazed and without power. In a minute the fit had passed, and a deep breath restored the clearness of the brain and the regularity of the heart's beat. He stooped down, picked up the letter which had fallen from his hands, and marched slowly away to the sacristy. As he went he was surprised to find his brain unconsciously pestering itself to recall some words which his eyes had seen, rather than read, above the altar in the Lady Chapel as he stood there clutching the screen in that brief moment of faintness. He shook off this irrational perplexity, and addressed his thoughts to the problem before him. As he did so, the verger came forward with his hat and gloves, and just at that moment the forgotten words leaped suddenly into his mind—

Tribularet Si Nescirem Misericordias Tuas.

CHAPTER IX

THE BISHOP'S EMISSARY

TWO days after her encounter with the Bishop, Mrs. Revington was in the drawing-room of Ladywell, adding to the bowls and vases—like the last strokes of a master's brush—touches of sweet flowers which she had just gathered from the garden. She wore a broad-brimmed hat of golden straw, with a band of black velvet round its narrow crown, and at its side a cluster of pink roses; her dress was all of white muslin, decorated with green and silver buttons, and having a broad band of white satin round her waist, in which she had fastened a yellow and a red rose. A scarf of cream lace was bound round her neck, and hung, like a stole, over her breast down to her knees. At her throat she wore a large old-fashioned amethyst brooch, and in her ears two handsome pearls; a gold chain was suspended from her neck with a bunch of charms at the end. Her skirt was short enough to disclose high-heeled brown shoes with silver buckles, and openwork brown stockings of the finest silk. She had a pair of garden gloves over her hands, and the scissors with which she had cut the flowers peeped out from among the roses in the basket carried in her hand as she moved about the room. In a word, she was a fashionable and beautiful woman, playing with the idea of a quasi-pastoral existence in the centre of a cathedral city; and thus arrayed, and quite at her

ease, she was preparing herself to receive a possible visit from the wife of that city's Bishop.

When her task was finished she glanced at the ormolu clock on a little French writing-desk near the window, and setting down her basket, and drawing off her gloves, seated herself before the table, like one who would employ spare moments before an important occasion by despatching a few conventional notes.

DEAR CHILD (she wrote)—Your last letter is very charming and nice, and it makes me look forward to the day (so soon coming now) when I shall cross to Normandy and bring you home. I will tell you, certainly, about your father; but what good M. Vermut says is quite true; from his books you will learn best to understand him. Still, do not think that you have not my sympathy in your desire to know about the father who loved you so dearly, and of whom your memories must be necessarily confused and indistinct. I am glad you are reading your father's books, though I am not sure that it is well for a young girl to concern herself too deeply with problems and mysteries. You are certainly clever, and I do not wish your intelligence to be kept back; but remember we live in a world which has duties and occupations, and that it is not often one has time to sit down and worry about the problems of existence. I have come to this pretty old city so that you shall not be plunged at once into the whirl of London, which would confuse and frighten you; it will be easier for you to begin your English existence here than in London, and I think you will be happy with me in our tiny cottage home. The people here are quiet and simple; the Bishop, I am sure,

you will like and respect, although he seems a little stern and his religious ideas are not those in which your father wished you to be educated by M. Vermut. The cathedral is beautiful, and we will often go and sit there and listen to the great organ. Now, dear Silvia, I must say adieu to you, and kiss your name after I have blotted it, just as I would, if I could, kiss your brow.

At this moment the bell of the little cottage tinkled, and Mrs. Revington, the pen suddenly plucked from the paper, her ears listening intently, straightened herself above the table, and waited. Her first visitor! At last, at last! Had Lady Harriet yielded to the Bishop's pressure? Had the Bishop really spoken to her at all? She had no evidence on which she might build her hopes. The Bishop had held no communication with her. In the morning, on her way to Minster Street, she had met Major Lister under one of the arches of the Close, but there had been nothing more in his pained and one-sided stare at her than the old, far-off, and silent manifestation of a secret sympathy. But now the bell had rung! Its echoes could still be heard—at least by her! In a minute the door would open, and her hopes be either realized, or, once more thrown back upon the sharp thorns of uncertainty. And if it were indeed the Bishop's wife, how should Mrs. Revington (armed here with no menace of the secret) conciliate and charm that autocrat of the schoolroom?

The door opened, and Mrs. Revington bent once more over her letter.

"Miss Jane Medlycote," said the servant.

With a stab of pain in her heart, Mrs. Revington laid down her pen and turned to the door. The next minute a feeling of pleasure ministered to and

overcame her hurt. She rose from the table and gave her hand to the quaintest character in Warborough Close, the old spinster who had passed her on the way to the Cathedral on that day when she went to face the Bishop.

"Pleased to meet you," said the thin spinster, her long crumpled and elastic lips going up in one place, down in another, and seeming, at one and the same time, to stretch themselves at their extremities and contract themselves at the point immediately under her thin nose. Her voice was pleasant and cultured. "Your hands are nice and cool; which is a sign of a good pulse and a sound digestion" she went on; and her narrow Eastern eyes twinkled with amusement as she nodded her head. "Some people's hands are painful, are they not? But that's by way of small talk. How do you like Warborough, and can I do anything to make you comfortable? Where shall I sit?—here?—very well; now that's very nice and friendly of you; my back to the window and your face to the light!"

The old lady smiled all over her faded yellow face, the small eyes vanishing in a pucker of finely wrinkled flesh. She sat with her feet far apart, the white stockings thrust full into view, an old-fashioned grey parasol laid like a mace across her knees. As she talked the lace frill round the edge of her black hat bobbed and trembled.

Mrs. Revington, fingering her charms at the end of her neck chain, said that she liked Warborough very much. "I was writing to my daughter when you came," she said, "telling her about the place."

"And the people?" snapped Miss Medlycote, with a broad grin. To herself she said, "This clever woman has a voice like an angel."

"I do not know the inhabitants," smiled Mrs. Revington.

"You don't mean to tell me you filled a letter to a young girl with descriptions of Norman pillars, transitional arches, and stuffy tombs? Fiddlesticks! My dear lady, you have been poking fun at us. You described Lady Harriet's cracked lips, Miss Violet's sniff, and Jane Medlycote's old hat. You have been laughing; I can see you have."

"I assure you, no."

"Well, add a postscript and make the little girl laugh. Now, do. Tell her you have seen the first native. A mad old spinster, sixty-three last birthday, and vulgar as a tradesman. All letters should be scandalous. Truth is *au fond du puits*, not in a lady's ink pot, and pens are not buckets. Gossip, I hold, is the stuff of correspondence. All the great letter-writers," she continued, her eyes wandering round the room and seeing everything, "were gossips. Only in books, dear lady, are letters written about architecture and theology. And if you want gossip I can supply you. There is nothing about Warborough that I do not know. We have lived here for three hundred years, highly respected, always virtuous, generally solvent, and, with brief interludes, sane; and now I am the last pear on the old tree. Old Jane Medlycote! Sleepy, a little sleepy, but still hanging. Put that in a postscript and end up with two marks of exclamation, one for you and one for me."

She smiled and twinkled, rocking herself to and fro, and running her sunshade up and down her lap, like a rolling pin.

"I shall be grateful for gossip," said Mrs. Revington, smiling. "I cannot conceive of your gossip ever being

dull, or very unkind." Her fingers, heavy with rings, gently lifted up and down the gold chain that hung round her neck.

The old lady smiled and bobbed, folded her hands, in their grey cotton gloves, and leaned forward. "At present," she said, as though telling a state secret, "all the gossip is about you. In fact there's a breeze just now, a distinct draught. Do you take me, ma'am? Warborough is the tea-cup; and you are the storm. Wherever I go I hear the same thing. 'What does Mrs. Revington want with Warborough?' That is the question. Warborough, you must understand, does not worry itself with To be, or Not to Be, and suchlike; it is strictly Christian; but it does ask itself what the fashionable and beautiful Mrs. Revington wants in the Close."

"Shall I give you the answer?" smiled Mrs. Revington.

"If you will be so kind?"

"Peace."

Miss Medlycote sat back in her chair. "You won't get it," she said.

"You don't quite understand," corrected Mrs. Revington, smiling.

"You won't get it," repeated Jane Medlycote; "*tant s'en faut!* Peace is the last thing which anybody will find in Warborough. Let me recommend Patmos or Tokyo. Peace! rooty-too-too! why Warborough is a beehive humming with tittle-tattle. Everybody is in somebody else's garden gathering gossip; our noses, our hands, our legs, and our feet are loaded with that pollen. We live on it."

"Still, you do not understand," said Mrs. Revington with a smile.

"I'm an old fool then," cried Jane Medlycote,

sitting back in her chair. "But my mind keeps open house; you shall enlighten me. I am always open to illumination. How pretty you've made this room, to be sure. But that's nothing. Now, explain."

Mrs. Revington took her little lace handkerchief, which was scented with violets, into her hands, and lifted it as if to examine its workmanship. "The peace I speak of, does not come from individuals," she said, suddenly, raising her eyes to Miss Medlycote's face; "but from environment, from walls and fields and gardens. Do you know what I mean? I did not come to Warborough either to stir its tea-cup or to swell the chorus of its tattle."

"You don't want to know us, you mean?" asked Jane, with a shrewd scrutiny of Mrs. Revington's face. "Now, that is a pity, I declare it is," she went on, observing the other closely. "I came here expressly to ask you to tea to-morrow afternoon, to meet Lady Harriet."

The charms rattled for an instant at the end of Mrs. Revington's chain, as they slipped over her lap. She stooped for a moment, took them into her hand, and looked with a smile into Miss Medlycote's face. "Is Lady Harriet one of the bees, then, one of the gossips?"

"To do her justice, she is not," answered Jane with a sharp nod of her head, appreciative of a good stroke.

"Then I shall be delighted to meet her," said Mrs. Revington, amiably.

Jane Medlycote sat back in her chair. "Clever! clever!" she said. "Yes, you're clever, and just for the present I can't see my way to you. Forgive honesty, but you seem to me like one of those nursery maps, beautifully coloured and boldly printed, but with only the big cities marked on them—Paris,

Vienna, Petersburg, London, and Rome; there's nothing there, I mean, to suggest villages, and hedges, and ponds, and chicken coops, and gardens where people take tea under the trees and put breadcrumbs on their windowsills for the robins and wrens; and yet, here you are in Ladywell, all by yourself, and with all the air of the world about you, beautiful, distinguished, charming and most perplexing, saying that you want peace!"

It came to Mrs. Revington that she should trust this friendly old spinster. In the streets of the town she had seen her and instinctively liked her; only the other day on her way to the Cathedral she had felt that Silvia would love her; and now, well assured that in some way she must be there in Ladywell as an emissary from the palace, she felt strongly inclined to trust her with at least the fringe of her ambition, and so perhaps secure the good office of her friendship.

"I like you for talking to me so candidly," she said, laughing prettily, and speaking in an almost caressing tone; "it is pleasant and refreshing, and it constrains frankness. Let me be a nursery map, then. One likes to know the impression one makes as one goes through the world, and a fellow-being, if honest, is better than many mirrors. Is it not so, Miss Medlycote? At any rate, as the old proverb has it, *souçon est d'amitié poison!* And, please believe me, I should like you to try my friendship: if you will—I should like you to test it, and see if it is worth anything. Of one thing I am sure," she went on quickly, "however much you may disagree with me, your friendship will flourish with my daughter, and she will relish you exceedingly; you two will be friends."

"My dear lady," answered Jane Medlycote, blinking, "I have no doubt your daughter is the most pleasant young person on two feet; but, if you will allow me to say so, it is not about her I want to hear, it is about you. This is the first time of asking, and I don't want you to go too far. We shall meet again, and before the nuptials of friendship are reached, you will have ample time to say 'Not at home, to Jane Medlycote,' which will be equivalent to returning the ring, and all will be over between us, without a breach of promise. But at least, tell me, *what* kind of peace it is you are seeking in Warborough, and *why* you have hit upon this town—where apparently you know no one—for that purpose? It is this *What* and that *Why* which are making life and conversation in Warborough just at present perfectly unendurable to quiet Christians."

"With love and gladness, which is how polite people in the East, I believe, answer such requests," replied Mrs. Revington, smiling agreeably. "I come to a place where I know nobody," she went on, "because I desire to be quiet, first with myself, and then with my daughter. Do you think," she added, regarding Jane's puzzled face with serious eyes, "that a woman is always in the same mood, year after year: that the woman who lives the life of London is never dissatisfied, never a little tired? Change, nowadays, seems to me to be regarded as something of an offence. Consistency is the universal virtue. Surely the prodigal son would have been blamed, had he lived to-day, for deserting his pigs."

"And as for the Magdalen," cut in Jane Medlycote, "she would have been put in a laundry to scrub clothes at eight shillings a week."

Mrs. Revington paused, and examined Jane's

face again, before she went on. "For myself," she said, with a slight shrug of her shoulders, lifting the ends of her lace scarf and turning them over in her hands, "I am tired of London, and tired of the people I meet there. I am growing old, too, which is another matter. One can get fatigued. The body as well as the brain has its ennui, and its rebellion. Then again—if you will let me mention my little girl once more—I am very anxious that Silvia, that is her name, should not come straight from the extreme simplicity of her childhood's surroundings—she has lived abroad, I must tell you, for nearly ten years—to the confusion and racket of London life. She is a girl out of the common; her mind has nothing in it of the second-rate: she has the taste and the genius for quiet and simplicity."

"Your daughter?"

"My daughter."

"Humph! Well now, let me think. Yes, I understand what you have said; very good, very natural, very creditable of you. But, just one thing. Why Warborough?"

There was a moment's flicker of Mrs. Revington's apparently half-closed eyes—those wonderful quiet, dusk-hidden eyes so often and so ardently admired, but in which no man had yet read the first page in the volume of her love—and then she leaned a little forward, and her lips parted, and she said in a voice that expressed the shade of a hurt displeasure: "Forgive me, but will you tell me what it is you suspect me of?"

"I! My dear ma'am, I suspect you of nothing. Oh, that is true, I promise you. But, do you not see, one is mystified? Everybody here is mystified. If you kept your windows a wee bit wider open, and

Ladywell was just a leetle nearer to the Close, you would hear one question repeated from morning to night, till you were nearly wild with it, *Why Warborough?* ”

“I am glad I create so much attention! But the answer is unexciting, I fear. It is this: because I could think of no city which would be quite so pleasant to Silvia. I thought of Winchester—too near to London; of Salisbury—such a cold cathedral, with acquaintances of mine all round to pester us with invitations; then of Warborough—with its monuments, its history, its river, and—its famous Bishop. *Why Warborough? Let me ask rather, Why not Warborough?* ”

So the cross-examination of Mrs. Revington by Jane Medlycote went on, and presently ended; and then that notable spinster, just as tea was brought in by the staring butler on Mrs. Revington's finest silver tray, rose with a sudden jump to go. No, she would not take tea, on any account; she was going to the palace to see Lady Harriet; half-past four, please, to-morrow afternoon, at the Manor House, and tea would be served in the garden; very kind of Mrs. Revington to come; hands a little warmer now, but still nice and cool and dry—a great thing that; and then, “Good-bye, ma'am, good-bye, pleased to have met you.”

When Mrs. Revington sat down to her lonely tea there was good company in her heart, gay thoughts, with a rakish, swaggering air of triumph; strong thoughts, smiling over an astute move in diplomacy; bright thoughts, imaginative thoughts, ambitious, resolute, and gallant thoughts, anticipating and carrying out in airy magnificence the victory and the glory of a return to her lost world. She was not alone at tea. She was the best of company, the happiest of friends.

The Bishop, she said to herself, that hard old man, that proud and stone-hearted old man, who (for she did not know the whole truth) was a Roman Catholic masquerading as a dignitary of the English Church, had lowered his colours and capitulated to her, at the first assault. He was delivered into her hands, bound hand and foot. She had triumphed! Sweet is victory, and for an intellectual woman there is scarcely any sensation offered by the world so sweet, so intoxicating, as that of victory over men who are both strong and great. He was in her power—this proud old man, with his face of rock and his eyes of steel. He was hers to command—this genie of the lamp that illumines aristocracy. Where would she not compel him to lead her? Lady Harriet!—the lowest rung on the ladder of her ascent to Paradise; was not the Bishop the darling of the Court? The Court? Ah, could she not imagine the next turn of the screw! The Bishop's forced whisper in the Queen's ear, the Queen's remark to the Duchess of Hampshire, the Duchess of Hampshire's conversation with Lady Durley, and then, Sesame and Lilies, Sesame and Lilies!

And while Mrs. Revington pictured and dreamed to herself the triumph heralded by a visit from old Jane Medlycote, that good soul was drinking tea with Lady Harriet and Violet Lister. "Yes," she said, "I like her; I really do like her; but, my dear ma'am, I wouldn't trust her a yard."

"I cannot understand, Jane," exclaimed Lady Harriet, tea-cup in hand, the colour fading from her cheeks, "how the Bishop can stretch his Christianity so far as to wish me to countenance the woman for a single moment." She wore a flat piece of lace on her hair.

"There I am with the Bishop, ma'am," said Jane, watching Lady Harriet closely. "Religion has its forms, and charity is one of them. You may not be able to feel charity for this person and for that, but if you go so far as to cut them when they are living under your bedroom window, so to speak, you are not observing the forms of religion, and you are giving the dissenters cause to blaspheme."

Violet simpered, and raised her eyebrows.

Jane turned her narrow eyes on the girl: "How many people, Miss, do you shake hands with, wishing they were under the sea? We all dislike each other, but we keep up the forms of civilization; we're obliged to; the world expects it of us, and religion enjoins it. Don't sniff again at my opinions; it makes my tea cold."

Lady Harriet smiled. "Yes, I know, Jane," she said; "but do you think this—this—may I say *repentance*?—is sincere?"

"Yes and no, ma'am," answered Jane, after swallowing some tea with a loud noise, and thrusting the empty cup into Violet's hand that she might put it down upon the table. "Mrs. What-d'you-may-call-her is tired of London, bodily and mentally; not spiritually. Her repentance, as far as I can poke my nose into it, is social and intellectual. It smells of drawing-rooms, and not of pews. She is bored. She repents because vulgar people cease to amuse her. Then there is this daughter of hers. I don't know what to say on that point. It seems to me—yes, I really think it does—it seems to me that she wants to give this girl a chance. I like her for that. I was sitting in a draught, but my heart warmed when she mentioned the child, and I hate children—they're insincere little hypocrites. She was writing to the

girl when I arrived, and there was a box of flowers addressed to her on the table ; and the good lady told me, with a sparkle in her eyes, that there was nothing second-rate about this Silvia. I liked that. It rang truer than the rest."

"That, of course, is my chief justification for noticing her," said Lady Harriet, gratefully. She sat back in her high chair, pursed her dry lips, and emptied crumbs from the folds of her silk skirt upon the tea-tray in front of her. "When the Bishop asked me to call, on the ground of Christian neighbourliness, I most sternly refused. For the first time in my life," she continued, sadly and, alas, most untruthfully, "I found myself obliged to refuse a request made to me by my husband. He told me that among the clergy there was a feeling of uneasiness at seeing a lady living under the shadow of the Cathedral walls ostracized and banned. To that I replied with firmness, that to countenance Mrs. Revington would be to countenance social wickedness and worldly vanity—if nothing worse. This has always been his own opinion in these matters, but apparently age weakens the resolution of the will. He told me that he thought people considered we were indulging a personal grudge against the woman, because of our friendship with Edmund Revington, rather than showing that we set our faces against social licence in general."

"And that is no doubt the general opinion," said Jane, stooping to pat one of Lady Harriet's Aberdeen terriers.

"I am sorry it should be so," replied Lady Harriet, raising her eyebrows, "for I had hoped that people knew us better."

"So they do, ma'am," said Jane, crumpling up her lips ; "but they love to see a speck on your robes now

and then, just to convince them that you are earthly." She turned and smiled upon Violet. "People are children, Violet," she said, nodding her head briskly; "most of them, nasty children; but we must make allowance, my dear, for our own comfort! *On peut mépriser le monde, mais on ne peut pas s'en passer.* My accent is in good form to-day; it made a deep impression, I assure you, on the prisoner in the dock over at Ladywell." She turned to Lady Harriet: "Well, ma'am?"

"I was saying, Jane," said the Bishop's wife, "that I maintained my ground till the Bishop appealed to me on the score of this child. He told me that when the woman, with a courage which I *hope* was inspired by maternal affection, and nothing lower, stopped him in the Cathedral, reminded him of his friendship with Edmund Revington, and said she was anxious to undertake work of some kind in the diocese, that she spoke so respectfully of her daughter that he really could not help feeling a moment's pity for her. Now, I do not at all wish to visit the sins of the mother upon the child; that is not Christianity; and after all, it is Edmund Revington's child of whom we are speaking. For her sake, I told the Bishop, I would break up the ostracism, but, I said, I really must wait and see if the woman is truly repentant of her past before I make any overtures in the smallest degree in the nature of friendship. I think I am justified in that. I feel I have gone a *great* way, a very great way, in asking you to call and see her, and invite her to tea so that I may inspect her before sending a card to Ladywell. I am astonished, in fact, that I should have gone so far. I detest the woman, and I abominate her habits. But for my duty here as the Bishop's wife, and for the sake of example, I assure you that I

should never have dreamed of paying her the smallest attention."

Jane, in her brisk fashion, gripping her parasol, rose to go. "As far as I am concerned," she said, "I forgive her her trespasses against society with my whole heart; but if she ever trespasses against me, woe betide her; I'll blow in her face, I declare I will. For the present I have asked her to tea to-morrow, and she is coming—with love and gladness, as she says."

"You did not say that we were coming?" inquired Lady Harriet, suspiciously.

"My dear Ma'am," exclaimed Jane, extending her hand, the fingers of which Lady Harriet touched quite pleasantly; "I am not so flat as my hat. Good-bye to you."

"Mamma," said Violet, with a smile in her shallow light eyes, "would it not be a good opportunity to leave cards at Ladywell after Mrs. Revington has started for the Manor House? We should miss her, then, and we could be out to her when she returns the call."

Jane Medlycote looked at the girl, and her lips worked ominously.

"I leave no card on Mrs. Revington," replied Lady Harriet, "until I have inspected her for myself."

"Violet," said Jane Medlycote, "I was going to give you to-morrow an old silver Charles the Second porringer, which hasn't its twin in the two continents. I shan't now. You've been nasty. Paul shall have it, as a gift of welcome. So there!"

"But I thought," protested Violet, with a quick cunning, "that you yourself disliked Mrs. Revington. You *said* you distrusted her."

"So I did, and so I do, but I am an old woman," replied Jane. "You are young, and I want to see you nice to people. That's the way to make them

better. You must like Mrs. Revington, and you must be very kind to her daughter; then you shall have the porringer. To-morrow I will show it to you just to keep you on your best behaviour."

On her way through the hall Jane Medlycote said to herself, "I did not tell a story, not a single one; I am pleased with my dear old self." As a footman was about to open the door for her, the Bishop made his appearance.

"Ah, dear Jane Medlycote!" he exclaimed, as if the meeting were unexpected; "you have been here, and I have missed you! I am too late for you. You are going. But just one word with you, please. Well?" he asked; drawing her to one side, and bending down his heavy head, "well? Is it going pleasantly?"

"*Le vent du bureau est bon!*" answered Jane, twinkling up into the face of the Bishop, whom she most sincerely loved. "They'll meet at tea to-morrow in my garden. Don't worry any more. It only wants a little tact and a little patience to manage these knots and tangles. How are you? You aren't looking quite so well as I could wish to see you. We must wait for that, I suppose, till Paul comes back?"

"Ah!" cried the Bishop, with a sudden light in his face. "That will be a great day for all of us, won't it? Our boy, eh? But many thanks to you, dear Jane Medlycote, for your kindness to that poor lonely woman. I feel sorry for her—I feel sorry for her. Let us all try and live in love and charity with our neighbours as long as we can."

He smiled again, shook her hand warmly, and then turned to the staircase. "Thank God!" he said to himself, as he mounted the stairs with heavy tread, "thank God!—thank God!" But his face was stricken and grey.

CHAPTER X

JACK PRIEST *VERSUS* FINANCIER

THE Mission ruled over by Father Severn was in the nature of a monastic establishment. Its clergy were bound by a solemn oath to celibacy, and the lay brothers were subjected to all the rigours of a religious order. In a big barrack of a building, grimy and dirty, this company of fasting and prayerful men lived in the midst of London slums, preaching in the streets, visiting in the homes of the poor, waiting at prison gates, attending at hospitals, and going down into the very mud and garbage of the city to rescue the fallen and the unhappy.

There was no doubt about their earnestness. They might love at night to discuss among themselves the puerilities of ritual, to wear hair shirts, and during Lent and on every Friday to flog themselves with the Discipline, like silly children ; but in the streets and slums of the town they were recognized and hailed by the people as the friends of the poor ; and man after man, and woman after woman, did they rescue from infamy and folly, giving them in their hearts, in place of a vice, an altar at which they might attempt to worship God.

It is inherent in the London poor to be suspicious of the moral rich, and to have an unbounded admiration and respect for pomp and show. This disposition,

almost a paradox, finds itself satisfied by religious orders in which the vow of poverty goes hand in hand with an extravagant exaggeration of the circumstance of the Romish ritual. The English monk, in his corded dust-blown habit and his shabby sandals, makes a picture at their street corners; and when every hooligan hails him cheerfully by name, and tells a mate that Father Badger—who does not drink nor smoke and lives for the most part on bread and vegetables, and has not a penny of his own—is a fine referee of a boxing competition and a good fellow at the club, then we may be sure that the monk is well on his way to popularity with the hard-living poor. And when this same monk is seen on Sunday standing before a glittering altar, being clothed there by soft-footed priests with garments of white and gold, while the organ sounds, and one of the boys of the slums, dressed like a cherub, swings a censer behind the priest, and fills the church with an odour dear to uneducated sensibilities, is it altogether unnatural that it comes gradually into the gratified minds of the poor people gaping admiringly on all this pomp and mystery, and listening to words which have no meaning for their brains, that the poor monk of the street corner is somehow or another the trusted priest of God, and holds in his hands their own poor shoddy and drabble-tail chances of an easy and restful time in the life to come?

Father Severn sat in his private study at the Mission—a room which was more like an office with its grey distempered walls, its oilcloth, and its deal tables—talking with Father Vesey. The work of reconstituting the Sacred Society of Nicodemus was giving him much thought, and absorbing all his attention. His clergy of the Mission, and a few of his lay-brothers, were also

members of this secret society, and he was able to discuss with them every day the mole-like operations of its diplomacy. They, who would thus confer with him in the evening, were now doing the local work of the Mission by day, but he himself was devoting every hour of his time to the crisis which had so suddenly arisen in the affairs of the Society.

Like Father Faber, the famous vicar of Elton, who afterwards became a priest of the Brompton Oratory, Father Severn had been to Rome, had prostrated himself before the Pope, and had kissed the Papal toe. He had prayed at the shrine of St. Aloysius the Jesuit, and was as well known in the English College at Rome as in the Roman Catholic circle at Westminster. It was, perhaps, the master-stroke of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus, which worked chiefly in Evangelical parishes sapping in secret the foundations of Protestantism, and leaving the Ritualists entirely to themselves, that it should have for its head a man who was regarded even by the Ritualists as a too bold champion for corporate re-union with Rome. No one would have suspected that the humble curates all over England who modestly and with a careful deference suggested to their old-fashioned Low Church incumbents some slight advance in the character of the church services, and went about in the houses of the parish uttering cunning tolerance for the High Church party, and leaving books and tracts secretly issued by the Sacred Society of Nicodemus, in the name of Protestantism, which sorrowed over the "dissidence of dissent" and sighed for the day when Christ should put an end to the schisms of Anti-Christ—no one would have suspected, I say, that these unsuspecting Low Church curates—so little more advanced,

apparently, than their old vicars and rectors—were directed by the notorious Romanist, Father Severn, who, as every one knew, was conducting a fantastic Mission somewhere in the south-east quarter of London.

The movement of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus was designed, then, to break down very gradually and in secret the traditions of Protestantism, and to prepare England for entertaining the idea of visible and corporate re-union with Rome. As Father Desanctis said of the work of Pusey, so the diplomatists in the English College at Rome said of this Society: "Puseyism is a living testimony to the necessity of Catholicism in the midst of our enemies; it is a worm at the root which, skilfully nourished by our exertions, will waste Protestantism till it is destroyed."

For many years we have known of Societies in the English Church such as the Order of Corporate Re-union, which attests its loyalty to the Pope and prays for him in the secret synod: the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, which has Requiem Masses for souls in purgatory, teaches, one understands, the "Eucharistic Sacrifice," and publishes confidential "Intercession Papers": and the Society of St. Osmund which published a book called *The Ceremonial of the Altar*, in which the priest is told to bow at the name of Mary, in which the Pope is prayed for, and in which the priest, in administering extreme unction, is commanded: *Wash your fingers, and let the sick man drink the ablution*. In a word, there are many semi-secret Societies whose only reason for existence is to overcome the work of the Reformation; but all these Societies are ritualistic, and for the most part do not pretend that they admire the English position or feel any repugnance for the appalling mediaevalism of the

Roman See. The Sacred Society of Nicodemus, on the other hand—seeing how the leaders and members of these extreme Societies went over to Rome one after another, and thus justified the enmity of the Evangelicals—came into existence with the cold and resolute pulse of an age-long propaganda, to work in the most complete and absolute secrecy for a slow, unnoticed, but eternal destruction of Protestantism ; its members impossible of making a sensation and raising a panic among the Evangelicals by going over to Rome, for the very excellent reason that they were all members of the Roman Catholic Community.

Father Vesey was, for the moment, discussing his own personal affairs with the master of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus. "I have not been very well," he said. "This dreadful disaster has upset me. I should like you to tell me, then, if you will be so kind, whether I ought to use the Discipline every day?"

"Which Discipline do you use?" demanded Father Severn.

"The one which Pusey described as being 'of a very sacred character, five cords, each with five knots, in memory of the five wounds of our Lord.'"

"Till you are better, wear hair-cloth night and day, and use the Discipline only on Fridays."

"Thank you. You are sure that will be sufficient?"

"You will know for yourself. If your soul is still rebellious, wear the Barbed Heart¹ for an hour a day."

After a pause: "I am glad to say I have managed to induce another lady in my parish since I last saw

¹ "A maze of wire the size of the palm of one's hand, upon one side of which barbs project, finer than the ends of the barbed fences of our fields."—*Westminster Gazette*, 1896.

you to use the Discipline," said Father Vesey, rolling his eyes round his spectacles. "She learned wonderfully quickly to feel a contempt for Evangelicalism, but it required great tact to make her see the beauties of ancient Church practices." Now, however, it is very difficult to prevent her from embracing the True Church."

"See that she does not wrest secrets from you!" said the master, darkly; and Father Vesey lowered his head and was silent.

At this moment came a knock at the door, and Brother Tossell—whom we saw at the Bishop's garden-party, after waiting till Father Severn had bawled a loud "Come in," opened the door noiselessly and cautiously, and thrust in his little head. "If you please, Father, a gentleman to see you," he murmured, with a weak smile, his eyes going from Severn to Vesey, and from Vesey to Severn.

"His name?"

"He said it was private business, Father, and very important."

"He refused his name, do you mean?"

"Yes, Father. He's in a motor car, a big one."

"Show him in."

Father Vesey gathered himself up. "Shall I withdraw?" he inquired.

"Wait in the next room," replied Father Severn, rubbing his big hands over his bullet head, and standing up to receive this new visitor—this gentleman who had called to see him in a motor car.

As Father Vesey went out of one door, Brother Tossell knocked at the other, and in obedience to Father Severn's summons opened the door and admitted Mr. Spencer Purvis.

The financier was determined to use the knowledge he had abstracted from Mrs. Revington's muff for the advancement of his latest ambition, a seat in the House of Commons. A General Election was drawing near; before he could present himself to a constituency, it was necessary for him to interest the serious public in his personality; subscriptions to hospitals were overdone; he must hit on something new; something moral and fresh and vigorous. So it was that the rôle he had determined on was that of a champion of Protestantism. He would bring out this weekly paper of his, which should serve the interests of his bucket-shop, get its great and permanent audience by the most daring of social scandals, and—for its first great "boom"—attract the universal attention of the serious public by its exposure of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus. "Rome's priests in the Church of England!" What a panic! What a "boom!"

But Mr. Purvis was somewhat in the dark about religious affairs, and did not quite know the exact value of his secret nor how best to make use of his knowledge. He was shrewd enough to know that where there was secrecy there was something wrong, and possibly reward for the discoverer. But religion was out of his country, and he had no one to consult in the matter. Mrs. Revington, to his great annoyance, was fled out of London—gone without telling him her whereabouts. To consult a journalist, or, indeed, any one, would have been, perhaps, to lose his secret; and this wily and astute financier was, above all things, suspicious of his fellow-men; he trusted no man, which was one of the reasons, perhaps, why he had escaped the Old Bailey. He was one of those confirmed rogues who swear that all men are naturally bad, and will laugh at an oppo-

site opinion. He would have suspected the motives of St. Francis of Assisi, and have seen good cause for scepticism in the devotion of Socrates to a pure ideal.

He had determined, then, to come to the man whom he had learned from this stolen book was the head of a Society in the Church of England, which was working secretly in the interest of Rome, and to learn direct from him by subtlety and craft what this membership book was really worth.

He came into the room, as was his wont, genially, and with the cheerful air of a man of the world. He was sprucely dressed; his close whiskers new clipped, his thick moustache trimmed, his reddish hair fresh from the shampooer's hands.

"Father Severn, I think?" he exclaimed, offering his hand, and turning his ear to the priest.

"And you, sir?" asked the master.

"Brown," said the financier.

Father Severn did not ask him to sit down, but Mr. Purvis took the least uncomfortable chair in the room, and with a good-humoured smile all over his red face, announced that he had called on business.

"Then you will not waste time," replied the huge monk, folding his arms, and studying his beaming visitor with a watchful frown.

Mr. Purvis had not expected to see a monk, and although Brother Tossell's dress had prepared him for a surprise, he found it difficult to believe that this bull-necked giant with the swarthy copper-coloured face and the close-clipped bullet head watching him so intently with those strange close-set chocolate-coloured eyes, was a member of what he was preparing himself to call from the hustings "the good, old-fashioned Church of England."

"Are you a member of the Church of England?" he asked, with a hearty smile.

"Most certainly."

"You are not a Roman Catholic?"

Father Severn's brow grew dark. "You said you were here on business," he said. "Be so good as to state it, and leave bad jokes for the street."

Mr. Purvis grinned again. "On my honour," he said, "I am quite serious"; and his eyes rested for a moment on the Zophim cross worn by the Master of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus.

"Then, to your business, sir," quoth Father Severn.

"I want you to tell me," said Mr. Purvis, crossing one of his short fat legs with some difficulty, "a few facts concerning that very interesting body of men, the Sacred Society of Nicodemus."

Any one might have supposed that he was putting a most ordinary question, and in quite an easy fashion, with no more serious object than a minute or two's gossip. But Father Severn detected far behind the smile in the little sandy eyes a strained watchfulness, and in the quickly and slightly canted head a determination not to lose a word of his reply. Here, then, said he, is the man who has discovered the secret of the Society. And with that knowledge there came a feeling of triumph and the zest of a fanatic.

"For what purpose?" he said.

"On my honour, my own enlightenment," replied Mr. Purvis.

"Mr. Brown must first enlighten me about himself?" said the priest.

"The dullest of commonplace fellows, I protest to you!" laughed Purvis; and his eyes buried themselves

in fat. "I spend my money freely, go to Church, say my prayers, and keep up the dignity of London life as well as my purse will allow me. Pah! a small man. One of London's millions; a drop in the ocean."

"And your address?"

"My address? Certainly, certainly: Hyde Park Mansions, a flat, a deucedly expensive flat, but comfortable and airy, and near life. You must come to dinner one night."

"Will you give me your card?"

"If I had my case, you should have the lot; but I am motoring out of London, and I travel light on these occasions. Yes, I leave everything of that nature behind me; letters, telegrams, cards and invitations. A cigar case, I assure you, is baggage enough for a busy man when he throws off the city for a few hours."

"You desire enlightenment concerning the Sacred Society of Nicodemus?"

"Yes; indeed I do."

"How did you hear of it?"

"In the most casual fashion imaginable!" replied Purvis, blinking his eyes, and stroking his knees. "A lady of my acquaintance mentioned that there was some such society, said that you were the head of it, and declared that the society was working in secret to convert the Church of England to Rome. I was interested; I confess, I was."

"Do I know the lady?"

"Ah!" laughed Mr. Purvis, wagging his head; "you want me to tell her name! That's hardly the thing, you know. No, no; we must respect the secrets of our pretty friends."

"She must be a singularly stupid woman," said Father Severn, contemptuously.

"On the contrary," laughed Purvis, "she is one of the most brilliant women in London."

"Then, a very wicked woman!" cried Severn.

"Ah, there I am with you. But, my dear sir, a woman, a woman!"

"I have no intention of telling you anything I may know about this religious Society," said Father Severn; "but I will shew you a paper in which you will find the wicked slander of this woman refuted in the most complete and absolute manner."

He walked across the room, opened the door at the far end, and passed into the little room where Father Vesey was pacing to and fro thinking of hair cloth and Disciplines. "Go downstairs," whispered Severn in his ear, "and get out from the driver of the motor car the name of his master and his address. Make it appear you are going out, leaving the house on duty. Be innocently interested in the car; don't hurry your questions; I can give you ten minutes. Be discreet!" In another minute he was back with Mr. Purvis, turning over in his hands a sheaf of papers he had gathered up from one of the tables as he whispered to Father Vesey.

"Now, sir," he said, handing a tract to Purvis, "if you will take that home and read it at your leisure, you will find the position of the Society you mention definitely stated. The tract is published anonymously, and does not give the name of the Society; but I tell you that it is issued by the Society on purpose to refute those calumniators among the very Low Church party who assert exactly what this wicked woman has asserted."

Purvis pulled out his eyeglasses, pinched them on to the end of his nose, and glanced at the tract. After a minute or two he glanced over the tops of his glasses.

"This is all right," he said, "as far as it goes; but what about the rules of the Society? Can I see them?"

"Certainly not," answered Father Severn, sternly. "Do you imagine that the curiosity of an idle man of the world is to be gratified by a serious religious Society whenever he chooses to take an interest in their affairs? You make demands, sir, on my civility."

Purvis, not smiling now, sat in the same position as when he had put his question; his eyes looked over the rims of his glasses, one hand held the tract open, the other rested on the knee of his crossed leg. "Suppose I know them?" he demanded.

"That makes your curiosity less excusable," replied the priest.

"Suppose I have an object in coming here?" demanded the financier. "Suppose I am here as a business man to discuss terms with you? Would that make a difference to you?"

"Terms? I don't understand you. Terms?"

"Come, you have lost a book lately?"

"I?"

"Your Society! Don't bandy words, sir. You said you were busy; so am I. I too am a business man." Here the financier pulled out his watch, and studied it with a frown. "I have got five minutes. Now! Do you wish to use your opportunity or lose it?"

"If your time is valuable," said the priest gruffly, "economize it by telling me, without questions and without impertinences, what it is you want with me."

"I will," said Purvis. He took off his eyeglasses, folded them up, and put them away. Then he raised his gaze and bestowed upon the towering priest a look

of brisk determination. "How much," he snapped, "will you offer for the book which contains the rules, and the names of the members, of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus? Now, reverend sir, how much?"

"An authentic copy?"

"It bears your signature. Let me remind you that time is going."

"You offer me, I understand, a stolen book containing the names of the supposed members of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus?"

"And the rules of the Society. What offers? Your rival bidder, let me tell you, is the Low Church Party."

"The book is in your possession?"

"I refuse to say where it is."

"I refuse to bid."

"Very well!" cried Purvis, getting on his feet, triumphant over this despised opponent in a monk's habit. "Your chance is gone. If you were to offer me now five thousand pounds, I wouldn't take it. That's how I treat people who try to be too sharp with me. I wish you good-morning."

"Good-morning," answered the priest.

At the door Purvis turned. "You have told me without knowing it the value of the book," he said.

"And you," answered Father Severn, striding suddenly over to the little man and gripping his arm, "without knowing it, have told me that you stole this book!"

"What!" cried Purvis. "Leave go of my arm!" But the huge priest whirled him round and dragged him by his pinched arm to the other side of the room. Here he threw open the door, and with a jerk of his head called Father Vesey to his side.

"Look well at this man," he said. Then, after a pause, in which Purvis blustered and threatened him with a summons for assault, he asked: "Who is he? What is his name?"

"His name is Spencer Purvis," answered Father Vesey.

Purvis was suddenly silent, confounded by this sudden unmasking of his identity. To Severn the name was like the sound of a trumpet.

"Send for a policeman," he said, his jaw stiffening.

If ever there was a man less likely to welcome the visit of a policeman, less anxious to make an appearance in the Law Courts, Father Severn knew that it was this shady rascal who—by some miracle—had become possessed of the precious book of membership.

Father Vesey hesitated amazed. Purvis looked into Severn's face and laughed. "A policeman?" he cried. "What the devil for? Do you think you can frighten me?"

"No!" answered Severn; "I know I can't."

"Then what the deuce, sir, do you mean by this swaggering impertinence?"

Severn repeated his order to Father Vesey. "Send for a policeman," he said. Then thrusting Purvis into a chair, he said to him: "I can't frighten you; God could not do that; but, I can give you in charge for stealing—and, by heaven, sir, I will." Then as the door closed on the wondering Vesey, he said: "Do you know what you have done? You have been fooled by a woman! You and she have stolen a *forged book*, a book which the Society obtained years ago from its repentant forger, and has kept jealously ever since to produce against such scoundrels as yourself, who would dare to traduce it. You come to extract money from

me, to levy b'ackmail. You come under a false name ; you lie about the offers you have had for this worthless, this trumpery, this wicked book, from members of my Church, the Church of England. Well, you shall go to prison for it ! And—listen to me—I will put every man named in this precious book of yours into the witness-box, and he shall swear on God's word that he is a true and faithful servant of the Church of England."

It even crossed the stupefied mind of Purvis—so scattered were his wits by the turn things had taken—to suppose that Mrs. Revington had allowed him to steal this book in order to remove him from her path. She had put temptation in his way ; he had fallen ; and then she had gone ; vanished ; and without a word to him. Here was an explanation of that evanishment. He had been duped. And now—whether she had duped him or not—and whether the book was a forgery or not—he would have to answer the charge of having stolen it ; would have to appear in a police-court—with this terrible monk as his accuser. Ruin was too near to be pleasant—financial ruin, political ruin, social ruin. His past would be told, chapter by chapter : his present would be laid bare, every hour of the day. Once more he would have to drag Mrs. Revington's name in the newspapers. There would be a scandal twenty times greater this time, and he would sink with it—sink for good and all, never to climb back again. The last place where he wished to stand just then, all things considered, was in the dock of a police-court.

"Look, here," he said. "I'm open to discuss matters with you. You know my name, I daresay. I am a rich man."

"Know your name !" cried Severn, contemptuous-

ly ; " I have known you for years as one of the devil's most flattering disciples. Know you, sir ! " he thundered, angrily. " Do you know that Edmund Revington was my friend ? "

" Well, listen a minute. Listen, do ! " cried Purvis, concealing his agitation by an affectation of easy confidence. " There's somebody else in this. A lady. It's her I'm thinking of. I never stole the book, I swear I didn't ; and you know well enough that you couldn't prove I did. Don't drag a lady's name into the police-courts and the newspapers for nothing. Look here. I'm willing to buy her off. I'll give you five hundred pounds, and, look here,"—he fumbled in his coat pocket—" here's your confounded book. Take it, and let the matter rest."

He flung the book forward towards a table, and it struck a corner and fell to the floor.

Father Severn did not look at it. " I make no promise to you, why should I ? " he said contemptuously : " you are an evil man, the assassin, yes, the assassin of my friend ; and your punishment has been long delayed. But, I ask you one question, and on your answer depends your fate : Who is this woman ? "

" I refuse to tell you."

" Very well," answered Severn, and as he took a step away he stooped casually and picked up the fallen book. " You had better keep this," he said, holding it out. " You can afford to carry the evidence of your guilt." He stopped, drew back his arm, and examined the book. " Where are the covers ? " he demanded. " Are they in your pocket, too ? "

Steps were heard mounting the stairs.

" No. I swear they are not. I tore out the sheets

myself, and left the covers with the lady I spoke of. There was nothing on them."

A knock sounded on the door.

"Her name?" demanded the priest. "Quick!

"No, I swear I won't."

"Come in!" cried Severn, turning his head to the door—and as he did so carelessly placing the missing book out of sight on his table.

Father Vesey entered. "The constable is in the hall," he said.

"Bring him upstairs," answered Severn.

"Stop!" cried Purvis. "You're making a mountain out of a molehill. Don't play the fool. We don't want any confounded sensation over an affair like this. The book's out of my keeping now; I'm ready to apologize: and to keep the lady's name out of the business I'll give you a thousand pounds for your funds. There! What can be more sensible than that?"

"The woman's name?" demanded Severn.

"I offer you a thousand pounds to——"

"I accept not a penny from you," answered Severn.

"Her name?"

"I'll write it down for you, then," grumbled Purvis, feeling in his pocket for a pencil.

"And her address," added Severn, "signed by your name, please. Remember this," he added, indicating Father Vesey, "here is the clergyman from whom this lady of your acquaintance stole the forged book calumniating our Church of England Society, and if you lie on that paper you go to prison."

"Will you give me your word," asked Purvis, glancing up from the paper on his knee, "that you will not in any way publish her name in the newspapers?"

"I make no promises whatever. Why should I?"

Do you still dream of blackmail? Are you still the fool of a lie? I have nothing to fear; the Society has nothing to fear. Why should I submit to your terms?"

"Then I won't give her name," blustered Purvis, angrily. "Hang it, I'm man enough to defend a lady's honour."

Severn turned to Father Vesey. "You can tell the policeman to go," he said; "this man's trickery makes me sick." Then turning to Purvis, he said: "You may go as soon as you think it safe. For the present I do not strike. You are free for a little—but mark your ways, I advise you. And tell the lady whose name you so naturally shrink from dragging into the law courts, that she lives from to-day in the shadow of a policeman. You too. You and she."

When Purvis was gone, and Vesey had returned, Father Severn—who had placed the membership book in a private drawer of his table—asked Father Vesey if now he knew the name of the woman who had stolen the book.

"I confess I don't," answered the mystified priest.

"Nor where that book is now?"

"I gather, in the possession of that man who has just gone, Purvis."

"Say nothing more about the matter to a soul!" said Severn, with authority. "I know who stole it; I know where it is; and I have rendered the knowledge of the thieves impotent. This is a state affair, for you and for me only. It will serve the interests of Holy Church to let the Society remain in ignorance. You are dumb on the matter, so am I."

CHAPTER XI

LADY HARRIET REMEMBERS LONDON

THE meeting between Lady Harriet and Mrs. Revington took place in the sunshine of Jane Medlycote's garden. Lady Harriet, careful of the smallest detail in so important a matter, arrived first, with Violet at her side and Major Hugh Weston Lister dangling in distinguished attendance. The good Major—who was a collector of old Church music-books, and a loving player of organs—wore a white bowler hat, a light grey suit with tapering coat tails, and his varnished boots were adorned with spats of white linen; his easy linen shirt was fashionably striped with red, and he wore a thick black tie tightly knotted round a collar that was just sufficiently open in the front to disclose a thin Adam's apple, in a purple throat. Lady Harriet, on the contrary, was dressed in her simplest black hat, and the most workaday of grey costumes; while Violet had come in a garden hat and a simple cotton frock—like neighbours, in fact, who had run in to ask a question rather than to pay a call.

“It is very good of you to come, too,” said Jane Medlycote to Major Lister, as she welcomed them under the trees. “It's always nice to have a man about on these occasions, it prevents fireworks and cools the air. Jove sitting on the lightning! I am never my

spitefullest when a man is about. That is where men are so completely useful ; they prevent women from being too womanly."

Major Lister, sitting on the edge of his chair, and leaning well forward, with his malacca stick upright between his knees, listened to this tribute with a strained air of attention. "Charmed," he said, at the end of it, in his grave voice, which was full of repose, "charmed, I assure you ; I like coming here immensely," and then he lapsed into silence.

"Your garden, Jane, is looking beautiful," observed Lady Harriet, sitting impressively back in her chair, and just a little working her proud head from side to side as if she wished to feel her neck with her chin. She looked out into the sunlight, and approved of it. Her hands were folded in her lap, and her eyes were cold and critical. So might have sat Juno beside the throne of Jupiter reviewing the legions of heaven.

The ladies, sitting in the shade of the trees, with the sunshine and the scents and the hummings and chirpings of an old walled garden all about them, talked of the flowers, and whenever a particular bush or plant was referred to, Major Hugh Weston Lister screwed round his head in that direction and glared at the object with a most painful but intelligent intensity. His conversation confined itself to brief remarks addressed entirely to himself. "Don't understand the Latin names," he would say ; or, "Can't fathom why the Almighty made green-fly" ; or, "Sparrows are cheerful birds, but they play Old Harry with the ivy." He kept his stick swinging slowly between his legs, like the pendulum of a Grandfather Clock, his elbows resting on his knees, and the back of his light coat looking as if it must split, with as many stiff and straining

creases as there are sticks to a lady's fan. Occasionally he would hum some ancient piece of Church music.

Presently, as they sat there, there came a sound of footsteps from the broad balustraded balcony above the garden, and Jane Medlycote's stately butler, nearly bald, and with a smooth flow of beard descending from his chin to the black bone-stud in his shirt front, appeared under the striped awning of the balcony, and led the way to the descending stairs with a rustle of lady's garments at his back. Major Lister straightened himself in his chair and looked towards the house with his head very much on one side. Jane Medlycote got upon her feet, and went out into the sunlight. Lady Harriet made an immediate remark about the dahlias to Violet—whose eyebrows were a little raised and whose bloodless lips were smiling with a paltry fastidiousness. Then at the top of the stone stairs appeared Mrs. Revington, dressed in a dove-coloured frock with a large black hat upon her head, and a light veil over her face. She put up her sunshade, gathered up her skirt, and descended the stairs. Jane met her as she crossed the gravel path and reached the lawn.

"This is nice of you," said the old spinster, beaming and nodding. "You don't find me alone, though. Some friends have dropped in. Come along to the trees, and we'll have tea. Bring plenty of strawberries, Jarvis," she called to the butler. "Major Lister," she added, speaking to Mrs. Revington, "eats strawberries; it's his only serious occupation in the summer."

Mrs. Revington was presented to Lady Harriet, who swung forward for a moment in her chair and bowed without a trace of Christianity in that courtesy; she did not offer her hand. Mrs. Revington stood at a sufficient distance to make such an offer of friendship

difficult, and her bow had just that amount of respect in it which a younger woman ought to pay to a matron, and nothing more. Violet did not get up from her chair, and bowed so slightly and with such simpering affectation of wonder at Mrs. Revington's appearance there, that Mrs. Revington scarcely wasted upon her the notice of that nod which a woman of the world bestows upon a schoolgirl. But to Major Lister—who was standing impatiently ready to sweep his white billycock from his head, even at the cost of exposing his most chilly baldness, Mrs. Revington gave the bow which manifested the nicest and most delicate appreciation of her situation; it was the bow of a woman to whom the courtesy and respect of men have long been a tribute, and who are able to acknowledge gracefully and charmingly the homage of a man without manifesting the smallest curiosity concerning his personality. Lady Harriet observed that bow, and for a brief moment a pleasant feeling of London drawing-rooms crossed her mind; she arranged her skirt over her knees, sat something less stiffly, and pulled down her jacket. Violet she thought looked a little provincial and silly.

Jane—need it be said?—was rattling away with the most cheerful humour, and breaking up the ice at every point where it threatened to freeze. Mrs. Revington was drawn, as it were, into the centre of the little circle, not left on the outside to work her way in. But the cheerfulness and briskness of her coming was chiefly between Jane and Mrs. Revington, with Major Lister shedding the light of a generous but mute geniality upon them; Lady Harriet contented herself with monosyllables addressed chiefly to Jane: Violet Lister was white, bitter, and inimical.

Mrs. Revington was talking about the house. "My passage through the hall," she said, in her beautiful soft voice, "gave me some idea of your treasure-house."

"It's nice, isn't it?" answered Jane, nodding her head with appreciation.

"Your Jacobean furniture is wonderful. It looks as if it came out of the same oak that made the rafters."

"The beams of the Ark, dear ma'am! I'll show you over by-and-by," said Jane, smiling and nodding her head. "There's more of it in the rooms. Chairs my great-grandfather sat in to read Dr. Johnson's *Rambler*: wooden cradles in which my great-great-grandmother rocked my great grandmother, my great-grandmother rocked my grandmother, my grandmother rocked my mother, and my mother rocked me and my poor dead brothers and sisters—five of them, and all dead now! And chests, wonderful chests, ma'am; chests with iron staples and padlocks, full still of the linen worked by all my grandmothers, and still scented with lavender."

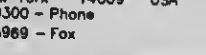
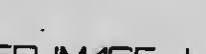
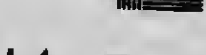
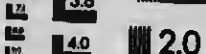
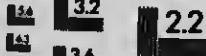
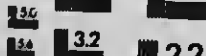
"Charming!" exclaimed Mrs. Revington, almost under her breath. "How charming!" And Major Lister, tapping the ground with the ferule of his swinging stick, said aloud to himself that there was poetry in old furniture, not a doubt of it.

Lady Harriet said almost warmly, "How interesting, Jane; how interesting!"—but Violet Lister was silent. Jane Medlycote continued to rattle away about the treasures of the Manor House. "I've got the original volumes of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary," she said; "all the numbers of the *Spectator*, the *Rambler*, and the *Traveller*; and some of the earliest copies of Milton, Burton, and Fuller in existence. Are you



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interested in Lamb?—I've got a dozen of his letters to my great-grandfather all acknowledging gift pigs sent to him ready for roasting, and all the volumes of Elia with autograph inscriptions. If you care to send a bag across, you shall sleep in the bed, and between the very same sheets in which Admiral Nelson, Southey, Mrs. FitzGerald, Lamb, poor George Dyer, Mrs. Tonna, Mrs. Gaskell, Mrs. Markham, and poor darling Jane Austen, have slept under this very roof. Oh, yes; I assure you, I keep a perfect museum. And here comes tea. Look at that stupid boy carrying the table in the way most likely to break its poor old back! Jarvis! do look at John and that table; but don't drop the tray while you do it, there's a good man."

It was while Jane Medlycote was fussing over the table, and Major Lister was screwing round his head to see when the strawberries were coming, that Lady Harriet made her first advance.

"You are living in Ladywell, I think?"

Mrs. Revington looked up, as if interested in a new conversationalist. "Yes," she said, in just that flattering tone which seems to anticipate pleasure and interest, without the smallest desire to hasten intimacy.

"Do you find it very small?" asked Lady Harriet, almost genially, her eyes beginning to blink and her lips to soften.

"I can feel its inconveniences," smiled Mrs. Revington, "but I refuse to acknowledge them."

"You like it?"

"Very much."

"It is certainly a quaint little place."

That was all for the present, but it made conversation tend towards a more general and friendly character. Major Lister was up and down, handing things

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—and spilling and upsetting nothing—with all the air of a man who can wait upon a woman as magnificently as he can lead a forlorn hope, or compel the surrender of a king. Mrs. Revington helped herself from the dishes he offered her, thanked him, but did not raise her eyes to his face; she was too politely interested in the conversation of Lady Harriet and Jane Medlycote, in which she now shared, to remove her gaze from that quarter. Violet Lister nibbling thin biscuits watched Mrs. Revington with a never slackening suspicion, a never abating enmity. She hated her. Her intuitions, on which she prided herself, told her that this handsome and well-dressed woman, redolent of London boudoirs and distinguished with a certain air of well-bred languor—irritating and insolent to her—this beautiful and clever woman, scented and elegant, who refused to blush, and hesitate, and be ill-at-ease—was a woman playing a part for a secret end, a woman to be watched and spied upon. Let her mother take her up, let her! the more joy for Violet Lister when the day came, which surely would come, when she might exclaim, “I told you so!”

After tea, when Jane Medlycote proposed a walk round the old-fashioned stone-walled garden, Mrs. Revington found herself walking beside Lady Harriet, without any contriving on her part. In front were Jane Medlycote and Violet; and behind, humming unconsciously through his nose, the good Major. Mrs. Revington knew that she had now entered upon the real struggle of her ambition. She might menace the Bishop, but here was one over whom she could hang no sword of threatening. She must make her way by stratagems, creep into the fortress by craft, and win over the garrison by subtlety and guile. Here in the

garden of old Jane Medlycote, with the bees humming in the wide borders, with the ancient blackened stone walls half-buried in great masses of jasmine, and with the shadows of trees across the lawns, the shadows of flowers across the flagged paths—it was here, and not before the Lady Chapel, that her battle had begun.

And what a battle it must be! The woman who had been called the assassin of Edmund Revington, whose name had been mentioned in a sordid divorce-case, and whose life for the last few years at least had been lived in open defiance of the world's highest standards of nobility and self-respect, was here in this old-fashioned Cathedral garden, walking at the side of one of her most embittered traducers, one of Society's most powerful and jealous guardians—striving to convince her with a delicate elusiveness in the small talk of social life, that her heart was converted to sweeter ways and purer thoughts.

The manners of what is called "Smart Society" have nowhere more scornful and relentless contempters than among the last remnant of the *noblesse* where the duty of position is still acknowledged as a charge from the Almighty, and the dignity of society is regarded as a barrier against anarchy and sin. To set a bad example is considered by these Old Guard of aristocracy to be blasphemous before God and traitorous to one's class. No matter what the condition of the Court may be, in the drawing-rooms of these stately and virtuous people decorum reigns and virtue is permanent. A lady there would as soon think of using slang or singing a song from the music-halls as of playing cards for money or of drinking brandy-and-soda among cigar-smoking men. The money standard does not exist there, and culture is respected almost as

highly as religion. It is here that we find the historic regulations of human society exalted to the dignity of Divine injunctions, and the great principles of human conduct venerated and acknowledged with an unswerving faithfulness. Men of letters, statesmen, and theologians mix here with the most stately and noble people from foreign countries, and maintain the high traditions of the salon before courtesans were permitted to reign there and financiers to yawn over its philosophy. A small remnant, it is true, and yet not so small as the reader of newspapers might be tempted to imagine from the advertisements of noisier sets ; and at least a remnant wielding enormous social power and envied always by those among the moneyed sets who have intellectual cravings and misgivings concerning their use of existence. It is surely one of the least comprehensible of modern convictions which holds—possibly owing to the confusion of titles with aristocracy—that society has surrendered to vulgarity and sin.

To get back into this serene and intellectual world ; to end the ban against her which had already lasted longer than was just, she thought ; to be free of the vulgarities and distresses of the lower world, and an equal among her equals, not tolerated but acknowledged, this was the ambition of Mrs. Revington ; a woman who, without religion and yet without the appetite for licence, desired the best because it was the best, and the highest because it was the highest, and could never be at peace among the second-rate.

At a corner of the garden, Jane Medlycote stopped to kill a slug, and paused over the operation till Lady Harriet and Mrs. Revington had gone by ; then, lifting herself up, and putting her hand on Major Lister's arm, the old lady stopped him as he would have passed, and

called him off to smoke a cigar with Violet and herself down a side-walk.

At the end of the garden Lady Harriet led the way on to the lawn, and the two ladies walked there under their sunshades, to and fro with leisurely paces.

"Do you really miss London?" inquired Lady Harriet, glancing at Mrs. Revington for a moment. "It must be very quiet for you in the Close."

"I came here for quiet," replied Mrs. Revington.

"The strain of London, modern London, must be severe," said Lady Harriet.

"I have not felt it of late. I go out very little. One can want quiet, I think, without being tired."

"People tell me that the air of London becomes more exhausting every season, more 'used up,' I think is the phrase."

"Yes?"

"You will certainly get quiet in Warborough," Lady Harriet went on presently; "we are all taken up with the affairs of the diocese; our parties even are diocesan!" She laughed.

"I have seen little of the City's life yet," replied Mrs. Revington. "Its monuments and its scenery are my employment just at present."

"You take an interest in those things?"

Mrs. Revington smiled. "Oh, yes," she said; "surely!"

"I did not know," replied Lady Harriet. "Oh, yes; the city is charming."

"Miss Medlycote has been my only caller at present," said Mrs. Revington, "but I think she really deepened the sense of tranquillity I find in Ladywell. I can imagine no hermit," she added, after a pause, "objecting

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to an interruption of his peace from such a charming person."

"She is very quaint and good-hearted," replied Lady Harriet.

"One learns from experience," said Mrs. Revington, with the hint of a sigh, "not to trust the generous instinct which is apt to rush one into friendships; but I do not think I shall ever regret having met Miss Medlycote."

Lady Harriet's social self became more active. "Jane is one of our treasures," she said. "She keeps society here from getting into grooves; she is always fresh, and vigorous, and bright."

Mrs. Revington mentioned one or two people in London whose names were beyond reproach and whose minds were original and fresh, like Jane's; names which she knew could not be repugnant to Lady Harriet's ears. For a few moments they talked of these people, and Lady Harriet was glad to hear about them. It would be pleasant, she thought to hear something of London from this clever and observing woman.

Presently she said: "You are expecting your daughter soon, I understand?"

Mrs. Revington glanced up, and their eyes met for a moment: "Yes," she said, "very soon."

The tone of her voice pleased Lady Harriet. "That will be nice for you," she said.

"I am counting the days to her arrival," replied Mrs. Revington. "It will be so good to begin our life together in little Ladywell."

It was impossible for Lady Harriet not to think that this woman loved her daughter. And if she really loved her daughter, she could not be any longer the wicked woman she had been, and therefore there was really no

religious reason why Lady Harriet should deny herself the pleasure of an occasional London gossip with Edmund Revington's widow.

The talk was of Silvia for several minutes, and at the last—when the others came across the lawn to meet them—Mrs. Revington said in her gentlest voice: "I should so like to send you, Lady Harriet, if you will let me do so, a photograph of Silvia. I am sure you would like it. She is so strangely like Ed——" Mrs. Revington paused. "I am so proud of her; you must forgive me," she said.

"Do not send the photograph, please," replied Lady Harriet; "I shall be coming to see you soon, and you can show it to me then."

"That is very kind of you," replied Mrs. Revington, meeting the stiff simper of Violet with unseeing eyes. She had conquered. Silvia's future was secure.

The ladies now met together, and after a few minutes' general conversation on the lawn, the Bishop's wife made her adieux, and with Violet and Major Lister took her departure.

"I think, Hugh, she is really anxious to live down the past," said Lady Harriet, as they crossed the Close.

"Perfectly sure of it," replied the Major, screwing round his head to look at her. "A woman of that order never lies among the pots longer than she can help. She's good quality. Nothing light about her. Barmaid entirely absent from her composition."

"You don't mean to say you like her, mamma?" exclaimed Violet.

"Like her, Violet?" replied Lady Harriet, with a shadow of annoyance in her voice. "How can I say whether I like, or not, a woman I have only just met?"

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All I have said is that I am inclined to think she is sorry for her past."

"Quite!" cut in the Major; "quite! I agree with you, Harriet."

"I distrust her through and through," said Violet, with acerbity.

"My dear Violet!" exclaimed the Major.

"You are rather young, Violet, to form so decided an opinion," Lady Harriet observed. "I do wish, dear, you would endeavour to be a little less censorious. It is very unbecoming in a young girl."

At the palace, when the Major had left them, to go lovingly over the pages of a *Venitane* and a fourteenth century Psalter which he had just added to his collection—Violet said to her mother: "I should like to make one remark, mamma, just to see if it comes true. I believe that Mrs. Revington has designs on Uncle Hugh—I saw how she looked at him!"

"My dear Violet!" cried Lady Harriet, "pray do not be so preposterous and so very provincial. Do you know that after poor Edmund Revington's death this woman (whom you suppose to have designs on Uncle Hugh!) might have married almost anybody in the worldly section of the peerage? Do you know," she went on—for Mrs. Revington had filled her mind with pleasant memories of her own life in London—"that as Belissa D'Eresby she was considered the most attractive girl in Europe, and that when she first married Edmund Revington there was no one in London whose hospitality was so brilliant and distinguished? You speak about her as if she were some scheming governess. Whatever she may have done, Belissa Revington is at least a lady by tradition. Pray, Violet, *pray* do not meddle with affairs of this kind. You

are too young, and too inexperienced. I really think I must send you to your Aunt Louisa for a season in London. I fear Warborough is not doing you good. You want polish ; and you are too apt, dear, to sit about and pry."

"Well," said Violet, and her voice suggested an attack of pins and needles in the throat, "we shall see ! I am not setting up my opinion, mamma ; but I have observation and intuition, as you have often said ; and *I think* Mrs. Revington has designs on Uncle Hugh. We shall see."

CHAPTER XII

JANE MEDLYCOTE GOES HOME WITH A HEADACHE

SOME days after the events related in the last chapter a telegram from Paul Lister foretold his arrival in a few hours at Warborough. A shaft of light seemed to shine through the palace as soon as this intelligence reached the Bishop. The old man looked up from his desk as Lady Harriet, in her lace cap and wearing an old pair of gauntlet gloves on her hands, and the linen apron she always wore about the house in the morning, almost ran into the room with the telegram held high up in her hand. He caught the smile from her face, and sat back in his chair happy and expectant.

"He's coming to-day?" he cried.

"His train arrives at four-sixteen, John!" announced Lady Harriet, with the ripple of laughter which always carried her gladdest words. As he read the message, she leaned over him from the back, with her hands on his shoulders, her little face close to his cheek.

"Would you like to hear me shout hurrah?" cried the Bishop, looking round at her, with a smile. Their laughing eyes were quite close together.

"Yes, John; I should!" she laughed.

"Hurrah!" he called. "Hurrah!" And then

he laughed, and rolled his great head, and stretched his legs ; and she, laughing too, kissed him on his cheek, and patted his shoulder. " You have put off going to see that dreadful Father Severn ? " she asked presently.

" Yes," he said : " that's over."

After this there was a coming and going of people expediting the day's work so that the Bishop might be perfectly free in the afternoon to receive his son. The effect of this good news upon the Episcopal Planet was caught and reflected by all his satellites. It was long since they had seen geniality in the face of their lord, long since he had moved about with a brisk alacrity, despatching his business good-humouredly and rallying his workers with words of quibble and banter. Everybody, therefore, rejoiced in Paul's coming. Mr. Sutherland St. Clair ran here and there, putting an indescribable touch of tact and good-feeling to this universal enjoyment. A gloom seemed to lift from the palace ; the sky became radiant and clear. And when, in the burning heat of the afternoon, the Bishop's omnibus with its great black horses drove into the courtyard and pulled up with a clatter on the pavement under the porch of the front door, there in the hall, with his happy servants about him, stood the smiling Bishop, ready to embrace his boy ; and there, overflowing with laughter and smiles, was Lady Harriet ; and there was Violet, with the faintest suggestion of rose in her white face ; and there, too, or at least coming there very slowly and seriously from the staircase at the back, was Major Hugh Weston Lister—who had left a most valuable thirteenth century Sarum Gradual on the rest of his piano, on purpose that he should be ready in the hall to receive his nephew.

Then out from the omnibus came Paul, brown and

smiling and glad, calling out, "Hullo! hullo! Isn't this good?"—and the next minute he was in the Bishop's arms, the old man laying one of his hands upon his son's head, pressing it there in affectionate blessing, while the other patted his back and embraced him lovingly. "God bless you, my boy!" breathed the old prelate in his ear; and then releasing him—"Now, it's your mother's turn!" he said, and went forward to greet Arthur Blount, with the old-fashioned courtesy which so nicely became his noble appearance.

There they all stood in the great hall, talking and smiling and laughing—while footmen went to and fro with baggage, boxes and cloaks: while the butler relieved the travellers of their hats and gloves—cordially greeted by Paul: while Lady Harriet's Aberdeen terriers ran here and there, wagging their tails, and jumping up at people's legs: and while Mrs. Tenner, Paul's old nurse, in her black lace cap and her black apron, stood demurely at the back of the hall waiting to be seen and greeted by "her boy."

It was just such a home-coming as is typical of a happy English home. The dread elements of calamity and storm, which threatened the smiling actors in it, were invisible and unfelt. The Bishop—who had written to Father Severn on the previous day, boldly postponing his attendance at the synod—had thrown off for the nonce the weight of his secret and his dread of Severn's wrath; and Paul was too happy in the largeness and tenderness of this welcome to think of the ordeal through which he must soon pass with this generous father.

When the old nurse had been duly embraced and rallied by Paul on her eternal youthfulness (remarks which were elaborately reported by the old lady to the

housekeeper and the butler afterwards) the cheerful party made their way to the drawing-room and were soon launched upon a sea of the most brisk and happy conversation. "

Paul and his companion had been absent from England for over a year, and in the course of their travels they had visited Egypt, Syria, Turkey, the Holy Land, Italy, and the northern parts of France. They had much to relate, and many questions to answer. Paul seemed to have observed things with a special eye to this home-coming: he had found in Vicenza and brought back with him a valuable copy of the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas for his father, a man who was credited with having that great saint by heart; and at Padua, by the luckiest chance in the world, he had secured two admirable bronzes of Vittore Pisano for his mother; and for his sister, who posed a little as an art critic, he had bought at Chiaravello a drawing of a child playing with a cat said to be the work of Leonardo da Vinci; and for his uncle he had bought in Rome an old liturgical Psalter with antiphons of a most perplexing character. It was curious to notice later on the way in which these two latter gifts were received: "How sweet of you, Paul, to think of me," said Violet, with her eyebrows going up in a little wondering expression of doubt and perplexity: "but do they *really* think this is Leonardo's work?" As for Major Hugh Weston Lister, he took the Psalter with reverent hands, offered no words of thanks at the time, but was immediately glaring at it through his eye-glass, humming aloud with the greatest earnestness as he turned the pages, and then was off with it to his dressing-room where Lady Harriet kept a piano for his delight.

But all this was after dinner. While they were in the

drawing-room—with the windows wide open to catch a breath of air from the silent garden stifling in the sunlight—a chance question of the Bishop's made Paul exclaim suddenly that he had met a most agreeable old priest in Verona who had known Edmund Revington.

"What a man that must have been!" he said, turning from his father to Arthur Blount, while Violet Lister looked with a little sniff of triumph at Lady Harriet. "I think I shall always regret having been too young to understand him and appreciate him when we knew him in London," Paul went on. "But you must tell me your remembrance of him. I tried to make Arthur feel the magic of his personality," he said, laughing; "but Arthur vows he has read the books and still doesn't believe in ghosts; therefore Revington is not among his gods. Unless a writer convinces Arthur of a pre-conceived opinion he is swept away among the ephemerals. He is a great admirer, by the way, of your old antagonist, that knife-using philosopher, Sir Frederick Mayor."

"Our disputations have been delightful," said Arthur, looking over his eyeglasses at the Bishop. "Paul believes in nothing after the twelfth century, except himself; and I have been teasing him all along the road with the last German historian and the very latest of London surgery."

At this moment the door opened, and the butler announced Mrs. Revington.

For a moment there was a dead silence, one of those terribly sudden cessations of gay talk which may almost be called a telepathic paralysis; and in that silence—beautifully dressed in her London garments and perfumed with the very breath of fashion, Mrs.

Revington entered the room. Paul turned swiftly to his father, and saw that the old man was regarding him with the most poignant dread and anxiety. It was only for an instant that their eyes met, but in that instant father and son—each from a widely different standpoint—realized that all the pleasant human nature of this joyful re-union was fictitious and unreal, and that a grim and cruel ordeal awaited them both. In an instant the naturalness and gaiety of this affectionate home-coming burnt its last flame of welcome and greeting, and sank down into the dust and ashes of a tragic reality.

“Mrs. Revington!” Paul repeated the name to himself, incredulous and staggered. The odious woman whose brutal lack of sympathy, whose violation of all honourable traditions, and whose sordid and appalling vulgarity of mind and life—so his mother repeatedly had told him—drove that almost god, Edmund Revington, to the desperation of self-destruction : that woman, here in his father’s house, here in his mother’s drawing-room, greeted by his mother as an accustomed visitor, and now, at this very moment, giving her hand to his father!—it was difficult to believe his senses.

He moved away behind his uncle, who had risen instantly with Lady Harriet, and passing Violet, who bestowed a look upon him of simpering approval, moved quickly to the windows, and passed out into the garden. Lady Harriet was conscious of this act, and the Bishop was conscious of it ; but no one quite so sharply realized its wounding offence as the woman who apparently saw nothing of it, as she gave her hand so politely to the prelate she had menaced but a few days ago in his own cathedral.

Paul, in the garden, was troubled beyond measure.

He knew the aversion which his parents had always entertained for this woman, and he believed—naturally enough—all the exaggerated accounts of her behaviour which had at one time reached the palace almost by every post. What had occurred, then, to work this revolution in their conduct? Above all things, what did that look of alarm in his father's face portend? He walked restlessly to and fro in the still and suffocating air, under a sky whose translucent blue was gradually catching the shadowing tinge of storm. Why did life mock him at every turn now? What was it in his nature which would not let him rest and be satisfied?

Mrs. Revington was returning Lady Harriet's first call, and she was quick to perceive that her coming had been ill-timed. Not only had the handsome young giant, whom she guessed to be the Bishop's son, gone from the room with her arrival; but the manner of Lady Harriet towards her was strangely different from that of her call at Ladywell. Then Lady Harriet had warmed almost to the point of kindness; now the pink-and-white face of smiles and graces became at once white and cold, the dry lips hard and censorious, the full eyes critical and resentful. It was evident to Mrs. Revington that the Bishop laboured to overcome his displeasure at her presence, and made pathetic efforts to thaw the frozen front of his wife's antipathy; but this only deepened her conviction that she had blundered woefully by this unfortunate call, that something inimical to her had happened since Lady Harriet's visit to Ladywell, and that all the ground so difficultly made in the first weeks was now gone from under her feet. The look in the eyes of Violet Lister told her plainly enough that there was joy in the palace over Mrs. Revington's obvious discomfiture.

But at the moment when Mrs. Revington—after some minutes of difficult conversation—was about to rise and take her leave, Jane Medlycote came upon the scene, entering the room with a brisk anticipation of pleasure at greeting Paul.

“I couldn’t rest another minute,” she cried, giving her hand all round. “I saw the bus enter the Close; I gave you all exactly half-an-hour to get over the kisses: and then I ran up the stairs, popped on my hat, and trotted round here nineteen to the dozen through an atmosphere like a baker’s oven. Poof! Is it not hot? But where’s Paul?” she cried, nodding with a little smile at Arthur Blount. “You look well enough, Fellow of All Souls,” she cried; “glad to see it, indeed I am. But, *where* is Paul?”

Lady Harriet, who had brightened a little at Jane’s coming, said that Paul had been kissed out of the room, and was coming-to slowly in the garden. Old Jane Medlycote made a step to the window and then paused. She saw what had happened. “Fellow of All Souls!” she said, “run like a dear rabbit, and tell Paul that a very old woman wants to see him, and promises not to kiss him once! Don’t say who it is, or he won’t come!”

With that the cheerful old maid stalked across the room, and took a chair beside Mrs. Revington just as that lady was about to rise and make her farewells. “Now, don’t *you* get running off!” cried Jane, tapping her on the arm. “I shan’t be here five minutes, and I particularly want you to come with me down the High Street to buy a book-marker for an old Colonel of the Blues who has just been converted to Christian Science. Your taste is perfect: mine’s amusing. Be unselfish, *r. w.*: and wait till I’ve seen our next Archdeacon.

Oh, this heat! If any one has got an iron to strike now's the time. Poof!"

Thus she was talking when Paul came through the windows. "I knew it was you!" he cried, with a smile; and then he suddenly became self-conscious, and frowned and looked hard. Arthur Blount had told him that Mrs. Revington was just leaving when he himself started to find Paul. But here she still was, and now he could not avoid bowing to the odious woman, scented and painted. He caught Jane's two hands in his, and greeted her with great sincerity: but there was restraint in this greeting which no one could help noticing, a want of cordiality, an absence of all freedom and vivacity. But Jane rushed him on into smiles and laughter, told him that he must come and see her directly after breakfast on the following day; and when he told her that he had brought back with him from Damascus a piece of mosaic for her, answered that he was a thriftless traveller to waste his money on a silly old woman when he so sadly needed a cravat that was not frayed.

While they talked, Major Lister engaged Mrs. Revington in a laborious conversation; and while this was going on the Bishop crossed the room, and after a remark which set Arthur Blount and Violet talking together, suggested under his breath to Lady Harriet that she should present Paul to Mrs. Revington.

Lady Harriet shrugged her shoulders, as if to say she would not be responsible for the consequences—an action which was lost neither upon Mrs. Revington nor upon Violet—who we may be sure, was impatiently waiting some scene between Paul and Mrs. Revington—and then leaning forward from her settee, she said: "Paul, dear; I don't think you have met Mrs. Reving-

ton. Mrs. Revington, will you let me introduce my son to you ? ”

Paul presented himself before Mrs. Revington, and bowed, not very pleasantly, but at least not with any violent show of resentment. Jane watched ; and as she swept everybody on into a general conversation, patted Paul approvingly on the arm.

“ I did it because I couldn't help it,” he whispered to her under cover of the conversation. “ I did it pleasantly because you asked me to. But you will have to explain the mystery to-morrow. I loathe the woman ! ”

“ If you hurt your father,” rejoined Jane, “ I'll have myself cremated like a heathen, and leave all my property to a Home for Cats.”

“ Hurt my father ! ” exclaimed Paul ; but Jane had flung herself into the talk, and paid no attention to him ; therefore she did not observe the sudden look of pain on his face as her phrase reminded him of the agony which so soon he must inflict upon his father.

When Jane had gone, taking Mrs. Revington with her, Paul crossed the room to his mother and sat down at her side on the settee.

“ I hope you are not angry with me,” he said. “ I was very rude. But the surprise took me off my feet. I dislike the woman so heartily. Can I help it ? ”

Lady Harriet patted his hand. “ Never mind,” she said, gently : “ life is full of these minor unpleasantnesses : we soon learn to put up with them.”

Violet here came and stood before them. Arthur Blount was talking with the Bishop ; Major Lister was walking up and down the far end of the room, humming to himself, and bestowing an occasional scowl upon Paul for an ungracious young cub who ought to be well trounced for his priggishness.

"What did you think of her Paul?" demanded Violet.

"I hardly noticed her."

"Were you not surprised to see her here?"

Paul glanced at his mother. "I was; yes."

Lady Harriet, looking up for a moment at Violet in a wondering inquiry that she should be so greedy for strife and contention, turned to Paul and told him that Mrs. Revington had taken Ladywell for a year, and that it was impossible for her not to call on the woman, however much she might disapprove of her past.

"I see," answered Paul. "But, taken Ladywell for a year! What on earth for, I wonder!"

"Ah!" cried Violet. "That is the mystery."

While the people in the drawing-room of the palace were engaged in this fashion, a scene of a strange kind was taking place in the furnace-like air outside. Jane Medlycote and Mrs. Revington had only got half-way across the darkening Close on their way to the High Street when they saw coming towards them a tall and swarthy monk with a little clergyman at his side endeavouring comically to take as big strides as his companion. Father Severn and Father Vesey were answering the Bishop's letter in person.

"Rooty-too-too!" cried Jane Medlycote; "I admire the common-sense of the costume: but don't I hate the spirit that can wear it! It isn't that I smell Inquisition fires when I see that sackcloth; not at all; but a monk always suggests to me a lack of everything that makes life decent—no bath, no soap, and no underclothing. I can't abide 'em. Dirty, *dirty* fellows!"

As they drew nearer Father Vesey gave a little start. "Why!" he said; "here comes the very woman who

stole the book. How very remarkable ! It is ; indeed it is."

"You are sure ?" demanded Father Severn, looking up quickly.

"I can't be quite certain at this distance, but I think it is the very woman."

"Claim acquaintance, but say nothing about the book," answered the monk. The next minute they met together. Father Vesey took off his hat, and got in front of Mrs. Revington. Father Severn stood resolutely at his side, blocking the way.

"We have met, I think," claimed Father Vesey, with a weak smile, his eyes travelling swiftly round his spectacles.

"I think not," replied Mrs. Revington, feeling her blood go suddenly cold.

"You were once kind enough to drive me home from church in your carriage ; I am Mr. Vesey."

"You have made a mistake, I fear," replied Mrs. Revington, smiling ; and with a little bow she made to move away. But the voice of Father Severn checked her.

"Mrs. Revington is not easily mistaken for another woman," he said.

Jane Medlycote started, and glanced at Mrs. Revington ; the old lady was muttering to herself, and frowning in great perplexity and irritation. Mrs. Revington tried to smile. "You are better informed than your companion," she said. "I am Mrs. Revington ; but not the good Samaritan of this gentleman's imagination."

And with this she passed on, and Father Severn said nothing.

"How strange, is it not ?—that the monk should

know my name!" said Mrs. Revington; her heart was beating with a sick dread. "It is stranger than the mistake of the other man. Evidently I possess a double."

"Humph!" said Jane.

"One likes to think," went on Mrs. Revington, "that one is quite different from other people. I suppose, then, these mistakes are humbling, and good for us!"

"Humph!" said Jane.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked Mrs. Revington, turning a smiling face to the old maid.

"That it will be wise for you to tell me why you took that little monkey for a drive in your carriage," answered Jane. "No, no; don't hurry it," she cried, as Mrs. Revington was about to speak; "these things always come better when they are born in the ordinary course of nature; I'd have boxed Jupiter's ears if I had been present when his head opened and Minerva popped out like a Jack-in-the-box. Speaking of that, ma'am; have you noticed that there's going to be a thunderstorm to-night? I always know when thunder's about by three things: the trees stand as still as if they were frightened; my head throbs right on the top, just under the bone; and all the gutters and dust-bins smell as if they want washing. *Pour couper court*; I'll postpone the birthday book-marker, and go home before the lightning comes. Look at that black sky! I always bury my head under three pillows when there's thunder, and I advise you to go home and do the same. Large pillows, one on top of another. It looks humble, and appeases the lightning. I've never been struck yet. Good-bye to you, ma'am; come and see me to-morrow afternoon."

Mrs. Revington smiled her good-byes, and watching

old Jane Medlycote stride away towards the Manor House, turned in at the little white gate of Ladywell, and entered the darkened cottage. "Now," cried her heart to her, "the play is played out. The past is irrevocable." You will never regain that which you threw away. Never. Never. Never. Your house of hope was jerry-built and is left in ruins."

She entered the little drawing-room wearily, and wondered that it should be so dark. While she was taking off her gloves, her mind busy with its thoughts, she stood before Edmund Revington's picture and regarded it in the deep gloom. "I have paid dear for listening to your soft words!" she exclaimed bitterly. "Edmund, why did we cross each other's path?" A faint light quivered through the room, as though somebody had run swiftly by the window carrying a torch and crying ill news. She turned and looked out at the sky. It was black with foreboding. "Yes," she said, "a storm is coming." As the words passed in her mind, out in the dark distance a far-off grumble of thunder rolled with a slow and menacing reverberation through the sullen heavens. "But it is a long way off at present," she said, and putting back her veil she rang the bell for candles. A sound of laughter from a corner of the room made her spring round, exclaiming with alarm, "What is that?" The figure of Purvis came out of the shadow.

"You never saw me!" he said. "There then; I've been sitting in that chair for half-an-hour."

"Why have you come here?" she demanded breathlessly.

"To settle accounts," answered Purvis.

At that moment, in the drawing-room of the Bishop's palace, as the family stood at the open windows expect-

ant of the storm and looking out beyond the river and across the flat meadow. In a blur of blue rain in the distance, the butler came quietly to the Bishop's side, and said to him—

“Father Severn would like to see you for a few minutes, my lord.”

CHAPTER XIII

OLD SCORES

WHEN the servant had lighted the candles in the drawing-room of Ladywell, Mrs. Revington turned to Purvis and asked him if he would like tea.

"No, I thank you," he answered; "but you may give me a little whisky and soda." Mrs. Revington ordered the decanter to be brought, and when the servant went to obey, she walked about the room arranging here a flower in a vase and there a piece of china on a table. She said nothing to Purvis; and he contentedly sat in his chair watching her with a curious wonderment.

As soon as the servant had withdrawn again, and the door was closed upon them, Mrs. Revington took a chair as far as possible from her unwelcome visitor and invited him to help himself from the tray.

"Thanks," he said; "I will. Shall I bring you a little?"

"No," answered Mrs. Revington.

He chuckled. "You aren't too pleased to see me," he said, filling his tumbler with soda-water. He looked up, with the glass half-way to his lips, and nodded to her in a familiar manner.

"But I've got a worse score against you than that. I have, yes! Here's your ladyship's health in the

meantime." He lowered the glass, and coming forward took a chair nearer to her. "You've got a funny little place here!" he laughed, shoving a vase on one side that he might put his glass on the table. "What's the game?" He put his hand into his coat pocket, and pulled out a cigar-case.

"I don't allow smoking in this room," she said.

"Eh!" he bent his head forward, and she saw the familiar silver tube in his ear.

"If you wish to smoke there is another room," she said. "This is my drawing-room."

"Will you come, too?"

"Certainly not."

"Very well, then, I'll deny myself, and stay here. But you're playing it rather high, my lady; you're trying me a little bit hard to begin with. Don't you think politeness might pay you better?"

"You said you had come here to settle accounts," she said, never taking her eyes from his face. "Explain what you mean?"

Here in Ladywell, the man whom she deemed in London to be only of a somewhat common and vulgar appearance, struck her as a creature infinitely horrid and vile. In the pressing crowds of a great city, where on almost every face, in a greater or less degree, greed has set its coarsening and its brutalizing mark, one may encounter vulgar people who do not fill one with any strong emotion of loathing and contempt; but these same people, once met with in the midst of nature's repose or at the verge of the sea's great passion, appear instantly as horrible and disgusting as some bloated and hideous creature of the insect world.

Mrs. Revington felt the shame and the horror of her position. She had delivered herself into this

monster's hands. She had given this more than common person power over her life. He had the right to enter her home, to announce to her servants that he would wait her coming, to order refreshment for himself, and to lounge at his ease in the very chambers of her privacy. It was fitting that fate should strike her with this rod of maiming irony at the very moment when her house of cards had blown over, at a time when triumph seemed so near at hand. The helping hand of the Bishop, she knew, was now lost to her. What was that terrible monk saying of her in the palace? She might menace and threaten, but all would be in vain. She might denounce the Bishop and drag him down to indescribable ruin, but she herself would be still outside the gates of rest.

A peal of thunder sounded in the distance, and rolled sulkily away like some appalling giant turning restlessly in his sleep.

"I will explain what I mean, certainly," said the financier, allowing a smile to play over his face for a moment. He pulled his chair a little nearer, took his tumbler from the table, and crossed his leg. "I want to know in the first place," he demanded, "why you ran away from London without a word to me?"

"Is it my duty to report to you my movements?" she asked.

"It ought to be," he answered.

"You presume," she replied, expressing all her scorn in the anger of her eyes.

He looked away, and began to fidget with the things on the table. "Did you run away," he asked, turning over a delicate little Dresden pounce-box with his thick blunt-tipped fingers, "because you were ashamed of having got me into a fix?"

"I do not follow you," she said.

"Look here," he cried, looking up at her quickly; "why weren't you suspicious when I brought you back the empty covers of a book that evening in Sloane Street?"

It flashed across her brain that it was he who had stolen the book from her, but for the life of her she could not understand for what reason.

"Did you take that book out of my muff?"

"You knew I did."

"Why did you take it?"

"For fun; but, from your point of view, because I was a fool and fell into your trap."

"My trap? What do you mean?"

"The muff was the bait; left so innocently on the table just where I sat; and the book peeping out of the side was the barbed hook set to catch me and get me jerked out of your path! I'm not a fool."

"You took that book? You stole it out of my muff? What have you done with it?"

Purvis watched her with a sulky temper in his gaze.

"Why did you do it?" he asked.

"Your imagination has played tricks with your common-sense," she answered. "That book was of the greatest possible value to me; by stealing it you have ruined a scheme on which I had set my heart. What have you done with it?"

"I? Done with the book? Why, I have given it back to its rightful owner. What else should I have done with it?"

Her eyes filled with anger.

"Why did you do that?"

"Because I am honest occasionally, and because I

object to your mixing yourself up with Church quarrels. They're dangerous. You leave them alone."

Mrs. Revington recovered her composure, and sat back in her chair.

"You are unnecessarily paternal," she said. "I had no intention of mixing myself up with Church quarrels."

"There, then; you're saved the temptation," laughed Purvis. "The book is back with old Nicodemus, locked up in his safe with the other archives, and that great ugly gorilla of a monk has got the key."

"What monk do you mean?" demanded Mrs. Revington, thinking hard.

"I forget his name."

"After travelling down with him from London this afternoon?"

"How did you know that?" he said, tumbler in hand, astonished at her.

"Well?" she persisted.

"It is true I did come down with him; but not in the same carriage—not me!" answered Purvis. "No, I assure you, I don't like monks and parsons. It was the nearest shave, too. As I came out from the booking-office, I as near as a touch ran into the gorilla. He was standing with a little weasel of a parson, whose acquaintance I have, and whose private papers you are familiar with, beside the bookstall. I watched 'em into a third-class carriage, and then got a ticket-inspector to find out where they were going. When he came back and told me that it was Warborough, I began to get buzzy in the head. I had good reasons to fear for your safety."

"My safety!"

"I know all about it! Well, listen now. As soon

as I got out at Warborough, I watched them and followed them, sending my bag up to the Mitre by the hotel 'bus. I expected to see them come straight to your cottage, and if that had been the case you very likely wouldn't have had the pleasure of seeing me. Instead of that, however, they went down into the poorer parts of the town and entered a house, next to a red-bricked church, which I found out was St. Mary's Vicarage. Is that one of your friends' houses? Well, then, how long they intend to stay in that vicarage before coming on here I don't know, but come they will, that's a certainty, and when your bell rings, I shall slip through the windows and leave you to the mercies of holy Religion. Ha, ha! that I shall."

Mrs. Revington leaned forward and rang the bell.

"What's that for?" demanded Purvis with anger, But Mrs. Revington did not answer. "If you think you can order me out, my lady, before I have said my say you make a mistake. Let me tell you." His sandy eyes grew hard and challenging. He sat forward in his chair and stared at her insolently. The door opened.

"I am not at home if anybody calls, Walker," she said, to the butler. "And I shall want somebody to take a note for me in a minute. Is it raining now?"

"Raining fast, madam."

"I will ring in ten minutes."

Mr. Purvis breathed more freely when the door was closed. Running his forefinger over his thick moustache, he said cheerfully—

"It amuses me that you should think old Walker could stop that monk from entering your house! Why, he'd twist the fellow's neck in half a minute; of course he would."

"Now answer me a few questions," she said. "Is the name of this monk Severn?"

"That's it."

"And you have given him back the book you took from my muff?"

"Yes."

"And told him that you obtained it from me?"

"No."

"Oh, yes!"

"Oh, no! I didn't I assure you. On my honour, no. But, I am sorry to tell you"—he began picking up the things on the table again—"that he knows."

"Do you know," she asked him in a tone of dreadfully quiet hate, "that you have ruined me for the second time in my life?"

He glanced at her out of the corners of his little eyes, and strove to smile.

"How's that?" he asked.

Another peal of thunder rattled across the sky, and this time it sounded almost close above their heads. A sudden downfall of rain driving through the trees came to them from the garden. A wind shook the curtains, and a window swung-to on its hinges. The air grew cooler.

"Why did you do it?" she asked.

"Because you were getting out of hand," he answered. "I want you just now. You can be useful to me. By a little interesting work you can pay back some of the money you owe me. Things are queer in the City. Money is tight. I require assistance in many ways. And now you can't run away from me again. You'll run away from here, and I advise you to be quick about it; but you'll run away with me. There's nowhere else for you to go."

"Why should I run away from here?" she asked.

"Why! Because, if you don't you'll be arrested for stealing!"

She laughed. "You are very silly."

"No doubt; but I don't advise you to run the risk. That monk told me to say to you that you were living henceforth in the shadow of a policeman!"

She saw a chance. "Is that very dreadful?" she asked. "You have been doing it all your life."

"And let me tell you something," he cried, nodding his head threateningly, "which perhaps you don't know. The book that you stole was of no value. *It was a forgery!* You have risked prison for a thing that isn't worth tuppence." Again she saw light.

"Is it possible?" she asked, with a feigned surprise; she was assured now that this threatening vulgarian, who judged of stealing by the value of the thing stolen, had been intimidated by Father Severn, and duped out of the book.

"Ha!" he cried; "when a woman attempts to meddle in matters like this—playing the diplomatist, or the detective! she always comes to grief. You thought you could do without me. You know now that you can't. Well, how do we stand? Are you going to wait here till the gorilla calls—on my honour, he's in the town still—or are you going to pack up a box and come back to London with me, like a sensible creature?"

She rose from her chair.

"The situation is certainly serious," she said. "Tell me; what do you want me to do for you in London?"

"This paper is of mine," he answered. "I can't wait at all longer. I assure you, a General Election's as good as certain now. It's life and death to me to make a

boom. I don't want to publish rubbish, the ordinary tittle-tattle written by outsiders; I want hot stuff, inside information about society, and I give you the chance of paying back old debts by writing it—mine, and the friends who don't like you in London! Honour bright, you could make the paper go. You know everybody; you have been everywhere; you have seen everything; and you're clever—of course you are."

"It sounds easy," she said, "but it wants thinking about. Evidently the bucket-shop is in a bad way just now. I am between the monk and the financier; I cannot decide all at once."

"Look here," he said, coming a little nearer to her, and softening; "I've spoken rather rudely, but I've been upset lately; forget it. You know the kind of man I am." He smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "As far as my nature has let me, I have always treated you with respect, and I always shall. There, then." He paused stroking his moustache, and looked at her hungrily. Then he lowered his eyes, and half-raised his hand to touch her sleeve. "I don't think," he said huskily, "you've ever yet heard me say one word of my admiration for you. Think of that! Not a word! I've been as dumb as I've been polite. But on my honour," he cried, growing serious and bold, "I have worshipped you all through. I've loved you, and I've never said a word about it; and you—well, there, you've never thrown me even a kind word."

"We have each said 'Thank you' often enough," she replied, watching him, "and that is all we ever could say to one another. What else is it possible to say?" she asked, loftily. "You have been obliging to me, and I have been obliging to you. Our acquaint-

ance has been a business one. If you wish it to continue, it must be on that footing."

"You forget for the moment," he said, "the shadow of the policeman. You're in rather a difficult situation just now. But there," he cried, generously, "I say nothing about that. I know my place; and I know first-quality when it comes my way. Let it be as you said. Now, then: will you come back to-night, before the monk calls? Don't risk anything; scandal's the very deuce."

"I can promise you that your name shall be kept out of it this time," she replied, going to the bell. "You must go now," she added, as she rang. "The storm is over, I think. I have some notes to write. To-morrow I will send a line to your hotel. Where is it you are stopping?"

"The Mitre," he said, picking up his hat. "Don't remember any of my bluster," he added, giving her his hand, with a smile; "only remember that I'm a pretty staunch friend, and that I came down here to do you a turn. By the way I took a few cards out of your tray in the hall; you don't mind my sending them circulars. Some of these old cathedral cats have long purses. Good-night."

"I shall not forget your kindness," she said. "Good-bye."

As he stalked with his pompous carriage out of the room, she wiped the palm of her hand angrily with a handkerchief. Then she went to the table and wrote a note to Jane Medlycote:—

DEAR MISS MEDLYCOTE—

Will you take your kind head from under its three pillows for a minute to read this note?

THE PRIEST

I find a letter waiting for me from Silvia, and it gives me great joy because it tells me that she is coming home earlier than I expected ; in fact, I am starting off to-night to fetch her. Will you wait till I come back to hear how it may sometimes be just and right to deny an acquaintance even with a clergyman ?

Believe me, with great sincerity,

Yours very truly,

BELISSA REVINGTON.

She addressed the envelope ; and sat for a moment in thought : " The monk," she said to herself, " will never think, of course—never dream—of exposing the Sacred Society of Nicodemus in public newspapers. I have nothing to fear from that. But, what has he said to the Bishop ? " She leaned her chin in the cup of her hand, biting her lips. The room grew lighter : the candles paled, as she sat there thinking. " He will tell him, of course, that I stole the book, and that he has got it safely in his possession. If I threaten still to make use of my knowledge, even without the means of evidence in my hand, they will meet me with a denial of their charges. And, did I expose it all, and succeed in persuading people of its truth, the Bishop would go quietly off to Rome, and I should be left worse ostracized than ever before. No ; I am beaten on all points. Poor me ! Silvia comes home, full of questions about her father, to find her mother living under a ban. What shall I do ? Shall I throw in my lot with the Philistines, live their life, and endeavour to think their thoughts ? Why not ? One can get hardened, and the life has its excitements ? I could marry Silvia well enough, perhaps ; at any rate I could save her from the worst

degraded of the wolves ; and Purvis will behave himself."

She got up and walked to the end of the little room away from the mantelpiece. Then she turned, raised her eyes, and looked at Edmund Revington's picture ; his eyes seemed to watch for her decision from the other end of the little apartment.

"No, I can't," she said ; "not yet ; not yet. Madame de Maintenon's carp could not live in marble fountains ; but I was not born in the mud. I like clean water." She advanced up the room, her gaze fixed upon the eyes of the picture. "You are having your revenge !" she said, bitterly. "I never loved you ; in those days I did not know what love could be ; what girl does ? but now—when I can guess what love would mean to me—I hate you. I am so hungry for love, you see ! Yes, I shall hate you more and more," she came nearer to the picture. "One day Silvia shall hate you, too," she cried with her heart. But the eyes seemed only to wait.

She moved away from the picture, and went again to the table. The curtains were blown about, jangling their rings ; the noise of the wind driving through the tall elms was like the sound of a wild sea.

"It would be madness to stop here," she said to herself, standing before the table. "I must live up to my fib, and go to Silvia. I do not fear Father Severn, but I have no wish to meet him. At all costs I must drive Purvis out of Warborough. I have still a hope with the Bishop. People are beginning to call on me, and although Purvis has gone off with calling cards, I might gain a footing after all, on terms. Purvis, then, is my danger. He is evidently in difficulties. If only I could pay him ; pay him off, and discharge him !

It is from him that I must now run away ; not from the priest. Purvis must go from Warborough to-night. Another day here ruins my frail hope." Her eyes caught the letter addressed to Jane Medlycote " *There* is my chance ! " she cried, " Jane will be my friend. I can bring Silvia back to Jane Medlycote. That friendship is my promise of victory in spite of all. Bless you, Miss Medlycote ! you have given me hope."

She rang the bell, and then sat down at the table. When the bell was answered she informed the servant that her maid must be told to make preparation for crossing with her mistress to St. Malo that night. There was a train soon after seven ; let her look it up ; and let a fly be ordered. The butler asked if the notes were ready.

" I will leave them on my way to the station," she answered.

" Shall I put out the candles, madam ? " inquired the man.

" Do not trouble. Thompson must be told at once."

When she wrote to Purvis. As she bent over the paper her face grew hot and shamed. There was only the sound of the wind blowing through the trees and her pen scratching over the paper, as she sat there after the storm. The flames of the candles near the open windows were blown to and fro.

" Dear Mr. Purvis (she wrote) I am sorry that I cannot be of assistance to you with your paper. I am going abroad immediately, and when this note reaches you I shall have started. When I do return it will not be to go at all into society. You spoke this afternoon of my account with you. If you will make a statement of how you consider

that account to stand, and will address it to me under cover to my solicitors, it will be forwarded to me, and I will reply to it from abroad. I should like to know my position in the matter, from your point of view, before proceeding further. It is unlikely that I shall appear in London again for several years."

As she addressed the envelope, a look of relief came into her face. She sat in the little room that was now greyly luminous after the storm—surrounded on all sides by burning candles whose flames appeared to shed no light on the beautiful objects scattered through the chamber—with a look in her face which touched it for a moment with an expression almost of exaltation.

"Out of my life!" she said, with determination; "out of my life!" and threw the envelope on one side.

"Jane Medlycote!" she cried. "I put my faith in Jane Medlycote!" The last rumble of thunder came to her through the windows, like the far-off echo of cannon. She rose from the table, and her eyes caught the pale flames of the candles. She shuddered, feeling suddenly cold and sick.

When Mrs. Revington drove up that evening at Warborough Station, and as soon as she had sent her maid to book tickets, she gave the two notes she had written to the fly-driver, and commissioned him to leave them immediately. Mr. Purvis received his note just as he was sitting down contemptuously to a Mitre dinner, with a Warborough directory at his side.

"She has thrown me over," he said to himself angrily, and sent the waiter for a time-table. "Just when I needed her, by——!"

"I can't trust her," said Jane Medlycote, putting her note carefully back into its envelope; "but there's something about her I could cry over," she was troubled by that rencounter between Mrs. Revington and the priests. The priests were going to the palace. What was the connexion between these men, Mrs. Revington and the Bishop? "If I can manage it, I'll be kind to her!" she said; "but she must be careful not to hurt my dear Bishop!"

The old spinster shook a sorrowful head over the mystery which, somehow or another, connected Mrs. Revington with her beloved Bishop.

CHAPTER XIV

FATHER SEVERN'S ANSWER TO THE BISHOP'S LETTER

THE Bishop had felt a portent in the blackened heavens as he stood with his family at the drawing-room windows. The foreboding of calamity which overcame him when his gaze met Paul's, at the entrance of Mrs. Revington, had deepened now into a grim conviction that the evil forces of his destiny, which had never ceased to accumulate their vengeance against him, were gathering together to burst over his head with ruin and destruction. For thirty years he had lived a stately and belauded life, with a secret in his soul which threatened his every hour with havoc and with shame. Now the end had come. Bereft of the world's respect, his name a scandal among his countrymen, his wife his accuser, and his children his reprovers, henceforth he must go out from the society of decent men, the scorn of the people and the leper of his caste. Long, with a fervour at his soul that none ever guessed, he had sung in the Cathedral—

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on ;
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone ;

but now that mighty Power had deserted him ; he stood speechless and alone under the silent heavens, waiting for the storm to break over his defenceless head, and destroy him.

Father Severn !

He could almost have cried aloud at this too sudden bursting of the thunderbolt, this too immediate fulfilment of his foreboding. Black were the heavens, and torrential was the far-off rain ; but the storm had not yet broken. Why should God's vengeance be swifter than the sympathy of Nature ?

"Father Severn ?" cried Lady Harriet ; "but you wrote and told him that you could not preach for him ?"

"This is his answer to my letter," answered the Bishop, forcing a laugh that was bitter and harsh.

"Let Mr. St. Clair see him," cried Lady Harriet, turning from the Bishop to the butler. "Why should you go, John ? He is not in the diocese ; he's a most dreadful ritualist ; and it's Paul's first evening at home !" She laid her hand upon his arm, stooped, and looked up into his face. "You are looking tired, my dear. Don't let him bother you."

"No, I must see him," answered the Bishop, dismissing the servant. "I shall not let him keep me long. Father Severn," he added, looking from Paul to Arthur Blount with a smile, "is one of those zealous sons of the Church who can never imagine that any one is doing her work except themselves. We have to flatter them with conduct which suggests our entire concurrence in that view. Otherwise," he said, moving to the door, "they sulk !" As he went out they heard him muttering to himself : "They sulk--yes, they sulk like children." Then the door closed behind him.

While he was passing with heavy steps through the darkening hall, the panels, the rafters, and the heavy furnitures, ones suddenly out in a dazzle of lightning, and as instantly leaped back into a darker gloom; a moment after the mutter of distant thunder rumbled its deep hubbub above the palace roof. "It has come!" said the Bishop to himself; "God and Nature are striking the hour together."

"Well?" he demanded, entering the library slowly and heavily; his head was a little bowed; his countenance severe and determined. "What business is it that brings you from London?" He went to his high chair under the tall windows, and sat down with his arms resting at full length upon the arms of the chair.

"The business of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus," answered Severn, standing by the hearth.

"Will Mr. Vesey oblige me by turning up the electric lights?" said the Bishop. "The keys are beside the mantelpiece. It is very dark here. Ah, that is better; thank you. We are evidently in for a storm. Now, then. What is the exact business that has brought you?"

Severn wheeled a chair into the centre of the room, and sat down in a business-like fashion with books and papers in his lap. Father Vesey lowered himself gently and sat hunched up on the edge of a chair, white and nervous. There was a weak smile on his lips, and his eyes, like tired bicyclists' at a race, moved round and round the shimmering circles of his spectacles. He held his wideawake balanced on the top of an umbrella gripped between tight legs, his long elastic-sided boots pressed close together.

"The first business, my lord," said Severn, with a

studied politeness, amazing to Father Vesey, "is to ask you for a new date for the synod. It would be convenient to the Society if you could make it the twenty-eighth of August, which is a Monday; on that date, I think, all the members would be present to meet you."

"That is not your only business?" asked the Bishop, drumming on the arms of his chair.

"No; there is another matter," replied Severn.

"Will you kindly state that?" The Bishop glanced up at the windows, as if this conversation had no interest for him.

"It would be more convenient to fix the day first," replied Father Severn; "the second object of our visit is the complement of the first."

"Very well, then. Let us say the day you have mentioned. The twenty-eighth of August. What next?"

Father Severn gathered his papers together, leaned over them, and regarded the Bishop with a gaze that was at once persuasive and merciless. "The second object," he said, "is the fond hope that we may be able to persuade your lordship to meet the Society in a more cordial spirit than you had at first intended. We have brought down with us evidence, which, we feel assured, must produce a great impression on your mind. The work of reconstituting the Society, owing to the theft of the membership book, has manifested to us in a most wonderful fashion the growth and vigour of the Catholic idea. We are hopeful that this evidence, presented to your lordship even in brief, will remove from your mind any prejudices which prolonged absence from the headquarters of our movement may have led you to entertain concerning the

modus operandi of the Society. We are also hopeful, my lord, that this evidence will convince you that our ideal is not a far-off and an impracticable aspiration, but a matter of practical politics, and the most vital and fruitful force in the modern Church."

"Amen!" exclaimed Father Vesey from the edge of his chair. The solid grandeur of the great library had worn off its effect upon his mind; his courage was slowly leaking back into his soul.

"I am sorry that I cannot give you very much time this evening," replied the Bishop, in his deep and measured utterance. "If you can lay this evidence before me adequately in a brief time I shall be glad to hear it. If not, perhaps you will leave papers with me which I can return to you after I have read them."

"It would be possible not to occupy more of your lordship's time," replied the monk, at once beginning to sort his papers, "than will enable you to give us your answer." He looked up, and added: "I am sorry to tell your lordship that we cannot go back to London to-night without that answer—except at grave discomfort to yourself."

"Very well, then," replied the Bishop, outstretching his legs, and crossing his feet. "Please proceed with the evidence." He glanced for a moment at Father Vesey, who immediately lowered his head and swallowed something in his throat, and then bent the wrath in his gaze once more upon Father Severn. A big-sounding roar of thunder at that moment rolled across the heavens. The Bishop glanced up at the windows over his shoulder, and shook his head, apprehensive of the storm.

"There has not been a single instance of resignation

from the Society," began Father Severn, looking up from his papers.

The Bishop brought back his gaze.

"I beg your pardon?" he said.

"There has not been a single case of resignation from the Society," repeated Father Severn. "The three or four members whom we had accustomed ourselves to look upon as slackening in their devotion, chiefly perhaps owing to absence from synods, have proved, from the correspondence caused by this recent canvass, to be among our most efficient members. They have been doing a most excellent and pious work, without encouragement or applause of any kind. But, as your lordship's time is brief, I must include the results of their labours with the general summary of figures which I shall now read out to you."

He looked towards Father Vesey. "These figures include the reports contained in this morning's correspondence, I understand?"

"That is so," replied Father Vesey, with an inclination of his head. "The figures are thoroughly up-to-date." He then lifted his bland countenance and smiled amiably through his spectacles at the Bishop.

"The figures," continued Father Severn, "are as follows. Lay men and women, inclined to be dissatisfied with the negative position of extreme Evangelicalism, 218,606. Lay men and women, willing to investigate the Tractarian thesis, 29,523. Lay men and women, not averse from discussing the question of re-union with Rome, 12,462. Lay men and women, who admit that Catholic Unity is the plain duty of Christians, 6,398. That, my lord, is, I think, a remarkable figure. To continue: Lay men and women, positively assisting in the work of the Society, without, of

course, being members, and who hold the faith of the Sacrifice of the Mass, 3,743. These figures, my lord, I must point out, refer only to Evangelical parishes scattered all over the country; they attest to the value of work done among the least hopeful elements of Protestantism, solely by our devoted members, without assistance of any kind from the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, the Order of Corporate Reunion, the Society of the Holy Cross, or any other of the ritualistic societies of the Church of England."

He paused. But the Bishop said nothing. The old prelate's eyebrows were slightly raised; his lips depressed; his eyes seemed to stare blankly at Father Severn; he looked like a man on the point of falling asleep.

"Our most hopeful work, perhaps," said Father Vesey, from the edge of his chair, "is that done for the souls of the little children of Evangelical parents." The Bishop started a little, and braced his intelligence. "Here, one may say, we are standing on the shores of the Promised Land," continued Father Vesey. "The future, I mean, is even more encouraging than the present."

"Referring to the work done amongst children, to which Father Vesey refers," quoth the monk, selecting a fresh sheet of paper, "the figures are as follows: Copies of Suckling's *Mass Book for Children*, secretly supplied during the last three years of the Society's operations, 1,823. Copies of Stories, in which the idea of reunion is covertly conveyed, supplied to children during the same period, 74,682. Children, on whom the members of the Society can confidently count for growing out of their Protestant environment——"

"Amen! Amen!" whispered Father Vesey, rubbing his hands up and down the sides of his umbrella.

"33,627," continued Father Severn. "That," he said, "is promising for the next generation of Holy Church's workers. The number of children," he went on, "who are definitely, but secretly touched with the Catholic idea is as great as 18,452. Seeing, my lord, that the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament numbered only 13,444 lay men and women in 1894, these figures, we hold, are of the greatest possible encouragement to the members of our Society."

Father Severn gathered up his papers, and sat back in his chair. "Your lordship, we hope," he said, with emphasis, "will derive from these figures a fresh enthusiasm for the pious Society whose existence, under God's blessing, we owe so largely to you."

"Your figures are finished?" inquired the Bishop, drumming on the arms of his chair.

The monk inclined his head.

"So far as they show," began the Bishop, in his slow and quiet speech, "that the fiercer and more passionate elements of extreme Evangelicalism are becoming infected with the graces of a deeper spirituality, I am well pleased with them. So far as they show tolerance for the far distant aspiration after Catholic unity, I am not disposed to find fault with them. But," he added, and his eyebrows began to twitch and tremble, and his great voice rose a little, "where they disclose the success of this Society in poisoning the English mind with the grosser superstitions and the more deadly materialism of the Italian, I am not only filled with a profound dissatisfaction, but I am so covered with shame and horror that I find it difficult to restrain myself from an instant

denunciation of the Society. I beg you," he exclaimed, raising a hand, "not to interrupt me." He paused as a peal of thunder, with a deafening crepitation, rattled above their heads; then, speaking in the rumble of its echo in his even and unimpassioned tones, he continued his words: "I have made up my mind to attend the synod on the date you have mentioned—whatever other engagements I may have made for that day. I shall on that occasion state with great fulness my position. I shall make an appeal to the Society, not to release me from any appearance of sympathy with its work which my former oath may seem to imply—but an appeal that the Society itself should relinquish work which no honest man can be concerned with, and at the same time retain his sense of self-respect." The Bishop heaved a deep sigh. "That appeal may fall upon deaf ears," he said, shaking his head. "At any rate, by speaking my mind, I shall in some measure have relieved my conscience of its burden. As to the course I intend to adopt in the future, that will depend entirely on the reception with which my appeal is met by the Society."

"I have been careful," said Father Severn, whose face was now so dark and stormful that Father Vesey did not care to watch it—"to address you on this occasion with great respect and deference."

The Bishop acknowledged that fact with a slight inclination of his head. "With studied respect," he said.

"But," quoth the monk, beating on his papers with clenched fingers, "when you speak of honest men, my lord, and when you suggest that this Society is an unclean thing, I have to lay a rein upon my indignation to prevent me from forgetting your age and

your position. Honesty, do you say! No man knows better than your lordship that God is no respecter of human ideas in working out His schemes for human redemption; the whole course of the history of Christianity is a black and a terrible one, judged by our standards; but so long as God's purpose is achieved, He does not greatly care by what ends. And what are those ends? I challenge you to say whether there can be a greater present end to the sacrifices of God than the unifying of the Christian Church on earth, with the political and social governance of the world directed entirely by Religion to religious ends!"

"From Rome?" inquired the Bishop, with a suggestion of fight in his voice.

"From Heaven!" answered the monk, getting upon his feet. "There is only one lawful Primate and President of Christendom, the Bishop of Rome," he cried, beating the air with his crooked forefinger. "To him only can the faithful followers of Christ own allegiance. If he is head of the Church, he is head of the world; above all princes and governors—all parliaments and peoples. He is King. He is God." He drew nearer to the Bishop, and resting his clenched fist upon the writing-table, bent down a little towards the frowning prelate. "If Christ came to save the world," he said, "he came to save it socially and politically, as well as spiritually. The politics of Europe, the farther they depart from Christian control, the farther do they march towards the debauchery and ruin of anarchy. You cannot look across the face of the world and point to one political act of Parliaments which has helped mankind to realize the end of their being—worship of God. Modern politics are modern materialism. How to get on in the world,

how to make money in the world, how to enjoy the good things of the world; not the Cross, but the greatest happiness for the greatest number!—education itself is to be made a means only for advancing the social position and the petty vanities of the working-classes!—this, my lord, is politics without God. You once realized that without the consecration and direction of the Vicar of Christ there could be no true progress in human ideas. What has occurred since then to cloud that bright vision of God's purpose? Is it the world? Is it popularity? Is it success? Where is your Cross, my lord, where is it? And look at the world in whose standards you see nothing vile. The holy men and women of France have been driven into poverty and exile, that France may work out her godless political future without any interference from the Cross. Education in England, under the next Ministry, will be made godless, too;—the first step towards driving the Cross out of this bulwark of Protestantism! In Germany, the tide of Socialism which is rising to sweep away its Lutheran Monarchy is animated by Atheism, and Atheism alone. Look at America! is it the Cross there?—is it the crucifying of the lusts of the flesh and a surrender of the heart to the Holy Spirit?—or is it the Strenuous Life, the strong treading down the weak to the music of sweated dollars? Men talk of a wave of anti-clericalism; you know, my lord, it is a wave of anti-Christianity! You know—the whole world is crying out the tidings—that men hate the Cross. Why is it? Because there is no one sole and authoritative Voice, rising above the clamour of the world and acknowledged by all Christians—uttering the Will of God. The forces of mammon; the forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil,

are united in one universal swinishness after pleasure and greed. They have their central authority—the Human Belly! But the disciples of Christ—hating each other, fighting against each other, disputing over rubric and tradition, ornament and vestment, interpretation of Scripture and the exegeses of miserable heretics—these are without unity and therefore without force. Do you doubt, my lord,—you speak about honest men!—do you doubt that the world can be profitably governed only by the Holy Spirit through the Church which Christ left to it as the engine of its operations? ”

“ To all this,” replied the Bishop, his voice calm, but his face white and wrathful; “ I will answer at the general synod. But one thing I will ask you now. Do you think it honest, under cover of the English Church, to put into the hands of children such a thing as the *Mass Book for Children* ? ”

“ Why not! I would set the son against the father, and the daughter against her mother, to save the soul of Christendom! ”

“ Certainly—certainly! ” cried Father Vesey.

“ To save their souls,” said the Bishop, watching Father Severn’s face, “ you would destroy their sense of honour? ”

“ I recognize no such term as *honour*,” answered the monk, angrily. “ I know only one thing, the Cross. I know only one Saviour, the Son of the Blessed Virgin. I care nothing for Mass Books, and Missals. A candle on the altar means no more to me than an oil-lamp set on a kitchen-dresser. Beads, incense, copes, pectoral Crosses, & 1 lights—I care nothing for them. But if the Church, in her wisdom, has decided that these things are necessary for her children, I would

sooner cut off my two hands than oppose her. Who am I to oppose the Holy Ghost? My devotion is given to the Church founded by Christ three centuries before there was a Bible for ignorant men to lose their wits and their souls over. To that Church—recognizing it as the only force which can govern the whole world to the glory of God—I give my allegiance. It is her I serve. And for her I would do anything—set children against their parents?—yes, a thousand times yes; sap and mine Protestantism, under the cover of Protestantism?—yes, a thousand times yes! Why not? The Church is God's Will, and before that Will your petty standards of right and wrong are as dust before the wind. I do not know *honour*!”

“You address me,” said the Bishop, “in a manner which I am not accustomed to bear. You forget yourself. I am not here to discuss history with you; certainly not here to listen to your presumptuous usurpation of the Almighty's Will. You may be the Master of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus; but you are not my Master. I will speak to the Society. I will not listen to you further.” He waved his hand towards the bell, and his frowning gaze turned towards Father Vesey. “Ring,” he ordered.

“Listen to one thing!” cried the monk, drawing back a pace. “Your enthusiasm for the Anglican Church as the chief directing influence in the British Empire is well-known, and it is a noble one. Its consummation would be a pearl worthy for Rome to wear in her crown. I say that, and I mean it. But let me tell you that I will break that ideal into powder, break it and shatter it, if you forsake the larger ideal of Rome as the one and only influence in the affairs of the whole world. You talk about appealing to the general synod.

You will not detach one member. But I—denouncing you before the world—I will shatter the English Church Union to pieces, and drive your timorous and dishonest ritualists out of England. I am not given to boasting. What I set my hand to, that I perform.” He paused, glowering down on the prelate. “Be mindful, my lord, that the Commission on Abuses in the Church of England will present its report next year, and that a Liberal Ministry, with the whole forces of Nonconformity at its back, will be called upon to legislate in the spirit of the Thirty-Nine Articles. What will that movement need to make it absolutely destructive of your dearest ambition—more than the impetus I can give it in denouncing you? The Bishop of Warborough is still a layman of the Church of Rome, and at the moment of my exposure he will be a member of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus.”

The Bishop’s face was grey and cold. He lifted up a hand, slowly and wearily, as though to check the violence of the monk’s utterance. “You claim that you are not boasting,” he muttered, hardly opening his lips. “That may be so. But are you thinking of what you say? Have you considered at least one point?—that in driving me out of the Church of England you will also disrupt the Society of Nicodemus?”

“I do not easily miscalculate!” rejoined the monk. “The mass of ritualists, an unnumbered host of them, will go over to Rome with the first attempt at legislation against the Church by the next Government. Where will be your boasted Establishment, then? But, with few exceptions, the members of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus—now numbering eighty-six—will remain in their Evangelical parishes quietly pre-

paring the ground for the next upheaval. The Society will continue to exist in secret, but with a new name."

"And a new master?"

The monk's swarthy countenance grew dark with anger. "Yes," he said, fiercely, "that is true. You *will* succeed in driving me away from my life's work, and that knowledge," he added, sinking his voice, "will make me very certain when I set my hand to your destruction. Be sure of that! But I shall go to Holy Church," he cried in a loud voice, as Father Vesey rose nervously from his chair, "and I shall be received there, and in some Catholic monastery here in England—with the ritualists as Romans and the French religious orders on every side of me—I shall still labour for the conversion of the last remnant of Protestantism—even if it be not from the inside of the enemy's camp. But you, sir—you will be Churchless!" He snorted bitterly, and his eyes lighted for a moment with hateful fires: "Outside the Salvation Army," he said, "I do not know where you can go!"

The Bishop pointed to the door. The monk turned away, contemptuous and scornful.

"I think, my lord, you ought to know," murmured Father Vesey, standing on the hearth, with the brim of his wideawake hat held against his chin, his umbrella clutched against his breast, "that the Society has been singularly successful during the past few weeks in its operations here in Warborough. The Master and I have only now come away from a vicarage in this town, after admitting the clergyman—who was delighted to hear of your lordship's connexion with us—a member of the Society. Other clergymen will follow shortly. We have had in the town, during the

last three weeks, as many as seven lay-workers ; and *next* week we hope to have as many as fifteen. I thought, perhaps, your lordship would like to know how successfully the Society is working, before taking such a drastic step as breaking away from it."

"Please to go," said the Bishop, pointing again to the door. His heart beat with despair.

At that moment, just as the last peal of thunder crashed overhead and a violent rain struck the windows in a continuous and roaring descent, the door opened and Lady Harriet, half anxious and half smiling entered the library.

"Am I disturbing you?" she asked, at the open door, and then paused ; all the smiles vanished from her eyes as she perceived that she had broken in upon some angry altercation. There by the darkened windows, in what seemed to her a tragic isolation, friendless and lonely, sat the Bishop in his high chair, ashen and stern. There on the hearth, white and embittered, stood Father Vesey. And in the centre of the large room, towering up in his brown habit, with a face of the most violent and undisguised fury—trembling, indeed, with some emotion—was the monk whom she distrusted, Father Severn.

For a minute there was a dreadful silence. Lady Harriet standing at the open door, her fingers still touching the handle, looked at the three men, from one face to the other, and then fixed her gaze on the Bishop. "What is it?" she asked, and her eyes flew indignantly to the face of Father Severn.

"What is it?" she said, coming forward.

"We have had a rather angry argument," said the Bishop slowly. "I fear we have all forgotten toler-

ance and charity. But it is over. My visitors are leaving. Will you kindly touch the bell?"

No farewells were uttered. Father Vesey made something like a bow to Lady Harriet as he passed her, but Father Severn strode by without courtesy of any kind. The door shut, and the sky lightened.

"What is it, John?" inquired Lady Harriet, hastening to his side. She laid her hands upon his shoulders, and gazed searchingly and anxiously into his eyes.

"Nothing," he said, "less than nothing. I was foolish to be so moved. It is a matter of this Commission on Abuses in the Church. Nothing more."

"You don't mean to say," she demanded, "that they wished you to support the extreme ritualists?"

"Yes. That is where we quarrelled," he answered, reaching up to stroke one of her hands upon his shoulder.

"But how dared they attempt it, John?"

"They are desperate men just now. Legislation is in the air. They clutch at every straw."

She nibbled her dry lips with her little teeth, her face pained and anxious, her hands still on his shoulders, but her eyes looking over his head.

"They could not expect sympathy from you," she said. "How could they? Why did they come?"

"I have always supported Severn in his Mission. I have felt sorry for him. His work is about the hardest in London. I have known him many years, of course."

"Still!" she said, taking her hands away, and standing up before him.

"But it's all over now," he answered, getting up.

"Don't let us be bothered by these good enthusiasts any more. Where's Paul?"

"He is dressing for dinner," she answered. Then the slim, tall woman, with her white hair, and her gracious ways, turned to him, and laid her arms about his neck. Her eyes became soft again, and her lips kind. "Don't be worried any more!" she cried. "Let the servants know that you will never see this man, and write to him that you cannot support his Mission any longer. Why should you be worried?" She kissed him, and putting her arm through his led him towards the door.

"It is quite light now," she said. "The storm is over;" and drawing him with her across the room to the fireplace, she turned off the electric light.

In the grey twilight, which seemed to them cold and mournful, like the ashes of a dead fire, they went out from the library. In the corridor the chaplain approached them from the hall. He was walking, as was his brisk fashion, swiftly, his coat-tails swinging out behind him, his right hand thrusting a handkerchief into the sleeve of his left arm. When he was near them, he drew on one side, smiling and charming, and after an exchange of glances with Lady Harriet, he turned to the Bishop:—

"I have just seen Father Severn in the hall, Bishop. He said you are going to him on the twenty-eighth of next month. I told him you must have forgotten the Festival of the Diocesan Lay-Workers' Association, which takes place on that day; but he wouldn't wait for another date."

"I must go to London," answered the Bishop. "Bestwick will preach for me."

"John, dear!" cried Lady Harriet, turning round in front of him. "The Festival of the Diocesan Lay-Workers' Association! You have never missed it."

"I must go to London. It is unfortunate the days should clash. I am very sorry."

Lady Harriet's face grew white and cold. Her eyes became hard and pitiless. "I must get ready for dinner," she said and walked away.

"Speak to Bestwick for me," said the Bishop to his chaplain, and followed after his wife.

As she went up the stairs he saw the hard expression of her cold face; his jaw fell a little and his ponderous head began slowly to nod. "Ah!" he sighed to himself, "if only I had been able to tell you years ago!—if only I could tell you now!"

CHAPTER XV

THE ARRIVAL OF SILVIA

FOR the next few weeks the storm gathering above the Bishop's head paused in its vengeance. Under this pall of hanging blackness, the work of the palace went on silently, perfectly, and ceaselessly—like a well-ordered machine. The gloom deepened every day in the prelate's mind ; his countenance was heavy and morose ; he performed his duties punctiliously and with a wonderful despatch, but without cheerfulness and without joy in the work ; and from this grim and taciturn old man the least and humblest servant at the headquarters of the diocese took his colour and his tone.

Between the Bishop and his wife there came a divorcement of sympathy. She was determined to make no advance from her side until he himself volunteered at least some reason for his intolerable submission to Father Severn's commands ; and he, for his part, avoided as much as possible any conversation which could give her the least excuse for putting such a question.

Lady Harriet, therefore, devoted her spare time to driving Arthur Blount about the country, taking with her on these excursions Violet and, sometimes, Paul. A new interest, too, began to divert her woman's

attention from the sullenness of the Bishop. Arthur Blount showed an unmistakable pleasure in Violet's society. His turn of irony, his not altogether unpleasant cynicism, and his aptitude for making fun of people, ministered congenially to the disease of Violet Lister's mind. It did her good to laugh openly at people whom hitherto she had despised in secret. She was apt to smile in his society, and into the wax-like pallor of her complexion there even came occasionally the shadow of a rose. The Reverend Sutherland St. Clair—only waiting for some "old and doddering" vicar of a rich living to die, that he might ask the Bishop both for that comfortable income and also for permission to propose to Violet—looked with a jealous eye on Arthur Blount's advance in Lady Harriet's favour. And Arthur Blount, considering within himself that Violet, if not beautiful, was at least very distinguished looking, and would inherit some day a considerable income, debated with himself whether the hour had not arrived when he should cease to admire women in general, and instead, by surrendering his charms to one, provide himself with the means for continuing his student's life in dignity and comfort.

While this was going on, Paul was left greatly to himself. He was surprised to find that his father did not put to him the question he dreaded; and as day followed day without any call to a private interview with the Bishop, he found himself—not so much relieved of his fear, as teased into a mental disquiet and a spiritual restlessness by the suspense of his situation. He had called upon Jane Medlycote for her explanation concerning Mrs. Revington, but from that interview he had only gathered into his mind fresh perplexity and new disquiet.

He had found the old maid busy in her morning room with letters and papers all about her and a look of great worry on her face. In the centre of the room, too, was a packing case nearly filled with some of the spinster's most precious first-editions. However, as she drew off her spectacles, and placed them on the table, the old lady turned to him with a smile of welcome in her eyes, and was soon her cheerful self again. Paul was amused to notice that she had been reading financial newspapers, and that the table was strewn with half sheets of notepaper covered with her spider-like calculations!

"I'm afraid," he said, smiling, "that I have interrupted you in your business affairs."

"A mere trifle!" she answered, leading him away from the table. "But I'm glad your father has not come with you. What would he think, young master, to see an old woman like me still concerned with the management of her fortune? 'Jane Medlycote!' he would say, wagging his beautiful big white head, and lifting a forefinger to shake at me; 'Jane Medlycote! lay up for yourself treasures in heaven!' And that would have been his first reproof to me, and I should have died under it. But there, money must be managed; and though I should never have dared to say so to the Bishop, I don't mind telling you that the parable of the talents is my greatest comfort. There's no burying things in a napkin about the last of the Medlycotes; and when I get to heaven I shall be able to give my ancestors a pretty good account of my stewardship." The old lady's cheeks grew flushed and her eyes sparkled. "Look at that!" she said, pointing to the packing case, "I'm even sending some of my books to London to have them valued!" She rubbed her hands,

and nodded her head with self-approval. "When I die, young master," she concluded, "there'll be no waiting for my death duties. Apple-pie order everywhere: the linen folded in the chests and cupboards, the money for the tradesmen's books waiting on the table, the inventory of all my possessions tied up with my will, and every share certificate and bond carefully fastened with pink tape so that even a lawyer couldn't muddle them. There!"

"Don't talk about dying, my dear," he said, patting her hand.

"Because you want me to talk about Mrs. Revington! Well, well, I don't wonder. Young master, that woman is a mystery to me. She's a woman of the world, and knows something about the money-market; but not much I fear: I've taken her advice on one matter, and I don't like it. But that's nothing. I don't like her; and I do. Sometimes I could almost trust her—sometimes I have trusted her!—and then sometimes I feel afraid of her. At one moment she is the nicest woman I have ever met; and then at the next she's the most dangerous and poisonous person that ever dared to cross my path."

"Why do you try to like her?" he asked.

"There's no mystery about that!" answered Jane, crumpling her long lips firmly. "And I'll tell you what it is. She seems to me to have some power over the Bishop—I can't say what it is, and I know it doesn't mean evil on his part, bless his beautiful clean soul!—but in some way, young master, she is able to pull the Bishop's strings, I'm sure of it; and that's why I am nice to her; I'm just standing by, ready to see she doesn't pull too hard. Now all this is between you and me. Not a word to another soul on two feet. There's

no tragedy about it ; no sensation ; no crisis ; nothing of that kind. But there's just a leetle something that isn't quite comfortable between the Bishop and Madame Fine Feathers. And so, my dear boy, you must be nice to her ; and you must encourage Lady Harriet to be charitable to her ; and you must do nothing in the world that will make your father anxious about her. In the meantime I shall be at Madame's side, ready to pull her nose directly she begins to worry the Bishop—if she ever dares ! ”

Paul began to think hard. “ Her husband, of course, was a friend of my people,” he said ; “ but that is all. There was no mystery ; no relationship between them. I wonder,” he said, with something of a sigh, “ what it is that has happened to my father since I went away. Things have altered,” he said, turning to Jane, and laying a hand upon hers ; “ he does things which perplex us all. For instance, last night that London monk, Father Severn, called at the Palace——.”

“ Ah ! ”

“ Do you know him ? ”

“ Never spoken to him in my life.”

“ Well, he called, and persuaded my father—against the wish of my mother—to go up to London one day next month when the Lay-Workers are keeping their festival here.”

“ That's the twenty-eighth,” said Jane. “ The twenty-eighth of August. Twenty-eighth of the eighth ; twice fourteen are twenty-eight ; I'll remember that. Oh, so your father is going to London on the twenty-eighth of August to see Father Severn ? ”

“ Yes,” answered Paul, looking at her. “ What does that mean ? Can you tell me ? ”

“ Tell you ? Tell you what ? How can I tell you

why the Bishop is going to see Father Severn on the twenty-eighth of August in London? Drat the boy, he takes me for a wicked witch in league with the devil. No; certainly not; I can't tell you. I don't know."

"I can see, my dear, that you are worried by what I have told you," answered Paul; "and I can see that in some way you connect Father Severn with Mrs. Revington. I wish you would tell me how that is?"

"I am going myself to London on the twenty-eighth of August," answered Jane, blinking her eyes; "when I come back I'll send for you—*perhaps!*"

And so their conversation ended. Paul, more mystified than ever, was left to wander about the city nursing his troubles and perplexities. This mystery between his father and Mrs. Revington could not last for ever, and even while it lasted his father might send for him to go through that dreadful ordeal which his courage shrank from contemplating. He heard from his uncle that Mrs. Revington was back in Ladywell, and for a minute his interest quickened in the mystery; but it sank again, leaving him face to face with the sorrow in his own soul. He had heard from Violet her suspicion that Mrs. Revington was setting her cap at Uncle Hugh, and therefore he was now half amused and half angry to see the musical Major, most sprucely dressed, perpetually crossing the Close to Ladywell, morning and afternoon, with his precious Psalters and Graduals and Tropers under his arm. But even this state of affairs could not deflect the current of his meditations from that face to face encounter with his father which every tedious day brought nearer to him.

Three weeks before his father was to go to London—and on the day following Arthur Blount's departure

from the palace—Paul Lister, in a mood of restlessness and dejection, threw down the book he was reading, and leaving the palace crossed the courtyard to the Cathedral, with the intention of wandering there while the Choir practised for one of the great festivals. He was fond of music, particularly of sacred music heard in ancient buildings of stone, and he hoped, as he crossed the courtyard, not only to waste the hours of his suspense by wandering in the Cathedral, but to receive into his wounded soul the balm and the nepenthe of great spiritual music.

The rush-seated chairs in the long nave, standing on their carpet of cocoanut matting, and looking trivial and mean under the lofty magnificence of the vaulting, were already partially filled with people awaiting the practice. In the choir could be seen dimly through the darkening screen and the network of the brazen gates, the choristers busy over their singing-books, with three or four canons and their wives seated in the stalls. Lights shone down the choir and round the organ where the organist stood talking with a minor-canon and three of the choristers. In the north aisle a party of tourists, chiefly Americans, were being lectured on the mortuary chests and the monuments by the verger who counterfeited a clerical manner.

Paul stood for a moment just inside the great west doors, surveying the scene before him; then he turned off to the right, and made his way to the south aisle. As he approached it, a girl came slowly round the corner of the stone arch into the violet light thrown from the great oriel window, and in a minute was there confronting him. He uttered an exclamation of surprise, and stood gazing at her in astonishment; for he was standing face to face with the musician of the Orne.

"Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed, in a half-whisper, and was silent, gazing at her.

She looked at him, too, with an interest and an astonishment that could not be concealed. Her pale cheeks—that shone luminously in the light from the window—became warm with colour, her lips, of deepest scarlet, parted, and her deep-set wonder eyes of grey-blue, with their long dark curving lashes, grew suddenly bright and feverish. She was standing face to face with the man who had surprised her at her morning music on the Orne.

When the exclamation of "Mademoiselle!" escaped his lips, she recovered herself, and turning her gaze from his, looked back over her shoulder. At that moment Paul's uncle and Mrs. Revington came round the corner of the arch; and the girl joined them; they looked up and saw Paul.

In the twinkling of an eye destiny had exalted him and abased him. For an instant a mirage of unimagined happiness had flooded the chambers of his eyes with loveliness and light: then it had been sponged out of his heaven and he beheld only the waterless desert of his pain. She was there, the angel-child whose fragrance of soul had first reached him on the air of dawn across the shining calm of a river—reached him and filled his brain with a craving and a passion for sympathy such as hitherto he had never known, never dreamed of; she was there, a delicate figure in blue, standing now before him in a violet glamour of sunlight—beautiful beyond expression, beautiful beyond all utterance of music, of colour, and of speech—the daughter of Mrs. Revington!

The quickness of Mrs. Revington's instinct, even while she wondered how such a thing could be, told

her that Paul Lister had somewhere before encountered her daughter, and that the man was passionately her lover. For a moment she was tempted to chastise with his own passion this raw youth who had dared to show his contempt for her. As his eyes sought hers he read there the smiling triumph of this thought. But before he had time to fear it, or even to realize its bitterness, she advanced a step towards him, and was smiling in his eyes.

The next minute he was introduced to the musician of the Orne, and for the first time knew her name. Silvia! But—Silvia Revington! He thought her more womanly than she had seemed to him on that unforgettable morning. There was a depth of feeling and understanding in her eyes which he had not guessed across the river. The face was small, one of those divine ovals which the great masters have consecrated in their sublime efforts to imagine the Madonna, a countenance without line of age or shadow of experience, a child's face free from all contagion of the world, and yet breathing through its softness, its tranquillity of grace, and its imperishable bloom of innocence, a profundity of feeling, an infinite experience of thought. But for the long moist mobile lips of scarlet the face with its grey eyes would have been cold and colourless; but not without meaning, bewitchment, and spiritual profundity. Her voice, for which he waited with an eager impatience, was the beautiful voice of the Orne—low, musical, nervous. She spoke, he discovered, with the suggestion of a French accent, rolling her r's with a faint lisp, and speaking with the careful and deliberate enunciation of a foreigner. She was dressed still simply, and yet with the touch and finish of cities, which perhaps was responsible for her appearance of

womanhood. She wore a large drooping hat of straw trimmed with flowers, and her dress was of blue muslin, the colour of a hedge-sparrow's egg, with a band of pale blue velvet round her waist fastened by a beautiful old paste buckle. And yet in spite of her dress—which as much as railway and steamship removed her from the banks of the Orne to an English city—the effect which she made upon the mind of Paul was the same as that which he had experienced in Normandy—a feeling purely intellectual and spiritual, a feeling of wonder and of reverence.

While they stood there the organ sounded through the Cathedral; and as Major Lister had brought the ladies there to hear the practice, they now all turned and walked up the south aisle towards the transept. Paul walked beside Silvia, and as they went he pointed out to her, with the eagerness of a poet and the learning of an archæologist, some of the wonders of the stone carving. She was surprised to hear such a flow of knowledge from lips so young, and wondered to see in his strong and vigorous face the glow and the tenderness of an artist, transfiguring it with beauty. For the untidiness of his hair, and the carelessness of his dress, she liked him; but she had been tempted to mate the suit of old and faded grey, the flannel shirt, and the bronzed and vigorous face, with the life of the fields, with sport and strength and hardihood. It caught her soul unawares to find that this young son of Anak was a poet and an artist.

At the first sound of the voices of the choristers, she turned away from him and listened, half raising a hand that he should be silent. The others, now at the end of the aisle, turned and waited for them to approach. But Silvia stood, listening. She was standing in a shaft of

softened light which fell upon the arches, the pavements and the tombs, from an ancient window of greens and blues. Her countenance became almost crystalline, and her eyes showed like glass ; but for the movement of her breast, and the trembling of her scarlet lips, she might have been one of the dead listening to that music. Paul watched her, and knew that he was happy.

The singing stopped abruptly, and the voice of the organist, correcting the singers, came booming to them, ghostly and rumbling, down the long aisle and under the great arches. Silvia went forward.

"Was that not wonderful?" she asked. She might in another place, he felt, be capable of mischief and a quaint wit ; but here and now she was under the spell of sound and time.

"You are fond of music?" he questioned. "Yes, of course ; I know you are. Not many weeks ago I heard you playing a violin on the banks of the Orne. Did you see me?—Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember," she replied, glancing up at him with a smile. "You surprised me ! It was very early in the morning."

"And we meet here!" he said. "Is it not strange?"

Mrs. Revington and the Major passed across to the nave and sat down on chairs close to the choir. The organ sounded again, and again Silvia paused to listen.

Paul watched her, and let his soul drink of its comfort. He was unspeakably happy in her presence.

When the music stopped, and once more the voice of the organist came to them, Paul asked her if she knew what words they were singing. She shrugged her shoulders. "Does it matter?—the words?" she asked. "Sound is so beautiful, and it is its own meanings. I do not like words."

"But these words," persisted Paul, "are as beautiful as this new setting." He went behind a monument to the nave, leaned forward and picked up a Bible from one of the seats. "Will you read them?" he asked, straightening himself and turning the pages. She watched his face bent over those turning pages, and a little smile softened the intensity of her lips.

"Will you read them to me?" she asked.

He glanced up quickly, and smiled. "Yes," he said; "I will. And I promise to stop directly the choir begin again. But—perhaps you know them?"

She glanced at the page and shrugged her shoulders again. "No," she said, a little dissatisfied. "No; I do not know Ecclesiastes." He was amused by the difficulty she had to pronounce the word.

"This is the anthem they are learning to sing," he said; and then leaning against one of the arches, his cap under his arm, one leg crossed over the other, the beautiful young giant read, and the girl watched him and listened.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while
the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when
thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;
While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be
not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain;
In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,
and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the
grinders cease because they are few, and those that
look out of the windows be darkened,
And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound
of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice
of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be
brought low;
Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and
fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall

flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail : because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets :

Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

He looked up with a light of triumph on his face. "That's music, too!" he cried, shutting the Bible. "Aren't they fine, those words? 'When they shall be afraid of that which is high!' 'And those that look out of the window be darkened!' Doesn't the whole poem fill one with a sense of dread, a foreboding of some mysterious and inexorable ill?"

The choir began to sing again. She drew a little nearer to Paul. "This time," she whispered, half smiling, "I am listening for the words." The French accent coming from those deep red lips pleased him, and her voice was beautiful and soft.

When the music ceased, she said to him; "I liked very much to hear you read those words. I do not think I understand them; but now I can feel what the music is trying to express. It is trying, do you not think so?—to express terror; a whole city—like one dying man—waiting within closed doors for destruction, while the grass grows in the street. Something like that. But, I do not like that. It is not easy, I think, to be afraid of what is high. Is it, do you think? It surely is the little, the imperfect, the incomplete, which ought to make people afraid. Do you know what I mean? Ah, but I suppose," she cried, turning away, with a pout of her lips and a slight cloud in her eyes, "that men did not know in those days what

Infinite means, and *Eternal* means. They could not. There was no science."

"Ah!" he cried, bringing her eyes back to his with the exclamation. "You are a disciple of the same master as I follow."

"I do not understand," she said.

"Your father," he answered, sinking his voice.

Her eyes brightened. "Do you read my father's books? Yes?"

"And I knew him," he answered, inclining his head.

"You knew him!" she cried, drawing closer. "You knew him! Then, you will tell me about him. I want to hear about him from people who heard him speak and knew him. My mother has a picture of him here; it is beautiful; I sit and look at it very often. His books!—oh, I know them very well indeed. You know them, too? I am glad; I am very glad."

At that moment Mrs. Revington came to them. "Major Lister wants us to go and sit in the choir," she said to Silvia.

The daughter laid a hand upon her mother's arm. "Mamma," she said, "this gentleman—I do not know his name—knew Papa. We have been speaking of him."

Mrs. Revington glanced quickly at Paul Lister, and he caught a look of almost tigerish distrust in her eyes, but it was only for a moment. "Yes?" she inquired, smiling. And then, with her hand laid upon Silvia's arm, she walked with her towards the choir.

After this strange and delightful meeting with Silvia, Paul shook off the burden of his troubles. And what did it matter to him whose daughter was this lovely child, foreign to England, foreign to the whole earth in her seriousness and mysticism? He was cheerful in

his ways, merry in his conversation, and lightened the deep gloom which had settled over the palace. To no one, perhaps, was he quite so charming as to his uncle. He paid the humming Major visits in that gentleman's dressing-room; examined the beautiful old service-books with reverence and enthusiasm; assisted in the deciphering and translating of the monastic Latin; and heard with a patient ear the Major's efforts to give an organ effect on the piano to the quaint and ancient music. What more natural, then, than the Major should succeed in his persuasion of Paul not to think unkindly and uncharitably of Mrs. Revington, but to come over with him to Ladywell and hear Silvia render this old Church music on her violin. So it came about that not a day passed but Paul saw Silvia, either at Ladywell or in the Cathedral, even in the streets of the city where he mooned many hours watching for her, and where presently he found himself often going with Silvia at his side to examine the wonders and the beauties of the ancient place. Every fresh meeting with her deepened the spell over his soul. He came to know that he was not only happy in her presence, but that he was unhappy out of it; and—greater discovery than this—that whether he was with her or without her he loved her with all the force and masterful strength of his impetuous heart.

There is, midway between that gross, animal, and physically magnetic attraction which unites man and woman, and that perfectly pure and ethereal passion which is a rushing together of spirits in a communion, so unearthly, so divine, that human language is powerless to measure its ecstasy and rapture; there is, between these two, love in which heart and brain are so perfectly blended that the one consecrates the other and

makes of human union an earthly sacrament not unmeet to be offered to God by his creatures of flesh and blood. This love it is which saves marriage and creates the domestic altar. It is experienced by the commonest and the most uninteresting of people ; by the humblest and the simplest, as well as by those who find in this passion a release from the tortures of a too curious intellect. The man of science and the unquestioning peasant find their solace in this same domestic devotion. Burns's "true pathos and sublime of human life" is the comfort of the poet as well as the reward of the clerk and the publican. But the deeper the consciousness, and the more elastic and responsive the sensibilities, then, the grander and the more transcendent are the joy and rapture of this normal affection—the domestic love.

Paul gradually came to recognize that he loved Silvia with human passion. It was a discovery to him which brought at first a sense of shame and shrinking to his soul. Out of the darkness there came to him, leaping and tossing their scarlet plumes, waves of fire and waves of blood which broke and crashed through the chambers of his brain, drowning his former life in one great swelling ocean of desire. The thought of possessing this small creature of such fine and delicate flesh and bone, mounted like fumes of wine to his brain. To be master of her ; to have the keeping of her soul and the lordship of her body, to be to her the clock of her hours and the compass of her ways, this was now the consuming passion of his brain.

A man of the world, seeing mother and daughter together, would hardly have been aware of Silvia. But to Paul it was the mother who was negligible. He did not possess the experience of life to know that the

man who could awaken tenderness in those cold eyes of the woman, and bring into her unimpassioned voice the tone and softness of a caress, would win for himself a victory, such as Caesar, Antony, and Napoleon would have sacked the world for. To him the woman was hateful—if for nothing else—because she was painted and perfumed ; he could not believe, in the impatience of his youth, that beneath all this there waited, hungry for love, the soul of a woman. No ; to him she was a woman of a false and vulgar world, clinging to her youth with a paltry tenacity, and living without one single clean and honourable ambition. It is a problem for the psychologist to settle how it comes about that men of this stamp—big, strong, and powerful men—turn from what they dream the grossness of a woman nobly moulded and voluptuously formed, to worship the slight and lineless creature, so frail and insubstantial that a breath might blow her out of this boisterous world.

And Paul's love was not for the spirit only. It was the normal love of humanity ; the clean and resolute passion of a good man for a darling woman ; the love which, we have said, embracing body and spirit, makes marriage a domestic sacrament. If he thought often of the deep satisfaction of possessing her soul ; so, too, he thought as often of the rapture and the victory of awakening her human love.

There is in all men of this pure nature, a fervour of love which is unknown to the man of the world. Paul Lister had gone through school-life with a Gladstonian intensity ; he had heard nothing of miserable schoolboy wit, seen nothing of evil practices ; and at Oxford he had been thrown into the society of men who lived the purely intellectual life—a class of men far removed

from the young Philistines who can read Plato and the *Sporting Times* in the same afternoon, and view the Venus of Milo and the picture of a ballet girl with an equal admiration. For the vices of common young men he felt not so much an intellectual repugnance, as a physical wonderment and loathing. Nor had he seen anything of that section of London society in which the moral restraints are unacknowledged, and the marriage tie is worn as the badge of licence. Bred up among the society of good and noble women, with a disposition naturally austere and wholesome, he came to love with a clean body and a clean soul, and his passion had the force and hunger of a whirlwind.

There were occasions when he saw Silvia for several hours together. Once when he had to goe Ladywell with his uncle early in the morning, Mrs. Revington had asked them to take Silvia for a day's excursion, and as she was speaking, Miss Medlycote—in answer to a note from Mrs. Revington—had come to act as the girl's chaperon. He had felt perplexed by the suddenness of this arrangement, but the joy of a long day with this mysterious and beautiful child had soon swept all other thoughts from his mind; and so joyful was he, that at the end of that happy day he did not observe what Jane Medlycote, with sorrow and alarm, observed in Mrs. Revington's face—the traces of a battle and a defeat.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LIGHT OF A SOUL

THE divine metaphor which has compared for all time true goodness to the effortless and indefinable effect of light—Let your light so shine before men—has in these later days received a fresh exegesis from the man of science. Light is a vibration ; thought is a vibration. As there are vibrations of heat, so there are vibrations of the brain ; and the physicist and the psychologist find themselves considering a like miracle when they compare their knowledge on light waves and thought waves. Both of these waves are vibrations in the ether.

A really good person, a perfectly pure and beautiful character, has the same effect upon us as light. We do not need to examine the acts and the workings of such a personality to know that it is good ; any more than we need to examine the sun to know when it is daylight. As the air is filled with the effect of the sun, so is the mind filled with the effect of a noble personality. Every man makes an atmosphere about him ; cities are good for us or bad for us according to the thoughts of their inhabitants. We feel in ourselves by the law of telepathy that a light shines from a beautiful soul ; and in such a presence, even without knowing it, we glorify God.

Silvia shed this effulgence of character upon all who

came within the sphere of her thought. She was an artist; the feminine side of the artist, receptive, and not creative. What her mother had believed at first to be an intellectual and a class superiority was, in truth, the radiation of an artistic nature. She was pure and she was good; but she was something more than this—she was absolutely without materialism. This extraordinary spirituality of mind was certainly in part the effect of her training. Edmund Revington, coming to disbelieve the Christian thesis, and yet feeling in his soul that deep and absorbing reverence for the personality of Christ which we find in the work of all the later agnostics—from Renan to our own day—and, perhaps, also fearing the vulgarising influence of London upon his daughter's mind—had placed her under the tutelage of one of the most remarkable of modern Frenchmen, an ex-priest of the Roman Catholic church, as famous for his adventures in psychical science as for his destructive criticism of ecclesiastical Christianity. From this friend of her father's, in the seclusion of a Normandy village, Silvia's mind had received its bent.

Like all lonely children living exclusively in the society of extremely intellectual adults, she early acquired a seriousness which was not natural for her years; and therefore when her tutor came to unfold the sum of his teaching to her, telling her that all material appearance was but the thought of God endeavouring to express beauty and truth, she did not meet his teaching with the smiling scepticism which cheerful and amusing children would certainly have received it with. No; to the lonely and serious child, who had inherited from her father the faculty for mysticism, it became at once a gospel of truth. She

hailed it with joy. It explained everything. It made her understand why God had always seemed so close to her.

In this manner it came to be natural that Silvia should think as often of God, and talk as often of God, to her tutor, as modern English people talk of themselves and their concerns. It is unnatural to talk about God in modern society; to Silvia it was unnatural not to talk about him. She was Miltonic in this. She could not conceive of thought without relationship to the origin of Mind. The universe was her absorbing study; the Creator of it her constant meditation. What else could life offer? God was the supreme reality. For gossips, for jests, for scandals, she had no inclination. The business of life—seeing that everything was provided for her—did not touch her. She was without what we call earthly cares; she was free to say with perfect truth, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy sight." Every day with her was but an intensity of the feeling which carried her spirit out into the invisible. She was a soul given to God because she loved Him with all the fibres of her being.

Now, in England to confess oneself spiritually-minded is to announce oneself a foreigner. Our great commercial history has had its effect upon the language; our speech is blunt, businesslike, and material. The spiritual person cannot express himself easily in any language, but in the language of modern England—with its slang, its Americanisms, and its general flavour of frivolity—he finds himself stammering for his meaning like a foreigner ignorant of idiom and of term. Silvia, then, when she appeared at Warborough felt herself a foreigner in her own country. Her mother

talked about her clothes ; Miss Medlycote talked about money-markets ; Major Lister talked about music as a thing by itself ; the Bishop, Lady Harriet, and all the other people in Warborough talked about something they called the diocese. Nowhere, except in church, did people give any evidence that their thoughts were ever concerned with God—and then how cold, how hard, how lifeless their faces !

It was only in the society of Paul that the child found herself able to utter the natural meditations of her mind ; he, although troubled about many things, and—as Silvia told herself—more concerned with the difficulties of Christ than with the peace of God, yet established in her mind some instinct of sympathy which enabled her to talk with him easily and naturally. He, it must be confessed, was a little startled at first to hear the name of God so repeatedly on her lips ; and, like a true Englishman, it was some time before he could accustom himself to this everyday religion ; but presently, as he perceived more clearly the beautiful and unearthly character of her mind, he began to love the light which shone from her spirit, to feel the beauty of so constant a communion with the unseen, and to understand that such a relationship with the divine is the natural consummation of religion. So they drew every day nearer to each other. But if Silvia did not speak her natural thoughts to others she yet worked upon them by the sheer force and beauty of her light. To her mother she became every day more precious. Mrs. Revington was at first drawn to her by the quiet of the child's mind. There was no storm there, no disquiet, no irritable unrest. It was pleasant to have that serene personality at her side. Later the mother felt the deeper magic of her daughter's soul.

"Are you never unhappy, Silvia?" she asked her one day.

"No, my mother."

"Every day here is just like the day before; does that not bore you?"

"I am very happy, I assure you."

"You do not want to go away, to London? where there is much more to do?"

"I shall be happy wherever you go."

"I wonder how it is you are so easily pleased, Silvia?"

"I have you, dear mother; and I have my father; and I have God. It is impossible to be unhappy."

Mrs. Revington was startled; but the next time that she looked at the picture of her husband it was with kinder eyes.

It became gradually her pleasure to do little things for Silvia. She made it every day her concern to fill the child's bedroom with flowers; to see that the hangings were constantly changed; to add beautiful pictures to the wall and the most charming vases to the mantel-shelf and the writing-table. It was significant in her change of mind towards her daughter that she should one day remove from her dressing-table the tortoiseshell hair-brushes and the silver trays and toilet jars she had placed there, and put in their stead ivory brushes and toilet ware of the most delicate Dresden china. Later on she took away the pink silk curtains and hangings and substituted chintz that was fresh with the sense of innocence and purity.

Sometimes she would go into the child's bedroom on her way upstairs at night and look at her in the peaceful unconsciousness of untroubled sleep, and think how beautiful she was. One night she stooped

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over the bed, and kissed Silvia's forehead. The child, hardly opening her eyes, lifted an arm and drew the mother down to her. "Good-night, dear mother," said Silvia, kissing her cheek. "Good-night, dearest," answered the mother, and lay there, till the pressure of that enfolding arm was released. Then she went from the room, with a new emotion in her heart.

One evening when they were reading together in the drawing-room, Silvia put down her book, and said: "Mother, there is something I should like to ask you, if I may. Was my father unhappy when he left the Church? Did it hurt him, I mean, to give up his form of faith?"

"Yes, Silvia, I think it did."

"Sometimes in his books," answered Silvia, "it seems to me that the happiness he speaks of having found in nature is forced, is put on like a gay cloak to hide a wounded body. He must always have been sorry he could not believe in the Church. I suppose it must be hard to give up anything that one has once believed in very sincerely."

"Yes; that is always hard, Silvia."

"It must be almost as sad as losing love for a friend." She was looking at her father's picture, and did not see the change of expression in her mother's face.

One day when they were in Jane Medlycote's garden, the spinster who had been consulting Mrs. Revington about investments, turned to the child and said: "Well, Miss Madonna, what do you know about stocks and shares?"

"Nothing," answered Silvia, with a smile.

"You live your life just as if these things didn't

exist," answered Jane; "and yet if they didn't exist where would you be?"

"Somewhere in the universe," answered Silvia.

"Not in my garden!" answered Jane. "Not a bit of it! You'd be in Queer Street, treading a sewing-machine for eighteen pence a day. That would be your place in the universe. Don't you get in the habit, my dear, of laughing at your mother and me for talking about money. Well then, if you don't laugh at us; wondering why we do it. (I wish you wouldn't take me up so!) We do it, Miss, so that you and other young people may enjoy yourselves. The money-market is our sewing-machine. We study it, toil at it, master it; and support our children."

But Jane—although she often spoke harshly to Silvia—convinced that she was not "earthy" enough to be healthy—loved the child, and it was always a delight to her when Silvia went over the old house at her side, examining its treasures, learning its history, and admiring its beauties. "You mustn't think me a wicked old woman," she said one day, "because you hear me asking your mother about the Private Investor's Direct Agency, and all the rest of it. I am thinking of those who come after me. I'm not so good as I might be; but I go to church, read my Bible, and say my prayers, and when I go to heaven all my ancestors will be glad to know that the Manor-House of Warborough is left in apple-pie order."

To Silvia this was only the attitude towards the mystery of life which she now found everywhere about her. "If we try to do our duty," her mother had once said, "we need not be afraid to die." Afraid to die! The phrase sounded oddly in her ears. Afraid to see another page in the wonder book of life: afraid to draw

a little nearer to the gorgeous picture of God's painting ! The poor child was perplexed and confounded. The world hurt her, and confused her ; it did not speak her language. Everybody here was of this mind ? To please God, to satisfy God, to avert and escape His displeasure—this was the gospel of life preached by "the diocese." No one ever spoke about enjoying God.

Major Lister, walking on one occasion with Paul to Ladywell, said to him : "There's something deuced queer about little Silvia. I don't know whether you have noticed it ; probably not, but I will tell you, my dear fellow." The Major re-fixed his eyeglass, and continued : "When I bring her a new piece of music she plays it finely, quite well in fact, either on the piano or the violin. But when she plays the same thing, after practising it for more than a week—by George, my dear fellow, I can hardly recognize it."

"She plays it so well ?"

"Plays it so well ! I declare she violates every law of harmony ; I do, indeed. It's vile, my dear fellow. She plays like a baby. Screech, scrawl, yell, and boo-hoo ! Her mother never says a word, and I never say a word ; and so the child goes on playing like that, thinking that our souls are enchanted. Each time the same thing comes out worse. It's rather painful, I assure you."

"How do you account for it ?" asked Paul, remembering the music of the Orne.

"Well, there's only one explanation," answered Major Lister, "and it's such an unpleasant one that I hesitate to give it. I'm fond of the child, Paul. I think she is quite charming. Everybody thinks that. She's so fragile, and dainty, and French. She bewitches

me, I declare she does. But," he continued, lowering his voice, "I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that she isn't quite right in the head; and that's the unpleasant explanation of her painful music."

Paul objected to the explanation with a far greater vigour than Major Lister had shown for the bad playing.

"I hope you are right, Paul," replied the Uncle. "Nothing more objectionable than a man who goes about the world thinking everybody is mad. But, my dear fellow," and he shook a sad head—"I don't know whether you have noticed how little Silvia is inclined to, what I may call, Sabbatize the week-days. She is just a little too religious to be really quite healthy. Any doctor will tell you that the most dangerous form of mania is the extremely religious. I am anxious for her. I discovered the other day that she is almost a vegetarian. I do wish we could make her a little more secular. To-day I have brought with me some light music for that purpose. D flat is a fine key: it is the key of God; but, my dear fellow, speaking with the greatest reverence, we must sometimes give the other keys a chance."

When they arrived at the cottage they found that none of the music brought by Major Lister found favour with Silvia. She shook her head over each sheet. "Not enough key of D flat for you!" laughed the Major. Silvia shrugged her shoulders—

"This is not music," she said; "there is no bass. It is all treble: a church with much decoration and no architecture. You do not like that?"

When she was talking afterwards with Paul, Major Lister ventured with the greatest tact in the world to suggest to Mrs. Revington that Silvia was somewhat

dangerously fond of serious things. "If I may say so," he concluded, "she takes religion too seriously."

His remarks had their effect on Mrs. Revington, whose heart was now quick to feel a mother's apprehension for anything concerning Silvia. That night after dinner, she spoke to the child.

It was hot indoors, and with light wraps thrown over their shoulders the two ladies sat in the moonlit garden. The colours of the still flowers were visible in the mellow light; and over the dark line of the hedge, silhouetted against a sky thick inlaid with patens of bright gold, they could see the great Norman towers of the silent Cathedral. The tall black trees held the whisper of the night air, and against the sky and before the lighted windows of the cottage, bats wheeled and circled in mysterious flight.

"Silvia," said Mrs. Revington, "have you thought that we must soon be discussing your future?"

The child turned to her in wonderment. "What is my future?" she asked. "Are you going to send me away again?"

"No, not that," said the mother; "but your future in the world. You will some day want to be married; and before you choose a husband, you ought to be where you can see men and judge of them. Here we see very few people. I think we shall have to go to London. You will like London; the people are clever and amusing; the theatres are sometimes interesting; and there are dances, and parties, and concerts."

Silvia put out her hand and laid it on her mother's. "Are you thinking of this only for me?" she asked.

"Yes, dear."

"I would sooner stay here."

"But is it good for you, Silvia?"

"Good for me?"

"Your future that we were speaking of."

"Oh, I have no future like that!" cried Silvia, with a little quick laugh. "Ah, no!"

Mrs. Revington could not help laughing. Silvia at that moment seemed so French, and yet she was choosing Warborough before London!

"Silvia," she said presently, "I want to ask you something that is very serious. You will forgive me if I seem to put my questions in a way that hurts you. You know that I am very fond of you, and that I would do nothing to cause you pain." She pressed the child's hand. "Will you tell me," she said, "something about your religion?"

Silvia started.

"I know that parents and children do not discuss these matters nowadays," went on Mrs. Revington, not guessing why Silvia started. "But you have been educated in an uncommon manner. It was your father's wish that you should grow up outside all forms of religion, learning no doctrine, and professing no creed. Such a training, dear child, is apt to make a young girl somewhat self-conscious about religion; and that is really dangerous because it destroys her interest in other things."

Silvia could scarcely believe her ears.

"I have no wish to pry into your secret thoughts," continued Mrs. Revington; "and I do not ask you to tell me your religious views, if you do not wish to do so. But I do ask you, my dear, to try and see that there are other things in life beside religion. I do not mean merely amusing things like dinner-parties and dances; but intellectual things like literature and

politics and art. I want you to take an interest in these things——”

“Oh, my mother!” cried Silvia, interrupting; “do let me tell you. It will be difficult, because I do not know English very well; but I will try to say all I feel, because it is important. I want you to understand me, because I want you to love me.”

Alas for the man, says Sabatier, who has not in his inmost heart some secret which may not be told, because it cannot be spoken, and because if it were spoken it would not be understood. *Secretum meum mihi!* Silvia knew this, and yet with the ardour and the superb faith of youth she determined to make the great effort—to utter the secret thoughts of her soul in order that she might win her mother’s love. She knew that till now she had only enjoyed her mother’s kindness, her thoughtfulness, her self-sacrificing care and tenderness; now the great opportunity was presented to her of winning her mother’s love. To win that love, to establish absolute sympathy between her mother and herself, she would throw open the gates of her soul, and let her spirit rush out burning with desire.

“Oh, mother mine,” she cried, “we are going to talk face to face at last.”

“Come nearer to me, Silvia,” whispered the mother; and putting her arm round the girl’s waist she inclined her head so that her cheek rested upon Silvia’s hair.

“Now tell me,” she murmured.

Then Silvia poured out the secret of her soul. The black shadows cast by the tall hedge: the gold light of stars in the dark sky: the sound of the Cathedral clock slow striking the quarters of the hour: and the moonlight making the centre of the garden white and mysterious, like the form of silence; all this helped

Silvia, and helped Mrs. Revington. To the one it was as if God were speaking through her lips : to the other it was as if a light shone from Silvia and transfigured the night. In a voice scarcely above a whisper, the soothing and compelling tone of a deep yearning, her lips hardly moving, Silvia unlocked her soul. She spoke the language of the saints, the language of spiritual desire and spiritual craving. At first her mother did not understand ; it sounded to her like words, words, words—beautiful words sweet in the ear, but having no meaning for the reason. As she listened it came to her that there was a meaning in the language, and that this meaning was something she had striven to understand years and years ago—somewhere, somewhen, And now she knew at last what that meaning was.

Life without God was like a body without the senses. God was all. This so beautiful and so little world had its place in the beauty and the wonder of the universe, its part in the destiny of eternal love. It was God. To be receptive towards nature was to receive God. Not a flower, not a fragrance, not a sound—but had their part in the mystery of His existence, the infinite sacrament of His revelation. To be quiet, to sit with folded hands inhaling into the soul the out-breathings of the Father—not struggling to understand Him, not striving to please Him—this was to receive Him. And when once He was received, and the soul was born again, then life became a sublime communion with its own destiny, which was God's ; sickness and want, sorrow and pain, the coldness and the cruelty of the godless, had no power to wound or to distress. Why seek out delights, when all delight was summed up in the Father ? Why distract the mind from its communion, when all things else must fall short of that

ecstasy? To be—that was enough. To contemplate—that sufficed. A body into which God had breathed a living spirit—what else, what more could it desire than to house and give shelter to the thoughts of God?

As the child spoke with her quiet low-spoken words, her head resting beneath the caress of her mother's cheek, her hand lying passively in her lap, it seemed to the older woman that she could see the coloured earth with its seas, its mountains, and its green places, moving through the vast ocean of the ether, its glowing atmosphere surrounding it with transparent loveliness; and that it appeared there no longer small, isolated, and detached, but a part of one tremendous and everlasting existence—a cell in the brain of God.

Our lost illusions sometimes come home to us, like children to their mother, crying to us: "Why did you turn us out?" The illusions which Mrs. Revington had lost in London, came back to her then in the garden under the Cathedral. She remembered the prayer of childhood which had quieted terror of robbers and bears in the night season; she remembered the quiet assurance that God was watching over her when a star shone through the open window and looked between the curtains of her bed; she remembered the awe with which she had made her first communion. Words of Christ which she had learned in those days returned to her: the strains of half-forgotten hymns floated across her mind. A deep feeling of peace stole over her spirit, and she smiled at her happiness. It was good, it was best, to believe it all again.

"Ah, but all this you know!" cried Silvia, of a sudden looking up into her face. "My father must have told you so often? It is his religion."

Then Mrs. Revington knew where she had heard it

before—this philosophy too sublime for a rough earth—and she sighed, feeling that the night had grown suddenly cold. But before she parted with Silvia mother and daughter had begun to love each other ; and when Silvia had gone to bed, she stood before the portrait in the drawing-room, resting her arms on the mantelpiece, and gazing reproachfully into the eyes of her dead husband. “ Oh, Edmund ! ” she exclaimed ; “ why didn’t you tell me as Silvia has told me ? ” And the eyes did not answer : “ Why would you not listen to me ? ” They were as patient as the eyes of God.

If it were possible to set a date to any event in spiritual progress, we might say that it was from this night Mrs. Revington began her marvellous conversion to the soul of Edmund Revington. She who could truthfully say that never yet had she loved a man, she who was by nature formed and fitted for love’s absolute surrender, began to fall in love with her dead husband. Later, that dead husband grew to be life itself to her. His memory gradually became to her the bread of life. She ransacked the chambers of her mind for every reminiscence of his soul. The sound of his voice came back to her ; the intensifying light in his eyes when he talked ; the movement of his hands ; the sad smile which haunted his lips. She remembered his habits. She recalled the ordering of his days. She set herself to build up into a living personality every impression he had made upon her mind. She went up to London and hunted for a whole day in davenport, escritaires, chests, and writing desks, for things which he had touched and handled, things which had pleased him, things which he had worn. The smallest rags of his memory became to her inestimable treasure. It was as if she were a young

girl infatuated with a hero, and obsessed by his presence. She talked with Silvia of this new found lover, and made the girl feel that her father was a living being. The man who had hungered for love, was now, as a ghost, the devoted object of two women's affection. Mother and daughter fell in love with him, a love which grew with every day. It might have been to them that he was absent in a foreign land, and that they were making ready for his return; it never seemed to them as if he were out of reach of human sympathy. Some day they would meet again, and life would become beautiful.

This was the work of Silvia. She did not win her mother to a faith in God which was love in its purest passion; she could not make her feel that outside the thought of God there is only suffering and pain; but she gave her tenderness, and she gave her repentance; and even now they could talk face to face.

One night as the mother sat on the edge of the child's bed, her arms about her, their cheeks laid together, Silvia said: "We three, my mother; only we three."

"Ah, little girl!" smiled the mother; "we must soon make room in our hearts for another."

And Silvia hid her face in her mother's kisses.

That other, that strong lover of Silvia's, became to her something of a fear. She was beginning to experience the awful revolution in a young girl's mind when the white purity of innocence is stained by the first faint hues of a woman's passion. Into that lovely mind no monstrous shape could creep, but God ordered it that she should know human love; and her mind, like the white blossom of a fruit-tree, deepened gradually to the colour of the rose. Thoughts of Paul could not be

kept out of her heart. She strove to make those thoughts remembrances of his words ; they obstinately remained thoughts of the man himself—his rough-hewn face, his strong hands, the sound of his deep voice. She became in his presence self-conscious—for the first time in her life. She studied her appearance in the glass before going down to him. She went out by herself for long walks, and returned with the old steadfast calm shaken in her eyes.

As she was decorating with flowers the mantelpiece under Edmund's Revington's picture, her mother said to her one day : " You are making a brave fight, Silvia. But do not be unhappy, and do not resist. It is best to be conquered, best to give all that we possess."

" Oh, mother ! " she cried, laying her arms about the other's neck, " I think I can attain that Best so easily."

But she was troubled and afraid. Love came to her out of the darkness, suddenly, and with terror. She knew nothing. She was not of the world. God had been all in all to her ; now there was Man.

CHAPTER XVII

FATHER VESEY HEARS A CONFESSION

FATHER Vesey sat in his Pimlico lodgings doing nothing. His hands were folded in his lap over two or three Mass books, and his knees were pressed closely together ; in his cadaverous cheeks there was a flush, like the colour of indigestion ; and his eyes glittered and burned feverishly. He sat there perfectly still in a horsehair armchair, thinking.

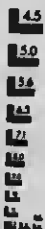
That morning he had stolen away to a church in Paddington for High Mass, and now the disease of ritualism was scorching his blood like a fire. The elaborate ceremony had made him rebellious. After all, this Sacred Society of Nicodemus asked more of a man than human flesh could bear : to work among Protestants, to conduct Protestant services, to submit oneself Sunday after Sunday to the cold and bloodless " duty " which had in it nothing of worship or passion—this was a torture of all the senses, an abdication of life itself. " Happy, happy ritualists," he cried in his soul, " who boldly defy your ordination vow, your Articles of Religion, your Bishops ; and, openly before men, worship God with incense, with colour, and with light ! "

He lived again through the service of the morning. First there was the procession round the church, a long rustle and glitter of garments, the Cross lifted on high, with banners swaying in the air, the smoke of pungent incense hanging in the aisles, and lights shining in a



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quavering line. The three clergymen, vested for Mass, wearing their birettas and robes of cream silk richly ornamented, the Celebrant further adorned with a heavy cope, had brought up the rear of this gorgeous procession—and the sight of the Celebrant's face, awed and white with the ecstasy of that which lay before him, had thrilled Father Vesey's Catholic soul.

He had looked, too, with envy on the robing before the high altar, when the Celebrant exchanged his cope for a chasuble, and the birettas were laid aside, and the priests stood in front of the altar and went through Confiteor. Then was the altar censed by the Celebrant, and the Celebrant censed the server. Then after the reading of the Office, the Gospel was read with pomp and ceremony; the book was censed, a crucifix and lights were raised in front of it, and the deacon and the acolytes made the sign of the Cross upon their forehead, lips and breasts. When the reading was finished, the Book was carried to the Celebrant, who bowed before it and kissed it.

Then came the singing of the Creed, with bowings and fallings, with kneelings and upstandings; and then followed the great glory of the service. Father Vesey had longed to mix the elements in the chalice with that elaborate ceremony: had longed to hand to the deacon that he might hide it in the white veil over his shoulder, the paten of gold; then, with the deacon standing below him, he had longed to receive the censer, and with it to cense the elements on the altar, to be himself censed, and then to perform the ceremony of the Lavabo, while the choir and congregation were censed. And, ah! the ecstasy of those secret prayers at the altar as the choir sang the Sanctus and the Benedictus Qui Venit; the hidden movement of the hands,

the muttered words, the head bowed to the altar, bowed to the ground—the rich garments all the while glittering in candle light. How the Host and the Chalice shone when the priest raised them high in air ; how the candles wavered when they were raised aloft ! How impressive the falling down of the people as the bell tolled proclaiming that Christ had transformed those wafers and that wine into His Flesh and Blood. *Agnus Dei* !—another opportunity for those mysterious prayers, those genuflexions, crossings, and secret ceremonies : and after that the moving picture of the priest embracing his deacon before the altar with the Kiss of Peace. It was finished, the great Catholic service of the Eucharist ; the priest lifting a small wafer made the sign of the Cross in blessing, and God returned to His Heaven.

Father Vesey, as we have said, was suffering from a severe attack of the disease of ritualism ; and where ritualism is an end in itself, it is a disease in grown men, this sensuous delight in pretty clothes, incense, banners, and candles—this approach to the Infinite through toy-shop and millinery stores. His blood was on fire with the thought of vestments, lights, incense, music—and God's prerogative. That marvellous condition of the mind—so bewildering and so horrible to the man of science—was now his in which a man can persuade himself that at certain moments he is God Himself. The pomp of it, the glitter of it ! The altar, the altar ! Father Vesey knew every book which had ever been published on this subject ; there was not an instruction for the sacrificing priest which he had not got by heart. As he sat in his chair he was thinking of the mystery of these things. He had just read the cautels for Mass Priests contained in the *Directorium Anglicanum* : how before Mass the

priest should not wash his mouth or teeth "lest perchance he should intermingle the taste of water with his saliva:" and of how "if a fly or spider or any such thing should fall into the chalice before consecration or even if he shall apprehend that poison hath been put in, the wine which is in the chalice ought to be poured out, . . . but if any of these contingencies befall after the consecration, the fly or spider or such-like thing should be warily taken, oftentimes diligently washed between the fingers, and should then be burnt, and the ablution together with the burnt ashes must be put in the piscina:" and of how "if any one by any accident of the throat vomit up the Eucharist, the vomit ought to be burned, and the ashes ought to be reserved near the altar:" and of how if the Eucharist fall, the place where it fell must be scraped, a fire kindled there, and the ashes reserved beside the altar; while, "if by negligence any of the Blood be spilled, upon a table fixed to the floor, the priest must take up the drop with his tongue, and the place of the table must be scraped, and the shavings burnt with fire, and the ashes reserved with the relics beside the altar."

These things—all the extravagant perversions of that simple and beautiful breaking of the loaf "after supper" nearly two thousand years ago—he thought upon, firing his blood with the mystery of it all, till he could bear it no longer. "I am sinning," he cried, fearing for his vow to the Sacred Society of Nicodemus, and sprang up from his chair. He went to the door, and turned the key in the lock. Then he crossed to his American desk, unlocked it, rolled back the cover, and from one of the lower drawers drew out a whip with nine lashes made of spiked steel, similar to those used in certain English nunneries.

He took off his clothes, tossed them on to the table, and stood naked in the grimy room. His body was a ghastly sight. The last article which he had removed was a shirt of rough haircloth, which had stuck to his skin as he drew it off, pulling away with it the scabs of healing sores. From his stooping shoulders to his knees, he was raw with wounds and scars. The ill-nourished body, which had never been cultured, never known the health of firm flesh and steadfast muscle, this miserable unmanlike body of weak bones and hanging skin, was red and raw and torn with the agonies of self-inflicted torture. Here was a scarlet stripe, and there a pus-oozing sore ; here a long and jagged tear as if a needle had been dragged across him, and there a gash like the cut of a razor. His round shoulders were bloody ; his thin shanks with their square, ungainly knee-caps were lacerated and bruised ; his concave chest, less scarred, had a patch of bleeding flesh in the centre where the Barbed Heart had pressed and pierced the skin.

He took off his spectacles, and his eyes looked glazed and dim. Then, going close to the clock and peering at it to take the time, he returned to the table, grasped the whip, and flogged himself for a quarter of an hour. The blood started from his skin, pale, sluggish, yellow coloured blood ; and he whimpered and groaned and cried with every stripe. His face was contorted, his eyes rolled as if they would fall from their sockets, the saliva overflowed from his mouth and covered his chin. It was hideous to watch him. Had he been some madman, or some sensual flagellomaniac, it would still have been a ghastly spectacle ; but when one heard from his whimpering lips and his grinding teeth, as the lashes curled round his bleeding body,

cries to God, to the Virgin Mary, and to Christ—the sight assumed a horror and a depravity which neither the language of pity nor contempt can adequately express. When he had finished, he dropped the whip upon the floor, flung himself down upon his knees, and lifting his hands—sweating, gasping, and shivering, prayed for strength to be faithful to the vow of Nicodemus.

He had dressed himself, groaning dreadfully the while, when there came a knock at his door. Hastily hiding the whip, he crossed the floor, turned the key, and opened. The landlady stood there, and told him of a lady who wished to see him; he bade her show the visitor up. This lady, Miss Wilmot, was one of the Protestants of his congregation whom he had successfully tainted with Romanism. He made the room straight, seated himself at the table with a book before him, and awaited his visitor.

A physician seeing this lady would have been able to diagnose her condition without any examination. She bore in her hot and freckled face every symptom of her disorder. She was one of those many spinsters to whom no interest in life can ever take the place of frustrated hope. Her eyes were large and bright, her complexion was hectic to the verge of being mauve, her lips were long, blue, and weakly mobile. When she spoke her eyes shone, her cheeks burned, her whole body twitched, and there was a nervous trembling in her voice. In a word she was an hysteric.

“I can't wait any longer,” she said, working her fingers together. “I have tried to keep it back till the proper day, but it is impossible. I was ill this morning; I could not go to my work. I must confess now. Will you hear my confession?” She kept throwing back her head, and brushing back strayed

hair from her eyes. She was dressed in cheap imitation of the fashion, but looked untidy and disordered in her attire; she wore a large black muslin hat trimmed with red roses, and from under this hat her reddish hair escaped and hung carelessly about her forehead and over her ears.

"Yes; if you wish it, Miss Wilmot. Wait for me."

He passed through the folding doors, which opened with a loud crack, and presently returned wearing a cassock and a biretta. His face was grey with his suffering, but his eyes glittered like a fox. She fell on her knees before him. The folding door which he had pushed-to hurriedly, opened with a click of the catch, and gaped open.

"Let me remind you," he whispered, "that in the words of Dr. Pusey you must obey me as God Himself: and that what I know through Confession I know less than what I do not know. Speak to me freely."

"I have read, Father, the *Ministry of Consolation* which you gave me," she answered, pressing her hands to her bosom; "and I can now truthfully say I believe that 'the power of the remission of sins is ordained in the hands of the priesthood, and no other channel whatsoever is appointed for our assured forgiveness'; and I know, too, it must be right that we should not 'shrink from confessing, openly and honestly, all sins against purity and modesty.' But, Father," she cried, covering her face with her hands, "how shall I tell you the dreadful thoughts which enter my mind, thoughts which I do not even know language for; thoughts which are wordless, as fire is wordless, and blood is wordless, and wine is wordless? How can I tell you these things?" She drew away her hands, and gazed at him, trembling.

He sat down in front of her, and laid his hands gently upon her shoulders. "Remember," he murmured, "that you are not speaking to a man ; you are speaking to God. Do not struggle for words ; let your thoughts utter themselves."

She bowed her head. "I do not how know to begin !" The big black muslin hat with its cheap red flowers was trembling under Father Vesey's face.

"You spoke of thoughts."

"Yes, Father ?"

He bent his head for her answer : "Thoughts of money ?"

"No, Father."

"Thoughts of slander ?" His eyes smiled.

"No, Father."

"Thoughts of coldness towards God ?" Again he bent his head for her answer.

"No, Father."

His hands pressed upon her shoulders : "Perhaps, my child, they are thoughts which come to all of us who are specially marked out by the devil for his assaults. Thoughts of the flesh ; immodest thoughts ; thoughts of the body ; thoughts of lust ?"

"Yes, Father ! Yes !" The red flowers trembled violently : the shoulders shook with a convulsive sob.

"Be calm, my child ; and tell me about these thoughts." His eyes were feverish behind their spectacles, his mouth worked excitedly. "Do not forget, I pray you, anything which has entered your mind. I am God, who knows all things, and can forgive all things. But, if you keep anything back from me, then will my Absolution be in vain, and all your past confessions will be as if they had never been made."

"Oh, Father, I am so frightened!" she cried.

"Have no fear, my child. In Confession many dear women have told me the black and dreadful thoughts which enter their minds; and, as God, I have forgiven them and delivered them from their bondage. Remember that it has been well said:

'Confession is the toilet of the conscience; the priest washes and cleanses the soul, soiled with sin; he restores it to health, pure and white; those children who will not be attended to by their mothers, remain all day dirty and disgusting; the souls who will purposely neglect the cleansing of Confession are unclean souls, vile and base souls.'

"My child, do not let your soul remain dirty and disgusting. Speak to me openly, having a good courage; for God knoweth the thoughts of our hearts."

Father Vesey held with Father Augustine Wirth that "the most responsible office of the priest of God is the hearing of confessions"; since "in the pulpit he can touch certain sins only with kid gloves, in the Confessional he probes the sores to the very bottom. In the pulpit he must be a lion, in the Confessional a Fox". He held this doctrine, and now, with his body fresh from chastisement, the victim of the whip's physiological effects, his brain was consumed with a passion to make this woman strip bare her soul before him.

"Tell me everything, my child," he said, bending his head so that his breath heated her ear; "I am discreet." The folding door cracked, and gaped wider; she started, and, looking up, cried. "What was that?" She was trembling convulsively.

The world has probably forgotten the sensation caused by Lord Redesdale's exposure in the House of Lords of that vile and nasty book *The Priest in Absolution*.

The newspapers and even the more private Hansard were unable to publish the extracts read aloud on that occasion ; but even on the evidence of that which was printable the whole Press of the country declared unani- mously its stern condemnation both of the book and of the society which issued it—the Society of the Holy Cross. It is enough to say that Archbishop Tait, fol- lowing Lord Redesdale, described it as a disgrace to the community that such a book should be circulated secretly under the authority of clergymen of the Estab- lished Church ; declaring of those questions prescribed in the book which Lord Redesdale had been able to read aloud :—“ I cannot imagine that any right-minded man could wish to have such questions addressed to any member of his family ; and if he had any reason to sup- pose that any member of his family had been exposed to such an examination, I am sure it would be the duty of any father of a family to remonstrate with the clergy- man who had put the questions, and warn him never to approach his house again.”

Well, this book, which we might expect to find under lock and key in a collection of pornographic literature, was one of Father Vesey's favourite volumes. He had read it so often that corners of the pages were grimy with the smear of hot finger marks and the more prurient pages, hanging loosely from the binding, were scored with pencil marks and speckled with his annotations. There was no hint in that book as to the elucidation of secrets which he did not know.

It would be a cruel thing to judge this little priest. The ordinary man of the world, who lives by what he calls the law of nature, keeping his body vigorous and clean, going to his pleasures as he goes to his golf, his fishing, or his shooting, and having a hundred interests

in life; to keep his brain healthfully employed; such a man knows nothing of the deadly and baneful prurience which works like a gnawing acid in the brain of those who spend their whole days in an effort to strangle nature. Words and pictures which mean nothing to him, are to these men like furnaces kindled under their thin skulls. The hint of immodesty, the suggestion of sin, is sufficient to set their brains conjuring up Rabelaisian and Dantean pictures of infamy and debauchery. They imagine vice, which is always sordid and is generally vulgarly disgusting, to be worse than it is—a thousand times more infernal and devilish. They regard the majority of women as monsters of iniquity, creatures whose thoughts can only with the greatest difficulty be turned away from the most abominable depravity. Of the sordid vulgarity and barter of vice; of the extreme rarity of a really dissolute woman, they know nothing. Their minds are salacious; choked with the lubricity of a timorous but questioning ignorance; and, dwelling upon the common immodesty of the world, they build out of their imaginations hells of the most fearful and bacchanalian order where men and women, with the swine of Epicurus, are for ever hurled in some hideous revel of Paphian obscenity. They would not enter those hells of their imagination for anything that life could offer; but they must needs pry and peep over the edge—because their minds are not pure.

Consider, then, Father Vesey, with his starved body lacerated and scarred, his mind full of the poison of *The Priest in Absolution*, bending over his penitent, his hands on her shoulders, his lips close to her ear, tempting her to tell him all the shameful evil of her thoughts. It is a horrible picture, but it is not an uncommon one;

wherever women go to Confession there it exists, offending the eye of Heaven and disgusting the souls of sane and healthy men.

And what shall we say of the tale told by this poor kneeling woman with her scorching face? It was such an outpouring as you may hear any day in the wards of the Salpêtrière, or in the *clinique* of any physician who employs hypnotism for the cure of nervous diseases. It was dreadful, it was painful, it was sad; but a healthy man standing there would have known at once that he was listening not to the measured utterance of a rational mind, but to the heated delirium of neurosis. He would have prescribed for her, not whippings, and penances, and invocations to the Virgin and the Saints, but out of door exercises, cold baths, healthy literature, and a visit to her doctor.

To Father Vesey, however, the words of the distracted woman were the cries of a soul to God. He rose from his chair, and gripping her hands in one of his, with the other he made the sign of the Cross above her head, and cried: "I absolve thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost! Amen!"

She rose, stumbling to her feet, and covered her hot face with her hands. "How can I look at you!" she sobbed.

"Your sins are forgiven," he answered.

"But you know now how I—how I——"

"Your soul is white as wool," he said.

"Yes, but you were God then; now you are a man."

He laid his hand upon her arm: "I am always a priest," he whispered.

"Your fingers burn me!" she cried, and the hat shook violently.

"Do they?" he asked.

"How shall I look you in the face when we meet?"

"Look at me now."

"No, no!"

"Yes."

"I dare not."

"Like this!" he answered, and lifting his hands he drew her fingers away from her face.

Her eyes were full of tears, but they were bright and burning.

"You are not afraid of me now?" he asked, still holding her hands.

"Yes, I am."

"Why?"

"I am afraid of myself."

He dropped her hands hastily, and moved away. There was a sound of footsteps on the landing outside. The handle of the door turned. Father Severn entered the room.

He glanced at the woman's weeping face, then at Father Vesey standing white and nervous by the table; then he looked round the room, and saw that the folding doors stood open.

"This lady?" he asked.

"She has just made her confession," answered Father Vesey.

"I have seen you somewhere, madam?" he demanded.

"Yes," she answered, rubbing her face with her handkerchief. It was impossible to forget that terrible monk.

"Where was it?"

"I would rather not say."

"Ha! I remember. This is good." He shut the

door and came forward. "Be so good as to sit down."

"You won't say that I come to confession!" she pleaded. "I should lose my place."

"I serve God, madam," answered Father Severn, crossing the room to Father Vesey.

"This woman," he whispered; "she has made a confession? She is one of your parishioners? Can you trust her?"

"Yes."

"You are sure she has no designs?"

Father Vesey trembled. "I cannot believe it," he answered. "I have known her for two years. She comes to all my services." He glanced across the room at his penitent with fear and apprehension.

"Do you know what she is?"

"A private secretary, I think. She goes to the City. Her name is Wilmot."

Father Severn turned round. "Am I right, madam," he demanded, "in thinking that you would do something for Religion?"

"What do you mean?"

He sat down, drawing a chair to the table so that he might be opposite to her. "If you could serve Religion, do something which would help the work of God—you would do it?"

"Yes."

"Anything?"

"Yes—No. I wouldn't do wrong to help Religion."

"Sin is sin when it is done deliberately for purposes of sin," answered Father Severn. "There is no sin in any action which is done for the glory of God."

"Oh, yes, I believe that. The end justifies the

means." She had learned the first lesson in the Jesuit grammar.

Father Severn looked round at Father Vesey : " You have given this sister absolution ? "

" Yes. "

Father Severn turned to her again. " After God has forgiven us our sins, He expects us to show our gratitude in good works. Will you undertake a noble work in the name of Religion to show your gratitude ? "

" Yes, " she stammered.

" You are employed, Miss Wilmot, in the office of the Private Investor's Direct Agency ? "

" Yes. "

" Your employer is Mr. Spencer Purvis ? "

" You called on him the other day, " she answered.

" Yes. I know him. He employs you ; what as ? "

" His typist and secretary. "

" You have access to his private room ? "

" Yes. "

" To his safe ? "

" Yes. "

" To his papers and books ? "

" Most of them. "

" God requires some of those books ; will you give them to Him ? "

" Steal ! " she cried.

Father Severn turned to Vesey with a scowl : " You have ill-instructed this lady in her duty towards God, " said he.

Father Vesey bowed his head, and crossed the room. " My child, " he said, bending down to her : " God sometimes requires an heroic act on our part to prove our faith. He has just shown you great mercy ; will

you turn your back on the opportunity? He has so miraculously provided for a manifestation of your gratitude?"

"I shall be sent to prison," she said.

"No; you will not be sent to prison," answered Father Severn. "I swear that to you."

"Mr. Purvis will be sent to prison?"

"No; I swear that to you."

"Why do you want me to steal? What do you want the books for?"

"For the work of the Holy Church. Ask no more. I have given you my word."

Father Vesey addressed her again. "Be not like Thomas, my child," he murmured. "Believe without question, it is the faith of a little child which best pleases our Heavenly Father."

And so the wretched woman was persuaded. An evening was named when she should bring the books to Father Vesey's rooms, taking them back with her early in the morning; and further it was agreed that on the afternoon of Monday the twenty-eighth of August, the day of the synod, directly Mr. Purvis left the office, as he would do, with Father Severn, that she should pack up the papers and books required, and carry them in a cab to the Mission House in Southwark.

Father Severn needed some tangible proof of Purvis's guilt as a financier to intimidate him into the course he had now determined upon. He decided to get hold of the books and search them for evidence; to use that evidence to obtain the co-operation of Purvis in his destruction of the Bishop; and then, in case Purvis should prove obstinate on the day of the synod, to have those books and papers in his own hands, wherewith to overawe the swindling financier.

When she was gone Father Severn turned to Vesey and said: "I now hold the Bishop in the hollow of my hand."

"Good, good!" exclaimed the other, rubbing his palms together. "And only a few minutes ago I was feeling rebellious against the Society, and longing for full communion with Holy Church."

"Humph! Now, tell me," said Severn, "what reports do you get from Warborough, and what have you learned about Mrs. Revington? But first, if you please, shut your bedroom door."

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. PURVIS RECEIVES A VISIT

WHEN Father Severn left the Secretary of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus, he made his way through the streets to a sisterhood in Fulham. He was never greatly troubled by the interest his habit attracted in the London streets, but on this occasion he was altogether unconscious of the stares and smiles and elbowings with which his progress was greeted.

He was perfecting the last wheel in the machine which he had invented for crushing his enemy.

Father Severn was not animated by any personal enmity towards the Bishop of Warborough. In one sense he feared him, feared the effect of his appeal to the synod, and feared the influence upon England of his now powerful and militant anti-Romanism. The Bishop was one of the great figures in the modern world. As a theologian, as the great philosopher who had silenced Sir Frederick Mayor, as an orator, and as an administrator, his fame was in the mouths of men. His magnificent ideal of unifying Anglican Protestantism throughout the British Empire and the United States of America, was beginning to attract the admiration of statesmen and the more far-seeing of newspaper editors; it was looked upon as a surer means for permanently consolidating the Empire than any material device of political economists; and,

moreover, it was also regarded as the surest method of guaranteeing the peace of the world. With France driving Rome out of her coasts, and Germany's awakening to a fast broadening Protestantism, the friends of the Papacy saw that a movement was begun, which might one day leave her isolated, insular, and parochial; while, on the other hand, the friends of Protestantism were deriving a fresh energy and zeal from an ideal which promised them universal and catholic influence.

To Father Severn it was a hateful thought that Protestantism should ever enjoy the prestige and glory of a world influence. He held in his hands two means of checking the movement in this direction. In the first place, by denouncing the Bishop as a Romish conspirator, he could paralyze with consternation the more tolerant forces in Evangelicalism and Nonconformity, and so delay, for centuries perhaps, the unity of Protestantism. But this could only be done at the cost of delaying Rome's triumph, and also at the terrible price of having himself to abandon his congenial work of conspiracy. The second means which he held in his hands could be exerted with the first attempt at legislation on the part of the House of Commons against the abuses in the Church of England. he knew that any drastic measures might be so violently opposed by himself as to drive practically the whole army of ritualism into the Roman communion; Anglican clergymen, he knew, found less to trouble them in the practices of Rome than in the spirit of extreme Evangelicalism. This disruption of the English Church would be accomplished easily enough, if only Parliament would legislate; but then, the work of Catholicizing the Church of England would be again indefi-

nately delayed. In the meantime, he was threatened by the Bishop's influence on the synod.

He had thought over and over again whether it would not be wise to set the stubborn and turbulent old man free of that youthful vow of his; at one time that step might have been possible (in spite of the temptation to wait until his hand could be forced as Archbishop of Canterbury), but now he considered it would be dangerous. Dangerous, unless he could be freed in such a manner as to tie his hands with cords of steel so that he might neither destroy the Society, nor work any longer for his Imperial Protestantism. To free the old fighter, broken, scarred, and maimed; this was now the policy of Father Severn, and fate every day was more and more strengthening his hands to this end.

He came to a standstill at a large red-brick building in one of Fulham's mean streets, and rang the bell. On a small brass plate let in a heavy oak door under a porch, was engraved the name, The Sisters of the Blessed Virgin. The grating of the door was presently slipped back, Father Severn was examined, and then the door opened, and he was admitted into the convent. A nun closed the door, and went before him down the stone passages to a door at the far end of this cold tunnel of uncovered brick. She knocked, waited till she was bid to open, and then turning the handle admitted Father Severn to the presence of the Mother Superior.

The room in which Father Severn now stood was comfortably furnished, in marked contrast to the miserable cells in which the Sisters passed their lives; but it was without flowers and without any grace of beauty. The chairs were easy, the tables large and comfortable, there was a thick carpet on the floor, and

a sofa against one of the walls ; it was easy to see that the fireplace was not there for ornament only, nor to be used spiritually as a temptation in winter months.

The woman who rose to greet the Father was of handsome appearance. She was nearly sixty years of age, with a face of the most transparent whiteness and eyes pale, prominent and vivacious. Her features were thin and fine ; you could almost see the bone at the bridge of her nose. In her snow-white linen and her nun's habit of rich and voluminous black, edged with violet, the intense pallor of her face and hands was accentuated, and her height and nobility of carriage shown to their best advantage.

This lady was the head of one of those numerous Anglican Sisterhoods which sprang up in England after Dr. Pusey's famous visit to Ireland. It was one of the most rigid and most successful of those agencies for assisting the priests in their work of Catholicizing England. The nuns took the threefold vow of perpetual Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. They gave up all their private property on entering the Sisterhood, vowed themselves to celibacy, and forego all interest in the outer world. The Mother Superior's word was their unquestioned Gospel. Their work consisted in teaching in the school attached to the convent, in visiting among the poor, and in doing ecclesiastical needlework for ritualistic churches. In addition to this it was their duty to perform all the household work of the convent, scrubbing floors, emptying slops, cooking, and dish-washing.

Father Severn was the confessor of this establishment, but his real interest with its concerns lay in the large and flourishing convent school. Here, chiefly because the charges were so small, hundreds of parents

had sent their children to be educated; and, as the nuns were scientifically trained in the work of teaching, the children prospered exceedingly. But while the ordinary work of the school went on, the children were most thoroughly and carefully trained in the extremest form of ritualism. They attended Mass, they went to confession, they learned by heart prayers from the Roman missal, and they were taught the secret meaning of all the elaborate ceremonies of Catholic worship. It was here, then, that Father Severn saw the great hope for his ideal; and while he was brusque and often cruel to the confessing nuns, he was gentle, encouraging, and even playful with the children when he visited them in school. The school, indeed, was the one hobby in the life of this iron-minded and relentless machine.

He inquired of the Lady Superior concerning the state of the nunnery, and was told that order prevailed.

"Sister Rose is still troublesome," said the old woman smiling indulgently, and blinking her thin eyelids, "but she is so very young that I do not make myself anxious about her. Yesterday she flung a saucepan of potatoes over Sister Violet in a fit of temper. That was naughty of her! I administered the Discipline, and told her that next time she did such a thing I should put her on bread and water and make her wear hair-cloth on every day of the week."

Father Severn merely scowled, these feminine matters did not interest him.

"Sister Marian," went on the Lady Superior, "you remember her—she was Lord Waltham's daughter—still has intermittent longings for a return to the world. I am sorry for the poor child. She is not strong,

and the rougher housework, which is so good for her soul, tries her a great deal. The day before yesterday she refused to scrub the passage used by the school children. I made her kneel down there, and in the presence of the seven eldest children in the school lick the sign of the Cross in the dirt. To-day she is quite sweet again. I am really deeply attached to her."

The level tones of the old woman's voice and the gentle smile on her face as she recounted these barbarities, would have made a saint shudder.

"I have administered the Discipline five times since your last visit," she said, "and eight of the Sisters have used it upon themselves. We have only three of them really ill; but eleven complain of ill-health and I give them a little home-made medicine once a day."

"And the school?"

"We are very full just now. A hundred and seventeen altogether."

Father Severn got up from his chair. "There is a lady I should like you to see," he said. "I think she might enter the Sisterhood."

"Has she property?"

"No; but it will be an advantage to the Church that she should take the vow before the twenty-eighth of August, and be received into the convent permanently on the night of that day. Her name is Wilmot." He wrote down the name and address on a piece of paper and gave it to the Lady Superior.

"Do not mention my name to her. A low church clergyman in the parish where she lives, a Mr. Vesey, is now trying to persuade her to enter some religious house; use his name. He has reason to fear for her purity, and would rather she became a ritualist than

a Magdalen. From my point of view I consider she will be able to serve you ; I know that it will be an advantage to Religion if we can have her safely here on the night of the twenty-eighth. Her disappearance from the world will be an advantage."

"Very well ; I will write and ask her to come and see me."

"And now, what news have you for me concerning that Mrs. Revington ?"

While Father Severn—perfecting his plan for the destruction of the Bishop,—was visiting Mr. Purvis, and at each fresh visit astonishing that now thoroughly anxious financier by the Church's knowledge of his business ; and while, we have seen, he had his spies in Warborough, and his agents in the City—all working for him to the same end—Miss Jane Medlycote, in her old stone house in the Close, was pondering on the mystery which somehow or another linked her beloved Bishop with the monk and Mrs. Revington.

She did not like at present to put any questions point-blank to Mrs. Revington. She considered it wiser to cultivate that lady's society, and use her powers of observation secretly. But as the weeks wore on, and Mrs. Revington made no mention of that strange encounter with the priests in the Close, Jane began to grow anxious. The twenty-eighth was drawing nearer, and the gloom in the Bishop's mind was deepening.

"I cannot think," exclaimed Lady Harriet, "how the Bishop can desert the Lay-Workers for that Romanizing Mr. Severn in London. If he were a ritualist—if he liked the man, I could understand it. But, he is even less a High Churchman now than he was when I married him ; and I am quite sure that

he detests Mr. Severn. The whole thing is a mystery to me."

"Well," said Jane; "perhaps he is going up to London to denounce the Roman fox; something of that sort. You may be sure that if he sets his mind to anything painful like that he would keep it from you and everybody. He's like that."

But it was not from Lady Harriet that Jane hoped to obtain light. It was from Mrs. Revington. What was the mystery of this woman? She had come to Warborough a tired and jaded lady of fashion, with no more soul, Jane told herself, than a shoe-horn. Warborough had done her good; the rest cure had improved her mind; the air of London had gradually gone out of her face and out of her garments. But this was not all; the mysterious creature was actually growing lovable. Since Silvia's arrival she had become sweet and gentle and tender. There was a new light in her eyes, a kinder and more frequent tenderness on her lips. She was growing in grace too swiftly to be altogether comfortable.

"Warborough's doing you good, ma'am," Jane had remarked one afternoon in the garden.

"I feel as if I do not want to go away."

"Don't you miss your rackety entertainments?"

It was the same kind of question which Mrs. Revington had suggested to Silvia. "No, I miss nothing. You see I have found so much—a daughter."

"A very remarkable daughter, too," said Jane. "A leetle too religious perhaps; but she's young, and sense only comes with years; doesn't it, ma'am?" The old lady got up from her chair and drove a neighbour's cat out of her best flower-border. "What are you going to do with Silvia?" she asked, coming back.

"Keep her as long as I can."

"It seems to me that Master Paul is the likeliest burglar in that direction."

"He appears to admire her," she said, not without a sigh.

"That would be a good match," went on Jane. "Money and all the rest of it—heaps and heaps; but I don't know how it would turn out. Paul's to be ordained next Easter, I understand; how would Silvia like curating, and how would the Bishop like her peculiar form of religion? It wants thinking about."

"I don't like thinking about it at all, to tell you the truth," answered Mrs. Revington; for she was watching Silvia's terror of love with a growing dread. "Silvia is too young to be married. If marriage were suggested I should ask her to stay with me for at least four or five years. We get on very well together."

"You do, indeed. If I may say so, ma'am, Miss Madonna has done you good."

Mrs. Revington looked at Jane. "That is quite true," she said.

"I notice things."

"No one could live with that child and not grow better," said Mrs. Revington. "She is entirely selfless: she has no inclination that is not sweet and noble: and—well, you have said it, she is religious. It is a form of religion which I do not quite understand, but I can reverence it. I do not think perhaps it can last, just as it is difficult to see how innocence can last: Providence is not what we should call very sensitive where innocence is concerned; but it is a religion which makes her childhood happy, and perhaps if we all pray very much, Heaven will give her an equally happy religion for her womanhood."

"Why do you speak, ma'am, half-bitterly?"

"Oh, I am not very much in love with the system of things. Providence does not move me to gratitude. Things are rather barbarously arranged for us, don't you think? Our refinement—what is it but a manner? We are so constructed that the habits of our being, the necessities of our health, mock every æsthetic aspiration we may be tempted to entertain. Nature is uncouth; as for civilization it is a monster."

"You only came to see all this when Silvia arrived?"

"It has always been more or less in my mind; but the thought of Silvia has certainly made me see it with crueller sharpness. It would be hard enough to have to tell any young girl the facts of existence and the ways of the world, but Silvia—" she shrugged her shoulders—"it seems like a sacrilege."

"Don't tell her," answered Jane.

"There are times," exclaimed Mrs. Revington, "when I feel a desire to escape with her to some place where none of these problems intrude, some little seaside village, without society and without occupation. Indeed, I can even bring myself to contemplate a Religious Retreat, where Silvia would be perfectly happy, and I—well, that does not greatly matter. I mean, it seems to me that with a girl trained as Silvia has been, and holding so mystical a view of life, it will not only be difficult, it will be really dangerous, to tell her the facts of existence."

"Again, I say, don't tell her. Wait, my dear, wait. *La journée sera dure, mais elle se passera.* There is a twelve o'clock to every day."

"Oh, as for that; it is either a question of letting her find out or of telling her. The result is the same; a terrible shattering of ideals and a winding-sheet for

poor innocence. The world is our coffin ; we cannot get out."

" My dear," said Jane, tenderly, " I quite recognize that Silvia is different from ordinary English girls. She has been brought up with a very clever old man ; which is highly dangerous, since precocity of intellect is not natural ; but now she is out of his hands ; she is in the world ; she sees people and she reads books ; and—perhaps you don't know it—she is already in love. Leave nature to tell her the rest. I feel for you : I understand, believe me, your repugnance. To me, my dear, the world is not a beautiful place. It's the fashion nowadays not to believe in the devil ; but I don't mind telling you that next to the parable of the buried talent my greatest comfort in Holy Writ is the text ' An enemy hath done it.' Devil or no devil, there's some power at work on this earth which is not all good, and that power seems to have had a great deal to do with the ways of society. But, for all that, saints have managed to exist here before us ; and when you and I are fast asleep under the green grass there'll still be saints walking about on top of us, talking about the East wind and the Pentateuch. Not a doubt of it. And so I say, don't worry about Miss Madonna. Let God answer her prayers, as He chooses, as He sees best. Prayers are answered, that's a certainty ; and Silvia's will be answered along with the rest. As for innocence—there's not much credit in that. It's innocence with knowledge that counts : and one good married woman teaching her children to be a little better than herself is worth twenty nunneries full of whimpering young pussy-cats. Why, my dear, you yourself are better than you think, in just feeling motherly about Silvia. That's the first

step towards the highest society—God's; for don't tell me there isn't as much Mother about the Almighty as there is Father. Doesn't it make your blood boil," she concluded, "to hear these Roman Catholic prayers to the Virgin Mary?—just as if God hadn't made all the mothers in the world!"

It was almost always in some such manner as this that conversation now flowed between Jane Medlycote and Mrs. Revington. The old spinster, anxious at the beginning of these dialogues to discuss something concerning the Bishop and Father Severn, found that her interest was carried away to Silvia and to Mrs. Revington herself. And, indeed, it was difficult not to feel a consuming interest in this beautiful woman, whose character it was now as possible to watch unfolding as it is to mark the opening of a rose; every day the sun demanded more and more of her undiscovered sweetness, and those who breathed the same air as she did became conscious of a deeper fragrance from her soul with every sunset.

Silvia's great gospel of the essential oneness of life had not, perhaps, played any great part in this spiritual change; but the effect of this Gospel on Silvia herself had produced in her that exquisite degree of sensitiveness which in its turn had touched her mother to nobler ends. Silvia's society was formative; she distilled the essence of a pure soul. She believed that every living thing drew its breath from God. She found in flowers a passion which only great poets and great painters feel—a passion for a living, breathing creature, so beautiful and so gentle. There was life for her in the wind; life in the trees; life in rocks and stones. Everywhere the same great mystery. Dogs looking into her eyes answered her gaze of sympathy,

and showed to her deeps in their consciousness where, it was possible to think, every great emotion stirred. Birds came to her. Horses liked to nuzzle her. Nothing in nature was afraid of her ; and in nature she could see nothing commonplace ; everything was mysterious with life. She knew the enormous psychological gulf which separates " Am " from " I Am ; " she never dreamed of talking the poor modern triviality which would degrade the self-conscious glory and agony of man, to the quiet obedience of merely conscious things ; no ; because bees have laws, and ants work with intelligence, she did not feel that therefore in any bee-hive or in any ant's nest was perhaps the equal of Shakespeare or Newton : to her it had been enough that men hive bees, and bees do not hive men : and that the creature less physically fitted to contend against the struggle for existence is the creature which has overspread the face of the earth, lifting up in his progress palaces and towers to the stars : to her, even this would have been enough ; but there was that in her soul which told her of a closeness of relationship with God, a nearness to the source of all beauty, and all love, which more than anything else sustained the conscious glory of her soul.

Dimly understanding Silvia's beautiful communion with the invisible, her mother could not but fear for the shocks which must presently shake her soul. And this very alarm—purely of the world in its origin—was that which hastened her own spiritual development. From the mere tigerish courage and devotion of maternity, she passed swiftly—knowing her helplessness—to the extremest and most yearning forms of solicitude. Bitterly she might speak to Jane Medlycote, for we are all more atheistic in conversation than

in solitude ; but in her lonely hours she felt more and more that she could rely on no one save God in this absorbing anxiety for Silvia's peace. Silvia's religion shaken by love !—the Mystic in love with a man ! So at last she learned to pray again. Knowing the world so well, and hating it more and more with every fresh day of Silvia's intimacy, she came to understand that God alone could help her, and she poured out to Him her yearning for her child, that He should keep her from the world. Thus mother and daughter drew together ; and thus Jane Medlycote was prevented from asking her question.

But just before the twenty-eighth of August, Jane came to Mrs. Revington with the request that she should accompany her to town on that day.

"I have business in London," said the old maid, "and my nerves aren't what they were. A four-wheeler gives me the spasms, and a street-crossing sends me into hysterics. My dear, the policemen I have embraced in London would make a force sufficient to arrest the progress of evolution. I am no longer in full possession of my nerves. That's age. When the nerves break away from our apron strings, it's time for the old soul to go."

So, on the twenty-eight of August—that day big with fate for the people of this history—Jane Medlycote in her best silk dress started for London with Mrs. Revington, two hours before the Bishop drove out of the Palace courtyard on his way to the synod.

Jane Medlycote first paid a call on a firm of book valuers, and then drove away to see her lawyer, Mr. Hatch, Mrs. Revington waited in the outer office.

Jane had come to make a confession. She had been

investing money without asking for Mr. Hatch's advice. She had followed the telegraphic advice sent to her by the Private Investor's Direct Agency, and after having made money for three days, had gone on ever since losing heavily. At first she had hoped to recover her vanished thousands, assured by the Private Investor's Direct Agency that things were about to change for the better ; but at last she had abandoned that hope ; and now, thoroughly ashamed of herself, and she hoped decently repentant for an old woman, she had come to Mr Hatch to know whether there was not something wrong with a society which had so persistently counselled her to invest money in concerns which almost immediately after became moribund.

Mr. Hatch was young ; a tall, sandy-haired, red-faced man, with heavy eyebrows and a military moustache. He listened to Jane's tale without manifesting the smallest sympathy, his hands quiescent, his blue eyes fixed upon hers in a steady and expressionless stare. At the end of it, in a voice which was sharp and heartless, he said briskly : " Do you know what you've been doing ? "

" Losing money," she said ; " not a doubt of it."

" No, you haven't," he answered, with no change in the expression of his eyes. " You've been giving it away. You've been filling the pockets of one of the biggest rogues in London. You've been paying the losses of a scoundrel named Purvis. Ever heard the name ? Spencer Purvis. The Private Investor's Direct Agency is Purvis : and all these companies in which you have put money are Purvis. Purvis, my dear lady, is a very rich man. He is rich because England is full of Miss Medlycotes."

" Very well, Mr. Lawyer," said Jane. " Let us put him in prison."

Mr. Hatch got up from his chair, went to a hat-box on the top of his safe, and took out a hat which he set with great care upon his head. "We'll pay the gentleman a visit," he said, ringing his bell. "I've often felt a longing for ten minutes' conversation with this great financier, and now you have given me the opportunity. He must be in deeper water than I suspected, for he has been playing with you, my dear lady, desperately."

He told the clerk who answered the bell to send for a cab.

"I have a lady with me," said Jane. "She's waiting in the outer office; remember, Mr. Lawyer, please, she knows nothing of my investments. Mum, sir, if you please."

"What is her name?"

"Mrs. Revington."

Mr. Hatch stopped on his way to the door.

"Have you ever heard the name of Spencer Purvis before?" he asked.

"No," answered Jane.

"Well, ma'am, mum, if you please! Don't mention it to your friend. I suppose, by the way, she didn't recommend the Private Investor's Direct Agency to you? Yes? Well, well! This is a very strange coincidence, Miss Medlycote. You are introducing me to two quite interesting people on the same morning."

When they got to the cab, Jane Medlycote explained to Mrs. Revington that she was obliged to pay a brief visit to the City. "Money affairs, dear ma'am. Mr. Hatch is going to talk for a few minutes with my stock-broker." It was only when the cab pulled up in Old Broad Street that Jane mentioned the name of the Private Investor's Direct Agency; and as she did so

Mr. Hatch's light blue eyes suddenly fixed themselves upon Mrs. Revington under his hat-brim. Mrs. Revington showed a moment's interest; then, in perfectly collected tones, she said, "I will wait in the cab till you come back to me."

In the office Mr. Hatch asked in a knowing way for Mr. Purvis. The nervous fluttering Miss Wilmot, perceiving the old-fashioned lady with him, took it to be a case of a promising client, and expressed no surprise at Mr. Hatch's knowledge of her master's name. "Engaged just for the moment," she said; "take a seat, please."

Presently, while they sat together in the outer office a glass-panelled door opened and Mr. Purvis appeared standing there with Father Severn. The monk held a paper in his hand. "Well, telegraph to her," said the monk; "and if she still refuses to come this statement of hers must suffice. In any case, I will return for you at two o'clock. You will be ready to come?"

"Yes," replied Purvis, with a flourish of swagger, "I daresay I can manage it. Always anxious to do what I can for a good cause." The monk scowled, and went out.

"Mr. Purvis?" asked the solicitor, rising.

"Well, sir?" demanded Purvis.

"This is Miss Medlycote of Warborough." He turned to Jane, but her eyes were still fixed upon the door through which the monk had passed. She was thinking, not of her vanished thousands, but of her Bishop.

"Ah! a friend of Mrs. Revington's if I remember rightly," said Purvis. "Come in, come in!" and he led the way into his private room.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TICKING OF MISS MEDLYCOTE'S WATCH

JANE MEDLYCOTE, coming down the stairs from the office of the Private Investor's Direct Agency—office boys and dandified young clerks turning to grin at the old lady over the banisters—requested Mr. Hatch to put her in the cab with Mrs. Revington and tell the coachman to drive to some very quiet place not too far from Southwark, where she might have luncheon. Mr. Hatch recommended the Cannon Street Hotel, where, he told his client, she would be able to engage a private room. He then asked her if she had approved of the verbal trouncing he had administered to Mr. Purvis, regretting that she had been so pre-occupied as to miss the finer shafts of his irony and the clever triumphs of his diplomacy.

"I have more important matters on my mind," answered Jane, to his utter confusion. "But you did very nicely, Mr. Lawyer," she added, "and I will write and thank you to-morrow."

As soon as she was in the cab, and almost before she had bowed her farewells to Mr. Hatch, the spinster turned to her companion, and said briskly: "Now, ma'am, I do bid you most sincerely to tell me the nearest way to your heart; straight through the gate, or zig-zag under the hedges? Which?"

"I have been fearing as I waited for you," answered Mrs. Revington, "that you have invested money with this Agency, and that the speculation has not been successful."

"I put that by, ma'am," replied Jane, looking out of the window at the hurrying hatless crowds in the streets. "Money's here to-morrow, and gone to-day; three per cent. is the widow's friend and the spinster's companion; seven per cent. is a philandering and heartless rogue; and anything over is the old gentleman himself. I'm not talking of money; and I don't deserve to talk about it; for I've been flirting with seven per cent. and listening to the twelve per cent. godlessness of Beelzebub. That's not your fault. No; put that out of your mind. What I want to know from you is the directest route to your heart. I'm in trouble; and I want your help. Please to remember, *on connait l'ami au besoin*; and answer me in as few words as possible."

"Straight through the gate, then," answered Mrs. Revington, fearing to hear what would follow.

"Purvis!" snapped Jane. "Who's Purvis?" She turned and looked at Mrs. Revington.

"I daresay you know," replied Mrs. Revington, "that my money transactions with this person once brought my name prominently into the newspapers?"

"No, ma'am; I don't. I'm an ignorant woman."

Mrs. Revington wondered to hear this. For some minutes she fenced with Miss Medlycote, and then she surrendered. "All I need say," she answered, "is that some years ago this man was divorced by his wife, and among the names shamefully mentioned in the case, there were the names of those who had borrowed money from him. My name was mentioned; and I was ruined.

It is owing entirely to him that I have been obliged ever since to live among people whom I detest."

"So this is the man!" cried Jane. "This Purvis! Well, to be sure. Tut tut! I never gave it a thought." Then she turned swiftly to Mrs. Revington. "But how is it you still know him; or, if you don't know him exactly—recommend him to your friends? That's past comprehension. That beats me, my friend."

"It is a long story," began Mrs. Revington.

"Don't tell it then!" cried Jane, and presently the cab drove into the courtyard of Cannon Street Station. A flock of pigeons got up under the horse's feet and fluttered round the cab windows. The whistle of a railway engine, and the noise of roaring steam greeted them as the cab pulled up. "I've got something more important to say to you than all this," said Jane.

Mrs. Revington knew that she was at last brought face to face with the question which should determine her after career. This old woman, whom she would have laughed at a year ago as a ridiculous antique, had suddenly assumed power and dominion over her, and was become the arbiter of her destiny. As she followed Jane into a small private dining-room overlooking the station-yard, she realized that when she crossed that threshold again it would be with a soul emptied of its aching secrets.

"Half-past one!" said Jane, looking at the little gold watch stuck in her waistband. "We've got an hour, ma'am," she cried, looking up, as she stuffed the watch back in its place; "don't waste a minute of the sixty God gives you in which to prove your friendship for old Jane Medlycote. If you do!—you'll have twenty-four hours a day ever after to wish you hadn't."

She stopped as a waiter entered. "French or Ger-

man?" she asked. "English, miss," replied the servant. "Very satisfactory;" said Jane; "now listen to me, Robert; put everything on the table at once, sweets, cheese, and all; and when I ring the bell—and not before!—bring coffee and the bill. Make no mistake, if you want to take a little loose change home to your wife."

Till luncheon was served and the door shut, she did little else but stand at the window, appearing to watch the cabmen asleep on their boxes, the pigeons picking up corn under the horses' nosebags, the knot of people buying bananas and apples at the fruiterer's shop, and the ceaseless stream of omnibuses, waggons, and cabs passing up and down Cannon Street. As for Mrs. Revington she walked about the room examining its furniture and wondering what strange scenes had been enacted within those four narrow walls under that high roof. There was a piano in the room, and on the rest was a tattered copy of a comic song. The furniture was new and heavy and hot. On the sofa were several newspapers, with a spilt cone of cigar ash on the floor.

When the door was closed, Jane came to the table. "Belissa Revington," she said; "five minutes have gone!"

"Yes," answered the other, taking off her gloves. She turned from examining herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece.

"Then, tell me at once: What is the power you possess over the Bishop of Warborough?" Mrs. Revington hesitated, and Jane raced on: "Don't bother your brain, my dear lady, to wonder how much I know of your secret. I know nothing. I fling all my cards on the table—the poorest hand ever held by a

lonely old woman. You can deceive me, ma'am ; you can cajole me, hoodwink me, diddle me—for an hour ! Play fair ; tell me everything. One minute, before you answer ; when I say I know nothing, I mean that I know nothing for certain ; but I do know from putting two and two together, that somehow or another you are under the thumb of this fellow Purvis, and that he has driven you to strike at the Bishop of Warborough through another villain—the monk whom we met the other day in Warborough Close. Now, that's all I know. What I am here for is to save the Bishop."

She took out her watch, lifted the long gold chain over her hat, and placed watch and chain at her side on the table. "Fifty one minutes more," she said, and helped the dishes. The roar from the street disturbed her. She rose and went to the open window. "Can't hear oneself speak !" she grumbled, pulling down the sash with a jerk. The noise came to them now muffled and dull ; but from the hotel itself the clatter of feet along the stone corridors, and the occasional whistle of a railway engine beneath, and all the hurry and movement of a London terminus became louder and more insistent.

"You are quite right," said Mrs. Revington, "in saying that I am under the thumb of this man Purvis. I owe him large sums of money, and ruin is the price I pay for refusing to do his bidding. He made me, for instance, give him the names of rich people in Warborough to whom he could send his miserable circulars ; he saw your card at my house, and asked me about you ; I tried to deceive him—for I am fond of you, Miss Medlycote—and when you spoke to me a little later about the letter you had received from

the agency I endeavoured to speak so lightly about it that you would think nothing more about it. I promise you that it was only my conviction that you would be too shrewd for the man, which prevented me from telling you to have nothing to do with him."

The voice of a German quarrelling and disputing in the corridor with one of the officials of the hotel came suddenly across their conversation. Then there was a movement of feet, and the strong gutturals died away down the corridor.

"Fat as you talk," answered Jane. "Manners are having a day off. Now, don't bother about the money; that's nothing. I want to hear about the Bishop."

"I am afraid to tell you," answered Mrs. Revington, quite honestly.

"Drink some wine," answered Jane. She looked at her watch. "If it wasn't for the whistling and shouting," she said, "I should hear my little angel ticking. This watch, ma'am, has ticked away most of the life of old Jane Medlycote, as it ticked away her mother's before her. If you're good, I may give it to you for Silvia. We'll see."

"I can only tell you at great pain to yourself," replied Mrs. Revington; and she followed Jane's advice, drinking some hock.

"Forty-five minutes," said Jane, glancing at her watch.

Mrs. Revington set down her glass. "I am very serious," she said. "You are fond of the Bishop; what I have to tell you will hurt and burn."

"Hurt and burn! Well, ma'am, what is an old woman's heart for, except to be hurt and burned?"

A boy ran along outside whistling.

"I should have said," answered Mrs. Revington, "that what I have to say will break your heart?"

"What of that, ma'am?" demanded Jane, tearing off a piece of bread, and lifting it to her munching lips. "If love asks or friendship requires a broken heart, who would hesitate? I'd sooner go to my last account with a broken heart, than an empty heart; and so would you, ma'am, if you think about it."

"You have given me the phrase," replied Mrs. Revington, as Jane lifted her glass to her lips; "what I have to tell you will empty your heart of its love for the Bishop."

"Rooty-too-too!" said Jane, setting down her glass, and beginning to eat again. "What stuff do you suppose old-fashioned friendship is made of? If he had committed murder—bless his old heart!—I'd tell him to say his prayers, and I'd kneel down with him, and then I'd take his hand and lead him off myself to the lock-up. Don't you entertain any new-fangled qualms about emptying a withered old frump's heart of its love. You couldn't do it, ma'am; God couldn't."

"You are a splendid friend, Miss Medlycote!" sighed Mrs. Revington.

"Take some pudding," answered Jane. "Push your plate to one side and dig into this—what is it?—apple amber or something of the sort. Don't pick, ma'am, eat." She was busy with the plates for a minute or two, and then she looked at her watch. "*On perd tout le temps qu'on peut mieux employer,*" she quoted; "Forty minutes, ma'am!"

Mrs. Revington ate a little of the pudding, and then pushed her plate away. The crowded table and the stuffiness of the room irritated her. "You make me feel," she said, "like some odious gossip. You are

inviting me to take away the Bishop's character."

"I'll bring it back, ma'am!" retorted Jane, looking up, her narrow eyes sparkling, her long lips stretched their farthest in a smile of surety.

"Oh, if it wasn't that I knew you desire to hear this detestable secret only to serve him," answered Mrs. Revington, fingering the stem of her wineglass, "I would, I assure you, push all your questions into the gutter. But even as it is, I hate to speak. How am I to tell you," she asked, looking up suddenly, "that the Bishop is not honest!"

Jane's eyes became tigerish; a hectic colour mounted to her thin cheeks. "Carefully ma'am. You must tell me that carefully," she replied, in a slow, cutting voice. "What do you mean—'Not honest'?"

"Oh, I shall hurt you so!" cried Mrs. Revington, leaning forward with a sincere abandon of friendship. "Why do you make me hurt you? What is the use? Let him go on living in his lie, it——"

Jane dropped her hands in her lap. Her eyes blazed; her lips munched ominously; she was on the edge of a passionate outburst, a storm of anger and rebuke. But after a moment, she crumpled up her mouth, withdrew her gaze from Mrs. Revington's face, and looked down. "Thirty-seven minutes," she said.

When she looked up again Mrs. Revington's eyes were still fixed on hers; and Jane knew that the woman was speaking truth from her soul. Whatever she said now, however base and inconceivable, Jane would believe it. "You are a brave friend, Miss Medlycote," said Mrs. Revington softly, studying the faded old spinster lovingly under the drooping lids of her eyes; "If I had known you ten years ago my heart would be lighter now."

"You said something about 'dishonesty' and 'living a lie!'" answered Jane. "What does that mean? Time is flying; I'm obliged to be rough and quick; forgive me, ma'am, if you please; and proceed."

"Believe me," replied Mrs. Revington, slowly and sadly, resting her arms on the table, and leaning forward with her eyes fixed upon Jane, who now sat bolt upright in her chair, which she had pushed back from the table; fidgeting with her hands in her lap. "Believe me, I never so shrank from speaking words as now I shrink from saying these. Let me at least say this for a preface. There are no heroes in this world of ours; dear Miss Medlycote, every god has feet of clay, and every Achilles is vulnerable; it is unwise of us to worship perfection and to be angry with imperfection. We women know our own hearts; and every man is born of a woman. Why do we dream that one of our sisters can bring forth a god? Why build idols out of our own substance? We love a man only to have our hearts broken by the discovery that he is not a god, but ourselves in stronger shape. You, my friend, have loved a man believing him to be a god; your love is a beautiful passion, pure and sacred; will it bear the strain of knowing that your god is but a man, the son of a woman?"

A company of good-hearted men passed by the door laughing loudly over some jest of the table.

Jane only nodded her head. She could not trust herself to speak. Her heart was beating its wings like a bird newly caged. She dared not strive to imagine what evil she would hear told of her idol; she felt that only by keeping silence could she sit there and receive the blow. Her fingers were picking at their nails: her cheeks were flushed: her eyes hot and vindictive.

"My friend, once more I ask you," pleaded Mrs. Revington, "is it not better to let the thing be as it is? You cannot alter it. You cannot make it as if it had never been. All you can do is to bring ruin on your friend."

Jane's lips worked nervously, but she did not speak. She uncrossed one of her arms, and pointed with a shaking finger to the watch on the table. She knew that time must be passing; but she did not look to see the hands, and the noise of her heart beating drowned the ticking of her watch.

"I am sorry for you," said Mrs. Revington; "you make my heart bleed; but I will tell you."

Jane Medlycote sprang up from her chair. "For pity's sake ma'am," she cried, "no more words! Tell me the thing. What is it? Am I made of rock, or stone, that you should drip words on me till I am worn away? The truth, Mrs. Revington, the truth! What has my Bishop done?"

She stood beside the littered table in the little commonplace room, a figure magnificent in its courage and its loyalty. She was prepared to hear the worst said of her god that could be said by human lips, and she was determined to bear it, to answer it, to excuse him, and to love him.

"It is not what he has done," replied the other, quietly; "it is, what he is. He is not what you think him. He is an actor—a hypocrite."

"Do you tell me so!" cried Jane, her face crimsoning with excitement and passion.

Mrs. Revington nodded her head. From the station below came the *thud, thud, thud*, of an engine's panting gasps as it moved forward over the rails.

"He doesn't believe what he preaches? He is an

atheist? An infidel? Do you tell me that?" cried Jane, approaching her. This was worse than she had imagined. A sin of the flesh might be forgiven; but a sin of the soul—! She felt in her heart the agony of a sublime passion preparing itself for death.

"No, not that," replied Mrs. Revington, quickly; "it is not as bad as that. He is a Roman Catholic. He is a Jesuit!"

Miss Medlycote's face became as grey as death. She was stricken in a minute with age and ruin and decay. She stood there like an old tower, leaning to its fall. Mrs. Revington saw with pain and apprehension that the spinster's forehead was spotted with little blobs of perspiration; brown shadows like the skin of a pear loomed under her eyes, speckled with infinitely small nodules, grey coloured and blue; through her cheeks ran thin blurred lines and streaks of purple, and her lips distended with the agony of her grief—wore the hue of ashes. In her eyes, full to the twitching lids, was the water of the soul.

"I believe you," she gasped; "I see it now! It is true. Oh, my dear God, why is it true?" And at that moment it seemed to her that something fell down in her heart, and lay very white and still, bleeding to death.

Mrs. Revington rose, and made a step towards her. The action roused the courage and the pride of the old woman. With a superb effort she recovered herself, and stood up once more upright and strong.

"You said truth," she muttered. "You have emptied my heart. It couldn't break; it was so solid with love." A tear overflowed and ran with a sudden fall to her lips, leaving a shining streak upon her face. "Not so bad as an infidel, Mrs. Revington! Ten thou-

sand times worse, ma'am ; fifty thousand times worse ! " Her eyes blazed again ; but her words came now in gasps, like arrows drawn from the bleeding flesh of her heart. " I'd sooner say there is no God, and have done with it," she cried, " than I'd cheat people into the strongest faith that ever lived. But—what proof do you possess ? I believe you, I believe you ; but tell me the proof ? If that dear saint of God is a monster of hell there must be some paper signed by the devil to prove it. Not so bad as an infidel ! Not so bad !—to creep into people's houses ; to spy into people's souls ; to cheat, to trick, to befool and deceive ! Not so bad !—to preach by stealth what you are sworn to denounce ; to practise jockeyship in the name of righteousness and jugglery in the name of God ! Not so bad !—not so bad ! Isn't thimble-rigging twenty million times viler if it is done in the interests of High God Himself ! But—the proof, ma'am ; let me have the proof. I came to save him ; give me proof, and I'll go away and denounce him and shame him and crucify him."

As she stood there, stricken and haggard and cruel, they could hear all about them the noise and traffic of the heedless world. It made them feel alone. The roar from the street came to them in a dull thunder, and the noise of the iron wheels of trolleys driven swiftly along the stone corridors of the hotel rolled a second thunder to them from the door. In the midst of the turmoil of London, in the centre of its pacing business and its monotonous routine, these two women—so strangely contrasted in thought and habit that they might have been creatures from different worlds—faced tragedy in this little room and knew it with the same eyes. Almost all the tenderness which lay hidden in

the heart of Mrs. Revington—but, as yet, not all of it—rose up and answered the agony in the spinster's soul.

She knew now that the worst was over, and that it was kinder and more merciful to pile up the proofs and leave the worshipper without a vestige of the fallen and shattered god in her heart. So she told how she had discovered from her husband's papers that this great and powerful Bishop of the English Church was a Roman Catholic, a member of a secret society which existed to convert England surreptitiously to the governance of Rome: and how she had gone to the rooms of the secretary of this society and had taken from his private papers the book which contained the Bishop's name: and then of how she had come to the Bishop, and holding the menace of exposure over his head, had forced him to receive her that she might one day—blessed and acknowledged by so powerful a man—claim again a place in her rightful social world.

"Where is that book?" demanded Jane, who had listened to this swift and convincing tale with a face of judgment.

"I have not got it," she answered.

"Where is it?"

"Father Severn possesses it."

Jane clasped her hands together. "You gave it to him, or to Purvis?" she demanded.

"Purvis stole it from me."

"And gave it to the other?"

"Yes."

Jane thought hard. There was a brightness which seemed ashamed of itself in her eyes. "Tell me," she said; "what does this mean:—At three o'clock to-day the monk wanted you to attend a meeting somewhere—at his Mission to be sure—where the Bishop went

this morning? What are they going to do with him?"

Mrs. Revington shrugged her shoulders.

"Purvis is to be there," answered Jane.

"How do you know that?"

"He was told to come by the monk this morning; the monk was in his office. I heard what they said to each other. And you had written some paper. The monk held it in his hand. What did you say on that paper?"

Mrs. Revington became deadly white under her enamel. "I cannot tell you," she said.

"But you must! I know it was forced from you by Purvis. Do not be frightened to tell. Lord, I shan't say cruel words now. We're all bad; everybody's bad. What did you say on the paper?"

"I signed away the Bishop's soul," replied Mrs. Revington.

"Exposed him, you mean?"

"No, not that," she replied. "Oh, I hate to tell you. The writing of that paper almost killed me. It is the crime of my life. The infamy of my soul. I will tell you what I did. I wrote a lie: a wicked lie. The Bishop has enemies in this secret society. I do not know why, but he is evidently afraid of them: and they want to destroy him. I have been made the means of his destruction."

Jane Medlycote came to her side, and placed her fingers round the beautiful woman's arm. "He is a wicked man," she said; "but we mustn't call in his own wolves to devour him. Our duty stops where the angel stands at the gate with a flaming sword. An angel, Mrs. Revington! What have you done, my friend; tell me?"

Mrs. Revington moved away from her. She walked over to the piano, and stood looking down at the yellowing keys, her fingers fidgeting with the dog's-eared copy of the song on the rest. "You make me strip my soul bare," she said. "Why should I do that? It is not a small demand you make. I have told you enough. And, after all, the Bishop is not punished unjustly."

"Still you are going to tell me," said Jane, coming to her side, and laying her hand upon her arm. "Because—well, because I am going to help you, to save you." There was an indescribable sense of strength in her voice: her long flexible fingers pressed affectionately and strongly.

Mrs. Revington looked round. "Do you remember the day when I asked you to go with Silvia for a long outing?" she asked. Her eyes seemed to be almost closed; her breath came sharply.

"I remember better," answered Jane, "the look on your face when we came back. You had had a fight, and, my dear, you had been beaten."

"Yes, I was beaten," answered Mrs. Revington. Her face was now hot and her eyes bright. Her breast rose and fell quickly. "In the morning of that hateful day," she went on, "I received a letter from this person, this Purvis. He told me that he was coming down to Warborough on a matter of life and death; that my whole future depended upon my meeting him in a conciliatory spirit. Can you imagine my feelings? I could not bear that Silvia should see him. I dared not let anybody in Warborough know that I still held any communication with him. So I sent you all out; and I received him. You say there were traces of battle on my face? It is true. I fought that day desperately, fighting with a man I despised and whose superior I am

at every point. But there are battles, Miss Jedlycote, in which the meaner can triumph and the strong be defeated; and I was defeated on that day. He told me that he would tear up the sum of my debt to him, and henceforth leave me absolutely free, if I would do one thing for him. Heaven knows how I hated that offer. He had sent me while I was abroad the amount of my debt, demanding payment. I think he is in financial difficulties. He frightened me. To be free of him: to have henceforth no dread of him: to be no longer obliged to receive him: above all, to know that Silvia's life would never be darkened from this shadow of my past;—ah, can you imagine what that meant to me? And yet when I heard his terms, my soul sickened and I fought against him till the last drop of endurance had oozed like blood from my soul. I surrendered. I promised to come to this meeting, or to write the paper. Last night I wrote it, and posted it to Purvis. I signed away the Bishop's honour. I wrote that the Bishop had sent me to steal the book of membership from Father Vesey's rooms." She covered her face with her hands and turned away. "I lied!" she cried between her palms. "I lied to save Silvia."

Jane's long fingers tightened gently on the arm. "Don't give way," she said. "I told you I would be your friend. *There is time for you to untell that lie.* I will come with you."

"Where?"

"To the monk's Mission House."

"Do you know what is taking place there?"

"It may be the Day of Judgment, but I shall be there," answered Jane.

"It is a general synod of the Secret Society," answered Mrs. Revington. "They meet behind locked

doors ; seventy men, or more ; and no one is allowed to enter. It is too late I assure you."

The picture of her old Bishop standing up among this company of Jesuits, denounced and reviled as a thief—never mind how wicked he might be—was too much for Jane. "Is a locked door going to stop you from wiping out that lie ? Not it !" she cried. "Come along ; we'll go at once." She went to her watch on the table, and hurried quickly to the bell. She had forgotten to count time during this terrible scene. "The hour has passed ; the sixty minutes gone for ever," she said ; "it's five minutes to three !" She rang the bell violently.

"Why should you want to save the Bishop ?" asked Mrs. Revington. "You wanted to crucify him a moment ago."

"What a question for a woman to ask !" cried Jane, pulling on her cotton gloves. "Have you never loved a man ?"

"No," answered Mrs. Revington, "I never have."

Jane stopped, and looked at her. "That accounts for everything," she said slowly. "My dear, I forgive you ; and I think God will forgive you. But we must get back that lie. You yourself must get it back ; yes, even at the cost of placing Silvia and yourself in the hands of that villain."

Mrs. Revington hesitated.

"You ask me," she said, "for more than I can give. No, I will not ruin Silvia."

"If Silvia were here, what would you do ?" asked Jane.

Mrs. Revington felt in this question an appeal not to her love, but to her honour.

"Let us go," she answered coldly.

The bill came with the coffee ; Miss Medlycote paid the account exactly, gave the servant half-a-crown and a few coppers, and marched away to the door, with her hand at Mrs. Revington's elbow. When they were getting into a cab at the door, the waiter appeared, breathless at the window.

"Excuse me, miss," he said ; "but you left your watch and chain behind you."

CHAPTER XX

THE SYNOD OF THE SACRED SOCIETY OF NICODEMUS

IT was a few minutes after three o'clock on the twenty-eighth of August when the Bishop of Warborough drove up to the head-quarters of Father Severn's Mission.

The door was opened to him by Brother Tossell, who quailed with a sly grinning nervousness before the terrible sternness in the Bishop's countenance, and ducking his head and lowering his eyes, made haste to conduct the grim old man up the stairs and along the corridor to the hall of meeting. The Bishop followed the nervous little brother with slow, long strides; his hat upon his head; a stout walking-stick, on which he leaned heavily with his right hand, striking the concrete floor of the passage with a long and almost mechanical precision. The burly slow-moving figure seemed to fill the narrow passage. The big hat on his massive head seemed to touch the dirty grey of the ceiling as he walked. He wore a soft thin overcoat, and round his neck, hanging loosely, was a white muffler.

When Brother Tossell rapped upon the door, there came presently a sound of drawn bolts, and the turning of a key, then the door opened an inch or two and

Father Vesey's spectacles and his long nose, twitching like a rabbit's, appeared in the interstice. The Bishop reaching the door at that moment pushed it open in his stride, and still wearing his wide-brimmed and be-ribboned hat, entered the room. Brother Tossell, on the outside, closed the door; and Father Vesey, on the inside, stooped down to bolt it and lock it. On both faces there was a grin.

All eyes in that long grey room were turned upon the great Bishop. He moved straight and silently towards the table, thrusting his stick under his arm, and taking off his hat, as he came; never once looking at the company before him. Among all the black-coated servants of religion thronging that dull chamber, the huge old man with his ponderous head and rounded shoulders stood out clear and distinct, the greatest of them all. Many men there thought of that great controversy between the Bishop and Sir Frederick Mayor, and remembered how nobly the Bishop had silenced an unphilosophic materialism.

There was in his presence, a note of colour, as he came to the table, with the white muffler streaming over one of his shoulders; the freshness of his pink face, the whiteness of his hair, the clean blueness of his eye, seemed to breathe upon the air the sense of the outer world, of moorland, sea, and mountain-top. Men looked at him with admiration; many of them with dread and apprehension, a few of them with pride and affection.

The floor had been scrubbed an hour before by three of the lay brothers. Its ill-planed deal boards were sodden, and gave off a stuffy smell of damp wood; here and there the water could be seen lying in long lines, like thin puddles in a lane. The tall windows,

with their cheap sashes and imperfect glass, wore the moisture exuding from the boards and were coated with dust and dirt ; it was difficult to see through them the broken tiles of the surrounding slum property. The grey walls, with their slate-coloured wainscot, and the miserable fireplace of stucco looking so ridiculously small in the long grey flatness of the walls, with only the picture of Edmund Revington to break the monotonous deadness, added to the gloom and depression of the apartment. And this general dulness was intensified by the rafters of pitchpine which formed the roof.

Here were gathered a company of clergymen and laymen numbering nearly eighty. They stood and sat two deep around the long table. Two or three of them wore the monk's habit, but the general impression made by the company was one of mournful blackness and severity. The band of white linen round their necks looked grey and soiled in the gloom of the room ; their clothes had the appearance of being damp and dirty and worn.

Father Severn looked up as the Bishop approached the table and set down his hat and stick there. The Master offered no word of welcome, but lifting up his shoulders from their stoop over the papers before him, glanced quickly round the room, and prepared to open the meeting. Father Vesey crept noiselessly into the chair at his left hand, and over his glasses peeped at the Bishop sitting resolutely, with his hands folded on the table in front of him, on the Master's right. There was now, for a moment, perfect silence in the room ; men heard the air singing in their ears ; then, some of the more nervous coughed, and cleared their throats with a little gasp, and Father Severn sat back in his chair.

"We are here to enroll ourselves as members of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus," he said, slowly, "to sign our names in a new book of membership and to take afresh the oath of allegiance. If there is any one here who would like to ask a question or to make a statement before proceeding with this ceremony, let him now do so."

A newly joined member at the end of the room made haste to rise, but a priest at his side, pulled him quietly back into his seat, and whispered in his ear. There was a pause. Then the Bishop, unfolding his hands, pushed his chair slowly back from the table, and rose like a man heavy and sleep-laden. He rested his fingers lightly on the furred brim of his upturned hat, and looked over the heads of the men opposite, to the windows beyond. In his countenance there was the working of a profound emotion.

"Before any man takes this oath," he said, very slowly, and speaking with labour, "I desire that he should consider well within his heart the things I shall now bring to his thoughts."

Father Vesey's eyes shot scorn and hatred through their spectacles, as he leaned forward watching the slow-speaking and deeply-moved prelate. Father Severn sat far back in his chair, gnawing one of his thumbs between his teeth, and studying the faces of the synod with a rigorous scrutiny.

"I desire in the first place," said the Bishop, bowing his head for a moment, and swallowing a lump in his throat, "to remind you of the origin of this Society. It was founded," he said, raising his head, and speaking with a sudden accession of energy, "by a small knot of men who believed that the Reformation was the work of mistaken zeal and short-sighted statesman-

ship; men who believed that it was the duty of all devout Christians in this country, to labour as followers of their Master, and as patriots, to restore to the Church of England her ancient union with the See of Rome. I was one of those men. Nay, I was the foremost of them all in founding this Society. I believed then that it could be possible for a layman of the Church of Rome to labour here, as a priest of the Anglican Church, for the union of Christendom without doing hurt to his soul's honour. We worked in those days with a greater tolerance for Protestant feeling, and with a deeper and more affectionate respect for the traditions of our fellow-countrymen, than has, I think, been the case with this Society in recent years. We had not then assumed an intellectual superiority over Protestant thought and feeling. Evangelicalism was not to us a subject for contemptuous disdain. We did not laugh over the opinions of religious people who differed from us on points of doctrine. We were deeply and profoundly stirred with a sentiment of sincere sympathy for our fellow Christians in England and we desired to bring them with us quietly and affectionately to perceive the sweetness and beauty of Catholicism. If it had been possible," he cried, thrusting his arms behind his back, and squaring his shoulders momentarily with a sudden jerk, repeated with every few words, "if we had thought it possible, to create this sentiment in their minds openly and without disguise, I declare that we should never have founded this Society!" He brought his hands in front of him again, and laid his fingers once more upon the brim of his hat. "But while we deemed that this was impossible, we did at least labour only to create a general atmosphere in the minds of those we worked

amongst as fellow-Christians, we did *not* struggle with subtlety and craft to make individual converts to Rome, certainly not to steal children away secretly from the faith and the traditions we were trusted to instill into their minds by their parents."

He folded his arms over his breast and turned to his breathless audience. "As I grew older I learned to see first the impossibility of this proceeding, then the dishonesty of it, and finally its intellectual falsity. I mean," he said, raising his voice, "that I learned first to despair of our work, then to hate it, and finally after a bitter struggle, to denounce it in my soul with all the weight of my reason. My intellect would not let me admit the pretensions of Rome. When I reached this last conclusion I came to the Society, and I asked to be released of my obligations. This request was refused. I was told that I could only leave the Society by publicly announcing that I was secretly a layman of the Roman Church. This was a hard sacrifice. I had conceived the idea of working for the union of English Churchmen and English Nonconformists, and of making in the centuries to be such a power of the English Church throughout the world, that Rome herself would be obliged to yield on those points which now keep us apart; so, by the triumph and not by the surrender of the English arm, I dreamed that the unity of Christ's Church should one day be attained. I was face to face with one of those crises in a man's life, his management of which determines his whole after career. I was allowed three months to reach a decision. In those three months I sought out the most learned theologians and the profoundest historians in Europe; I consulted with the first minds of our time and I disputed with the erudition of the

world ; and the more I strove with an iron will and an electric intensity of purpose to discover the truth of this matter, the more did I become persuaded that the truth lay with England and not with Rome."

There was a low murmur of dissent at this. The first muttering of the gathering storm.

"My ambition," continued the Bishop, clenching his fists at his side, "to make the Church of England—by means of the vastness and dominion of the British Empire—a power of such catholic scope that Rome would one day be obliged to yield before its advance, and thus consummate the unity of Christendom—this ambition was so strong in my heart that I bowed before the terms of the Society. I could not surrender my ambition for Christ ; it was easier to surrender my sense of honour to the threats of this Sacred Society ! I was left free to work out my ideal, secure from exposure by the promise of the Society, and yet forced by that Society to subscribe to its funds and to remain at least in name a son of Rome. The Society had it in its power to drive me out of the Church of England. That was a calamity I could not face. To be robbed of my Christ was to be robbed of my life."

He folded his arms over his breast, and looked down the room. Here and there his gaze encountered the face of a Warborough clergyman, and his heart sickened within him. But here and there he caught faces in which sympathy appeared to shine, and fixing his eyes upon these few countenances he took up his tale, with a sudden desire to win this whole company of men, by the magic of his eloquence and the force of his intellect—to the side of justice and truth.

"When I was told a few weeks ago that a new membership book must be signed, and a new oath taken,

I refused to renew the terms of my contract. In your name, I was threatened by the master of this Society with denunciation and exposure if I refused. I learned that you would rather I stood up here and lied to my God, than that I should be left in quietness to serve Him as I have served Him all my days. Is that the ruling of this Society? Do you say to me, Either take an oath you do not believe in, either lie to Almighty God; or in the name of that God, we will drive you out from before His altar? Is it thus that this Sacred Society hears the Voice of God and delivers the oracle of Eternal Verity?"

He paused, and there was another muttering from the assembled priests, men turning to one another and whispering.

"I will tell you what this Society is doing," cried the Bishop. "It is punishing a man, it is torturing him and wringing his heart with a life-long ignominy, for an indiscretion of his youth! Is that done in the name of Christ?"

There was an angry note of dissent from the priests. "Not an indiscretion! Not an indiscretion!" cried one of them.

"I say that it was an indiscretion," answered the Bishop, "and that is the statement of a soul which asks you now not to make it lie before God. My reason assures me that the claims of Rome, which in my hot youth and under the spell of Newman and Pusey and Keble, I embraced with a passionate but not an intellectual fervour, are fantastical claims, claims inimical to the Idea of Christ."

"No, no!" cried the priests; and some of them laughed scornfully and angrily.

"I do not intend to argue the historical ques-

tion," said the Bishop, "I do not intend to show you how there was a Scripture before there was an *ecclesia*—"

"How old is the Bible?" demanded a young priest, derisively.

"We know from Celsus," said the Bishop, "that there was one Gospel from the beginning; and that this Gospel which is the Scripture we name according to St. Mark, was speedily made into three gospels—the Synoptists; and finally, long afterwards, and to meet the growing difficulties of Christianity's progress, a Fourth Gospel made its appearance. He speaks of men altering 'the character of the Gospel from its first written form, in *threefold*, *fourfold* and *manifold* fashion'—Mark, Matthew, Luke, John and the Apocrypha—remoulding it 'that they might have wherewith to gainsay refutations.' From the first there was always a Scripture. Moreover, let me remind you of Newman's confession: 'The more I read of Athanasius and Theodoret,' he said, 'the more I see that the ancients did make the Scriptures the basis of their belief.' And again he said: 'The Fathers do appeal in all their controversies to Scripture as a final authority; when this occurs once only it may be an accident; when it occurs again and again uniformly, it does invest Scripture with the character of an exclusive Rule of Faith.' Do you now tell me that the *ecclesia*, influenced on every side by Egypt and Greece, by Jew and Gentile, by Roman thought and Eastern mysticism, and coming to us shot and dyed with all the kaleidoscopic colours of a too eager proselytism and a too zealous willingness to compromise for the sake of its own peace and for the conversion of the whole world,—do you now tell me that this Church

is an older Authority for the Master's preaching than the synoptic Scripture ? ”

“ Newman went to Rome ! ” shouted a priest

“ By surrendering his reason,” answered the Bishop, sternly.

There was an angry clamour for a moment, but Father Severn beat it down wearily with a tired hand.

“ I said I would not argue the historical question,” went on the Bishop. “ My object, for a brief moment, is to state my position to Rome on modern grounds. Newman went to Rome by surrendering his reason ; those who shout at me have not read his works. Newman did go to Rome by surrendering his reason. That is the confession of his life. Now, it is just because Rome demands this complete surrender of that faculty which makes man likeliest to God that I view her as an enemy of God. The Church of Rome is a stationary Church. It is anchored fast, not to Scripture, but to her own Tradition. She is not elastic, not fictile, not living ; she is a dead past. She has tenacity, but it is the tenacity of a sluggard clinging to his pillow. The great advances of human knowledge, the growing revelation of Himself which God makes to His people through the avenues of science and research, do not touch her, cannot shake her from this immemorial sleep. It is to her as if Newton never heard the music of the stars, as if Darwin never watched the slow and mysterious building up of Adam's body, as if, in our own day, Lodge and Thomson had never heard the infinite and eternal vibration of the universal ether. It is because of this—because she will not go with mankind on his progress, but will stay behind nursing the tradition of antiquity and playing with her glittering toys of mediaevalism—and not so much because

her methods are repugnant to honest men, and her cause suspicious in the eyes of historical inquiry—it is because of this I view her crumbling power and her fading dominion without one shadow of regret.”

A shout of anger greeted this conclusion. For a minute there was a storm of dissent.

“The other day there was read to me a statement concerning the progress of this Society,” said the Bishop, speaking through and over the clamorous mutterings of the synod. “I had figures laid before me which showed the growth and the development of this Society’s propaganda. I should have been greater impressed by the mention of two or three names. You may win to your side hundreds of men and women, thousands of men and women ; but are you bringing in the leaders of mankind, the lights of science and the masters of democracy ? Where are Rome’s men of power, her captains of the people, her masters of science ? Consider how it is that the world sweeps by Rome, gaining its victories without her aid, and reading from the scriptures of nature without the consecration of her priests. Consider how man is going from height to height of knowledge, from mountain peak to mountain peak of truth ; consider how impatient are his feet of beaten tracks and his hands of ancient weapons ; and then ask yourselves whether a Church which stands still, anchored to a disputed Tradition, and more mindful of form and letter than of spirit and of freedom, can be the everlasting Church of God led perpetually by the Holy Spirit. Do not twist your intellects to account for those successors of the Apostles who have made the Chair of Peter infamous with every debauchery and every tyranny and injustice ; address your in-

tellects, I pray you, to the problem of the living world and ask yourselves whether it be possible that the governance of the nations can ever be given into hands that are empty of everything save tradition. This is my antagonism for Rome. I felt at one time the poetry and the pathos of her claim, my soul was swept over by the ancient music of her grief, I caught the spell of her enchantment, the syren magic of her eternal quiet. But the dreams of youth vanish in the noon of life, and God has so made man that his reason cannot be quieted. I laboured through the pages of history; I saw that there was no shadow of foundation for Rome's claim to an existence older than Scripture; and with that discovery all those traditions of hers which are clean contrary to the Logia of Christ became suspect in my eyes. I hunted them back to their origin and I found them to be the expedients of men seeking a purely temporal dominion. Jewish rite to conciliate the Jew: Egyptian rite to placate the Egyptian; Hellenic philosophy to attract the epicurean: and everywhere diplomacy and chicanery that Christ might march with the coats of Rome's military empire. This was my discovery, and in my heart I renounced Rome and went back to the Reformation to begin again my study of spiritual progress. I do not say that the work of the Reformation was a final and a perfect work; but I do *not* say with Mozley that 'Cranmer burned well and that is all the good to be said of him?' and I do not say with the Report of a certain Ritualistic Institution that the Reformation is 'a dark and in some sense, damnable spot in our Church's history.' I find in Latimer and Cranmer something more to be admired, something more English and catholic-minded, than I can find in Pusey

implored his confessor Keble to let him flog himself daily with the Discipline while he recited the Fifty-first Psalm! I go back to the Reformation, not to throw myself farther back into the mediaevalism of Rome; no, but to go further forward with the freedom of man's intellect and the growth of human ideas.

"And now that you know my position, however little you may agree with my conclusion, I ask you, as men who serve the same God of Truth as I serve, whether you can find it in your hearts to desire the blasphemy of an oath from my lips. I have the right to be released. This Society is not the Society I helped to found, and I should bless God if you determined now to disband it and break it and leave it as if it had never been. The Society in its origin was a dishonest Society—dishonest with the enthusiasm of youth which does not consider its means; but *this* Society—which has now got into the merciless hands of one powerful and dominant man—is a wicked Society; it is dishonest with the determined dishonesty of trickster and sharp. It teaches children to deceive parents; it introduces the grossest superstitions of Rome under cover of Protestantism; it is concerned, not with the spirit of Rome, but with the dangerous toys of Rome—with mass-books, flagellations, and instruments of torture. The object of this Society was to make England catholic-minded: its object now is to make women and children the pale shadows of mediaevalism. You are playing with Religion: you are deceiving Christ."

There was a shout of anger at this, three or four priests starting up with stormful answers on their lips. But many sat silent, listening with the shade of question and anxiety in their eyes. The Bishop,

beating the air with a long straight fore-finger, his eyes heavy with sorrow and his lips big with solemnity uttered his last appeal—

“ I beg of you who are here to-day for the first time—some of you clergy in my own diocese, won over, let me tell you, on purpose that the cup of my humiliation should be full—I beg of you to consider whether it can be right in the sight of God to violate your most solemn ordination vows and live the life of a lie. If you believe in Rome acknowledge her ; if you have lost your faith in her, acknowledge it now. I am an old man, and my days cannot be long ; but some of you are only now beginning the prime of your existence, and many of you are young men. Take heed, I implore you,” he cried, “ before you put your souls and bodies into the keeping of this man.” He turned and pointed to Father Severn. “ Do not think that by becoming or remaining members of this Society you will have power and freedom of discretion ; you will be the tools and vassals of his most faithful son of Rome. Differ with him : he will bend you to his purpose. Oppose him : he will grind you to powder. No tender and spiritual aspiration to tinge Protestantism with catholic sweetness will suffice with this man—your Master ; to satisfy his greed you must be the hot and unquestioning slaves of Papacy—furious for the conversion of women and children ! Not to him do I appeal : but to you. It rests with you to say whether I am to be driven out of the Church of England. It will rest with you to say whether you can, as honest men, desire me to take an oath of blasphemy. It rests with you to say whether you can face the consequences of driving me to defy you.” He paused. “ It rests with you,” he added solemnly,

"to decide under the eye of God whether this Society should not cease to exist."

He stood for a moment surveying them with an expression of dogged determination, an almost fierce and stubborn oppugnance: then, in a minute, his face cleared of anger, but not of sorrow, and an infinite tenderness overcame it. "I pray God to give you courage," he muttered and moved back from the table, and sat down, his head upon his breast.

For a moment silence held the room. Then a storm broke out carrying everything before it. Men rose together and began to speak in a clashing chorus of argument and denunciation. Some threw their words at the Bishop; others made clamorous appeals to Father Severn, others drew a little apart from the table conferring together in secret, with down-bent heads and faces of anxiety, their eyes glancing apprehensively towards the watchful Master. For the most part, it was the young men who were angriest in their clamour; it was the men of middle age who drew apart to whisper together; it was the old men who either appealed to Father Severn or talked together in patient placidity. Round Father Lacey's chair was gathered a little company of grey-haired men listening to the counsels of the venerable priest.

It was a scene of confusion; but the minds of those present were working gradually to the same end; and Father Severn waited. Above the clamour of those vehemently anxious to state their historical arguments, he caught the angry shout of—"Turn him out!" "Turn the renegade out!" "We don't want him!" "Who asks for his guineas!" And he heard also the voices of the older men saying: "Let him resign!" "Set him free!" "Peace, peace,

let us have peace ! ” And he saw on the faces of some of the men anxiety, dread, suspicion, and resentment against himself. Father Vesey leaned towards him and whispered : “ You had better speak now, Master, ” but he sat there silent, watching and listening.

The Bishop now turned in his chair and surveyed the scene before him with quiet and composure. He saw the group of old men gathered round Father Lacey, and his heart beat with hope ; those men of the older school would not ask him to take a blasphemous oath. One of the Warborough clergy came to his side : “ My lord, ” he said, bending down to the Bishop’s ear ; “ I had no idea the Society was of this nature ; I have been grossly deceived ; and I intend to say so when quiet is restored. Let me add, my lord, how deeply I sympathise with your position. ”

The Bishop looked at him, smiled, and bowed his gratitude. Then with an indication of his head he made the friendly clergyman see that Father Lacey was about to speak, and drew his chair nearer to the table to listen.

The old and withered priest held his fleshless hands crossed in front of him ; from his small, faded and sunken eyes trickled the water of extreme age. His brows worked with nervousness, and there was a smile upon his lips ; he held his head high, and the men saw that his neck was shrunken and corded, and that the curving jawbone stood out from the fallen cheeks like the lip of a cup. There was no one there unwilling to hear the faint fluting voice of this old saint, this living link with the Oxford Movement.

The hubbub died down, and the venerable priest, speaking as if to the air above their heads, asked to

be heard for a brief moment. "With humility," he said, "I desire to remind our dear brother that the surrender of the reason is a sacrifice that God requires of His children. It is the throe of sacred travail which gives the soul her palingenesis. We cannot understand God; we can only open the doors of our mind to receive Him. Further, with humility, remembering the holy counsel of St. Augustine, I desire to remind our dear brother that Papias and Irenæus speak of gospels concerning our Blessed Saviour as *heretics*, telling us that they are of later date than 'the bishops to whom the apostles committed the churches.' 'Those,' says Irenæus, 'who desert the teaching of the Church impugn the knowledge of the holy Elders'."

There was a murmur of applause, some men laughing their approval. The old priest's face became white and pained, and he raised a hand—that was like the claw of a bird—in protest and rebuke.

"These remarks I have addressed," he said, "to one for whom I entertain sentiments of affection and gratitude. I beg him to receive them without offence. What I have to say now is addressed to you, my fellow-workers in this blessed and sacred brotherhood." He paused a moment, and his face became stern and full of awe. "I say to you," he cried, "that to *ask* that servant of Christ"—he paused and pointed towards the Bishop—"to take an oath he does not believe in, is a crime; to *make* him take that oath a blasphemy. *We cannot do it!* To propose such a thing is surely to stain our lips with the darkness of a Christless heart. No, no, we cannot do it. I say to you: set him free; judge him not; let your blessing go with him into his work. I say to you, *God tells me you should let him go.*"

He paused, and a murmur of approval ran round the room.

"Then I would say this to you," continued the old man, "let us know how this Society is doing its work. Is it cheating and tricking men into the Catholic Faith?—then that is evil. I was one who joined this Society in its first year, 1869, and for five years I was its first Master. I know how it came into being. I know what was its first impulse. I know that what the Bishop of Warborough has said is true. All the days of my long life I have laboured in the spirit which called this Society into being: not to deceive, not to cheat, not to mislead—God forbid!—no, but to soften the hard heart of Protestantism, to breathe sweetness into the minds of Dissent, and to scatter the seed of Christ's great Catholic Church in the stubborn and stormy places of this grand England of ours. My brothers! only in that spirit can we continue our work with God's blessing." He paused, and faced the Master who was regarding him with a frown of contemptuous impatience. Encountering that savage scowl the straining eyes of the old priest, with their clotted lashes, blinked nervously: but he kept his gaze fixed upon the Master's face, and his voice did not quaver. "For the devotion of the Master to the interests of Holy Church," he said, firmly, "I have admiration and respect. But I think—with humility—with *humility*—for we must be slow to judge one another—that he does not understand the English spirit; and, therefore, that he brings an impulse into this Society which is not profitable. England can never be conquered either in her body or in her spirit!" he cried, his eyes sparkling and his face transfigured with the emotion of his patriotism; "she can only be wooed to Christ,

entreated to Him with love and tears." He paused in the deep silence which followed these words. Then, relaxing the tension of his lean body, and huddling up in a physical collapse, he said briefly: "Let us have a new Master, and the old peace."

Silence followed him. Then the Bishop leaned forward, and looked down the table: "God bless you, Lacey!" he cried: and his face shone with love.

When he drew back again, Father Severn was on his feet.

"So long as I am Master of this Society," he called in his loud gruff voice, which was like cannon after the bird-like softness of the old priest, "I will exercise my duties for the safety and protection of my fellow members." He paused, gathered up some papers in his hands, and faced the meeting. "You have heard what the Bishop of Warborough has said. He has appealed to you on grounds of honesty. He is shocked at the proposal that he should be made to take an oath which he does not believe. Like Cassius, he is an honourable man. Have you not asked yourselves, then, how it is I can suggest to you a course of action which seems to be not only cruel and vindictive, but dishonourable? Why do I say that we must keep this man a member of our Society, and bind him to us by an oath which can only be a blasphemy on the lips of a renegade and a traitor? Why?" He paused. "Why, I say? Because I have not the same respect for his lordship's sense of honour as he himself is pleased to entertain for it."

There was a moment's excitement, as the old Bishop leaned forward with a sudden movement.

"I had not thought to humble him and break him before this meeting," continued Father Severn. "With

evidence in my hand to damn him in the eyes of all honourable men, I had hoped to conceal his infamy, to tie the mouth of treachery with the oath of allegiance, and to save you from the knowledge of his shame. I find now that this is impossible. You would set him free, turn him out to denounce us in secret, and to break us up with subtlety and craft. Very well, then. You shall know the character of your destroyer before he goes to his work of destruction."

"What do you mean?" cried the Bishop in a loud voice. His fingers closed on his stick. The only sound that followed that angry demand, was the rustle of Father Vesey's hands as he slowly rubbed the palms one against the other, and smiled through his spectacles. The others sat spell-bound and astonished, gazing at the monk.

Father Severn did not answer the Bishop; keeping his eyes fixed upon the wondering face of Father Lacey, he said: "The old book of membership was stolen from Father Vesey by a woman of immoral character. She was sent to steal it by the Bishop of Warborough."

It is impossible to describe the effect produced by these words. It was as if out of a still sea one monstrous wave had suddenly arisen, towered heavenward and then crashed into foam. A loud, long angry shout rose from all sides; the Bishop plunged forward, and with both hands clutching at the edge of the table, looked up into Severn's face, and cried: "You lie! You whited sepulchre, you lie!" Men actually rose from their chairs, and with delighted faces, cheered the Master. A few waved their handkerchiefs. Others laughed, saying to their neighbours, "Like Cassius, an honourable man!" Father Vesey, beaming upon everybody, slowly clapped his hands, marking time to

the hubbub, merriment, and consternation. Tall and steadfast, heedless of the Bishop, with triumph and mastery in his swarthy countenance, stood the huge monk, his eyes set upon Father Lacey. He was waiting for the wave to sink and the sea to be calm again. Men looking up at his face became still and quiet.

‘You lie!’ cried the Bishop.

‘I have the evidence,’ said Father Severn, addressing the meeting. ‘In my hand I hold not only the missing book of membership, but a paper signed by the woman who stole it, saying that she did so on the instructions of the Bishop and guided by information which he supplied to her. That woman is the infamous Mrs. Revington, the woman who was once the wife of Edmund Revington, and who now would be, if she could, the wife of Spencer Purvis, the swindling financier, her domestic supporter!’

He raised a paper, and read: ‘I, Belissa Revington, declare that I took from Father Vesey’s rooms the book of membership of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus at the wish of the Bishop of Warborough and acting on the instructions I received from him. This book was taken from me by Mr. Spencer Purvis and given to Father Severn. Signed: Belissa Revington. Witnessed by Spencer Purvis.’

‘That document lies,’ said the Bishop his fingers tightening on the stick.

‘This woman,’ went on Father Severn, ‘is now living in the Close at Warborough, and is received at the Bishop’s palace even while the man Purvis is visiting her.’

There was a howl of horror at this; and the Bishop started to his feet. ‘Listen to me!’ he cried, glaring at the monk; ‘every word that you have uttered is a lie, and you know it.’

The two big men stood facing each other, not a yard between their huge shoulders.

"Is Mrs. Revington not living in Warborough Close?" demanded the monk.

"Yes, she is living there," replied the Bishop.

"And she is received at the palace?"

"Yes, she has been to my house," answered the Bishop.

The audience drew in a breath of amazement. What revelation would follow next? To what greater depths of infamy had this old bishop sunk? They sat watching these two angry men with expectation of fresh sensation.

"If the meeting requires further testimony," said Severn, looking away from the Bishop and flourishing the paper in his hand, "I can give it to them. The man Purvis is here," he went on, while the Bishop stood at his side watching him, "and will make oath before you, if you desire it. For myself I shall be content if you allow me to enter in the book of membership, before you vote me out of the Mastership, that the Bishop of Warborough was expelled from the Society for inciting a woman of evil character to steal the book containing his name as a member, in order that he might be free to destroy the Society that he himself had founded. Give me leave to make that entry, and I am willing to release this—Protestant." He turned and looked at the Bishop; and at that moment Father Vesey leaned forward and hissed between his teeth.

With the back of his hand the Bishop struck the monk across his mouth, and sent him stumbling backwards.

"He is innocent," said Father Lacey. "Thank God! he is innocent."

CHAPTER XXI

FATHER SEVERN'S MISTAKE

THERE are some blows which are rather a rebuke than a challenge ; blows dealt with so high a scorn, and so cold an austerity that they check instead of precipitating a crisis ; and such was the nature of the Bishop's sudden and contemptuous cuff. For a moment it silenced the excited gathering ; for a moment an almost deathlike silence reigned in the room.

Then the rage of the angered priests broke out.

Father Severn, coming back to the table, calmly and without the shadow of resentment in his face, was the signal for this outbreak. Father Vesey sprang forward to pat his shoulder, crying excitedly his admiration for the Master's patience. A storm of cheers broke from the majority of the priests.

"He behaves like a Christian !"

"A fine fellow !"

"Well done, Severn !"

"That old man is a savage !"

As they clamoured, some of them pressing forward to shake the Master's hand, purposely pushing past the Bishop to do so, Father Lacey rose and endeavoured to speak ; there was none to hear him. Every man was either shouting and gesticulating, or talking in excited tones to his neighbour. Some had insults to hurl at the Bishop ; others congratulations to shout to the Master ; others arguments that they desired their neighbours to hear. Every man was speaking

at once. Father Severn surrounded by seven or eight priests, with the Bishop just outside the pressing circle, stood at one end of the long table ; on all sides down the room men were standing up, bending across chairs to whisper in their neighbour's ear or leaning across the tables to shout opinions to the other side ; and at the far end of the room stood Father Lacey, pale and patient, waiting to be heard.

The Bishop viewing this hubbub for a moment with extreme disgust, took a step forward and possessed himself of his hat and stick.

"Look out for another blow!" shouted a young priest ; and like undergraduates they laughed and boo-hoed as the Bishop turned his back upon them.

"That's muscular Christianity!" mocked one, as the old man moved away. "No," said another, "it's Protestantism rampant!" "The old bear ought to be ashamed of himself." "The loaves and fishes, my dear fellow! our friend has a stake in the country!" "Hundred and fifty thousand a year of his own, and Lambeth in prospect!" "And then above the hubbub sounded the long sibilant hiss of Father Vesey, and a storm of groans instantly broke from the synod.

The Bishop, knowing that he had now brought ruin and disgrace upon himself, and that all his great hopes must be abandoned for ever, walked away from the hissing and groaning mob with a heart so full of sorrow that he could not feel even disgust for this scene. At the door he paused, finding it locked and bolted, and for a moment stood there as one walking in his sleep. Just as he was about to turn round and order Vesey to open for him, Father Severn appeared at his side, and stooped down to draw the bolt. A loud cheer broke from the priests.

"You are free now, my lord," whispered Severn, and held the door open. The Bishop passed out with the noise of their cheers singing in his brain. Father Severn pushed to the door, and returned to his seat.

When the cheering had died down, the Master informed the meeting that Father Lacey wished to address them, and resumed his high chair. The meeting showed itself ill-disposed now to listen to the gentle pleading of the old saint. He begged them not to judge the Bishop. He declared himself convinced that the Master was wrongly informed. Laughter followed him at every sentence. He asked them not to pick up the first stone and throw it at so good and pious a man. Shouts of "Madam Revington" greeted this rebuke. "Well," he cried, "let us at least hear further evidence. For myself, I cannot believe the charge; and I do not, on my soul."

The Master whispered something in the ear of Father Vesey, who went down to the far end of the hall, and passed out through the small door leading to the Master's private apartments.

"Father Lacey is right," said the Master. "You must hear the evidence. I have sent for Mr. Spencer Purvis."

Great excitement followed this announcement, men nudging themselves, chuckling, and saying, "We shall hear something now!" They were ready to hear the vilest things of the Bishop.

Purvis entered the hall, swaggering in with hat and stick in his hand, and was led to a chair beside the Master. It was difficult to recognize him. He was now clean-shaven, and had brushed his hair in a different fashion. His face looked rounder and coarser without moustache and whiskers; he seemed younger,

and yet it looked as if his face were stamped with many more years of infamy. His red flesh stood out firm and hot, with a glaze to it; his deep-sunken eyes seemed to have retreated further under his skull. The mouth was dreadful.

The reason for this change in his appearance can be given in a few words. At the very moment when he was thoroughly alarmed by the intimate knowledge of his affairs possessed by Father Severn, the financier had suddenly found himself confronted by Miss Medlycote's solicitor and threatened with an action, unless a satisfactory answer could be given to certain specific questions put to him by Mr. Hatch. It occurred to him, in these circumstances, that it would be wise to go away from London for a little, but he feared to do so without first discharging his promise to the terrible monk. That man had eyes everywhere; a hand would stretch out of the blackness and pull him back if he attempted to abscond. And besides, where could a man better elude observation for a few hours than in the slum mission house of a clergyman? So he had sent a clerk to the political club where he had a bedroom, with a letter to the valet concerning the packing and despatch of a portmanteau, and then going down with Father Severn to South Park had requested that a barber might be sent for to the mission-house. To Father Severn it mattered very little what became of this scoundrel after the synod, and he raised no objection. The financier was clean shaved, and so as to escape detection on the evening Boat Express, he had even taken out the silver tube from his ear and thrown it out of Father Severn's window. No one could recognize him now. His pockets were filled with envelopes which he had picked out of the waste paper basket of

a friend, and he carried only a roll of banknotes and some loose gold. He had even ripped out his name on the piece of tailor's linen on the inside of his breast pocket. Until the Boat Express left London then, he was willing to oblige Father Severn.

"I want you, Mr. Purvis, to answer a few questions," said the Master.

"With pleasure. I am a little deaf, as you know; you will oblige me by speaking distinctly." He put two fingers to his ear, and strained forward to catch the questions.

"You received a book purporting to contain the members' names of a religious society from a woman named Revington?"

"That is absolutely true."

"She had stolen that book to oblige the Bishop of Warborough?"

"She has signed a statement to that effect."

"Where is she living?"

"At Warborough."

"Is she on friendly terms with the Bishop?"

"The deuce take her, she is!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, she is! It amuses me."

"How is that?"

"Oh, let that be, pray. All women, sooner or later, go back to the Church!" He took away his fingers from his ear for a moment, and smiled on the company.

"You have long been on friendly terms with this woman?"

"I have certainly had the pleasure of her acquaintance."

"In the action for divorce brought against you by your wife, Mrs. Revington's name was mentioned?"

"I'm afraid it was."

"Your relations with her have not been honourable?"

"There, there; you put the matter rather crudely. Ladies in society do not live by the same standards as clergymen."

"You have paid her debts, I think?"

"Well, that is really nothing."

"Why did you pay them?"

"Oh, come now! On my honour, that is a leading question."

"Gentlemen do not usually pay ladies' debts for nothing?"

"I'm afraid philanthropy does not often go so far."

"How is it, then, that a woman so notorious is now a friend of the Bishop of Warborough?"

"Ask me another! It beats me; on my honour it beats me!"

"Can you suggest a reason?"

"Not before clergymen!"

"You do not mean you wish us to believe that Mrs. Revington——"

"Now, wait a minute!" interrupted Purvis laughing. "Look here, you know; you're coming it rather strong. What's the game? Madam stole a book to oblige a Bishop; the book belonged to you; I restore it to you; madam confesses her sin; and there surely the matter ends. Don't, I mean to say, go too deeply into her character. She has her points. On my honour, she's not so bad as some of them. As a man of the world, I tell you she has her points. Let that be."

He would probably have gone on, blackening an innocent woman's character by his hideous innuendoes,—obliged to this course by the intimidation of Father Severn—but for a most unexpected interruption. The

door, which Father Severn had forgotten to bolt, was suddenly opened, and the Bishop, followed by Mrs. Revington, Miss Medlycote, and Miss Wilmot, entered the room.

The Bishop had taken a little time to hear Jane Medlycote's story. On his way out, heartbroken and crushed, he had encountered his faithful friend waiting for him in the passage. In a little room on the left were seated Mrs. Revington and Miss Wilmot. With averted eyes Jane announced that she had come to save him from the wolves, and bade Mrs. Revington tell the rest; she dared not trust herself to speak. Mrs. Revington told her story. "I was wrong, wickedly and unpardonably wrong," she concluded, "but Silvia's life threatened by that horrible person was too much for me; and as you are a Roman Catholic I did not think it could greatly matter."

"You have come to save me at the cost of incurring the vengeance of this man Purvis?" asked the Bishop.

"Miss Medlycote made me see that I must do that; I am not afraid now."

"And you, my friend," he said, turning to Jane. "did this for a false friend: for a Roman Catholic?"

"Oh, I hate you for it," announced Jane; "but there, I couldn't think of letting the wolves tear you to pieces."

The Bishop, in a few words, promising to tell them more, cleared their minds of their suspicions, to their great amazement and to Jane's unspeakable joy.

"Then you are not a Roman Catholic, not a fox?" she demanded.

"No," he answered; "but in my youth I played the traitor."

"Oh, I can forgive anything you did before I knew you!" she cried, and caught up his hand, and squeezed it between her own. Tears came into her eyes.

"I thought I had lost you," she said; "I was getting quite low and faint." She looked up at him, and smiled through her tears.

"God bless you, dear Jane," he whispered; and the smile of his gratitude took away all her hurt.

Then the old maid went on to say how they had found Miss Wilmot waiting in that room and how she had broken down and told them that she was going into a nunnery that night for good and all; and of how they had persuaded her to resist this tyranny.

The Bishop questioned the poor distracted creature, and promised her his protection. "Come with me!" he said; "we will settle this matter at once." And he led them down the passage, and up the stairs to the hall where the Society was listening to Mr. Purvis.

Just outside the door he turned to Mrs. Revington: "They have slandered you most shamefully," he whispered; "it may be painful for you to enter?"

"No, I am not afraid."

He looked at her, and saw a new nobility in her eyes. "I shall have something to give you when we return to Warborough which will make your heart glad," he said; "I, too, have been among those who have injured you—perhaps the chief among them. You will have much to forgive."

She was amazed and could not think what he meant. But she turned and placed her hand on Miss Wilmot's arm. "Do not be afraid," she said; "nobody can hurt you."

The Bishop opened the door, and they entered the hall. When Purvis beheld Mrs. Revington and Miss Wilmot

enter the room, his face became rigid. He turned angrily to Father Severn: "What is this?" he cried; "a trap?"

"Be quiet," whispered Severn.

Several of the priests rose protesting against the presence of these strangers. One of the Warborough clergymen, who knew Miss Medlycote well, turned his chair round so that she should not see his face. Other priests smiled among themselves. "We shall have some fun now," they said.

It was a little time before either Mrs. Revington or Miss Medlycote recognized Purvis, and great was their surprise at the change in his appearance. Jane whispered in the Bishop's ear. Father Severn muttered something to Father Vesey, and that startled priest rose and approached Miss Wilmot.

"You must wait outside," he whispered; "we will send for you presently."

The Bishop laid a hand upon his arm: "Get these ladies some chairs," he said.

For a moment there was a repetition of the earlier hubbub, for among the priests there were many who greatly feared the ruin of exposure. They protested against this invasion by strangers, and appealed to Father Severn to close the synod. While this was going on, a Warborough clergyman—guessing how things were likely to turn—rose suddenly, and addressed Father Severn in a hectoring manner.

"I have been brought here," he cried, "under false pretences. I had no idea the Society was of a purely Romish nature. I refuse to join it. I support the Bishop in what he said. And if you are men, after blackening his character, you will listen to him now!" He brought his chair to where the Bishop was standing,

and offering it to his Diocesan, took up a position beside the ladies. Then another Warborough clergyman did the same ; and the hubbub began to die down.

Father Lacey rose. " I have an important motion to move," he said, " one which has the support of many of my brothers about me ; but before doing so I desire to say that we must allow the Bishop both to make a statement and to cross-examine the gentleman introduced by the Master."

In the rumble of conversation which followed this remark, the Bishop advanced to the table and picked up the statement signed by Mrs. Revington which was lying there. He held the paper towards Purvis.

" This statement is false," he said, quietly. " It is not true that Mrs. Revington possessed herself of any book at my orders."

" Well, then ; I'm glad to hear it," said Purvis.

" How comes it, sir," demanded the Bishop sternly, " that you exerted force to make this lady write that which was not true ? "

" Ah, pardon me ;" replied Purvis, shaking his head. " I distinctly understood that it was true."

" Who told you that ? "

Purvis, who was now in two minds, vacillating between his fear of Father Severn and his apprehension concerning the sudden appearance of Miss Medlycote, with Mr. Hatch possibly waiting outside—did not quite see how he could answer this question without incurring the monk's wrath. At the same time he had his own precious skin to think about.

" Father Severn," he said, " was of that opinion."

" You mean," quoth the Bishop, " that it was Father Severn who told you this false thing was true."

" Well, yes ; I certainly heard something of that kind from the reverend gentleman."

The Bishop silenced the interruption Father Severn would have made: "Your turn will come," he said. "We know at present that force was exerted to make Mrs. Revington sign a false statement. We know that Mr. Purvis was told the statement was true by Father Severn. This is important. But there is more to be told. How came it, sir," he demanded of Purvis, "that you ever had conversation with Father Severn on this matter? What brought you two men together in the first place?"

The breathless priests pricked their ears, recognizing a shrewd question. Purvis felt that here at least truth was the least dangerous answer. With a good deal of circumlocution he gave the history of finding the membership book in Mrs. Revington's flat and of coming with it to Father Severn to discover what it was worth.

"Then," said the Bishop, "you have access to Mrs. Revington's premises?"

"Oh, yes," answered Purvis.

"It has been said that you have paid her visits in Warborough?"

"I'm afraid that is true, too."

"At Mrs. Revington's invitation?"

"Well; she knew I was coming!"

He said this with a smile of tolerance which enraged the Bishop. "Answer me, sir, a question," he said. "I understand you have been this lady's money-lender; is that true?"

"I have provided her with funds occasionally; certainly," answered Purvis, attempting a smile.

"Which she has discharged by signing this false statement?" came the Bishop's swift retort.

"Well, yes; that is so."

"Therefore the money in question was a debt?"

"In a measure that is true. I keep accounts!"

"The lady would not have signed a false statement to get rid of a monetary obligation which was not strictly a debt? She was anxious to rid herself of something. What was it?"

"The debt, I take it."

"Nothing more?"

"Well, I think she had got a little tired of my society."

"I am attempting," said the Bishop solemnly, "to give you the opportunity of clearing a lady's honour. I advise you to be careful how you answer me. Now hear this question. Have you any hold over Mrs. Revington beyond the matter of debt?"

Purvis thought for a moment. The effect of his interview with Miss Medlycote's lawyer was fresh in his mind; he had no desire to have either that lady or Mrs. Revington for his enemy. "On my honour, no!" he answered.

"Do you tell us," cried Father Severn, "that this woman is innocent?"

"What did I say before she entered this room," asked Purvis. "I appeal to the clergymen. I declared that the lady was not so bad as some of them. No; I swear she isn't."

"That is not enough," cried the Bishop. "Tell me on your honour, is Mrs. Revington guilty or is she innocent of the sin imputed to her?"

"Innocent," answered Purvis, quailing under the old man's penetrating eye. "I swear she is."

The Bishop turned to the synod. "You have heard from this man," he said quietly, "that Mrs. Revington had borrowed money from him: that he was able to use this debt as a menace to make her sign

a false statement : and further that it was from Father Severn he learned the charge brought against me. I have now to say this to you. Mrs. Revington came to me saying that she had the book of membership in her hands ; the purpose of this visit was to secure for herself, through my interest, that place in society which she had forfeited by an indiscretion—an indiscretion and nothing more. Until that meeting I had never spoken to this lady." He paused, and a swift expression of pain overswept his countenance. "Now, hear me," he said. "The ban which society placed upon her, I might have removed, I ought to have removed, from the very first. Society believed, and still believes, that Edmund Revington, her husband, destroyed himself because of his wife's worldliness. That is false ; and I have known it to be false all through the cruel years of her ostracism. The real assassin of that saint," he cried, looking towards the picture of Edmund Revington ; and Mrs. Revington, raising her eyes for the first time, looked at it too, trembling in wonder of what she should hear ; "is the Master of this Society !" He paused and half turned to Mrs. Revington. She seemed to have derived courage from the eyes of the picture ; her gaze met the Bishop's, she was calm and sure of herself. Men looked at her, and admired the splendid dignity of her beauty. "I have kept silence," he said ; "and in keeping silence, I have sinned against you. But the same iron power which has locked my lips with sin, is that same power against which your husband found it impossible to contend. This wicked man," he cried, raising his voice, and turning suddenly upon Father Severn, "persecuted Edmund Revington when that noble soul repented of his youthful sympathy with

Rome, and by that persecution, using the vilest threats of exposing me and others, he so worked upon the fine and sensitive conscience of my friend, that, unable to bear it, he destroyed himself. At my house I have a letter from Edmund Revington written just before his self-destruction, telling me the reason of it. He was killed by this secret society of Rome."

The old man paused, and turned slowly to Mrs. Revington. "In the presence of this company," he said, "I ask you to forgive me." And he handed her the statement she had signed against his honour.

She leaned forward, and took it, and gave him her hand. "One more thing I have to say to this synod," cried the Bishop, turning round. "There is here a lady who has been employed—so I have just learned from her—by Mr. Spencer Purvis in his office. Tonight, unless I can save her, she will enter, against her will, a nunnery, driven into it by your Master. I will tell you why she is in this horrible situation. Father Severn needed to possess himself of certain secrets concerning the business of Mr. Purvis, before he could work upon that man's fears to come here before you and lie away my character and lie away the honour of Mrs. Revington. By means of this poor lady's confessor, Father Vesey, he made her take those books and so entangled her in the meshes of his subtlety that in fear of legal consequences she yielded to his command that she should enter a convent, and so be lost to the world. Fortunately my friends arrived here, and found her, distracted and well nigh out of her mind with terror, waiting in this building with the books and papers she had been ordered to steal from her employer's safe. They found little difficulty in getting the lady's story from her

lips, for she was ready to open the gates of her soul at the first touch of genuine human kindness. It is from that story I have made these obvious deductions. So, you see—every honest man must see—that the forces which have been set in motion to destroy me in the name of God, are the forces of corruption, villainy, and fraud. Those forces have been set in motion, not by a man acting against me with a personal malevolence, but by a man so drunk with his idea of Roman supremacy that no scruple of honour, probity, or justice can weigh with him for a single moment. Into such hands has this Society now fallen; the old ideal which brought it into being—wrong and impossible as I now believe it to be, but clean, and pure and patient—has now given place to a ruthless Jesuitism of the most deadly character, sapping the faith of little children, corrupting the souls of women and young girls, and thinking no more of blackening a lady's honour or of taking away a man's character, than of sending such a noble spirit as Edmund Revington to his last account. To how many of you does this Society represent the cause of God and His Christ? Of how many of you—after hearing these things—will it be said that you are the willing tools of this bloodless Jesuit?"

"Look here," said Mr. Purvis, in the silence which followed the Bishop; "I should like to know how I stand in this affair? It seems to me that there is rather more underhanded business here than is healthy."

But no one gave him any notice. All eyes were fixed upon Father Severn. The Master sat far back in his chair, with his head hanging a little forward, but with his arms laid strongly along the arms of the chair, and his eyes shameless and fierce. When Purvis spoke, he glanced at him swiftly, and said: "You cango."

"But my books and papers. What about them?"

"They will be sent to you."

"Thank'ee. I'd rather take them now!" He was beginning to see light in this affair. What a fool he had been. Why, all these people were in the hollow of his hand. Abscond! No, not just yet. He turned to Miss Wilmot. "Fetch me those books!" he said, with a scowl. She clung to Mrs. Revington. The Bishop rose from his chair, and took Purvis by the arm. "Go!" he said, "the lay-brother in the hall will show you where those books are," and marched him to the door.

"I shall not take this matter lying down!" cried Purvis angrily; "look out for yourselves, my pretty Jesuits!" he shouted turning round; and then the door closed upon him.

As soon as the Bishop had returned to the table, Father Severn rose.

"I am guilty," he said, "of one mistake. When I told the man Purvis that Mrs. Revington had taken the book at the Bishop's injunction, I believed it. I could think of no other explanation. She was living at Warborough; she was received at the palace; the inference I drew was the most natural. Now, however, I see that it was wrong. Everything else that I did was done honestly and righteously to prove and substantiate that inference. But this is all of the most minor importance. The real question lies between devoted service to Rome and a luke-warm and stammering service. Which is this Society to represent? I am willing to release the Bishop, who is no longer a loyal son of the Church. In token of that I tear up this old membership book, and scatter its fragments under my feet. As for the rest we can only debate upon it, when the strangers present have withdrawn.

Among those strangers now is the Bishop of Warborough."

"I will leave you to deliberate on that question," said the Bishop grimly. "If my counsel can weigh with any of you," he went on, "I say—break up this Society! You who are still devoted to Rome, go over to her like men; you who have repented, return quietly to your parishes and loyally do the service of the Church of England. I am free; free to act concerning you as my conscience shall decide. But before I act I shall want to hear the result of your deliberations from Father Lacey; him I ask to write to me and tell me your decision."

When he marched towards the door, it was not only the three ladies who followed him, but every one of those clergymen who were there at this meeting of the Society for the first time.

Mr. Purvis, possessed of his office books and papers, asked Brother Tossell to fetch him a cab. The grinning brother replied that cabs did not exist in that part of London; the only carriages for hire were hearses, he said. He bawled into the ear of Mr. Purvis directions for finding the Borough High Street, where, said he, a stray cab might possibly be found.

Purvis started off. The books were heavy; they made his arms ache; he became hot and tired. He had frequently to stop and inquire his route, cursing himself for having thrown away his ear-trumpet. When at last he emerged into the High Street, the perspiration was streaming down from under his hat brim.

There was only the lawyer of Miss Medlycote to fear for the present. But Miss Medlycote could evidently be kept quiet. His knowledge of the Bishop of Warborough would assure that. He had often avoided

scrapes in the past by threatening the exposure of great and famous names. Why ; he might go on for years yet. Even Mrs. Revington could be brought to heel again ; he had given her a receipt for the debt, but he could still play old Harry with her feelings ; there was the child now for a string to his bow. Oh, yes ; madam should be made to dance again.

He cursed this miserable quarter of the town ; loud with waggons and trams and 'buses, but without one civilized cab to be seen anywhere. He changed the books from one stiff arm to the other, and mopped his face with his handkerchief. He asked his way to the nearest rank, but missed the man's answer. "Shout, please," he said, "I'm deaf." Then he started off, cursing and sweating, to walk to the Elephant and Castle public house. How those books weighed like lead in his arms. As he went he saw a four-wheeler creeping at a slow trot on the further side of the road. He clipped the books close to him and stepped quickly off the pavement into the road. A clattering waggon was approaching ; the driver shouted to him, pulling at the horse's mouth ; he got in front of it, only to find that a tradesman's cart was passing it on the other side at a swift trot. Then he saw that the four-wheeler was full and cursed. His foot slipped ; the cart, to avoid him, jerked across the road skidding over the tram lines ; he recovered himself clutching his books to his breast, and tried to go back. People were shouting. An electric tram loomed suddenly in front of him between the waggon and the cart. Then the shaft of the waggon struck him in the neck and shot him between the cart and the tram :

"Oh God !" he cried, and dropped his books.

It was the work of half a minute.

CHAPTER XXII

PAUL AND SILVIA

THEY made their way through the palace gardens, out of the sunlight, where Lady Harriet's dogs were playing on the lawns, into the cold shade of a mossy walk which led at a slant, winding and winding under the overhanging boughs of scented laurels, down to a wicket gate and a bridge. Paul opened the gate for her, and she crossed the bridge into the meadows.

They had now escaped from enclosed walls and verdurous ways into the wide and windy open. Under their feet was slippery close-nibbled grass, with yellow ragwort fading in the sun and blowing in the wind: over their heads was a sky of serenest turquoise. The great empty landscape was broken only by a solitary willow shaking its silver leaves in the foreground, and by a blur of green woods and a purple mist of hills in the distance. Far away a brotherhood of Lombardy poplars rose sheer into the sky, and in the mid distance, rising out in the centre of this green plain, could be seen the spidery scaffolding of an old white bridge spanning the river. For the rest, it was earth, wind and sky.

"There is wind here," she said, looking down into the valley, and drew the fresh breeze into her lungs.

"It is better than all the gardens in the world," he answered, and waved an arm to the wide scene.

Although the sun baked the hard ground and scorched their backs as they descended to the river, the wind in their faces was cold and vigorous. It was one of those summer days which makes England the desire of the world. In spite of a cloudless sky and a burning sun, exercise of the body was possible and enjoyable, because of the clean cold wind singing through the air. At their backs—hot with the sun's fire—they could hear the rustle of blown leaves and swinging branches in the palace gardens.

They were obliged to run at first, for the slope of the field from the garden wall was severe and the grass was slippery ; but presently the footpath grew gentler, and a deeper green showed in the grass ; and then came to them the sense of moving water, and in a minute they were in the valley at the side of the river. A swallow, with the sunshine on its blue-black feathers, its white breast mirrored in the river, its russet throat almost skimming that gleaming surface, swept past them and was lost in the sedges. They came to a standstill on the green bank, looking down on the moving water.

Beneath them, growing out of the broad river, and massed together on the sides of the banks, was all the rich and gorgeous verdure of our English streams. Purple loosestrife and yellow marsh ragwort clashed their colours in the silvery reeds ; pink willow-herb and white hog-weed caught and reflected back the sunlight that streamed to them through the thick stalks of water-parsnips, bulrushes and the feathery leaves of fading meadow-sweet. Timorous, and delicate, and lovely, forget-me-nots, brooklime and water-cress stood out of the water, with a yellow lily here and there restless in the stream. The noise of the

water through the sedges mingled with the hum of insects. The sunlight twinkled through the wind-shaken reeds. Far over their heads a lark was singing in the central blue.

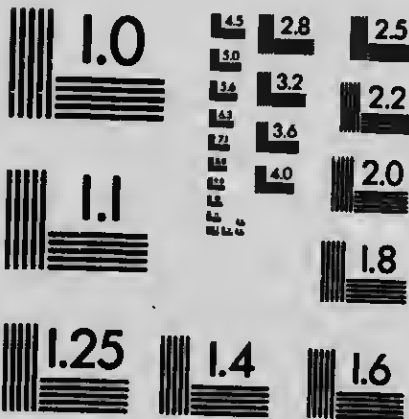
For a few moments Silvia—with the wind blowing her hair about and rustling at her dress—was absorbed in all these lovely flowers, questioning Paul about their English names, and asking him when they bloomed and how long the flowers lasted. He had not only the names of them for her, but legends about them; and they were happy there talking about these lovely things for many minutes. Then, before they started for their walk, he invited her to look back at the city on the hill.

The Cathedral, sheltering the Bishop's house under its walls, towered up into the sky, like some deserted castle, isolated and untenanted by human breath. It was only after studying the scene for a moment, that Silvia observed the red tiles and the ancient stone walls of the houses surrounding it. Then she saw how ivy clambered over garden walls, and how sunlight made burning sheets of fire out of open casements, and how above the jumble of red-gold tiles and the maze of old brick chimneys—some of them crimson with ampelopsis—a shimmer of heat trembled and glowed like a gauze of dew. The life of the city; its cobbled streets, its ancient doorways, its turnings and its windings, its bright shops, its gardens, its noise, its traffic, and its commerce—all this was shut out and hidden from their view. Only the silent cathedral, the ivy-mantled walls, the roofs, and a few sunlit panes, showed in the midst of that burning haze. Not a footstep reached them out of the stir of the streets, not a movement from all those busy hands was visible;



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the life of man was as if it were not. The hum of insects on the river's surface was nearer to them than the whole life of that city.

Silvia turned away and looked across the meadows where cattle were feeding, with their heads down and their tails sweeping off the flies from their loins. A sense of being completely alone with Paul for the first time in her life, overcame her consciousness and filled her with an apprehension of some unnameable dread. She had been asked by Lady Harriet to spend the day at the palace, while her mother was in London with Miss Medlycote. She had spent the morning in the garden with Violet and Paul. After luncheon she had played music to Major Lister, and talked to Lady Harriet in the drawing-room. Then Paul had come into the room, and asked her to go for this walk by the river ; and she had risen at once as if in answer to a command. No one else would go with them ; Lady Harriet said it was too far for her : Violet declared it was too hot : and Major Lister had letters to write. So they had walked through the gardens together, made their way through the shrubberies, passed through the wicket gate in the wall, and now they were alone together in a wide valley, walking beside the river, on into distance as silent as the sky itself.

It was just such a scene as Paul could have desired for the thoughts he intended to utter, this or the sea-shore. A garden filled with the voluptuous scent of flowers, and heavy with darkening branches and hot bunched leaves, would have made him restless and self-conscious ; but here was the open—the fresh clean open air, with sunlight and wind and the inspiration of unbroken sky.

“ This is better than the diocese ! ” he cried.

"Oh, much better!" They laughed at that; for "the diocese, always the diocese," was something of a jest between them. They began to talk about the Archdeacon, and Mrs. Archdeacon; the Dean, and the Dean's daughters; and about the polite chaplain and the Minor Canons.

"It is a mighty social machine, this diocese!" laughed Paul.

"There is hardly a burglar, I am told, to be found in the whole county," answered Silvia.

They walked on for nearly a mile, laughing and talking with their faces in the wind, till they came to a curve in the river where the cattle had trodden down the banks and made a way to the water. The holes punched in the clay by their feet were filled with water shining in the sun. Just beyond was the rickety bridge, with its blistering white paint and its rotting piles. The river here made a pleasant sound, not only among the rushes, but over a silt of yellow gravel, and the view, up and down stream, was wide and vigorous. Paul suggested that they should sit, and rest for a little.

He drew out of his pocket a favourite anthology, and asked if she would like him to read to her. She said yes, and watched him as he turned over the pages. He was bareheaded, and dressed in a suit of old flannels that was stuck over with little burrs of goose-grass. "You know so little of English poetry," he said; "I am glad." She knew why he was glad, and smiled. His face manifested no other emotion than a desire to find his place. "It is fine, reading to you," he went on; "you understand. Very few people understand poetry." He looked up suddenly: "Isn't it extraordinary," he asked, "how few people understand

life? Think of bridge, of cricket, of tennis, of golf, of shooting, of riding—of everything like that; why, all the world is an expert there; but, poetry—the soul's interpretation of the world—it's out of the fashion!" He laughed all over his face. "That's rather good, I declare it is; poetry's out of the fashion!"

She felt he was talking to himself; felt as if she were listening to his thoughts; it was pleasant, she told herself, to sit and hear a young man talking to himself; it never occurred to her to answer him. "What nice teeth he has," she was saying to herself; and she found herself liking to watch the wind blowing through his hair.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "you are going to listen now to one of the greatest utterances of immortal souls"; and without another word he began to read Wordsworth's lines written above Tintern Abbey on the Wye. She scarcely followed the gentle opening music of that noble harmony, so interested was she in studying the face of the youth at her side, this young and handsome Wordsworthian, who seemed to be himself the poet. But gradually this association of the words with the reader was merged into intelligent consciousness of the music, and at one and the same time she apprehended both the meaning of the words and the personality of the poet-reader.

These beauteous Forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my pure mind,
With tranquil restoration:

Yes, she understood that living memory of beauteous forms. But now the music was swelling on to grander harmonies—

Nor less, I trust,
 To them I may have owed another gift,
 Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
 In which the burthen of the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world,
 Is lightened: that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,
 Until the breath of this corporeal frame
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things.

He looked up with a light of triumph in his face. "An eye made quiet by the power of harmony!" he quoted. "We are laid asleep in body, and become a living soul! We see into the life of things!"

She nodded, and he knew by her eyes that the music was interpreting her thought.

She heard him reading on of how he had once run and played among the mountains and the streams, more like a man flying from something that he dreads, than one who sought the thing he loved. Then once again the music rose, and with it rose her soul in sympathy, till she listened almost breathless, her eyes fixed upon the poet's face, her heart saying "This is my language, this is I myself!"

She heard him read how the sounding cataract, the tall rock, the mountain and the deep and gloomy wood had haunted him like a passion, needing no

remoter charm of intellectual birth. The joy was in the things themselves; not in the mind of the beholder. But then she heard how that time of dizzy raptures had passed, and how her post-reader had learned:

To look on nature, not as in the ho.
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
 The still, sad music of humanity,
 Nor harsh nor grating, though of ampler power
 To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things

Silvia's heart beat with the music of these splendid lines; and the voice of Paul was like the sound of a trumpet in her ear. The triumph of man's discovery that he was one with the universe! this she felt was the strain of Wordsworth's organ music.

To all poets these lines are a passion and a deathless possession. To Silvia, the artist, hearing them for the first time from the lips of a man dear to her in the sacred heart of an unuttered love, they were a magic and a spell, a glory and a victory—the breathing vision of a soul who had looked upon God.

“That is your religion—the religion of the artist?” he asked, putting down the book, and turning to feast his eyes upon her. “But people hold the same religion in a different way. It is my religion, too, but you and I would quarrel over our Wordsworth and end in wor-

shipping in separate chapels. You find in him consolation and calm; I find in him unrest and a divine discontent."

"Discontent!" she exclaimed.

"He leaves you where he has led you, in the light of setting suns, feeling the divine Presence, breathing the ample air, your soul fast anchored to its purest thoughts. But as for me, I cannot forget that all through the shouting triumph of the angelic host sounds that ceaseless obbligato—the still, sad music of humanity; and that, after the Vision, returns the burthen of the mystery, the heavy and weary weight of all this unintelligible world. You," he said, enviously, "never lose sight of the Vision: to me it only comes in flashes so swift, so quickly vanishing, that they only mock."

She saw the sorrow in his eyes, the pain in his brow, and knew that his soul was fighting some dreadful battle in secret. The old desire to help him, to stand at his side in the midst of the conflict—even at the cost of losing the Vision—entered her heart. "What is it that troubles you?" she asked, gently.

He did not answer for a moment. Her question brought the great problem of his life before his eyes. He wanted to be young, cheerful, careless. He wanted to kiss and fondle this beautiful girl like a happy lover. But he could not shake off the burthen of his days. His reason carried a load which could not be laid down.

After a moment, with something of a frown, as though he struggled with himself to say it—

"The man we call Christ," he answered, looking away from her.

"Why does He trouble you?"

"Because I think He may have been right."

"And, if so?"

"Then, we are all wrong. I mean, the life we lead, good and pure as we may keep ourselves, is not his way after all. It is not Goethe's 'give up! give up!' it certainly is not His death to the world. There is between you and me," he said, looking at her suddenly, "the gulf which separates the modern world; one half of the serious world is looking towards God: the other, towards Christ. You look with Browning at the clear sky, and cry, All's right with the world. I look at London, and say, No man at any time hath seen the Father. There is all the difference between those two. You are content, and at peace, contemplating the beauty of the earth and the pageant of all lovely forms; I am full of discontent, looking at the pains and miseries, the destitution and the dreadful ignorance of mankind. You see the whole agony and stress of the nineteenth century as a flake of momentary foam rising out of the eternal deep, rolling majestically through infinity; it is nothing, less than a sigh from that great sea; but to me the suffering of one day in London is a torture which I find myself powerless to drug. That is where we are separated; and it is part of my pain that we should be separated. I would deny my unrest, if it were possible for me to do so, only to see the universe eye to eye with you. But it is easier for you to descend from your mountain, than it is for me to climb. Easier, and I think, wiser. Will you descend, Silvia?"

She started hearing her name on his lips. Her mother sounded the name quickly, making of it almost a command; he made it sound like a cry, drawing out its three syllables, and lingering over it, so that it

died away like a sigh. She was frightened, shaken through all her being with a new thought.

"I call you Silvia in my thoughts," he said; "let me be honest, and call you Silvia with my lips."

"I was not angry," she smiled. But she was frightened; the new thing was close to her; the long peace of her simple days was overshadowed at last by something which seemed to her like a conflict, something very near and very real and very strong.

"It seems to me," he said, quickly, turning on his side, and looking up into her face; that "my soul has been crying 'Silvia' ever since you spoke to me. It seems as if 'Silvia' had been my only language day and night through all these happy weeks. I have been calling 'Silvia! Silvia!' into the night, over the face of the shining waters, up to the mountains, and waiting for your answer. Silvia, what is your answer?"

That cry helped her not to fear any longer.

"My answer," she whispered, and looked into his eyes as if she would see his very soul, "is this: I have heard you calling."

"Heard me calling, Silvia?"

"Yes."

"Then, why have you not come down to me, angel from Heaven?" he cried, leaning suddenly forward, and taking her hands.

"I think that ever since you first called me," she whispered, "I have been coming down."

"Will you stay, Silvia?" he cried, kissing her hands. "Will you want to go back? Will you leave me always to follow you through the stars, always crying 'Silvia! Silvia!' like a hand that can never write quick enough for a brain, like language that is always just behind thought?"

"Whenever you call me I shall answer," she whispered.

"For ever?"

Her eyes softened with ineffable tenderness. "For ever!" She was silent before that thought, amazed by her first view of an eternal human passion. Then she said slowly: "If this is true I know the summit of joy. An eternity of love between us. This must be the height of being—immortality of love! You must love me with all the strength of your soul," she cried, releasing her hands that she might hold his, "you must so love me—as I shall love you—that you lose yourself in me. We must become one soul, one eternal consciousness of answered love. Then, we shall go through all the cycles of existence together; at each dying, I shall wake to find your face; at every fresh approach to the Mystery we shall be so much nearer to each other that we shall not be afraid even of oblivion."

They had come to the wonder of love, like children. As two children vow an eternal friendship and enter into a pact of the most beautiful and holy comradeship, so these two older children had come to love, and so they now plighted their troth. None of the more or less material and, too frequently, the sordid avenues made by custom and the world for uniting man and maid, had brought these two together. They had not begun their intimacy through the frivolities and flippancies of a jaded civilization. His first memory of her did not need to be disentangled from the thronging recollections of a ball-room or the crowding thoughts of a theatre. It was a love altogether free of the influence of cities. They had come suddenly face to face across a river: and now, resting on

the basis of a river they had acknowledged that passionate form of sympathy which we call love. Neither of them apprehended at that moment the problem which lay before them, nor guessed that it is to such a pure and sacred love as this which united them God brings His severest test. For a few moments they loved each other as spirits, loved as the angels love, and their language was the language of spirits.

It occurred to her presently that there were difficulties and menaces in the way of their perfect happiness. Would the Bishop, would Lady Harriet, give their son to one who did not share their faith? Would her mother accept Paul's idea of life?—this idea which he was now declaring—a surrender of his wealth, a denial of the world and society, and Silvia, only Silvia, in some cottage by the sea.

She wanted to think these matters out. "Let us walk on," she said, rising to her feet. He leaned forward and caught the edge of her dress. She dropped upon one knee at his side, smiling. "Yes?" she asked. He reached his face up to hers and she stooped over him; their lips met and they hung there in an ecstasy.

When Silvia rose, her eyes were opened to the mystery of love. She was conscious of the human side. The spiritual desire to companion this happy lover through the fields of destiny was shaken by a new passion, a temptation to cry that this earth alone sufficed, that her religion was here, in this man. She had talked about losing herself in his love; now she knew that she was lost, body, soul, and mind, and she began to be afraid.

Her mysticism seemed to rise like a mist from her mind. She had now no eager words to utter; no sweet

propaganda to preach to his soul. She could only be silent, holding his hand as she walked, and feeling that her heart was on fire. The blood burned in her veins; her eyes were full of tears. She was happy, and yet afraid of that happiness. It was too far from the stars; too close to the pressure of his hand.

And he was still talking of the life before them, as a schoolboy talks of his holidays. His plans were all arranged and settled. They would have a Frenchman and his wife to manage their household; Paul would work in the garden—for Bëndareff was right, no man can be happy without digging; and Silvia would be always at his side; and they would go together down to the sea, and watch the waves coming in over the rocks, or walk along the cliffs drinking the wind, and through the fields at sunset they would make their way home, picking wild flowers for their cottage. And they would "save up" for holidays abroad, visits to half-forgotten cities crumbling to dust, with their abbeys and churches, on shores scarce brushed by human feet. And it should be books and music all through life, and no one from the outer world should bring the world's standards to break the magic of their calm, and they would wait till death for the solution of life's mystery.

From tiresome ease, from idle toil,
O blest who timely turns his flight
To tread the consecrated soil,
To contemplate the perfect light.

So he paced on. The passion of that kiss had not silenced his soul, only made him more eager for the life of his desire.

He began to persuade her that the eternal vision was impossible for human hearts. It was not on the

mountain God intended men and women to live, but in the valley. Man had no language to express divine things. It was difficult enough, he laughed, to find words to express the satisfaction of a kiss!

She fought for the cause she had already surrendered. Yes, there was a language, she declared. Music was that language. Then she told him how a piece of music expressed to her first of all only the composer's effort to utter a spiritual thought. It was only by playing the same piece over and over again that she was able to perceive, far beyond the laws of harmony, the eternal thought it attempted to utter. But how weak were her words! they checked at the lips which still burned with their first caress.

"And then," said he, "you play it, Silvia, so that we none of us can understand you!" He laughed, and patted her hand. "You must play for the mighty world of ear, not for the universe outside the bounds of sense. My dear, you are like Balzac's painter, who went on improving his picture so long that he painted it clean out, and showed to the eye a canvas that looked like a muddy palette. You must read that story. The painter could not for the life of him understand why his friends did not praise his masterpiece. He could see it; it existed for him, in the mind's eye! But it is for the human eye we must paint, and for the human ear we must speak. Outside, dear Silvia, there is nothing for us, at least, not yet. We have our limits, and it is within those limits we must work out our happiness. We are human; it is our glory to be human. The eye and the ear and the hand, that is our trinity of comprehension. With those three you shall be as mystical as you choose; but beyond that, No! Attempt it, and I will close the

airy gates of your heaven with my kisses, and keep you here on earth human and beautiful."

"Ah, we shall never agree!" she said.

"In love all things agree," he answered.

"In place of my vision, you give me your Problem."

"It is better for you."

"But I want to be happy!"

"I will make you happy."

She found herself wondering how she could even contemplate this Man-given happiness, after that other. Had a kiss so much wonderful magic? He expected her, she saw, to give up her Vision as lightly as he would give up his millions. As if to answer her thoughts, he said: "It is only by giving up, Silvia, that we reach real happiness. Give up your idea of finding God outside the barriers of sense, and you will find Him again in human love. There is only one eternal figure in the world. The child Christ set in the midst of his disciples. We cannot be angels: we can be children. You and I are going to be children all our days—the happiest on earth."

"If I give up my Vision," she said, smiling, "will you give up your Problem?"

"I have lost it already in you!" he cried. "You are the solution of the mystery. Until I kissed you, Silvia, I did not know how easily human problems can be solved. Now, I am content. I give up the world, whose ways I detest, and I follow the child through the green fields till it is time to go to sleep. I am going to be happy, for ever and ever—on earth."

Silvia's mind was in too tempestuous a state to permit of calm judgment. She knew that she had lost the sense of closeness with God in the first kiss which a man had breathed upon her lips. It was this thought

which troubled her happiness. She was glad, she was even exalted in the experience of a new joy; but the old serenity had departed from her mind. She could not feel tranquil, she could not cease to feel afraid.

But life was leading her on to the final revelation. In a few weeks the beautiful child was to open her eyes, and find her God again, closer to her than breathing, nearer than hands and feet.

For the present she let herself drift with the tide of her joy. The river moving between its sedges to the sea should not more surely find and lose itself in the ocean, than she should find and lose herself in the eternal deep of love. Her soul moved with the water, leaving the cold mountain of the Vision, and winding through sunny human fields, bright with verdure and sweet with scent, to the round ocean and the everlasting shores. At present she did not guess the wonder of human love—that consummation that makes of human passion a glory which reflects the power and joy of God—but in the pleasant surrender to the hunger in her heart—even if serenity were vanished for ever—she was glad and she was content.

As they walked home again they talked of their plans for the future—their plans for living in simplicity outside the coasts of a civilization founded entirely upon the barbaric struggle for existence.

“Your mother will be furiously indignant,” he said chaffingly. “She has in her mind, you may be sure, some stupid young lordling for her lovely Silvia. She will raise her beautiful eyebrows at our fantastical notion of a cottage. It will seem to her so unpractical, or even worse, such horrible bad taste. But we will marry her off to old Uncle Hugh, who simply adores

the very scent on her handkerchief, and she will be glad to be rid of you."

"And the Bishop?" she questioned, in smiling retort.

"Oh, I have been hating like fire to go through a scene with him; but now, I am steeled. I have been dreading his summons to the library like a call to execution; but to-night I shall myself ask it. It will be easier to-night for both of us. He will be so sick of Father Severn! and I shall be so strong in the memory of your kiss. As for my dear mother—oh, one only has to look at her very hard, and say 'Thus it is going to be,' to shake the last vestige of haughtiness out of her annoyance."

"But, Paul, it will hurt them both. Not my views, I mean; but this giving up of everything. You are their only son. Everything in their future is you."

"I know," he answered. "But, thus it is going to be. It will be hard work with my father, for I love him, next to you, better than anything else in life. He was so good to me as a boy. He set me such a standard. I might easily have gone with the Philistines but for him. Yes, it will hurt, telling him; but I will speak with love, and he will forgive. Let nothing disturb you, Silvia. We are going to live our life in happiness and peace."

He stopped to point out to her a vole crouched up on the opposite bank in a feathery mistiness of marsh-bent, that most beautiful of grasses. The little creature watched them with its black shining eyes for a moment and then with a scuttle slid down into the water and dived under the sedges. They heard the bells of the Cathedral ringing for evensong.

The sun was setting now, and the plain lay glitter-

ing in a mist of yellow light. The old wooden bridge shone like some dream structure. The dragon-flies had the colours of the rainbow. The cattle crowded together, stamping the earth and sending up a dust which sparkled in the sunlight. Far off on the tall windows of the Cathedral the sun burned and glistened.

Paul pointed to the windows, and quoted Arnold :
" The line of festal light in Christ-Church hall ! "

So they walked back in the sunset, their arms full now of wild flowers, and when they had climbed the ascent and reached the bridge leading to the wicket-gate, they both drew up, as though for breath, and looked back over the plain. Far away, trailing his long legs behind him, a heron was wheeling over the river.

" Better than all the gardens in the world, Silvia ! " he exclaimed. " And better—how much better!—than the Diocese."

She smiled and nodded her head.

Then she felt his hands on her arms, and she was drawn into his embrace, and they kissed each other for the second time.

As they walked up the garden they heard the choir singing evensong from the Cathedral. " Listen ! " she cried ; and laid her hand upon his arm.

I need Thy Presence every passing hour ;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power ?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be ?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

CHAPTER XXIII

CONFITEOR

ON their homeward journey from London, after that terrible experience in the hall of Father Severn's mission, Jane Medlycote had striven to encourage the Bishop with hopefulness and good cheer.

"I shall never get over this," he had told her.

When she had spoken about Paul, no light of hope shone in his face, even for a moment. "Ah, poor boy!" he had exclaimed; and that was all.

So haggard and stricken was he when he entered the palace, just before eight o'clock, that all Lady Harriet's resentment vanished at once in a dreadful anxiety for his well-being.

"You are ill, dear?" she cried, going to him quickly as he entered the drawing-room.

The chaplain rose at once, and Violet, who was sitting beside him; they stood looking at the Bishop with faces of alarm. As soon as Major Lister realized that something untoward had happened he, too, came forward, his head very much on one side, his glassed eye glaring exceeding anxiety.

Lady Harriet's hands held the Bishop's elbows, and her white anxious face was raised close to his. "What is it, my dear? You are ill."

"Tired," he answered her: "only a little tired." He patted her arms, and tried to smile.

"You had better let me send you your dinner upstairs," she said. "Don't come in to-night. I think you ought to let me send for Dr. Brereton."

"Ah, no!" he replied, releasing himself from her arms and going forward to a chair. "I shall be better after dinner."

"I think you ought to go to bed, Papa," said Violet, approaching him. In spite of her anxiety there was still the foolish smile at the corner of her lips.

"I should, really, Bishop," echoed the chaplain, carrying the old prelate a footstool.

"My dear, you are really not fit to be up," said Lady Harriet, kneeling at his side.

While he was protesting that he felt but tired, and nothing more, the door opened and Paul entered the room. The cheerful greeting died on his lips as he beheld his father.

"He is utterly run down," exclaimed Lady Harriet.

"I am sure he ought to let us send for Dr. Brereton."

The Bishop's eyes were fixed upon Paul. "I shall be better soon," he said, stretching out his hand. "Pray don't let me make you all anxious."

Paul took his father's hand, and held it, looking anxiously at his face.

"Let me get you some brandy and egg, John," said the Major; "acts like magic."

But at that moment the door opened and the butler announced dinner.

It was almost a silent meal. The chaplain talked in whispers to Violet. Lady Harriet's anxious gaze never left the Bishop's face. Paul's efforts to be cheerful broke in the shaping. Major Lister only stared a general sympathy through his eyeglass. The servants

seemed to be affected by the general gloom, moving like shadows in the darkness behind the chairs.

As a rule the Bishop drank lemon-water, but to-night he was served with champagne, and as the dinner progressed this stimulant seemed to produce some effect upon his health. He asked questions about the Festival Service, and talked about his homeward journey with Jane Medlycote and Mrs. Revington.

"I hope Silvia was happy?" he asked.

"Paul nearly walked the poor child to death," said the Major.

"Ah, we are great walkers," said the Bishop, smiling.

At the end of the dinner he excused himself from taking coffee in the drawing-room, and asked Paul to come and smoke his cigarette in the library.

"Make him swallow half a tumblerful of brandy," whispered the Major in Paul's ear, as the others passed out into the hall.

"Tell Mather," answered Paul.

When the butler had brought the decanter into the library, Paul poured his father out some brandy, and the old man consented to be physicked. "You are making an invalid of me," he answered, smiling. "I am really well enough. Give me one of your cigarettes."

The Bishop smoked but seldom, and he had come so late to tobacco that the cigarette was the only form he cared about; it was soon over. It looked odd to see the grim old man, with his heavy head and his solemn face, smoking so slight a thing as a cigarette.

The dark curtains were drawn across the windows; the deep red of the library carpet shone in the glow thrown from shaded electric lamps; on the Bishop's writing table burned two tall candles in heavy holders

of Tuscan bronze ; the books filling all the walls, were in shadow. As the door shut the Cathedral clock boomed the hour of nine. Its echoes vibrated through the room.

The Bishop sat in his high-backed chair, almost in the centre of the room, with Paul a little in front of him, and nearer to the hearth.

The brandy did its work, and he presently appeared to be something of his vigorous self again. But Paul dreaded the thought of intimate conversation with him at such a time. He smoked nervously, listening to the vibrations of the Cathedral clock.

"I want to ask you the question," the Bishop began, slowly, "which I daresay you have been expecting me to ask you for some weeks. I want you to tell me, my dear boy, whether it is your desire to be ordained next Easter?"

Paul could not meet his eyes. It seemed like striking a wounded man.

"Ah!" said the Bishop, but not with any tone of grief or disappointment; "I fear that the Oxford spirit has not yet worn away from your mind. I had some little talk with Arthur before he went. He led me to think that you might wish to postpone ordination still longer. Well, dearest boy, I do not urge you to hasten your decision; I know how easily a man may earn a lifelong repentance from a too impetuous step in his youth. But, we can still talk together about the matter, like father and son. I should wish you to talk about your difficulties as intimately with me as with men of your own years; more intimately, seeing that all my affections are bound up in you. Let me, then, invite your confidence by approaching your present position." He paused and looked for a moment

at the smoke swirling up from his cigarette, "I know, my dearest boy," he went on presently, "how easily cultured minds may be infected with agnosticism. I know how difficult Oxford makes it for a man who has the Greats-mind to take that emotional step which leads to the embracement of Christianity. But I know also that the time comes when agnosticism will not satisfy a pure heart. You know Blougram's argument : I need not labour that point. Not to believe, is to believe. There is no negation. The full mind can never be open and uncertain. Either the Christian explanation is the right one, or there is another. What is it ? What are you going to believe about life ? How does materialism account for the abstract ideas of justice and love and self-sacrifice ? How does the physicist explain the presence of pity in this roaring cere of struggle for existence ? And if there is pity here—how can he keep all those divine emotions, which are the chief forces in human affairs, out of the universe ? If here—then, everywhere throughout the cosmos. More ; and this is what I would particularly say to you : how can science, how can philosophy account for that feeling after God which has been the impulse of mankind since the dawn of intellect ? There it is, Paul ; 'man in search of God, and God in search of man ;' sooner or later you will be driven by sheer heart hunger to leave the unsatisfying meats of philosophy and go in search of the Bread of Life. What says Augustine ? —'We are made for God, and our hearts can find no peace till they rest in Him.' It is because I feel this about you, that I am so anxious you should not, in tarrying before you take the solemn step of ordination, neglect to study with the deepest reverence and contemplation with the most complete affection, that great

Figure who, after all, remains in the midst of German criticism and scientific materialism, the Light of the World."

Paul looked up and met his father's gaze. "It isn't," he said nervously, "that I do not believe: it is because I do believe."

The old man watched him for a moment. Then he leaned forward and threw his cigarette into the fireplace; this action seemed to hurt him: his face showed an expression of pain: he lifted his left hand and began slowly to rub the muscles of his right arm. "Tell me what that means, Paul?" he said huskily. "You believe?"

The son also threw away his cigarette, quickly and irritably—as a man who can suffer no disturbance of his mind. "You are not very well to-night, dear father," he said, leaning forward, his arms resting on his crossed knees; "would it not be better to leave this talk till to-morrow, till you are better?"

"It will be late before I go up to-night," answered the Bishop. "I have some writing to do later on. Talk to me for an hour. Draw your chair nearer, my boy; let us sit side by side."

Paul drew his chair to the side of his father. They sat almost shoulder to shoulder, their eyes looking towards the fireplace. "Now, tell me," said the Bishop, taking his son's hand, and holding it in his own.

All the memories of his childhood came thronging back into Paul's mind. The triumph of his love, the glory of the afternoon, the very fragrance of Silvia's personality, were swept out of his thoughts. He was filled only with a divine compassion for this dear noble old man, the father to whom he owed everything.

"I wish it were possible," he said, "not to talk

about these things ; to go on as we have always lived ; just happy in each other's affection."

" Ah, you are thinking of me ! That is sweet of you But nothing in your mind can ever hurt me. If you were without faith, it would not wound me ; I should know that God was guiding you by His own path to the one source of mercy, His own absolute Fatherhood. But you are not without faith, and whatever views you may take of the Church, I shall not be pained ; so long as a man has felt the power of Christ it matters little what form his faith may take."

Paul was encouraged by these words ; they invited full confidence, and made that confidence easy, with the assurance now that his words could not hurt. " But he said, " it has always been your desire that I should follow you, that I should endeavour to go on with your ideal of an English Catholic Church ? "

" I know. But I can bear to abandon that ideal. Something has occurred to me to-day, Paul—of which I will tell you a little later—which has rather shaken the energy necessary for so hard a work. I now no longer feel myself in possession of the energy for that task ; I no longer feel that it is right of me to expect the devotion of your life to that ideal. No ; an old man can give up his ambitions with greater ease than can a young man. Ten years ago, surrender would have gone near to breaking my heart. It is not like that now."

It seemed to Paul—so young, so headlong, so impetuous, that everything was smooth for his confidence. His father, apparently, no longer cherished the great ambition which had been the motive energy behind his life's resistless work ; he no longer, apparently, desired with the old consuming passion his son's entrance into

the priesthood of the Church. And yet, even now he felt it hard to speak, hard to make clear the barrier which had grown up between them. His love for his father had taken the colour and the fragrance of maternity.

"Let me hear your views, Paul," said the Bishop, pressing his hand. "You believe in our Lord, but you are not attracted to the English Church. Tell me?"

The Cathedral clock chimed the quarter of the hour.

"I am too young almost to hold any opinion on so vast a subject," answered the young man, when the sound had died away. "I recognize that the effect of Oxford is to make one arrive late at fixed opinions. It keeps one young! And so it well may be that in five years' time I shall want to unsay every word that is now in my mind. I feel myself still very much of a boy." He smiled, and motioned with his free hand towards the crowded bookshelves: "In the presence of all these ghosts of mighty theologians, how shall I presume to speak?"

"Your theology will perhaps be nearer to my heart!" answered the Bishop, pressing once more the hand of the son whom he loved better than his life.

"Then I will try to speak to you, dear father," said Paul, answering that loving pressure; "and I know the depth of your patience will make allowance for me. It is thus that I feel: In organized religion I cannot find the secret which makes our Lord so inexpressibly precious to me; it must be there, because so many saints have found it there, and have been satisfied; but for me, I am sorry to say, I cannot find it. The more perfect grows the machinery of religion, the less do I find the spirit I am in search of. I admire the wonderful power of administration which has made

your own episcopate the example and the envy of Christendom. I can see the effect it has had upon the tone and character of men's lives all through this part of the world. I know that if every Bishop were working with the same faculty for governance, with the same magnificent ideal in front of him, and perhaps with the same force of great wealth at his back to put energy into the work of others—the life and the standards of England would be higher and nobler. Do not think, my dear father, that you have any more enthusiastic admirer than the son, who has kept clean so far only by your most loving care of him, and by the great example which your character has always set him. No ; I see and know the virtue of your life's work, and I would with all my heart that it were possible for me to think that at my life's end I shall be able to look back on a thousandth part of such service done for God and man. Such is my sincerest thought. And yet, in this work I know that I could never find the inspiration necessary to force it on."

"You are speaking very sweetly, and very modestly," said the Bishop ; "however differently we may find that we think on this matter, we shall discover at the end that our hearts are nearer to each other. Go on, my dear boy, with a good courage."

Paul's heart was so sustained by this great love of his father's that in spite of the labour with which the Bishop had spoken, he now let the current of his thoughts carry him onward with all the impetuous zeal of his temperament.

"I think it seems to me," he said, "that in the modern form of religion—in religion as highly organized as any vast commercial undertaking—there can never be the same potentiality which I find in the char-

acter of our Lord. This highly organized religion, I mean, can make people only good. It can make them only moral. The prospect before it, so it seems to me, is a world in which people do not rob their neighbours, do not kill their neighbours, do not deceive their neighbours, and do not bear false witness against their neighbours. Such a world, a perfectly moral world, would have been possible, I think, without Christ. Its prophets and its apostles are Plato, Aristotle, Epicuretus, Marcus Aurelius, Bacon, Kant and Spencer. The ordinary forces of evolution are away from man's ancestral savagery, which appears to be the origin of all his sins, and towards the natural morality of a self-conscious and educated man. Democracy, a purely material movement, is away from sin towards righteousness. I do not steal, or lie, or murder, is rather the result of my education and my heredity than the fruit of any religious impulse. But I do not wish to stop at being morally good; and it is here that it seems to me I have only one guide out of all the beings who have ever passed across this planet. It is to Christ I must look if I want to go on from being good, to become that which is infinitely more, a spiritual being. I do not mean mysticism; at least, I do not think I mean mysticism: how shall I say it?—a form of Docetism, perhaps, a desire to live in the world, as a man, enjoying the glory of life and the beauty of the earth, but feeling that every experience in matter is a spiritual reality, a growth in spiritual being, a deepening of spiritual consciousness."

"I know what you mean," said the Bishop. "But, tell me why you do not think it possible to find this spiritual——" He stopped, and a look of surprise, then of horror came into his face. Paul was looking

straight in front of him, and did not see ; but the pause, and then the sudden grip of his father's fingers on his hand made him look round. "For a moment," said the Bishop. "I could not get the word : aphasia—I am getting an old man : Go on, my dear boy ; tell me why it is not possible to find the spiritual life in the Church ?" He spoke heavily and huskily ; and the hand that held Paul's was now as cold as death.

After having his father's assurance that he was not ill, Paul continued.

"I know that other men can find it there," he said. "I know that men find it in Nonconformity, which is now as well if not better organized than the Establishment. They find it, too, in Rome. Therefore I say it is possible that in five years' time I may wish to unsay every word that I now utter, and that in communion with the Church I may yet come to find all the means for my spiritual life which now seem far away from it. But for the present it is thus that I seem to think : The Church is now a central part of the social world : in one sense, it is the social world : but in the full and general sense it plays a chief part in the social scheme of things. It is the protector of property, the sanctifier of commercial activity, the moral restraint upon the normal appetites of men, the great policeman of the social order. It is not only in the world, but it is very much of the world. Now, if the world were a spiritual world, this I could understand ; but the world is surely not a whit more spiritual than when our Lord bade men perceive that if they would find themselves they must needs first lose themselves. London, Birmingham, Berlin, and New York—these cities are surely not less worldly than the little cities of Palestine denounced by Jesus. It is, I mean, just

as necessary now as it was in His day, for a man who wishes to become a spiritual being to deny the world—to deny not only its evil and its folly, but its whole standard of conduct and its whole orbit of action. In a word, my dear father, I am not in love with the world. To give it up entails no sacrifice on my part. I abhor its ways, and I detest its outlook. If I were a saint, I should love it in spite of itself, as Shakespeare loved Falstaff; but I am rather in Lear's mood: before letting you hold my hand I ought to say, 'Let me wipe it first: it smells of mortality.' That is how it is with me. I hate the small proprieties of life: I hate the tone of modern talk: I abominate the money standard which obtains in every class: I detest the hypocrisy of politics: I hate all the social inequalities: and I suspect the whole system which can produce out of commercial stress for its highest ideal only Birmingham. There is something more than this; there is the Mount of Olives. I think that the Church ought to be clean separate from the world of commercial competition. I do not think its part is to sanctify the social order, but to declare that the social order is evil. Model-dwellings, open-spaces, poor law administration, temperance societies, and all those guilds and brotherhoods of self-help striving to intensify the strenuous life, with Mr. Carnegie for their final end—this seems to me the work of the moral reformer in love with the world. For me, confessing like a jaundiced philosopher that I am out of love with the world, I am conscious of a desire for something of aspect more sublime, as Wordsworth has it."

The Cathedral clock struck the half-hour.

"And this is the most difficult part of what I have to say," continued Paul. "I am horrified at the thought of saying one word which may seem to imply the dread-

ful, the intolerable conceit that I can perceive in our Lord, however dimly, even the shadow of something more beautiful and wonderful than you have always found in Him. That shocks me so that I can hardly go on. And yet I must tell you what it is I think, for here is the sum of all my thoughts."

The ice-cold hand seemed to tighten its grip a little.

"In some American newspaper," Paul went on, slowly, "Goldwin Smith has just now been attacking orthodox Christianity, in an effort to make a unity of Science and Faith. He sweeps away all idea of the Atonement, because the origin of species shows not a descent but an ascent of man; and yet he finds in Christ—just as Renan, Schmiedel, Neumann, and the others find—something so wonderful as to compel universal admiration. And he keeps on repeating as his grand discovery that Christ manifested and revealed the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. This is, in the eye of the philosopher, the claim of Christ on our admiration! Science and Faith ought to become a unity because Jesus, the Carpenter's son, announced that God was a Father and that all men were brothers! But this, after all, is really the pathetic note of all our sentimental agnosticism. It is poor stuff; it is vain; it is not worth considering. But while the Church, on the other hand, persists in standing at her Altar declaring that Christ is a sacrifice for our sins, and that through that sacrifice we obtain, with mercy for our sins, strength to perform our duty in the world—I do not see that agnosticism will ever advance further towards the mystery. No; I think the great step has got to be taken by the Church, not by Science; and when the Church does take that step Science will come to her with everything else in the world.

But what is that step? Here it is that I find myself most nervous of speaking to you. Not that I question your love and your sympathy; but because I have no words to express my meaning. I have got to try and tell you what Christ is to me. Is it possible for any form of words to express the relationship which exists between a worshipper and his God?—that point at which the finite touches the infinite, and knows itself immortal. The Apostles Creed leaves me cold; the Athanasian Creed finds me unintelligent; and yet if I were to attempt the task of uttering my inmost convictions concerning our Lord, how far short should I fall of those old utterances! Perhaps it will be better if I try to say what it is Christ seems to me to teach, rather than how it is I feel towards Him.

“It seems to me that the great magic of Christ is the protestation of his nothingness. ‘Learn of Me, for I am meek and low’ means really that; learn of Me for I am nothing. It is like that beautiful ballad of Béranger’s with its repeated gospel—

‘Be nothing,’ the Almighty said.

To feel one’s entire simplicity is to discover God. To have extreme poverty of spirit is to find the Everlasting. The world says, ‘Struggle, labour, aspire, fight on, overcome—be something!’ Christ says ‘Deny the world: be nothing.’ His words and His Works sound that one great master-note, Renunciation. He is always without effort: without struggle. It is, Give up, Surrender; not Fight, Conquer, and Succeed. Solomon in all his glory is a pretentious failure; it is the Son of Man, crying ‘Who is my mother, or my brother?’ that is the Light of the World. The creative piety of Jesus lies, I think, in His sublime and childlike denial of the world’s

standards ; in His spirit of renunciation ; in His absolute and beautiful Nothingness. If we would discover His secret it is surely here in the golden note of all His teaching—renunciation and surrender. The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man are not the facts for the truth of which He was content to lay down His life. He laid down His life, surely, to attest the truth of its teaching—that to yield and surrender even to the uttermost is to find God. It is as the Way-Shower that He is the Light of the World ; not as the divine metaphysician preaching Fatherhood and Brotherhood. Goldwin Smith, after all, has taken his idea of Christ from the Churches against whose orthodoxy he throws the spear of science. It is this Christ they preach ; making Him a part of the world He denounced, the sanctifier of its materialism, the reconciler of its dreadful inequalities. The Christ who is nothing, the Christ who cries always to the world, Renunciation !—the Christ who looked on the young man and loved him, and said ‘ Sell whatsoever thou hast, and come, take up thy cross, and follow me ’—nay, the whole and complete Christ who died to prove that it profits a man nothing to gain the whole world at the hurt of his soul—this Christ to the Churches, so it seems to me, is merely the beautiful idealist speaking in the imagery of the East, whose utterances in Aramaic have reached us first through late Greek and then through Lutheran German, and are, therefore, not to be taken at the foot of the letter by practical men of the world. Not all can aspire to perfection, we are told ; and the counsels of perfection uttered by Christ are not the Light of the World, but just pious aspirations which it will do a man good to reflect upon occasionally in the midst of the strenuous life. Be as good as you can, as moral as

you can, and subscribe to Church charities—that is the religious life. If this be so—then, how much remains of Christ? In what degree does His righteousness exceed the righteousness of Plato, or His metaphysics surpass the metaphysics of Buddha? To me, I declare it seems, that the essential Christ—the Christ who revealed the spiritual life—is denied now by the whole world, as He was denied in His lifetime; and that it is only the moral Christ, the good Christ who shepherds, not spirits, but the forces of evolution, Who is worshipped by the moral and respectable sections of modern society.”

He paused, and then went on again. “What do you think of me, sitting here and preaching my idea of Christ to one who is as far above me as the stars are above the earth? Where is my nothingness, where is my meekness, and humility? Alas, rightly am I named Paul, for I can only preach love with words of fire, and can see no way of establishing peace except by fighting for it. I am a fighter, an iconoclast, a violent man. I would I could be less Pauline!”

“Perhaps, wrongly am I named John,” said the old Bishop, speaking heavily, and with a long and painful deliberation. The Cathedral clock struck the three-quarters in the night outside. “For,” he went on, “it would seem as if I may have missed the spiritual life, and laboured only for the moral. It is true,” he added, with a deep sigh, “that organization hinders and prevents the spiritual life. Work and meditation are not yoke-fellows. I have been like Martha, careful of many things. Through God’s grace I have helped, I suppose, to make certain men and women good; but spiritual—I wonder? I fear not. But of this I will speak later. There are arguments on the other side.”

Paul turned impetuously to the old man, and laid his hand on his shoulder. "I have hurt you!" he exclaimed. His eyes were shocked by the ghastly look of carven misery on his father's face. "I have spoken like a boy; with all the conceit and effrontery of my crude years. Do believe me, my dear father, that I had rather have died than wounded your great heart for a moment. Think, between you and me—how vast the difference! Who would dream to hold us in comparison? We are separated by your whole life of devotion and victory! Then, why consider my words? I am just out of the schools, the measles of the Greats-mind is over all my infant thoughts; I know nothing of the rough stark world of actual experience. And even now, I declare to you that while I desire to go out from the world and to live the life of extreme simplicity and dependence upon God, it seems to me meet and right that you should live in an atmosphere of dignity, served with all circumstance, and habited with every splendour. I like to think of you as a king in this palace; I like to think of you waited upon by your troop of servants; and driving abroad with my mother behind those great black horses she is so vastly proud of! Dearest father, this is right and meet; for you are a king among men. Well, if you will not have that; you are one of the great Headmasters in the school of life. I declare it is right for you to live in honour and glory; and, on my heart, I vow that my reverence for you has increased with every hour of my life. If I am hermit-minded, it is probably because I lack your broad and tolerant philanthropy, if I want to go out from the world I do not disguise from myself that it is as much misanthropy which drives me into the wilderness, as it is religion which calls me there. But

I do think, I cannot help myself from thinking, that if I give up my possessions, deny that the acquisition of wealth is one of the objects of existence, and go out from the world to live somewhere in quiet and simplicity, I may some day find the Christ Who will quiet my unrest."

"You wish to give up your possessions?" asked the Bishop. His voice was full of pain and tears, and sounded far off.

"Let us talk of that to-morrow," said Paul, stooping forward, and kissing his father's brow. He almost cried his alarm, the Bishop's forehead was so icy cold. "Put on one side your writing, dearest father; and go to bed, and rest for to-night. To-morrow we will talk again. I have much to tell you; something that I hope will make you very happy. For to-night, let us make an end."

"Tell me—what you think—" said the Bishop very slowly, "will make me—happy!" Then a look of sudden agony swept across his face again. His eyes started from their sockets: his jaw fell: his face became ashen. He lifted his left arm and waved it towards, rather than pointed it to, the decanter.

Paul sprang up from his chair, and brought his father a tumbler of brandy. "Let me fetch my mother," he said as the Bishop drank. "You are really ill. Do let me?"

The Bishop shook his head, and rose from his chair. He put out his left hand, and Paul hurried to give the swaying old man his arm. "I must write. Before it is too late. The wave has been gathering for thirty years. It broke to-day. All the rest will be a dying away—like a little sigh." He paused and gripped Paul's arm: "I charge you most solemnly not to

send for a doctor, not to leave the room, and not to interrupt me." Paul gave the promise. Then the Bishop moved forward, staggered, and cried hoarsely: "Oh, my God! help me."

Paul guided him to the table. He sat down heavily, and with his left hand took a pen, and opened the inkwell. Then he raised with his left hand the right arm upon the table, and began to rub it slowly as though it pained him. "Sit with me," he said, glancing up at Paul with those eyes of staring horror. "Do not go. Remember your promise. Do not leave me alone."

Paul set some manuscript paper before him, kissed his father's brow, and then withdrew slowly to the hearth. As he sat down he glanced up and saw that his father was regarding him with that dreadful stare of horror, the mouth hanging helpless, as though endeavouring to say something. He hurried to his side.

The Bishop dipped the pen in the ink and wrote with difficulty on a piece of paper. "Smoke a cigarette, and make yourself happy. I may be late. Remember your promise. Do not leave me."

"For pity's sake, let me fetch my mother?" implored Paul.

The Bishop shook his head vigorously. "No!" he said. "No!"—and motioned Paul to go back to the hearth.

After a minute the Bishop settled himself down to the work before him. Paul could see the expression of a great mental effort in his eyes, and could hear the laboured scratching of the nib over the paper. Soon, apparently, the Bishop forgot the presence of his son, and was lost in his work.

The Cathedral clock boomed the hour: ten slow, deliberate, monitory strokes, with a vibrating interval

between each, as if Time were allowing man an opportunity for repentance. It seemed to Paul as if an age passed in that striking of the hour. He pictured to himself the huge rusty hammer heaving up in the belfry and descending upon the trembling brazen bell with a stern austerity, shaking dust from it, and sending its vibrating echoes out from the rafters and masonry of the dark tower into the August night of the City. How often he had watched that monstrous and bloodless hammer in the days of his childhood, thinking that it was moved by the finger of God!

The task of sitting in the great silent room, with its drawn curtains and its shadowed bookshelves, became more than he could bear. His nerves clamoured for a narcotic. He took a cigarette, and struck a match softly, so that it should not disturb his father. This Bishop did not hear him. He lifted the match to the cigarette, but his outbreathing quenched the tiny flame before he could draw it to the tobacco. He struck another match, and again the Bishop did not hear. The son sat watching his father, smoking as though by stealth.

The clock struck the first quarter. Paul threw away the end of his cigarette, and reached his hand to the bookshelf. The volume he took from the shelf was a modern one, *Contentio Veritatis*. It opened at the chapter entitled "The Sacraments," and Paul found himself reading:—"The Didaché indicates that, according to the original idea, the offering was of the fruits of the earth, not of the Body and Blood of Christ. It is of these oblations, and not of the administration of the elements, that sacrificial language is used by the early Fathers. Not until Cyprian do we find the doctrine that the Body and Blood of Christ are offered in

sacrifice, and it was perhaps not till the ninth century that 'the central point of the sacrificial idea was shifted from the oblation of the fruits of the earth to the offering of the Body and Blood of Christ.' "

He looked up, the Bishop was still busy at the table. He turned the pages of the volume, and came across a passage which fastened itself upon his attention: "Again, it has been sometimes thought," he read, "that organization and machinery are only harmful to society, especially to the society of the Church. There are anarchists in religion as well as in ordinary life. And anarchism, whether it is the protest against the exaggeration of the mechanical in life, or the revolt against the false in the organization of life, has its own relative truth and value. But when the anarchist maintains that society in general can act without organization, we can only answer that he misreads the history of the human race"—What a history that is! cried Paul to himself—"The answer to anarchism is written on the whole face of history. The advance of civilization has in large measure been worked out through the development of the machinery of social life; the inspiring ideas of the great leaders of mankind would have been lost, had it not been for the fact that they have embodied themselves in institutions. Nature is not unorganized, vague, fluctuating, but is articulate, ordered, and persistent in order."

It sounded to him as if his father were uttering the words. He looked up over the book, and saw that the Bishop was still writing between the two candles. The great prelate did not seem to be any worse. Perhaps the writing would relieve his mind of some disturbance which affected his health.

He turned back to the chapter entitled "The Per-

son of Christ," and read : " The society which Christ founded did not at first apprehend all the truth about His Person ; but it was guided by a kind of instinct (rightly attributed to the indwelling Spirit whom the Father sent in Christ's name), which enabled it to discriminate as questions arose, and to bar one after another, all the false paths which lay open on either hand. In doing this the Church claimed with perfect justice that she was interpreting the original revelation, not adding anything new to it. The theologian who first arrived at the accurate enunciation of a dogma was said ' to interpret the mystical tradition of the Church.' It is plain from the documents that this is true."

Paul closed the volume, and slipped it back into its place. " If only Christ had enunciated these dogmas ! " he thought, and sat with folded hands, looking at his father. The clock struck the half-hour ; when the vibrations had died away a silence such as comes into a room of death brooded upon the great library. The Bishop's pen made no noise upon the paper. He was writing slowly, but not as if he were writing deliberately ; rather as if his brain were impatient of the arm's slow labour ; there was an agony in the face, a tremendous sense of mental effort in the eyes. All about him on the table were the sheets of paper, with the wet and drying ink shining in candle-light. Paul could picture to himself the small neat writing which covered that paper ; the thin scholarly characters traced with a fine finish and almost breathing the spirit of an old-fashioned and orderly erudition. He associated the agony in the Bishop's face with the writing before him ; not with any illness or bodily suffering. But what did the words say ? What was

the Bishop writing with such consummate courage? They must be words of great moment. Was it his Will? Surely not; that must have been made years ago. Something perhaps to do with Father Severn. What was that mystery?—he wondered.

The clock struck the three-quarters. As he listened to the echoes, Paul wondered if the bell really ever ceased to vibrate, if it did not tremble and quiver through all its atoms from one quarter of an hour to another. It interested him to think that perhaps the bell shared in the whole movement of the clock, that while the hands travelled without ceasing round the dial, this apparently idle bell was sending its vibrations out upon the air, without ceasing.

As they died away for his ear, another sound reached him—a short, quick, stertorous and laboured breathing. He glanced anxiously at the Bishop. The prelate was bending close over the paper; his face was the colour of death; his eyes protruded; his lips were out-thrust in a great agony.

Paul rose from his chair, and stood for a minute at the hearth. Then he went slowly and noiselessly forward. He saw that the Bishop was grasping with his left hand the wrist of the right, forcing it—so it seemed—to do the bidding of the brain. He approached his father's side, and laid his hand gently upon his shoulder. The old man made no movement, but continued to write.

“You must stop, father,” said Paul. I insist on it.”

The left arm pressed against Paul, as though the Bishop would force him away from his side.

“No; you are ill,” said the old man. “I will not leave you; but you must stop working.”

The old man glanced up at him with horror, and

waved his left arm angrily. It was the action of a father driving his son away from the Will that disinherited him. Then, as he turned again to write, his head fell forward and struck the table. He had collapsed.

Paul—with a sudden terror freezing his blood—raised the Bishop up, and set him back in the chair. Then he rushed to the table in the centre of the room, seized up the tumbler of brandy, and came back with it. He poured some of the spirit through his father's lips; but there was no change.

"Will you wait here a minute?" he cried. "Just a minute, while I fetch Mother?"

The Bishop did not answer.

"No; I will not go, dearest!" he cried. "I will ring the bell." Do not be afraid. I will not leave you. Then, "Thank God!" he exclaimed, for the door opened and Lady Harriet entered the room, quietly and anxiously, intending to persuade the Bishop to go to his room

As she lay against the Bishop's breast, holding him in her arms, Paul explained to her what had happened. "I am going for Brereton," he whispered; "stay here; I will send Mather."

She caught his arm, and raised her face from the Bishop's. "Paul, we have lost him for ever!" she whispered, in her agony; "he is paralysed!"

"Do not despair!" he said and hurried from the room.

As he ran from the courtyard into the Close, the Cathedral clock struck eleven. He set himself to race the clock. Before the last stroke had died away, breathless and gasping, he was asking for Dr. Brereton. The doctor, he was told, had been called out an hour ago. Where to? Ladywell.

A fresh horror sped Paul upon his way. When he entered Mrs. Revington's drawing-room, his face was drawn and aged, and the sweat was standing on his brow. Silvia was not there.

"My father," he said to the doctor. "A stroke. Will you go at once? I will overtake you."

Mrs. Revington came to him, alarm in her eyes, sympathy on her lips. He explained to her quickly the tragedy in the palace. "I must go back," he said; "but tell me: Silvia, is she ill?"

"Yes, she is ill."

He seized up her hand. "I love her," he said. "Quick: tell me what is the matter with her?"

"It is not serious. Do not be alarmed. We shall get her well. Go back to your father quickly." Then she paused. "I am glad you love Silvia," she added.

"But tell me what it is?" he asked.

"Dr. Brereton will tell you. It is her nerves. We must be careful with her—do not be anxious."

He went out from the cottage, and overtook Dr. Brereton at the palace door. Lights seemed to be shining in every window. A small crowd stood in the Courtyard waiting for the doctor's bulletin. Already the City knew that the lion was stricken down.

The clock had not yet struck the first quarter.

The scene in the library stamped itself upon Paul's mind for ever. The Bishop had evidently attempted to rise, and had fallen to the ground. He lay, propped up with cushions, staring in front of him with that heart-breaking look of terror in his eyes. How fallen were the lids of his eyes; how oddly hung the right corner of the mouth; Lady Harriet kneeled at his side, ashen and motionless—like a watcher beside the dead. Major

Lister kneeled behind his head, arranging the cushions. Violet stood beside her mother, looking helplessly, piteously on. Paul's old nurse, the tears streaming down her face, kneeled at the Bishop's other side, chafing one of his hands between her withered palms, a bottle of smelling salts on the carpet beside her. Somewhere in the shadow of the bookshelves Paul saw that the butler was whispering with the chaplain.

Dr. Brereton's first examination was soon over. He led Paul away. Lady Harriet remained kneeling at the Bishop's side, white and motionless, with her eyes closed.

"The left lobe of the brain is affected," whispered the doctor. "The speech centres are gone: the whole of the right side of the body is paralysed. We must get him upstairs."

Paul approached his mother; "We must take him upstairs, dearest," he whispered.

She inclined her head—it was as though some one had disturbed her at her devotions in church—and rose slowly from her knees. She stood straight and rigid beside her husband, her eyes closed, her face white and deathlike.

As Paul came near him the Bishop fixed his eyes upon him, and pointed with his left hand to the table. Paul understood. He went there; gathered up all the pages quickly, folded them, and put them in his pocket.

Then followed a painful scene. The stricken Bishop expressed in his eyes and by the movement of his left arm some instant desire which no one could understand. Every one, except Lady Harriet, who remained immovable through it all, like a figure turned to stone, leaned over the Bishop to discover what it was he

wished. It was plain that he had a command for Paul ; and that was all. Once or twice he rolled his head in despair, and tears started from his eyes. Then he would make a violent effort, nodding with his head, and moving his arm about.

At last Paul realized that this wish had something to do with the Bishop's deed-box, and taking the keys from his father's pocket, he opened the box and brought it to the Bishop's side. Then he went through its contents, one by one, showing each by turn to the fallen giant, and looking for his instructions in the eyes that seemed to express only terror.

Presently the Bishop showed that the document had been found. Paul looked at it, and saw that it was an old letter written from Normandy to his father, and signed Edmund Revington. He guessed that it had something to do with himself, and nodded to his father. "I understand," he said, and put it in his pocket.

But there was still distress in the Bishop's face, as if he thought that Paul even now did not know his desire.

When the Bishop had been carried upstairs, Lady Harriet following in her deathlike stupor, and while Dr. Brereton was making his examination, Paul returned to the library and shut himself in there.

He felt himself snatched out of the beautiful region of dreams into the tragic and terrible realities of life. Death's footfall could be heard on the palace stairs. Desolation hovered over the house. Mourning and lamentation stood in the corridors waiting to break out with weeping and with wailing. It seemed to him that he could hear over the whole earth the falling of the innumerable rain of tears.

Your land, your house, your lovely bride
Must lose you ; of your cherished trees
None to its fleeting master's side
Will cleave, but those sad cypresses.

Bereavement is the common fate of the human race ! Everywhere, someone at this same hour, which found him listening to the breathing of Death upon the stairs, with bowed head was drinking of the dark waters of affliction. There was nothing eternal for man. All things crumbled to decay. Death had dominion over life. Man loved, only to watch the gradual wasting of the lovely form, and to mark the creeping ruin of the perishable mind. The eye loses her vision, and the ear his song—and the joy of the earth dissolves and is no more for us.

Paul was in this natural mood of dejection when Dr. Brereton returned to the library. "I am afraid," said the doctor sadly, "your father is in a hard case. I think we must prepare ourselves to abandon any hope of recovery. It seems to me that the left hemisphere of the brain is damaged by a serious occlusion of blood. All the facial muscles on the right side are paralysed, and the whole of the right side of the body shows every symptom of rigidity. I have got electric massage at work ; and I have telephoned to London for Sir Frederick Mayor ; he will be here to-morrow at ten o'clock, and we shall know then what there is to hope. I thought it best to send for Mayor ; he is your father's old controversialist ; but there was no bitterness in the conflict ; and he is our ultimate authority. We must have the best of science."

Paul fully concurred in this view, and for some minutes the two men talked together of the Bishop's condition. Then Paul asked if Dr. Brereton could tell

him anything of Silvia, explaining that he had her mother's permission for asking that question.

"Yes, I understood that you would be interested," said the doctor. "I will tell you what I can about the case; but it is difficult, and I am not yet sufficiently acquainted with it to speak with any certainty. Briefly, it is a question of nervous prostration resulting from a shock. Her control over her cerebral functions is not damaged and is not even weakened; it appears rather to be disturbed. From my conversation with her mother I gather that the child has too suddenly apprehended certain facts of existence which nature intends us to learn gradually and almost imperceptibly. She is markedly of the religious type; her whole temperament is devotional; in cases of this kind, the reaching out to invisible and immaterial things, which is the cerebral action of mysticism, suffers almost always a catastrophic change when the attention is powerfully and profoundly drawn to things close at hand. To speak very plainly, and as you will understand in the cold and blunt terms which alone make it possible to discuss such a matter, the affection which Miss Revington feels for you has come violently between her older religious ecstasies and herself. She is troubled because she can no longer establish what one may call a telepathic communion with the Unseen. It appears from what her mother tells me that the words of some hymn which she heard after her walk with you immediately seized hold of her mind, and in a few hours assumed in her consciousness the nature of a reproach. This at present is an *idée fixe* in her mind. She is not strong; she is intensely idealistic; and her sensibilities are extraordinarily keen. We must be careful for two or three weeks. You had better not

see her until I talk to you again. In the meantime, her mother's influence will be exerted to quiet the disturbance in her mind, to allay her fears and alarms, and to accustom her thoughts to the facts of human existence. If this should fail, we must have recourse to hypnotism."

Left to himself, Paul was plunged into the most profound melancholy. His mind was filled with a giant horror of life; he felt himself shrinking from the rough hands of custom and experience; he was like a child awakened from dreams to the black terror of the night. He felt afraid of existence.

It is natural that idealists should suffer in this manner. Paul and Silvia were both forced to look upon life not as they would have it to be, but as it really is. It is only by the loss of our very dearest, our other self, that we understand death; it is only by unkindness from the friend of our bosom that we know the full measure of cruelty; we may watch friends laid in the awful and the hideous loneliness of the grave without truly apprehending the desolation of death; we may experience harshness and even actual malevolence at the hands of our acquaintance without feeling the extreme torture and the agony of ingratitude. It is ourselves that must be wounded before we cry out. Lear held his reason, amidst all the buffetings of life, till the daughters of his body struck at him. Othello had laughed many times at jealousy before that agony came to him from the eyes of Desdemona.

And so it required the frightful catastrophe of the Bishop's living death to acquaint Paul for the first time with the meaning of that black and tragic title the King of Terrors; and so also it required the insistence

of a great human affection to arouse in Silvia a real knowledge of material existence, nay, an awakening to the truth that she was a creature of flesh and blood. Nothing in life is perhaps more interesting than the manner in which refined minds capable of the deepest feeling, meet and contend with these battles of the soul.

For the moment Paul was in rebellion. The great God seemed to him aloof, and sublimely indifferent. The human Christ uttered no words which showed a lamp to his feet in these dark and dreadful places. No ; he was alone with himself in the storm ; with no consoler's hand in his he looked over the pit's edge into the desolation of death ; with no answer to give her, he heard Innocence crying through the night for the vision of God which she had lost in the love of a man.

As he walked to and fro in the lonely room, the picture came back to him of his father seated at the table writing between the two tall candles. He remembered the writing which he had gathered up and placed in his pocket. He went to the table, took out the manuscript, and laid it before him. None of the sheets was numbered, but there was one which bore the title—

CONFITEOR,

and to this he turned with an excitement and a horror which sprang into his mind with his immediate apprehension of the word.

He had noticed in turning over the sheets that the writing looked oddly different from the Bishop's usual caligraphy. He found now as he bent over this strange opening, that it was exceedingly difficult to decipher. With infinite trouble he was able to read :

“ I, John Brooke Lister, a Bishop of the Church of England, and a servant of God, believing that death

stands now at my elbow, herewith make confession of a great sin which has lain heavily upon my conscience for more than thirty years. When I was a young man . . .”

Here it was impossible to read any further. Paul brought the remaining sheets, seventeen of them, one by one under his scrutiny; they were unintelligible. As he looked at the meaningless and laborious movements of the Bishop's pen, it came upon him with a shuddering horror that his father—having some secret thing to confess, bereft of speech, and feeling the breath of death upon his cheek—had made this superb effort to deliver his soul, and believing that he was uttering the agony and repentance of his mind had written—nothing!

Each stroke and curve of the pen had represented to him language; the words that he had in his mind, these he believed he had set down with his pen; and all through the gallant hour of the mighty effort he had been writing nothing. The hieroglyphics of a dead past were easier of comprehension than this death-rattle of paralysis.

The tears gathered in the eyes of Paul. He took up the sheets one by one, folded them in his hand, and rose from the table. Here was the very bitterness of life.

All through the sleepless torture of that night he heard one word, striking on his brain like the hammer strokes of the Cathedral clock: “Confiteor! Confiteor! Confiteor!”

CHAPTER XXIV

JANE MEDLYCOTE'S ROMANCE

PAUL was coming from the library on the following morning, when he encountered Dr. Brereton and Sir Frederick Mayor in the hall. It struck him as surely a fresh irony of fate that this famous vivisector and specialist of the brain, this great protagonist of atheistic materialism, who had once years ago crossed swords with his father in the pages of the *Nineteenth Century*, should now be summoned to aid, or to pronounce judgment upon, the stricken servant of God who now lay beyond the efficacies of prayer.

He looked at the tall slight man's ascetic countenance ; the thin lips which expressed at the same time sadness and resolution : the dark deep set eyes which declared the mind's sorrow and its ruthlessness : the high brow which under its limp-hanging black hair was marked with pain, repugnance, and an iron determination ; and it came upon him that science, too, has its religion, and that in the calendar of that human religion there are saints.

As he waited in the library for the judgment of this specialist, the gentle modulation of the surgeon's voice sounded in his mind's ear. The personality of the man was expressed more in his voice perhaps than in his countenance. Paul knew him now to be a man who, having found in his own mind a larger measure

of mercy and a loftier sense of justice than he could find in nature, had deliberately driven God out from his thoughts, even as Jehovah had banished Adam from the Garden of Eden, setting there at the gates of his brain the angel of science with the flaming sword of man's immemorial martyrdom. He recalled one of the phrases of this sad-looking man in his conflict with the Bishop: "It is not my argument that there is no God; I am human and I limit myself to the scope of human thought; my argument is that the evidences left by creative energy on the face of the world are not evidences of kindness, consideration, and justice, and not evidences of cruelty, carelessness, or injustice, but—obviously to every righteous mind—evidences either of a limited power or of complete indifference."

Paul, knew, too, that it was this man who had most closely explored the territory of the brain, and who had pronounced the opinion that every human faculty—the emotions as well as the mere locomotor functions—were not only expressed by, but were actually contained in, the grey substance of the brain. This sad-faced man could not only inhibit movement of foot and hand; with a touch he could render dumb the most eloquent of poets: with a moment's pressure he could send the saint to wallow in the filth and squalor of brutishness. A shudder shook all the fibres of Paul's being. Was it after all a vanity and a mockery, this lurid drama of human life? The litanies of man's long agony, the wounds of his unconquerable heart, the sublime and lovely aspirations of his unshaken mind—had these poignant appeals to Mercy and Justice ever stirred the rhythm of the stars, ever passed beyond the trivial miles of air shut down like a lid of iron on the lonely earth?

Of what avail now was prayer to his father's shattered mind. It was not God who answered human cries for help; it was the man of science contemptuous of nature's indifference to pain. Our prayers to God—what were they but the throes of prophecy labouring to behold the earth when man's brain should indeed have dominion over it? Prayers?—no, they were never answered. God did not answer prayer. Either He could not, or He would not; either He was finite, or indifferent. The thought of this hideous and appalling loneliness of the human race swept over his soul in a black flood, and his faith was drowned in it.

When the doctors returned to the library, Paul braced himself to hear the worst. He felt stunned and deafened and had constantly to rouse his conscience and bring it grudgingly to the sticking point of intelligence. He knew dimly that Sir Frederick Mayor was speaking in a voice of the deepest and most tender sympathy, and he was more struck by the almost maternal tenderness of the ruthless man than by his tidings. Then it gradually dawned upon his bruised and aching brain that the kind and solicitous voice was pronouncing like some inexorable judge the death sentence of his father.

“He will never speak again.”

Oh, God! how awful that was.

“He may live for a few months; six months is perhaps the limit; but I am sorry to tell you it must be a living death. It is a case of what we call complete hemiplegia; thrombosis of the small arteries of the brain. The muscles of the right eye are the only ones not affected on the whole of that side of the body. The muscles of the tongue, the face, the trunk and the extremities are completely paralysed. The rigidity w.

probably go, but sensation is doomed. There is nothing I can do, I am sorry to say, that can either help your father or comfort you."

"Science is powerless?" asked Paul.

"Quite powerless."

So this was the end. Science powerless and God indifferent!

One morning when Paul was sitting with Miss Medlycote, Mrs. Revington was shown into the room. She looked to Paul strangely older, and yet her face was infinitely more beautiful. There were lines there, but they were lines of tenderness and yearning; the vividness of her complexion had departed, but the colour of her face was soft and had that tint of melancholy, which painters use to express the compassion of their Madonnas.

When they had talked for a little, Mrs. Revington turned to Paul, and asked him whether the Bishop had mentioned to him before his seizure any matter referring to her husband. Paul instantly remembered the letter of Edmund Revington which had lain ever since in his pocket-book.

That was a letter which had greatly perplexed Paul, and he had mentioned it to no one. Some of the passages which refer particularly to this history may be given here—

"I am brought to a condition of mind which renders the thought of further existence on this earth intolerable to me. I have just been to see my daughter, who has become at every visit more dear to me, and in an hour's time I shall get upon the boat from which I am determined to drown myself. . . .

"What I should like to be writing now, in place of

this letter to you, is a denunciation of the Sacred Society of Nicodemus, which could be published to the world. This I cannot do without exposing you to ruin. The same mind which has tortured your existence is driving me to this act. You know whom I mean, that iron servant of Jehovah, Father Severn. Over and over again he has refused to let me withdraw from the Society, which I joined in a boyish enthusiasm for some universal authority in conduct, and has threatened to denounce you if I even criticize too boldly the Christian thesis in my books. He has become, in a word, the arbiter of my conscience. He holds in his hand the reins of my intellectual life. The books which most express my soul can only be published at my death. This is intolerable:

"It is not my subscription, apparently, that the man wants, for he insists upon my attendance at the meetings, and has even hung that picture of me by Watts in the hall of his convocations. I think it is, he fears that the withdrawal of men once prominently associated with the Society may tend to rouse the suspicions of other members—the sheep whom he drives at his will. Or is it that he is smitten with Rome's mania for temporal power; and, finding himself restricted to the affairs of a petty society, gives expression to this appetite in mean and spiteful tyrannies over his fellow-members? As regards yourself it seems to me that he is playing a deeper game: in you he sees a future Primate, and to exercise a control over your judgments then is the object of his violent ambition.

"However that may be, I cannot live without my freedom, and I cannot free myself at the cost of ruining you. These secret societies are the curse of religion and of politics. When once a young man takes the oath, his

life is cast. He can never develop, never change, never be free. Let him attempt to break away from his vow, and somehow or another the politicians or the Jesuits with whom he has worked, will seek him out, pursue him, and destroy him. . . .

"I am more sorry to die just now—although I am happily well assured of a life beyond the grave—because I seem to perceive in my Wife the beginnings of a mental change towards the pursuits which have hitherto pleased her. The love for which I have hungered with all my soul, might yet be mine if I could wait another ten years. Her mind is of such a fine order that it is impossible she should rest content with the pleasures of the modern world. But I cannot wait; and worse I cannot say any farewell to her. I wish it to appear, if possible, that my death is accidental. She is so strong a personality that she would lose what sympathy she now has for me if she knew I had destroyed myself. And it is my highest hope that in other states of existence we may yet meet, yet understand each other, yet enter into the perfect communion of love. . . .

"I pray God, my dear Lister, that you may have strength to bear the burden of Severn's tyranny.

"A Dieu."

When Mrs. Revington saw the writing of this letter, her face for a moment became deadly pale. She folded it slowly, and held it hidden in her hands. Very soon after she had received it, she made her excuses to Miss Medlycote and rose to go.

"On your way back," she said to Paul, "will you come into Ladywell for a moment? In half an hour perhaps. Silvia would like to see you." Then she went home to read her letter.

"She looks dreadfully aged," said Paul to Miss Medlycote, when the door closed.

"Rooty-too-too!" exclaimed Jane, who had troubles of her own to think about; "the good lady has merely washed her face. It is a good sign. Cleanliness is next to godliness."

"Ah!" said Paul, "that is it perhaps. The paint has come off."

"Silvia's doing," replied Jane. "The child is converting everybody. Complete missionary! Mrs. Revington gives up enamel; your sister gives up sniffing; and I give up being an old fool."

"What do you mean?" laughed Paul.

"Why," cried Jane, blinking her eyes and working her lips, "here have I been all these years spending hundreds of good pounds to keep up an old house big enough to stable a troop of dragoons. Why have I been doing it? Pride. Worldly Pride. Three rooms would serve my purpose. A backyard would grow all the flowers I am really fond of; and as for vegetables, why you can buy a cabbage for tuppence. No; it's wicked pride to keep up the Manor House with no heirs to follow me. I'm going out. I'm selling it."

"Never!" cried Paul.

"From the Christmas quarter," answered Jane, turning away her face.

"Well, my dear," said the frank Paul, "if you were twenty years younger, I should commend you for a sensible woman; for I'm all in love with the simple life. But, after all, is it worth while?"

Jane got up from her chair, and went to the window; her face was flushed, her eyes were moist. "Don't tell me," she cried, "that you don't know I *hate* going. The simple life? Fiddlesticks! If I could afford it,

I'd have half a dozen footmen to keep the old place in dignity and splendour for ever and ever. No; it isn't Silvia who has made me give up the house of my ancestors; and I haven't a scrap of repentance for my worldly pride; not me! No, Paul; but that is what the world must be told. I want to hear the Close saying, 'Old Jane is getting too far into her dotage to manage that big place, and so she is going to share the Myrtles with Mrs. Tregoning; poor old Jane—what a lark?' If they knew the truth, Paul, I'd tear their eyes out and then go and live in Boulogne like a whale in a duckpond."

The old lady had come back from the window while she was talking and now sat side by side by Paul. "I thought that some day I should tell your father the story of my life," she said, sadly; "but that is another hope of mine which has died of old age. God bless my soul, if Rachel had buried as many children as I have buried hopes she would have wanted a whole Brookwood to herself." She sniffed, and shook her head.

There are in every city of the world these old maids who keep the memory of a youthful romance as carefully and as fragrantly preserved in their hearts as they keep lavender-scented linen folded in their cupboards and chests. They attract little attention from their fellows, and live unnoticed lives in the shadow of a neglect which is congenial to their modest natures. Little acts of neighbourliness fill their uneventful days. Their books, their flowers, their needlework are the employment of their hours; their tea-parties the grand festivities of life. And yet if their neighbours saw a little deeper, or had time to pause and cultivate the confidence of these grey old ladies, they might discover that here in this tattered legion of neglected spinsters

is the Old Guard of romance, the passionate veterans of that love which never surrenders.

The tale which Miss Medlycote told to Paul Lister is not a far-fetched romance of spinsterhood, but rather one which is common enough to be almost dull, if extraordinary devotion and divine fealty can ever really be dull. It is a tale which the reader may be able to exclaim over, "Why, that is Aunt Mary's romance to the life," or "Miss Medlycote can be no other than old Miss Smith." Well, if it be so; let him go and sit more frequently with those excellent ladies, and pay them more regularly those simple acts of homage and friendship which are the last delights they find in a world which has been too rough for them. The sublime in life is so common that we overlook it, and exclaim that existence is a bore.

In the year 1860, Jane Medlycote was a young woman of a severely practical nature. Her governesses and her mother had bred her up in the domestic tradition. To manage a house was the object of all their homilies. Jane learned how to preserve fruit, how to mend and darn, how to shop, how to order a store cupboard, and how to rule a cook. She was not a pretty girl, not even good-looking; but she had a pleasant high-bred air and a sweet voice which saved her from being commonplace and unattractive. From the point of view of common sense there was scarcely a girl living more certain to manage a man's household with thoroughness and economy.

In those days there came to live in Warborough a widow and her son, who took a small house in Minster Street and kept up a decent appearance on a small annuity of a hundred and twenty pounds. The widow's husband had been a chaplain in India, a thor-

oughly dissolute man who drank himself to death ; the widow was now striving to preserve her son from following in his father's footsteps by keeping the young man close-tied to her apron strings.

This son, whose name Jane Medlycote declared she would carry with her to the grave, was put into the Bank at Warborough, and for some years lived an exemplary life. He was good-looking, demure, grave ; a boy who had never been to school ; a young man who had never come into social competition with men ; it seemed that he might live and die in Warborough, completely and happily ignorant of the world outside the geography of his mother's solicitude.

To the strong-minded and practical Jane this weak young man was greatly attracted, and for him she felt that maternal passion which is one of the most beautiful of human affections, and certainly the most durable form of human love. They became presently engaged, but as his position was a poor one, and did not permit of his approaching old Mr. Medlycote on the subject of marrying his daughter, the young couple agreed together that the engagement should be kept a secret to themselves.

A year and a half after their engagement, the young man was sent to the head office of the Bank in London, and thither his anxious mother went with him. He wrote regularly to Jane, whom he devotedly loved, painting his future in rosy colours, and imploring her to wait for another three years when he would undoubtedly be in a position to declare himself openly her lover.

Then his letters became fewer, and less cheerful. His future no longer wore the colour of the rose, and as if this depression had affected his mind, his very hand-

writing altered and became jerky and untidy. He said that he hated the dulness of his work, and the atmosphere of London. The lodgings, he said, were dull, and his mother unsympathetic. Jane wrote to him with assurances of her devotion, telling him that she would wait for him always, since he was the only man she could ever love. Then his letters ceased altogether; and presently she heard that he had married a programme seller in one of the theatres.

Jane never uttered to living soul a word of her agony. And more than this, infinitely more, to her own heart she never once confided a single reproach against her faithless lover.

Twelve years after that terrible discovery, Jane received a letter from this man. He poured out to her the most bitter and profound repentance. He had been captivated by a pretty face, and had fallen a victim to a doll. His wife was a useless and a careless person. There were days when they had only bread to eat, and his wife was head over ears in debt to the milliner and dressmaker. Six children had been born of the marriage, and the strain on the bank-clerk with his income of two hundred and fifty pounds a year, was almost more than he could bear. Would Jane, the Jane whom he had never ceased to regret, show her forgiveness by helping him through his troubles!

Here was the old appeal. The appeal of the weak man to the strong woman. Jane helped him then, and helped him month by month, till the monthly twenty pounds of old Miss Medlycote was counted by the clerk's wife as part of their income, and, therefore, many times anticipated. Moreover she toiled for him and mothered him; all that she had yearned to do for her husband she did now for another woman's husband.

She employed her needle for this family ; shopped for them ; preserved jams for them ; made English wines for them ; and sent handsome birthday presents to the children, whose names were all written in the old birthday book, where he had written his name more than twenty years ago.

As the years went on the school bills of the children were paid by Jane ; and at last she felt herself able to go and visit this struggling family in the suburbs of London. While she was waiting with the wife for the husband's return from the Bank, that lady said to her : " You'll be glad I saved you from marrying Herbert when you see him. He was a duck of a young man ; he's a goose of an old man."

And then Herbert arrived, grey, broken, silent. He sat in his corner, children climbing over his knee and sprawling at his feet, and just stared at old Jane Medlycote. The wife, in cheap and vulgar finery, wearing false hair, false hips, and high heeled shoes that were trodden over with the fulness of her protesting feet, gabbled away about the family's difficulties, protesting that if Herbert only had a little more pushfulness they would think a great deal more highly of his services at the Bank. Jane was too heartbroken by the sight of her old lover to reprove the poor vulgar wife, and took her leave more devotedly maternal than ever she had been before.

From that time she devoted every shilling of her money to mothering this family. Two of the sons grew up to be abominable scamps ; she paid their debts again and again, and in the end, paid their expenses to Canada and set them up as cattle ranchers. One of the daughters married a good-for-nothing young person, who took to drink and died leaving his wife with two children

and not a sixpence in her purse. Jane became their guardian. Finally Herbert's health broke down so completely that he was discharged from the Bank, and lived a life of the most abject misery in the constant revilements of his now thoroughly embittered and spendthrift wife.

Jane's fortune had been so eaten into by this family, that she took late in life to speculating on the Stock Exchange. She conceived the grand idea of making a vast fortune, and delivering them from all their miseries. As we have seen, impatient of sound investments she got at last into the hands of Spencer Purvis, and in a few week's time had been robbed of almost all her remaining capital. Now, in order to make her last sacrifice, she was about to sell the treasures of the Manor House—the books, the furniture, even the fine linen—and afterwards go to live with an old widow in a stuffy cottage.

Such was the tale told by this devoted lady to Paul, and when it was finished he could only take up her hand and kiss it.

"That is the story I thought one day to tell to your father," she said, patting Paul's hand; "the one man I have ever revered. I loved one weak man: I revered one strong man—that is my record. I have told you, Paul, because you are going to grow up like your father. You are strong—thank God for that every day of your life. Be always strong, and always stand in the world a reproof to weakness and vacillation—the cause of all sin and nearly all misery. It isn't sweetness and love the world needs: it's strength, young master. In the confusion of this modern Babel, it requires a strong voice, I can promise you, to make men see that Good is still Good, and Evil, Evil. It used to be taken

tor granted when I was a girl ; because we were all in love with the obvious. But, there ; I'm turning preacher—the last sin left to an old woman ! Run away, and see Silvia. My love to her, please."

Paul assured Jane that however much she might protest against it, he intended to clear away all her entanglements. "You must always live here," he said. "Think," he continued, lowering his voice ; "this will soon be the only house we shall be able to come to, when we want to see Warborough."

"I'll pinch you if you say another word," answered Jane. "But I tell you what you may do. You may go to the auctioneers and buy the house and the furniture, just as it stands, *on one condition* : that you and Silvia come to live here. I'll have no charity ; but I'll traffic with you to the edge of a thruppenny bit !"

Paul rose to go. "My condition is this : that you live with us. Yes ! Listen to me : Silvia and I are going to live for the most part out of cities : we have pastoral tastes, my dear : but we shall want to come back to Warborough every now and then : and we can only come back if you are here to receive us. Now that's a bargain. There's no getting out of it. And—if you refuse !—do you know what I will do ?"

"Pooh ! what will you do ?"

"Tell everybody the story you have just told me !"

Jane smiled, and put her hands on his arms.

"Kiss me, you dear fellow !" she said.

"On both cheeks !" cried Paul

CHAPTER XXV

MOTHER AND CHILD

ON Christmas Eve Paul left his mother sitting white and silent by the Bishop's side, to carry the gifts of the palace to Ladywell. His father's eyes followed him from the room. They could express no emotion now. Wheeled to the window, he regarded the valley and the river with the same expression as that with which he looked upon the crucifix or the stricken face of his wife. No one could translate the thoughts of his mind or interpret the almost imperceptible movements of his eyes. Whether he was at peace or disturbed by remorse, none could know. All that those staring eyes now manifested was a look of half-frightened frustration, the look of a baffled soul.

A letter had arrived from Father Lacey telling him that the sacred Society of Nicodemus was still continuing its work under the Mastership of Father Severn, but that he and a few others were going to leave not only the Society but the Church of England, and enter the communion of Rome. Paul, who opened this letter, held it before the Bishop's eyes; the dying prelate looked at it, but whether he read, or whether the news affected him in the smallest degree, Paul could not tell. Only when

Paul had written on a piece of paper the intelligence that he had given Edmund Revington's letter to Mrs. Revington, did the Bishop's eyes suggest anything that might be called emotion. It seemed to Paul that those dreadful staring eyes expressed then, first relief and afterwards a desire for silence and rest and even oblivion.

It was this terrible experience of striving to render easy the last weeks of his father's living death, which perhaps even more than Silvia's gentle influence, turned the current of Paul's thoughts away from the unrest of his period to the only hope mortality can ever have of rest eternal.

He began to perceive that what Sir Frederick Mayor had declared himself unable to mend was but the machinery of his father's mind, not the mind itself. Out from those heartbreaking eyes of his father, there looked a soul unable to express itself, as the eyes of a prisoner might look through his cell window. The strings of the harp of life had been torn asunder; and the musician sat there unable any more to utter his music. The brushes had been broken and the pigments scattered; and the painter sat there unable any more to express his pictures. Science looked on, and said the machine was shattered, and the machine was all; but the son saw that in his father's eyes which was not jangled machinery. He saw a baffled soul.

Then as death drew daily nearer, and he braced himself to receive first the blow and then the lifelong memory of his father's awful passing—a passing silent as death itself: not a prayer uttered, not a wish expressed, and, worst of all, not one last strong farewell to those he loved—Paul saw that he would never be able to endure this memory in his heart unless he

could feel through all the tragedy and pathos of human life a purpose and an end.

There must be purpose. The fundamental discovery of science that nature is but a synonym for law, and that evolution is only another word for eternal development helped him to go forward in his quest—

Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
Still clutching the inviolable shade.

He saw in nature an endless struggle, an unceasing effort, a perpetual labour—to what end? 'The laws governing the universe, governed the mind of man on his planet the earth. Man could not rest; could not be quiet: could not be satisfied. To think of all the long agonies of the human race as God's unceasing punishment for some foolish act on the part of our first parents—the first self-conscious human souls!—was impossible: he saw in all the moan and ache of mortality an effort, a divine struggle, to win for itself knowledge of the earth and to secure for itself the means of a higher enjoyment. Whence came this impetus? Surely from the great Cosmos, the Alpha and Omega of creation, the vast totality of everything, the sublime I AM of consciousness, the God of Law.

Then from this, brooding over his sorrow, he went onward through all the toil and labour of humanity, till he came to the tomb of human life, and saw the grave-digger throwing up the spongy earth with curses for his toil. Paul looked down into the grave and saw the skull of Shakespeare pitched up like Yorick's from the clay, and saw a philosopher lift it up, who lectured learnedly upon its conformation and its vanished cells. All that the soul of Shakespeare had

visioned and but half expressed—had *that* vanished with the evaporated brain, and left now but the bone of his empty skull? No; no! he cried, and turned away, angry with such degradation of majestic spirit.

And as he walked away from the grave where soon they must bring him he loved so well, there met him One in the garden, whose eyes were like the spirit of dark forests and whose lips were like still water seen at night; and He looked long upon Paul, as though He loved him, and said to him: "*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*"

Then the spirit of Paul went out from him and embraced that catholic faith which breathes and persists through all the follies, superstitions, blasphemies, and cruelties of religious creeds, the catholic faith in the immortality of the sinless Christ.

To what other end could the logic of his brain lead him? He had seen purpose in the universe, he had seen a struggle and an effort to reach some point in infinite perfection; and then going back to Shakespeare, the mightiest artist that ever lived, he had gone back to Christ, whose absolute sinlessness is the conviction of all the world. If Shakespeare, the artist, showed the way, and answered the mockery that mind is subject to the law of decay and death: how much more did Christ, the Light of the World, draw back the curtain and reveal the purpose of eternal development? The great Why which Paul was addressing to the universe, he now addressed to Christ, even as he had addressed it to Shakespeare: and the answer that his reason gave him was the saving faith that this sinless One had purpose and design. Not for no reason had Christ uttered the Beatitudes: not for no reason had he revealed the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood

of man : above all, not for no reason had he cried from Calvary, " It is finished ! "

This deepening of his spiritual conception of Christ, though it led him to no altar and gave him no form of words in which to express his belief, served to quiet the unrest in Paul's mind, to sweeten his whole character, and to strengthen his mind for the burthen of existence. He had been brought face to face with the supreme tragedy of life, the dying of our dearest, and having no worldly interests to turn his conscious thoughts from meditating on the full reality of death, he had seen that awful destroyer as he really is, and had known that, without Christ, he is intolerable.

Therefore he had come day by day nearer to that only healing which his turbulent mind needed, the sweetness of Christ. The act of renunciation most necessary for him to make was now made at last, and in surrendering himself he had found the righteousness for which his soul had hungered and thirsted. He could never accept the world, with its universal money standard and its appalling vulgarity of pretentiousness ; but in going out to his life of simplicity he would go now with the faith in Christ which sweetens all sorrow and takes away the fear of life.

Just before he set out from the palace with his Christmas gifts, Mrs. Revington and Silvia had been standing at the window of the drawing-room looking at the bare flowerbeds, the shivering grey grass, and the leafless branches of the trees, whirling and crying in the wind. Behind them, the candles burned about the room and a wood-fire glowed on the hearth.

Mrs. Revington looked older and sadder, but the sadness was made beautiful by the sweetness of the miracle of her great love. There was an infinite tenderness in

her eyes, and a deep calm upon her lips. The love which so many men had striven to win and had longed to see in her eyes, shone there now like a lamp of God, and was love for a dead man. The mistakes, the follies, the sins that had once come between her and Edmund Revington were now the dust and cinders of her feet ; her eyes looked into Paradise and saw her lover waiting.

But for this new-birth of love in her heart, she had surely failed to bring Silvia's mind back to the world of sense. Now, with words which startled even herself as they came to her lips, she had made the child perceive that the highest perfection possible to men and women lies not in living, or rather in attempting to live, outside the laws of nature, but in making all those laws in their daily lives beautiful and without offence. Mother and child had drawn nearer to each other, but in that approach the mother had become nearer to the dead husband than to the living daughter, and the daughter had drawn nearer to the wounding lover than to the healing mother.

But while Mrs. Revington knew that she had brought back Silvia's health, she knew as well that some other force had restored to the child her old contentment. What was that force ?—she wondered. Religion, she told herself ; and there left the matter, quite happy in the knowledge that little Silvia could now look placidly and happily upon human life.

They turned away from the window presently, and came back into the room.

“ You are much better to-night, Silvia ? ”

“ Oh, much better.”

“ I am glad that you will have a happy Christmas ; your first in England. Shall we read for an hour before we go up to dress ? ”

"Yes, I shall be glad."

They sat opposite to each other, at a little distance from the hearth, and soon the room was silent.

In looking up as she turned a page, Mrs. Revington saw that Silvia was not reading, but that she was sitting with her eyes fixed upon the Madonna and Child of Bernardino Luini.

This picture of the great Lombardy genius was marked by all his love of light and brilliant colour, and with that charming suavity of conception which sets him in the affections of some art lovers so far above more famous Italians. The Virgin was golden haired, with a pale blue hood drawn half over her head, a robe of lightest pink hanging over the bosom at which the Child lay with eyes just waking from slumber. The picture showed an eternal and a happy patience in the Mother's eyes as she watched the surprise in her Infant as He came troubled from slumber to the earth of light and air. The brilliance of the trellised background, with its bright pink roses hanging in clusters of shining light green leaves, and the figure of the patient smiling Mother bending a little over the half-startled waking Child, presented the mystery of the subject in a form intensely human, while it awakened in the mind thoughts which were only divine.

"You are fond of that picture, Silvia?"

The girl started a little, and turned her eyes to her mother. "Yes," she said; "I am very fond of it."

"I will give it to you for your home."

Silvia's eyes shone: "You could give me nothing I should love more."

"It is a beautiful work."

"I think it has helped me to understand something," said Silvia, looking once more at the picture. "I

think it has solved my great problem. Do you know what I mean mother? I come to it very often, and sit before it, and let its spirit breathe upon my mind; and I find that more and more I am quieted, and that the mystery is explained."

"What mystery, dear Silvia?"

The child went to her mother, kneeled at her side, and laid her arms about her. "It was all dark, my conflict between religion and love," she said; "until I understood maternity."

She lay there, with her face pressed against her mother's arm. Mrs. Revington knew now what had healed her daughter's hurt.

"To-morrow," said the child, slowly, "is the greatest and the holiest day in the year for women: is it not so? I can see now that human love means for a woman the love of God, because it makes her like God, the mother of His children? I am not afraid any longer." She raised her eyes and looked at the picture. "I should like to be the mother of one of God's children; I should like to lean over it and watch its eyes waking from sleep, to discover in my eyes its memory of God's love. It is a great thing to be a woman. A woman, I think, is the great artist. I am glad: I am content. All problems are solved in the miracle of maternity."

"I am glad you understand, Silvia. A woman gives herself, but she finds herself again. Sooner or later, we find ourselves."

But Mrs. Revington was not looking at the picture of the Madonna. While Silvia sat at her feet looking up with reverent wonder at the Virgin and Child, the older woman, who had won her battle, and whose hardness was melted now in a most tender passion, looked at that other picture.

She was answering the eyes of Edmund Revington, which said to her now—

“I am waiting.”

Snow began to fall on the frozen earth, just as Paul entered the garden of Ladywell with his Christmas gifts.

THE END

THE SAINT

By ANTONIO FOGAZZARO

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