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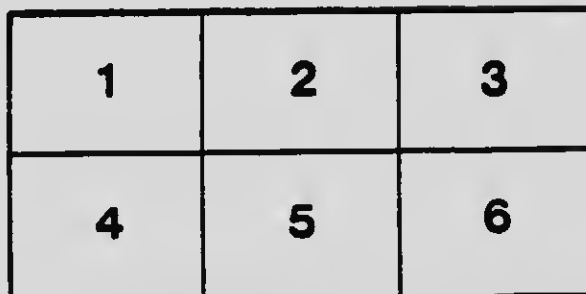
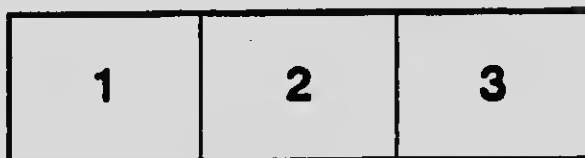
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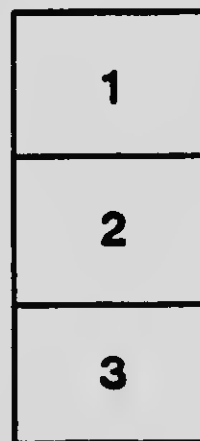
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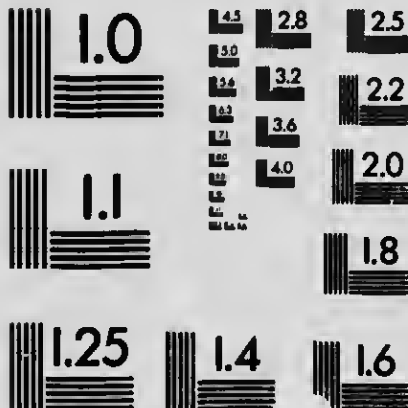
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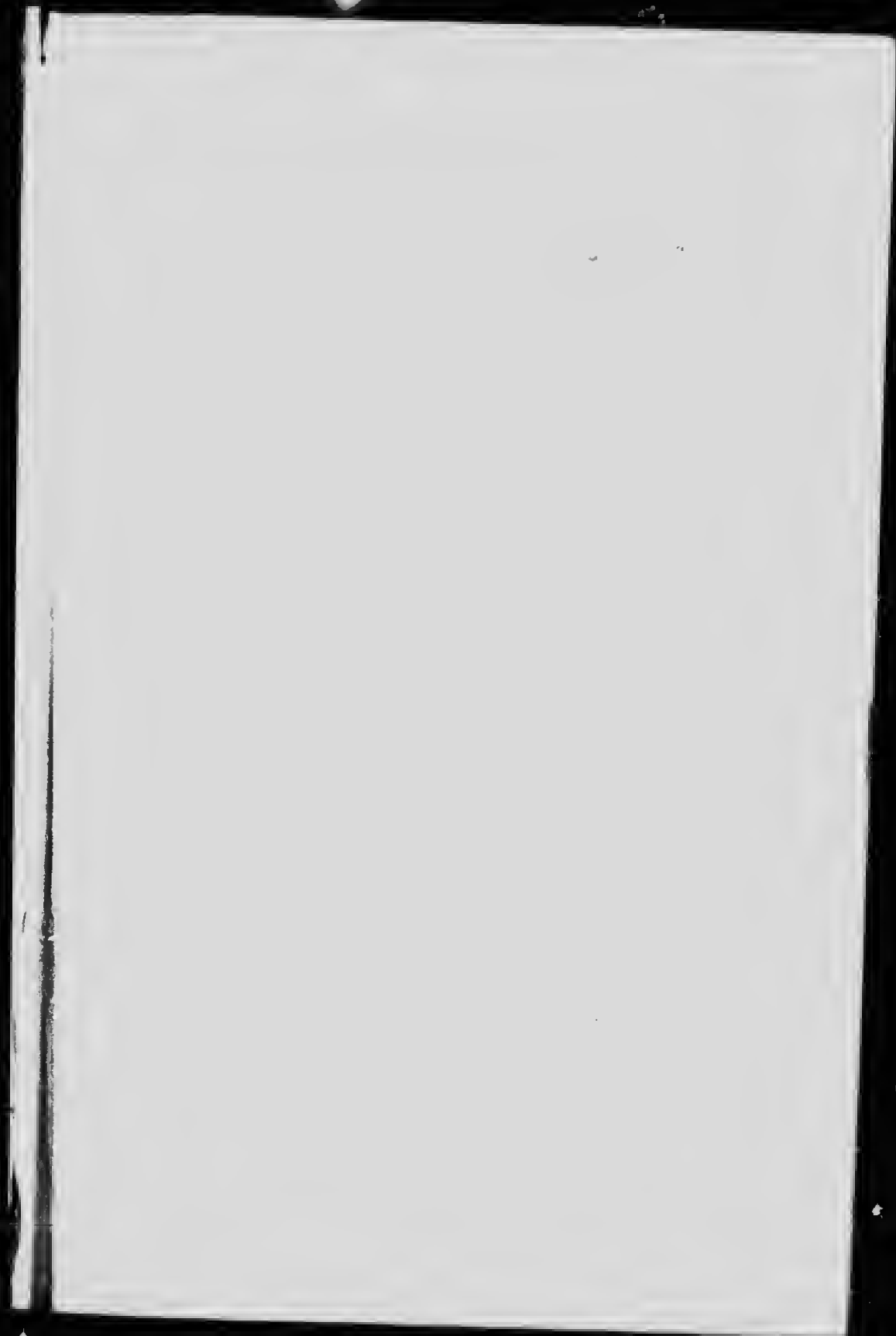
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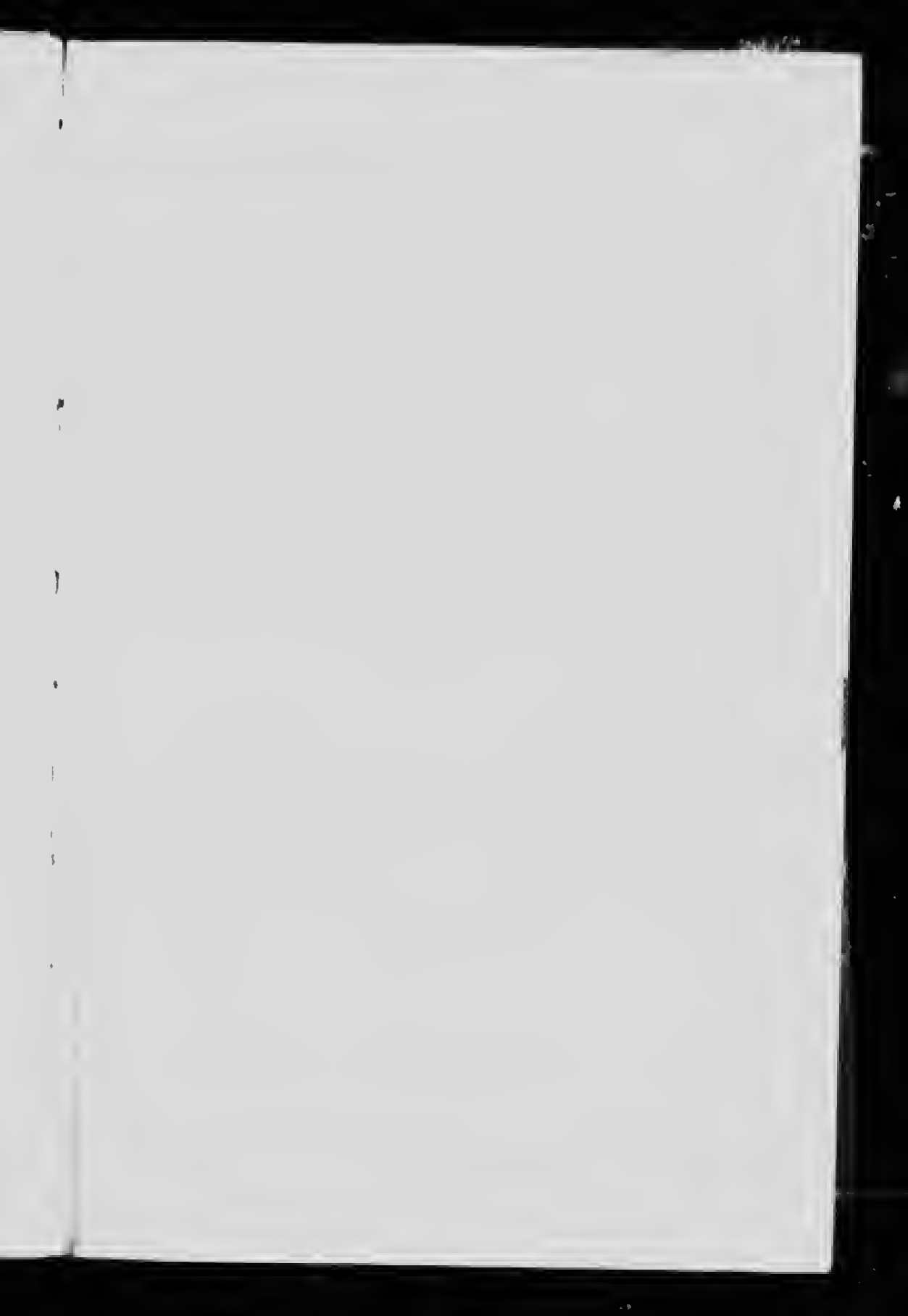






FIRST IT WAS ORDAINED.







"Lady Honoria passed, talking eagerly to her great friend,  
Mrs. Verschmidt." (Page 117.)  
*First it was Ordained*

[Frontispiece

# FIRST IT WAS ORDAINED.

BY  
GUY THORNE,

AUTHOR OF  
"WHEN IT WAS DARK," "A LOST CAUSE," ETC.

*ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANCES EWAN.*

TORONTO  
THE MUSSON BOOK COMPANY, LIMITED.

1906.



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Ledy Honoria passed, talking eagerly to her great friend,  
Mrs. Verschmidt. (Page 117.)

12-10-1910





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1906.

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To  
EUSTACE AND BEATRICE LAYTON,  
IN FRIENDSHIP.

**"First, it was ordained for the procreation  
of children, to be brought up in the fear and  
nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his  
holy Name."**

*The Marriage Service.*

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## PREFACE.

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ON the morning of the day during which I completed the writing of this story, I found the following paragraph in my morning paper :—

### RECORD LOW BIRTH-RATE.

---

#### REGISTRAR-GENERAL REPORTS A STARTLING DECREASE.

The startling intelligence is contained in the quarterly return of the Registrar-General that the birth-rate for the second quarter of 1905 "is the lowest birth-rate recorded in any second quarter since civil registration was established." The actual figures were equivalent to 27·8 per thousand of the population, the mean rate in ten preceding second quarters being 29·4. In counties with populations exceeding 100,000, the highest rate was 35·8 in Monmouthshire, and the lowest 21·3 in Sussex. In the great towns the rate ranged from 17·3 in Bournemouth to 38·2 in Merthyr Tydvil, and 38·6 in Rhondda.

I am perfectly aware that religion and sociology have become, as in the time of the Roman decadence, a sort of pastime. But such a paragraph as the one quoted should make even the indifferent pause.

The churches are doing their best to rouse the public conscience in this matter, but there is no "confraternity" such as is sketched in these pages, there is no organised society to teach the religious and economic aspect of the population question.

On the other hand, there is an organised society of men and women definitely pledged to teach the limitation of families. They have a monthly magazine, which is written by extremely able and cultured people, who are not in the least ashamed to promulgate views which are quite anti-Christian and socially anarchistic. Yet the churches do not dare to insist upon the religious and moral duties of marriage. What Dr. Fournier calls "*les pudibonds Angleterre*" must not be confronted by the meaning of the alarming truths that the Registrar-General is giving to the world. *La pudcur Anglaise* must be maintained at all costs!

Now and then some clergyman dares to speak out.

The Rev. Father Black preached a sermon on the duties of marriage and the sin of trifling with God's ordinance, in Calcutta Cathedral. At the service there was present a certain high official of the Indian Empire, notorious for his evil life and influ-



ence. During the days that followed, the Bishop of Calcutta received letters from men who had been present at the service to say that they would not allow their women to attend the Cathedral if Father Black was suffered to preach again. On the other hand, many men wrote to the preacher to say that they were most thankful that he had spoken out. That famous Indian journal, *The Pioneer*, backed the preacher in every way.

These facts are significant.

The churches are the natural director of the public conscience; that is, they should be so.

It is to be hoped and prayed that priests and ministers will lift up their voices now. The time is very ripe.

I have to thank Father Black for the loan of various documents, which have helped me in writing this tale. I should couple with his name that of the Vicar of Hayle, in Cornwall, who has been most sympathetic and helpful to a very difficult task.

The story of the execution in Chapter III. is true in every detail. It is not a pleasant story, but it illustrates a psychological point I had to make. I heard Mr. David Christie Murray tell it at a supper party in his house, and he has very kindly given me permission to use it in this tale.

The English translation of Verlaine's *Colloque Sentimental*, which Mrs. Emily Verschmidt recites in the story, is by the late Ernest Dowson. I am

enabled to give it here by the kindness of Mr. John Lane, who has lately published a complete and beautiful edition of the writings of the unhappy poet, and allows me to make one extract from it.

The story of how England was numbered by electricity is from a published account of a similar operation in America, which was written by the scientist who invented the method.

GUY THORNE.

P.S.—Since writing the above preface, the Bishop of London has spoken out on this subject. In an address given to the clergy of his diocese in St. Paul's Cathedral, he has denounced the hideous practices of the day with a strong and certain voice.—G.T.

# FIRST IT WAS ORDAINED.

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## CHAPTER I.

HIGH MATTERS.—THE VIGIL OF THE CENSUS, THE  
VIGIL OF ROLAND'S WEDDING.

THE new Census Building, as it was popularly called, was certainly one of the finest buildings in Kingsway.

The Royal Academician who designed the building—Mr. Norman Shaw, in fact—was once more enabled to continue the great architectural conception that the new route from Holborn to the Strand had given the artists of London.

The sweep of the Kingsway, at no place less than one hundred feet wide, showed that the era of mean buildings on great sites had passed away; that the power of the Metropolitan Board of Works, which produced Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road, twin horrors to the beauty-loving eye, was broken and ended.

The Census Building was a little north of the crescent where Kingsway and Aldwych met. Plane trees and acacias bordered the pavement in front

of the stone steps which led to the wide doorway. The electric lights shone through the green leaves with a pleasant effect that recalled some gay boulevard in Paris, or one of those little cafés hidden in foliage that confront the long tan-ride and the King's palace at Brussels. It was close upon nine of a summer's evening.

The heavy traffic of the day was over, commerce was at rest, and only pleasure-seekers were abroad. Cabs and carriages rolled up and down to the new opera house and the Gaiety Theatre; men with light overcoats over their arms, and in evening dress, strolled along in pairs, smoking cigarettes and enjoying the fineness of the night.

Two men who were on their way to the burlesque paused for a moment in front of the Census Building. Every window in the façade was brilliantly lit, the big doors were open, showing a white tiled hall, hung with electric globes, along which messengers in uniform and plain clothes were passing and re-passing.

"Hallo," said one of them, "they seem busy here. Some business establishment, I suppose. What a shame it is to keep those poor wretches of clerks at work so late, and on such a ripping night."

He had dined well and saw everything through rosy glasses—champagne and Grand Marnier cordon-rouge spectacles.

"My dear boy," answered his companion, "that's the Census Office. Didn't you know? They're all hard at work counting the population. Our names are in there, by Jove! My man came up to me

the other day with a paper to fill up, age and weight, ever been in love, sort of thing. Awful rot. The result'll be out in a few days now."

"Wish I knew the result of the next meeting at Doncaster," the other answered, and they passed on discussing matters of real importance.

There was some cessation in the stream of carriages now, as the distant clock of St. Clement Danes struck nine. The mellow notes came faintly up this street of palaces with the same resonance and appeal they had when Dr. Johnson worshipped in the church below, and came out into a London now vanished and destroyed for ever.

As the strokes of the bell died away, a tall and massively-built man, in the dress of a clergyman, came towards the Census Office from Holborn.

The face under the wide-brimmed silk hat was strong and with a square jaw. Deep furrows were cut in it by life and experience, and in repose the mouth was stern. The eyes, which were grey, had that look of elemental patience one sometimes sees in the eyes of old labourers. It was a patience mingled with a certain weariness, as who should say, "I can endure, I know the 'glory of going on,' but I shall not be sorry when it is all over."

Few people, however, saw Father Grogan's face in repose.

His life was too busy, full, and vivid for that aspect of him to be a familiar one.

A small and very filthy boy pushed a box of "wax lights" into the clergyman's hand. He smiled, gave the urchin a penny, put the matches into his pocket, and walked on.

When he smiled the eyes became lit up from within. They became extraordinarily alert and penetrating under the heavy brows, which were divided from each other by two deep perpendicular furrows. But it was a kindly fire nevertheless. The stern mouth, "a warrior mouth," curved into a smile of singular sweetness. Yet even thus the face was a keen, worn, fiery face, and the fact that the contours themselves were full and not haggard gave an added unexpectedness and force to this personality, this mask which hid and at the same time reflected the soul within.

Mr. Grogan was the vicar of St. Paul's, Bloomsbury, a great church which was in the van of what is known as the "Catholic Revival" in England.

He reached the open doors of the Census Building, ran up the steps with a certain excitement in his manner and entered the hall.

A commissioner came out of a little glass-fronted office and surveyed him civilly but with doubt in his eyes. The man's expression seemed to hint that this was an unfortunate time to call, that great things were afoot and strangers not welcome. The people who hurried backwards and forwards through the hall and ran up the wide marble stairway were all infected with this manner of stir and crisis. The clergyman saw it in one swift, comprehending glance, and it seemed to exhilarate him.

"Good evening," he said to the commissioner. "I have an appointment with Sir Arthur. Here is my card."

The man's manner changed. He saluted and

summoned a boy from among a little group who were sitting on a bench.

"Take the gentleman's card to the chief," he said, "the gentleman has an appointment. He'll be back in a minute, your Reverence."

The boy was four or five minutes away. During that time the clergyman talked with the old soldier, and it was noticeable how, in a moment or two, the man's official grimness disappeared. The two were *en rapport* at once. This flexibility of mind and richness of temperament was the secret of Father Grogan's great influence and success with everyone. Once, when taxed by an intimate friend with his magnetism, he half admitted it. "Thanks be to God," he had said with half-humorous admission, "I can get on with most people—except Unitarians!"

"And why Unitarians?" the friend asked.

"They seem to be so—so ludicrously defective!"

Grogan answered, and changed the subject.

The lad returned and led the priest up the broad stair and through wide silent passages to the door of Sir Arthur Childe's room, which was marked PRIVATE in white letters on one of the panels.

Sir Arthur, in whose hands the whole conduct of the great Census then proceeding was placed, was standing in the middle of the room.

He was a small, slim man, wearing a pointed grey beard and a moustache that hid the mouth. His eyes were obscured by large round spectacles, and he was only saved from insignificance by an abnormal frontal development. The ears were set far back, the space between them and the fore-

head was great, the whole cranium was large and massive.

Sir Arthur was the most famous statist of his day. "The King of Figures" he was called in a day when everyone must have a popular nickname or label, and though few people realised how his work and researches fed the political and social machine, his name was very generally known—even by that pitiable dummy the "Man in the Street."

He lived in Bedford Square, close to Mr. Grogan's parish, was one of his wardens, and an earnest Churchman.

"Here you are then," he said with a quiet smile. "I've got an hour to spare now, and I will show you everything. This is my own room, the centre of the web!"

The clergyman looked round him with great interest.

The room was large and lofty. The neutral-tinted walls were covered with framed maps and diagrams in colour, bars of red, blue, orange, and green diminishing in length and size, intricate squares of dots or cross-hatching, things which suggested enormous parti-coloured chess-boards.

One wall was entirely taken up by heavy books, suggesting ledgers. At one side of the room, not far from the huge central writing table, with its papers and telephones, stood an unusual object. It was about seven feet high, half screen, half frame. It suggested—to the clergyman—a very elaborate abacus, that contrivance of coloured balls running upon wires which is used in elementary schools.



to teach infants the essentials of arithmetic. But in this case there were balls of every colour, numbered squares, words and figures that suddenly made their appearance in slots like the indicator belonging to a series of electric bells, a great dial with a ticking pointer, and something in a long glass tube, something like a worm that crept slowly upwards.

The floor of the room was thickly carpeted, the chairs were all armchairs and padded in crimson leather. Grogan felt glad to see the chairs. They at least were within his experience, and he understood what they were for.

His eye fell upon the writing table. Among the papers stood a vase of red-brown Sumatra ware, and in it a few tall purple irises stood.

The priest sank into a chair and pointed to the flowers.

"I'll acquit you," he said. "Wizards have nothing to do with flowers. You shall not be burnt after all! But, seriously, what's that thing?"

He pointed to the great abacus.

"That," answered the statist, "is the Hollerith indicating screen. It is, of course, American, like nearly everything else I am going to show you to-night. I can't explain it to you in detail, but briefly, by means of electricity it keeps me actually abreast, in point of time, of all the figures and statistics that are being gathered and tabulated in this building. It's my eye, so to speak. There!"

He walked towards the screen. A line of discs had changed colour, over them appeared a card,

punched with holes, in much the same fashion as the "amount of your purchase" appears in the cash-machine at a shop.

"Here's an illustration," Sir Arthur said. "For the last three months, out of every 1,000 marriages 651 have taken place in church, 130 in Nonconformist chapels, 41 in the chapels of the Italian mission, and 170 in registrars' offices."

The clergyman's eyes were wide. "Yes, you are a wizard indeed, Childe," he said. "I was quite right."

"Oh, that's only a bye-issue," Sir Arthur answered. "The thing is registered automatically. You'll understand better about it in a moment."

He lit a cigarette and passed the box over to his friend.

"Yes," he said dreamily. "The work of the statist has something of the poetry and glamour that has clustered round the name of wizard! Who could call figures dry? We are occupied with our complex percentages and ratios, our electric machines work for us—and all the time we are telling the story of Humanity! We are counting up the stories of failure or success, registering hopeless miseries as well as great joys. We know how many happy marriages are likely to end in the sordid arcana of the divorce court, we can predict with some certainty how many people will raise up strong and healthy citizens for the service of their country and their God! It is given to us to know who fill the asylums and the prisons, and why; we have our fingers upon the pulse of Mammon himself, and we can say to how many of his worshippers he will be kind, to how many

turn a deaf ear. Our work does not cease with Death itself! We measure God's acre and know how many empty shells await their souls again in every crowded yard of it. More, we know the very price and material of the casket that holds their bones! 'Is there nae poetry in *that*?' as Sandy Mackay said."

Sir Arthur had a rich though quiet voice, tremulous in the lower register, tremulous with feeling now. For this man of figures saw everything *sub specie æternitatis*, and he tabulated the things and doings of this world with a vast enthusiasm and joy because he saw so clearly they were but preparatory to and indicative of the next.

There was a silence when he had made an end of speaking. The clergyman who had long known his friend as an earnest Christian and a sane man of the world, had but rarely found this note of poetry, this conception of vastness and the epic proportions of modern life in him. In the quiet house at Bedford Square they had enjoyed many talks on the social conditions of the day—talks illuminated and made valuable by the statist's accurate knowledge. But Father Grogan had not before seen his friend at the helm of his ship, so to speak, and had perhaps hardly realised the magnitude, beauty, or importance of his task.

"You can give me an hour, Sir Arthur, you say," Grogan said at length. "It is very good of you. After that, if it's possible, I should like a few minutes with Roland Speke. He sent me a note to say he would be here until midnight. You know I am going to marry him to-morrow?"

"I know," Sir Arthur answered with a kindly smile. "He has a month's leave. He's worked splendidly. He is the ideal secretary, and I'm very fond of the lad. I didn't want him to come to-night, but he begged to be allowed. Nothing could quiet his nerves but work, he said. 'I am so happy, sir,' he told me, 'that if I go on thinking I shall be worn out by to-morrow. Let me come and work!' I'll ring for him and you can make arrangements to see him after I've shown you round."

He pressed a stud upon the table. In a minute the door opened and a man of about thirty came in. He was of medium height, firmly built, not "good-looking" in the conventional sense of an abused word, but with an exceedingly pleasant face. His hair was darkish red, his forehead open and broad, and the eyes, sunk a little in the head, and to-night with dark rings under them, were steady and kind. The nose was large and markedly aquiline, the mouth not set into any visible confirmation of character as yet, but with humour latent at the corners of it. When he smiled, as he smiled now, coming up to the priest with outstretched hand, one saw that he had a splendid set of white and even teeth.

There was something very clean and wholesome about Sir Arthur's secretary.

"Ah, Roland," said the clergyman; "Sir Arthur is going to show me round his marvels. After that, about half-past ten I suppose it will be, I want to have a talk with you. We will go to some restaurant to supper and celebrate your last night of bachelordom in the orthodox fashion! It's

months since I've supped in a restaurant! How will that do?"

While he was speaking the keen eyes were searching the younger man's face, marking the nervousness that was lurking there beneath the smile, the strain of crisis in the honest eyes. The priest knew exactly the emotions of his friend. He was psychologist as well as priest.

"Oh, thanks very much," Speke answered. "I should like that awfully. My room's number 2—next to this. Will you call for me?" There was a note of relief in Speke's voice. He had felt the need of some strong and experienced companionship on this night of nights. He had come to forget himself and his affairs in the stir and movement of the office, for he did not wish to be alone. Father Grogan's proposal fitted in exactly with his mood. On this night it was a priest that he would close to be with, on the vigil of such a heart-hallowing sacrament.

He nodded and went away. His heart was very full, for he knew that the priest, his friend and confessor of years, was there for him, to give him his strong hand and ghostly counsel for the changed and unknown future.

The two older men watched Speke go with a kindly smile.

Then they looked at each other and gave a half sigh. They had made experience of life; Sir Arthur himself had been married for a year in the far off spring-time of his soul. They knew the truth of *surgit amari aliquid*, and that perfect happiness is not here and not yet.

Sir Arthur was the first to break the meditative silence.

"Come," he said, "I am going to show you the latest marvel of the age. I am going to show you how we are counting England by electricity!" He paused for a moment and then went on, in a much graver tone.

"Of course all I tell you is between you and me alone. The world will know of it soon enough, the Premier and one or two members of the Cabinet know now. As hour by hour the machines are doing their work, it is being borne in upon us that a terrible shock awaits the nation. You and I have talked over this before with growing anxiety and fear. Confirmation awaits our fears. Before we go into the counting room let me show you this."

He took a long thin book from a drawer in the writing table and began to turn over the leaves.

"Here," he said, "are some of the Registrar-General's figures for the past years. Each year as the return is issued there is a column or so of half-hearted analysis in the press, and the matter is forgotten for another year. But *we* are going to wake England up! The cumulative statistics of years will burst out upon the public consciousness in one solid terrifying FACT. *The population of the country is diminishing at a rate which is almost incredible.* No one realises it as yet. In less than a month the whole world will know with what hideous swiftness England is sinking into decay."

His voice trembled with emotion. He was one of those citizens in whom the national honour and

welfare were a religion. He loved England with his very blood. The hysteria of frothy Imperial sentiment left him cold, and street-corner patriotism disgusted him. But the strong, hidden love of country lay lava-hot deep in his heart, and in these latter years, as he came to be the one man who knew the accurate and indisputable history of each flying month, he saw things which grieved and saddened him with that terrible grief a son may feel for an erring mother.

He pulled the slim volume towards him and ran his fingers down the pages.

"From 1876 the birth-rate slowly and continuously declined until 1903," he said. "I won't give you individual figures of the years, I only want to impress the fact upon you. In 1903 the birth-rate was 28.4 per thousand and the population close on thirty-three and a half millions. Last year, in 1910, the birth-rate was 17.8."

"And the population?"

"My electrical machines are counting it now. Come and see them telling the inexorable story of England's decadence."

Sir Arthur led the way out of the room. He walked some distance down a passage and opened a door.

The place they entered was a long hall.

All the floor space was taken up by the machines which were counting and tabulating the people of England.

"Come to one of the machines," said Sir Arthur, "and I will explain how it's done. These machines were invented by an American, Herman Hollerith,

and the eleventh United States Census was taken by them. We have recently adopted them here. The saving of labour is incalculable, the gain in accuracy enormous. One hundred of these machines with 100 trained operators could count the whole population of the world in a year ! ”

They stopped before one of the instruments. From a table rose a high box, like the upright part of a piano from keyboard to top, though considerably larger. The front of this was covered with dials like clock faces, or the dial upon a gas-meter. Indicating needles constantly moved round the numbers on the discs.

In front of the screen, and standing upon the table from which it rose, was an apparatus that somewhat resembled a hand printing-press. A man stood by this with a card in his hand. He placed it in the press, pulled over a lever, and inserted another card with automatic precision, the first having been carried away by the mechanism.

This is what Father Grogan saw, comprehending nothing of it save that the dials above were continually registering something that the press below had taken cognisance of in some mysterious way.

The long room was brilliantly lit. There was no sound in it save the click and thud of the presses as the operators pulled them over. No one talked. The clergyman was reminded of a long shed of hand-loom he had once seen at work in the South of France.

Sir Arthur began to explain. “ The principle of the work is this. These machines have the



power of reading written cards and recording the information on them. You see this card? It is  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches by  $6\frac{1}{4}$  inches. All you see is a piece of mill-board pierced with a great many holes. What this really is, is the history of a man's life. They are prepared from the census papers by operators who punch the holes in them by a machine something like a typewriter. The card is divided into 288 imaginary spaces each a quarter of an inch square. Each space has a particular value or meaning. A hole here"—he indicated the spot with a thin white finger—"means the person belongs to a certain age group. These two holes tell us that this man is a grocer; this combination here tells us he is single. A trained man can read off one of these cards as quickly as if it was printed in ordinary type. It's only the substitution of one set of symbols for another, after all.

"Very well, then; I'm giving you the whole thing in outline merely. We have our forty odd million of these cards. Each card is numbered. The machine in front of you takes these cards from these millions of different sources. It reads them, groups, divides, classifies, and shows the result on those dials.

"Watch this operator. He puts a card in this press and pulls down the handle. Above the card are a number of sensitive needles. Those that find a hole pass through it into little cups of mercury. The others are pressed back. This closes an electric circuit and the pointer on the dial above moves. The great beauty of the invention is that it counts a combination of things at the same time—age

and sex, for instance, various occupation groups, and so on. There is practically no end to the combinations of the machine. All the long statistical labour of comparison and tabulation that was once necessary before any social fact could be got at, is done away with. The electric current will tell us everything."

They watched the clicking, glittering things with their steel and brass fittings, their mahogany and vulcanite, for a few minutes longer. Then, turning away, they went back to Sir Arthur's room.

He glanced at the indicating screen as he came up to it, and sighed deeply. "Every hour shows me how my fears are justified," he said. "*England is committing racial suicide.* There is no more to be said. One must just put it plainly without heroics."

"There will be a great awakening when you publish your results to the world."

"Yes, but how long will it last? Will it make the *individual* realise his or her duty? I fear not."

The clergyman began to pace up and down the room.

"There is not a parish priest of experience in England," he said, "who is not now awake to the fact that women are refusing motherhood. Diocesan conferences are being held everywhere to discuss these questions. Marriage is being regarded more and more as a mere temporal arrangement for mutual convenience. The State by its Divorce laws, and the lack of an individual sense of sacred responsibility sapping marriage from within, are destroying the English Home. And if *that* goes,

The English character and name must surely perish with it. God's laws in the material universe are inexorable in their operation, and they are no less so in the realm of morals. And these sins and influences that are at work on England bring surely, if slowly, results that are certain."

"The Church must speak out," Sir Arthur replied. "It seems to me that this is the only chance. It is one of the greatest chances the Church has had for many years. It is only by belief in the Incarnation that England can be saved. And if—when I publish to England the truth of what England is doing—if the Church stands up and speaks out through the length and breadth of the land, then there is hope."

"I see with you eye to eye," the priest answered. "Already a great movement is afoot. The minds of the clergy are stirred and troubled. Everywhere we find married people stay away from church because they are refusing the duties and responsibilities of marriage and are *afraid* to come to God's House with this weight upon their conscience. The time is at hand, I see it clearly. We must all rise and work together. And now, my friend, good-night. You have shown me the wonders of science, and they have but laid bare the canker at the root of English life. I have much food for thought. But rest assured that the Church will not be silent. I must call for Roland now. Tomorrow the lad enters the holy estate himself. Perhaps, if God gives me words, I may begin the work to-night!"

He pressed the statist's hand.

Both men's faces were furrowed with thought and very grave.

The clergyman called for Roland Speke, and together they went out into Kingsway.

Once, as they walked towards the Strand, Father Grogan turned and looked back at the great building with its lighted windows. The thud and click of the relentless machines hummed in his brain still.

He felt as if he had been below the surface, the gay and alluring surface of life, had seen the rotting piles on which a splendid edifice is reared—as one may see the rotting timbers beneath the houses of La Guidecca at Venice.

He had long known the state of the country, but it had never come home to him with such cumulative force as on that evening. Doctors and priests—these are the men who know the Truths of human life to-day—and he knew them.

But he was an imaginative man with a touch of the artist in him, and the dispassionate machines that gleamed in the long hall, the unknown fluid of electricity which men had tamed but never seen, appealed to the artistic side of him with sinister and symbolic force.

It was not until they had turned into the roaring Strand that he shook his mind free of its uneasiness, and turned to the young man at his side.

They passed by St. Mary's Church, stark and unlit in the roar and radiance of London's most characteristic and astonishing Street. The church and the dark façade of Somerset House seemed the only things aloof and remote from the stir and radiance.

Speke pointed to the tower.

"In listening mood, she seemed to stand,  
The guardian Naiad of the Strand!"

he quoted laughing. "Now where shall we go to sup? We can't go to any very swagger place, because we are not in evening clothes. But I know a little Italian place not far away, just past the Tivoli, where we can be quiet."

"Where you will, my dear boy," he said, "I am quite ignorant of these haunts. But let it be where we can be quiet certainly."

"This is just the place," Speke said. "Some years ago, when I first came to London, I made a study of the Strand. I was curious about all forms of life here. I wanted to get beneath the surface if I could. I began with the Strand—and I made no more experiments. Behind the glittering fronts of these bars and theatres every form of villainy, despair, and gross materialism lurk. The street is a home to hundreds of men and women, actors, bookmakers, and far worse. The well-dressed criminal moves in and out of these places; the fast young man of the middle-class finds his first scraggy morsel of life here, and often his death and ruin too."

He spoke seriously, and his words had a ring of conviction in them. The clergyman was momentarily distressed. He had been too much with undercurrents on that night.

"It is something the same in my parish," he said. "It is a place where young men live who are engaged in business and have no real home."

But do not strike a harsh note to-night. If the Strand is all this, rise up awestruck and cling closer to God!"

They turned into the restaurant of which Speke had spoken.

It was a long, low room, with an avenue of little tables on which the silver and napery gleamed brightly. A dark-haired foreign dame, who sat behind a little counter at the door, smiled at the two men as they entered.

They found a table in an alcove halfway down the room. It was a table made for two people, like many others in this discreet and comfortable place.

From where they sat they could see the entrance door which led into the Strand. An arc-lamp hung outside the restaurant, and its brilliant steel-blue light filled the space of glass framed by the door with radiance. The upper panels were of plain glass, and the two friends could see heads and shoulders passing. There was an odd sense that one was looking at a show. The pleasure-pilgrims were coming from the theatres and flowed past unceasingly. All ranks of life, every state of fortune, went slowly or swiftly across the little stage. And among this crowd with regular recurrence, every two minutes or so, came a great black hat with a red feather. It moved slowly among the people—*papillon de nuit*.

The waiter brought them some soup. As he left the table the hat passed once more

Father Grogan sighed.

Again on this eventful night he was reminded

of what the gentle recluse at Oxford called "The great stream of human tears which are for ever falling through the shadows of the world."

"And now, my dear friend," he said, turning to Speke, "I have something to say to you about the life on which you are entering. You will bear with me for a moment, won't you?"

His voice was gentle, rather wistful indeed. Roland was rather troubled by the note that had come into it.

"For four years now, Father," he said, "you have known all about my life. I owe my present attitude towards life to you. Say anything to me."

"You are going to marry a good and sweet girl," the priest answered. "I know that you are approaching this sacrament—for marriage *is* that—in a spirit of awe and reverence. Your love for Gertrude is deep and strong. If you live your married life worthily it will be a thing so blessed and beautiful that all your anticipations of it—and you have told me of them, you know—will be poor things beside the reality. You will be able to say what Schiller said after his marriage—'Life is quite a different thing by the side of a beloved wife. Beautiful Nature! I now for the first time fully enjoy and live in it.' But remember, Roland, that there are temptations in married life that you know nothing of."

Speke half smiled. "Goodness knows I don't underrate the force of temptation," he said. "I've made far too many mistakes, and worse, to do that. But with Gertrude I shall be utterly and completely happy. You cannot think that any outside

influences could *ever* come between us? You don't know what we are to each other. The mere thought of such a possibility seems a desecration."

"That isn't what I mean," Father Grogan answered. "I have no fear for you or her in that sense. Let me put my views to you as simply as I can. 'Poor old Grogan,' you'll say to yourself, 'he's always preaching.' Well, I shan't mind that if you'll listen to me for a minute. Now I know, I'm quite certain, that you take the higher view of marriage instead of the vulgar and carnal conception of it, which is so common in this sense-bound age. Yet none of us ought to forget that man is a sexual animal. Sense says so, quite independent of religion. Scripture confirms it—'*male and female created He them.*' 'Be fruitful and multiply' was said of man in Paradise remember. But we are not *mere* animals. A man is a spirit manifesting himself in animal form. The law of life is that spirit controls and matter obeys. Spirit *wills*, and matter expresses that will. But, mind you, the flesh is not merely the slave of the spirit, as the ascetic wants one to believe, it is the symbol."

"I think I see your view. You want to say that one shouldn't feel that natural and human love should in any way make us feel that we are further from God."

"Exactly. I discern a tendency in many priests, a tendency which I personally greatly deplore, to teach that celibacy is a higher state than marriage. It is a danger in the revival of Catholicism within the English Church. It's purely a Roman doctrine,



and—as I see it—a dangerous heresy for us. I believe that a married priest is a better and happier man than an unmarried priest, just as I believe that a married man is happier and worthier than a bachelor.”

“Yes, Father. But you need hardly insist upon that to me! I believe it so thoroughly!”

“But I have more to say, Roland. Believing as I do that desires which good but mistaken men call carnal are truly most spiritual and most beloved of our Lord—does He not sometimes work a miracle and join us to the one woman we are meant to love?—I want to warn you.”

The priest’s voice became increasingly grave. The waiter bustled up with an omelette. Mr. Grogan left his portion untasted and went on speaking.

“You are a man,” he said, “but you are also a Christian. You live the Christian’s life, sustained and helped by the sacraments of the Church. Now, Christian marriage, in common with all Christian things, has in it the law of self-denial and self-conquest. That is the Apostolic view of it. It is to be ‘*in the Lord*.’ It is only ‘*in the Lord*’ that it is permitted to the Christian.”

“All this,” answered the young man, “has been often in my mind.”

“Then it is easier for me to say what is in mine. To-morrow morning, dear lad, it will be my joy to make you and Gertrude one. I shall read the beautiful service of the Church to you both. And as I begin I shall say this, ‘First it was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the

praise of His holy name.' Now you are not a rich man. You and your wife will have but a moderate income for some years. If it is God's will you will be blessed with children. All over England there are young men in your position. A family may increase and income may not increase. The burden may be very heavy, heavier you may think than you can bear, *heavier than you need be called upon to bear*. If ever you think that, remember that it is an evil and a wicked thought. Shun it, fly from it. England has been thinking that thought, and I hear to-night from Sir Arthur of England's decadence. 'Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,' the Englishman should find in himself and display it to his wife. The Scriptures are everywhere absolutely clear as to the end of marriage. God's condemnation is express against the perversion of it—'the Lord slew him.' St. Paul writes that 'women marry and bear children.' It is your duty as a citizen and as a Christian to take no part in specious modern theories. Shallow economists may mouth Malthus to fools and men who wish to drug their consciences. Many honest and worthy men—as the world and society count honesty and worth—would hear what I am saying with amazement, call me fanatic and bigot. Whenever anything of the sort comes your way—if it ever should—do one thing. *Think of the Incarnation and what it means!* That is all. In the blinding glory of that thought no evil purposes or ideas can live. How simple it is. Yet how absolutely sure! Roland, let your union be spiritual and timeless, pure, mysterious, and eternal! Let

it be for you and your love the highest of all human states, for it is the most symbolic of them. The highest state of a man is the state in which he can know most of God and do most for Him. And that state is the marriage state!"

His voice dropped, though it had never been more than half raised.

As he made an end of speaking, his hand was on Roland's arm, the worn face was turned to him in tremulous appeal, the eyes were fiery in their earnestness and the fire shone through a mist of unshed tears.

The young man was profoundly touched and moved.

The delicacy and reticence of the clergyman's words were informed with an utter conviction and an enthusiasm which sank deep into heart and mind. The priest spoke of marriage as Speke had never heard anyone else speak of it. There was a true and virile love for human event in his words, mingled with a pure and lofty aspiration before which all that was earthy and mundane faded away.

If only all clergymen were like this!

If only those who were good and saintly realised that this world *was*, that the "visible world existed" no less than the unseen and spiritual world, that the two could not be separated, that they were one. Where had this man and priest learned this gracious lesson? Had he also loved? Was there a human romance in his past, that he could enter into the solemn and exalted thoughts that were filling the young man's brain in this Vigil? The answer came to the bridegroom in a

flash, came in Grogan's own words—he saw life and all it held in the light of the great Central Fact of the Incarnation.

Yes! there was no wisdom like that wisdom.

Again the swarthy foreign waiter came up to the table. He removed the untasted course with a grunt of dissatisfaction, jealous for the honour of the house.

He brought them a sole—*au vin blanc*.

Perhaps a less well-balanced nature than Roland's would have got up and left the restaurant. His brain was full of the rush and swirl of high thoughts. The hero of romance and not of fact would have "waved the dish away."

Mr. Grogan and Roland Speke were not heroes of romance. Their talk was over, its force and meaning were vividly with them both and were to remain with them.

But both were hungry and both had plenty of common-sense. Both, moreover, were men who realised that it is in the harmony of function wisdom lies.

This is a great Truth.

They began to make an excellent, supper and both praised the cook and enjoyed the modest flask of Montepulciano the waiter brought them. Both were better men for the meal, and when they parted outside the restaurant mind and body were in tune.

All Ding ein Weil!

"Till to-morrow, and God bless you!"

Roland stood still for a moment, watching the massive black figure passing away through the crowd.

It was larger and taller than the others among which it walked. The watcher was struck with a sudden wonder at the thought of how much power, force and influence can be stored up in this mass of salts, phosphates, and water we call the body.

"The Temple of the Holy Spirit," he murmured to himself.

Then he turned and began his walk to Westminster and his chambers there.

He turned into Parliament Street, and met a cool breeze coming up from the river. The great wide spaces opposite Whitehall and the Horse Guards were swept and clean. Few people moved there, and the spacious street, with its fine buildings, under an unobscured and starlit sky, harmonised with the solemnity of the young man's thoughts.

How many thousands of times had he walked up this highway in the mornings when the sun gilded the breast-plates of the mounted sentries and the throats of the pigeons were iridescent—how many times gone home at evening to see the Abbey stark and grim against a sky lurid with the lights of Vauxhall, while the electric torch of Parliament flared above Big Ben.

And now he was going home to College Street for the very last time, the last time of all.

There is always sadness in farewell, whatever may be the delectable country to which we are to journey. Roland knew a slight and not unpleasing melancholy as he turned into the network of quiet streets behind Dean's Yard.

He came to his bachelor home at last. In the light of the few gas lamps the old red brick houses

seemed friendly and inexpressibly *familiar*. The high stone wall opposite that bounded the Abbey precincts was crowned with the green of trees. The roar of London here faded into a soothing sound like the bourdon note of a distant organ.

High above, a towering presence, felt rather than seen, the great Church that Edgar built and Edward the saintly king made more glorious, hung in the air. It seemed to radiate peace and confidence. Even in that restless modern year the dwellers under the shadow of the Abbey knew the meaning of sanctuary.

Roland let himself into his house with his key and went up to his two rooms on the first floor.

The gas was lit but was turned low. He pulled the chain and in the brilliant light from the incandescent globe surveyed the room.

The pictures were all taken down from the panelled walls. All his own things, his personalia, had gone. The room, denuded of all that had made it "home" for five years, was gaunt and inhospitable. Corded trunks and packing-cases stood against the wall. They were labelled with his new address at Bedford Park, where he had taken a house. To-morrow a van would come to remove them, and his sister Margaret would install these Lares and Penates in the new home while he was away at Ilfracombe with his bride.

Nothing was left in the chambers but the tables, chairs and sofas belonging to Mrs. Buscall, the woman who let the chambers.

The table was spread for supper. A cold chicken and salad stood upon it. There was a bowl full

of roses there, and there was a bottle of hock. The kindly folk of the house were making their little endeavour of farewell.

Footsteps sounded on the landing outside. Someone knocked at the door, and William, the man who looked after the three bachelors who lived in the house, entered.

William's evening clothes, which the custom of No. 27 obliged him to wear after six o'clock, were shabby. His face was shabby also, and his eyes were bleary. He was a worn old servitor, not too honest, but he had been Mrs. Buscall's butler for many years.

William had seen many generations of young gentlemen come and go from 27. He came in now with a leather case in his hand; his hand shook very much.

"I made so bold, Mr. Speke," he said, "as to buy you a little soovencer, if you'll 'ave it, sir, from William."

He opened the case and took out a curved briar pipe. He could not look Roland in the face and his voice was thick. "It's good wood, sir," he said, "and this 'ere is a silver screw which can't never break like them ordinary putty-fixed bone screws. It's block-amber, sir, the mouf-piece, I, I—God bless you, sir, and your missus."

He dropped the pipe into the salad and left the room hurriedly, snorting in his grief.

Roland sat down quickly. Yes! there was pathos in farewell! This pathetic and battered old fellow who had stolen his whiskey and forgotten to post his letters for years made a link with the past.

Poor dear old William! William cared for him it seemed then!

Five years—that was a great space in a man's life. For five years he had lived happily and quietly in these old rooms.

Rye, the barrister on the ground floor, had been there four years; St. Ruth, the gallery-man for the Central News, had lived above him for six. Speke let his brain go back in reverie over his past life.

He was an Oxford man, a typical undistinguished happy son of the University. His father was a clergyman in the North of England, who had married the daughter of a country gentleman with a small income of her own.

Roland had been in the sixth at Marlborough, and had gone up to Pembroke. He had been in his college Rugby team, had taken pass mods and just managed a third in "greats." His life was the ordinary decent undergraduate's life. He had been in no special set. He had known neither fast men nor smugs. Members of the Bullingdon, or the type of person who preaches at the Martyrs' Memorial on Sunday evenings, had been alike alien from his Oxford life. Like most Oxford men who are not extremely brilliant or markedly vicious, he had developed late. When he had taken his degree, he was still a schoolboy in heart.

His father had died when he was twenty. Mrs. Speke had gone to live in the sleepy and restful little town of Lynton. She was a Devonshire woman and had some property near Exmoor. When her husband died her old impulse in her blood asserted itself, and she left the grim and busy



movement of Lancashire for the unforgotten Coombes of her youth, the valley where the waters meet, and the purple heights of the moor above.

Margaret Speke, Roland's sister, lived with her mother part of the year. She was a student at the Guildhall School of Music, and during term time she lived with her uncle and aunt in Lennox Gardens.

Mr. Basil Speke, the uncle of Roland and Margaret, was a younger brother of the Rev. Roland Speke, the Lancashire clergyman. He was a barrister who had not long taken silk, and had got over that period of diminution of income and anxiety that often comes to the well-known junior who aspires to the, sometimes, rather barren dignity of a King's Counsel. He was married to the second daughter of an Irish peer, had one son, now at Harrow and about fifteen years old, and lived his life among important people from a social point of view. In short, he was quite a familiar figure in London life.

When Roland came down from Oxford it was his uncle's influence that had procured him the post in the Census Office, which had eventually led to his becoming Sir Arthur Childe's secretary.

The barrister was a cynical and cool-headed man of the world, without, one would have supposed, very many human affections. But he had been kind to Roland and Roland's sister. Both were welcome in Lennox Gardens, and through his uncle's hospitality, in the first instance, Roland knew many important people and some good houses were open to him.

Basil Speke wanted his nephew to get on. Nice girls with some money of their own were asked to

Lennox Gardens. Not the nicest girls of all—the prettiest girls—a private secretary could hardly aspire to those. But those girls whose fate it is to see their more comely sisters married speedily, and for whom a well-bred and decent young man like Roland Speke is “just the thing”—girls about whom their mothers say, “I have every confidence in Roland; he is a thoroughly good fellow and an ideal husband for poor dear Violet.”

Roland had developed late. His development dated from a time on which he was kept very late at Sir Arthur's house in Bedford Square. He had stayed the night with his chief. The next day was a Sunday. An hour or two of work still remained to be done.

“I am going to church,” Sir Arthur had said, “at Saint Paul's, you know, and afterwards the vicar, Father Grogan, is coming to lunch. We can finish our work in the afternoon. Will you come to church, too?”

Roland had never been what is called an “irreligious” man. At Oxford, of course, he had met several young donkeys who talked cheap Atheism and were extremely proud of their ability to be rude to God! But, having an observant eye, he realised that nearly all the young men who talked like this were doing something they ought not to do, and were too fond of to give up. There was a *raison d'être* for their attitude at once.

And he looked round upon the intellectual people of his own age—no less than the intellectual people of other ages. It was a survey which made him reflect. Take any group he liked—Newman, Mr. Gladstone, Lord Salisbury, Browning, Pusey,

Keble, Lord Roberts the soldier, Sir Henry Hawkins the judge, Pope Leo, Mary Anderson the actress—any jumble of well-known names. Yes, and what did one find? Were all these folk in their different spheres and with their different temperaments deluded and fools? It was difficult to believe so.

Therefore Roland never allied himself in thought or word with agnosticism or denial. At the same time he really knew nothing about religion. He just put it by, as a thing to be thought out when he had time—when he was older. In fact—though he didn't realise it—what he promised himself was that he would be a Christian and come to our Lord *when he had need of Him*. Roland belonged to the majority.

It has been said, and excellently said, "in the soul of one who is ignorant there is always room for a great idea." The great idea came to Roland when he went to the celebration of the Eucharist with Sir Arthur Childe.

He realised that miracle took place every day. At the Eucharist he found certain facts were borne in upon him. From his own personal sensations and knowledge he knew that Christ had actually come to that church at a certain moment. Then he understood that a miracle is not the breaking of a law, but the exception to an observed order. He no longer had the slightest difficulty in believing in the supernatural.

He met Grogan at lunch. He met him again, in private, soon afterwards. In six weeks Roland became a regular attendant at St. Paul's and a man who, quite openly and simply, tried to regulate his life according to the rules of the Faith and the commands of God.

Of course he often failed. He was always failing. To be a Christian is the greatest of the arts and the most difficult also. But he went on trying.

He no longer spoke of "Christ," or "The Christ," as the arrogant, the timid, and the ashamed speak. He said "Our Lord." This is a trifle, possibly, but it is also a badge.

He lived more happily than before. There was more enjoyment in everything. He had fallen into Grogan's hands, and Grogan held with Kingsley that this is God's world and not the Devil's. "The cloister, and the cloistered mind," he said, "are not worthy of a strong man. Live your life, enjoy it. The Christian philosophy is the highest hedonism. Carry the thought and consciousness of the Incarnation with you, don't shut yourself up with it. The Puritan and the Romish monks are not strong. They are epicene even—at least that's how I look at it. You are an Englishman. The English temperament is not the temperament of the recluse. Keep to your national habit of mind. A sensible man, when he goes abroad, always drinks the beverage and smokes the tobacco of the country in which he is. Racial experience has shown that these are fitted to the climate and environment. An English doctor once told me that lots of people came back ill from the Continent because they would insist on an English diet while they were there. Always be in correspondence with your environment. That is the scientist's definition of Life, and it is one of the few scientific definitions I know that is wholly true. The ascetic life is un-English to-day. It does not give character.

Never forget that strength of character is not a fixed set of habits, as so many people think. Force may take its own direction. The ascetic says that there is one royal road for the cure of vice. He is quite wrong. There is no royal road, but there are many avenues to self-control. Even in our own Church there is a party whose efforts towards the attaining of personal holiness I admire and reverence, but whose methods I entirely distrust. Don't be influenced by it. These theories come from Rome—and you know my views of Rome. Why!" he added with a wistful smile, "our Lord Himself was a diner-out!"

Roland had absorbed his outlook and recognised its wisdom. His inner Christian life grew stronger as he went about the world. He himself began to acquire a manner—or perhaps convey an atmosphere—of quiet strength.

Basil Speke remarked it. "That boy will do something," he said to his wife. "He's got a lot of force stored up in him. He grows on one. Find him a girl with some money, Honoria, and have him married as soon as possible. Then I can take him in hand and see what his career is really to be. He will be a useful friend for Patrick, young enough to be a friend for a very young man and old enough to keep him steady." Patrick was the barrister's only son, the boy who was at Harrow.

The "girls with some money" were paraded before the young man with force stored up in him. Nothing happened, and one day the Basil Spekes were startled to hear that Roland was engaged to Miss Gertrude Moultrie, the daughter of an

Oxfordshire clergyman, who was vicar of a small river-side hamlet.

She was pretty, her family was just ordinary upper middle-class, and she hadn't a penny.

"Throwing your chances away, that's what I call it," Basil's uncle said to him. "We've done all *we* could to help you on, too. Nothing would have been easier than for you to have married one of the girls in our set with some money of her own. You must go your own way, of course. It's very romantic and charming, no doubt—though I should have thought you were too sensible for that sort of thing. Well, you'll find out. Love is Romance, but marriage is History. You'll go and be fool enough to have a large family on an insufficient income, I make no doubt. You'll drop out of society, and dozens of men without half your ability or advantages will pass you in the race."

During the period of Roland's engagement there had been a coolness between him and the Lennox Gardens people. They had not dropped him, but he was not on the same terms of intimacy as before.

\* \* \* \* \*

All these thoughts and memories of the past flowed through the mind of the young man as he sat in his lonely and dismantled room.

Well! that was all over and done with.

The orchestra had tried its instruments. The violins had twanged and sung in long single notes, the flute had given out its liquid preliminary roulade, the hoarse voices of the great brass trumpets had joined in the tuning. Now all were silent and expectant, the concert was about to begin.

Roland stood up. His head was bowed.

"Oh, heart! oh, blood that freezes, blood that burns!  
Earth's returns

For whole centuries of folly, noise, and sin!  
Shut them in.

With their triumphs, and their glories, and the rest.  
Love is best."

He went into his bedroom and opened the window wide to the night. His thoughts were too great for this little room.

He knelt down to say his prayers, the last evening prayers he would ever say while his life was unjoined to Gertrude's life.

To-night his prayers were all praises, jubilant cries of thankfulness to God.

He rose at length and stood for a moment without moving. The soul of the young man had hardly come back to him. It had been away in other places. Blinded by glories it could not see, stunned by enormous harmonies it could but faintly hear; it seemed still to have been among angels, to have caught a faint echo of the chorus that rises round the throne of God, to have moved, stumbling, over the shining pavements of Heaven.

Crash!

The whole air was filled with an enormous thunder and reverberation of sound.

The roar and agitation of the air beat in upon the brain with extraordinary force and power.

Big Ben was striking midnight.

It was over. The last clang went shuddering away over the southern heights of the City.

Roland's marriage morning had come.

## CHAPTER II.

### AT ILFRACOMBE. ROLAND'S OPPORTUNITY AND A MEETING WITH SIGNIFICANCE.

ROLAND climbed up the steep sides of the Rapparee Cove at Ilfracombe.

It was about eight of a clear summer's morning, marvellously fresh and fragrant. His towel was twisted round his neck and he wore an old Norfolk jacket and grey flannel trousers. How glorious the swim had been in the still cool water! The right arm had risen and fell, conquering an element. The rich salt water had cooled the blood and tightened the muscles, the brain worked calmly and well after the fine tonic of the swim. Strong and healthy life throbbed in the young man, as if the sea, which the old Greeks taught was the fountain and primal source of Life, had lent him new vigour and courage.

When he had mounted the rocks and stood upon the green slopes of Hillsborough, he paused and took in deep breaths of the morning air. There was a mist still upon the sea, and he could hear the far off throbbing of screws as the navies of the world moved up the Channel towards Cardiff and



Bristol. Every now and again the long ululation of a syren came through the sunlit mist. To his left lay the little harbour of Ilfracombe, with its fishing boats and one great paddle-wheel steamer that had come overnight from Barry. Behind was the green Capstone Hill with its winding walks and terraces. The sun was flooding it with light. It was a perfect morning, instinct with the lyric joy of mornings in Devonshire when the heart is young, the body strong, and all the glories of sea, combe, and swelling hill but harmonise with the throbbing content within.

There came a sense of enormous *blessing* to the watcher. He seemed surrounded by and overwhelmed in God's gifts. All was well with this world, because the Other world was over-lapping and interfused with it at such a moment as this.

To-day was the last day of his Honeymoon. Like hundreds of other young men, he had taken his bride to the lovely western town. Ilfracombe is known as the first home of groom and bride. Roland and Gertrude had laughed together at the pompous eloquence of the guide-book—"When Ilfracombe emerged from the chrysalis of a fishing village into the butterfly existence of a fashionable holiday resort, it assumed without dispute, and still maintains, the title and status of 'The Mecca of Honeymooners.'"

Roland could not understand the joke and jest that commonplace people made of the first sacred and happy days of wedded life. All jests and references of this kind seemed a desecration to him now. He had not thought this before. He had,

indeed, never thought about the question at all. To-day a jocular remark, the mere repetition of the sticky-sentimental word "*Honeymoon*" would have seemed as ill-placed, as wrong, as a pun on the Eucharist.

He began to stride over the smooth pneumatic turf towards Gertrude, home and breakfast.

The Spekes were staying in rooms. They could not afford an hotel, nor would they have chosen that life of passages and public rooms, curious eyes and little privacy for love.

But in the little rooms over the tobacconist's shop, fronting the Pavilion and with the giant rock Capstone towering above the building of green glass, they had tasted something of the sacred and intimate delights of Home. Day after day, night after night, as painted suns flamed and waned over Lundy Island, Roland had known a foretaste of home. He had thought himself so well-found and happy in his Westminster chambers. What a fool he had been!—how ignorant, at least. Now he knew that there could be no Home without Gertrude, without one's wife.

As he strode home after his swim his mind was moved with these thoughts and full of them. He had only discovered a Truth that is the loadstone and heart's property of all happily wedded folk. But he thought he had discovered a new Truth. In the riot of his blood and the psalm of his thankful thoughts, he imagined that he held the key to the most immedicable troubles of life, that he had elaborated a philosophy which should shoe men with swiftness and make their hands strong.

He came down a path which led to the harbour.

The fisher-folk were busy on their boats, calling to each other through the clear air—for the sun had devoured the sea-mist now—and saying that the day would be hot.

Roland hoped that it would be hot, a blazing day of summer! the last day before they went home to the little house at Bedford Park and began real life together.

For this month at Ilfracombe had not been real life. Days were too lyrical, evenings too ethereal. One could not always live in blissful holiday. It would be with genuine regret that he and Gertrude left this lovely town in the far west, hallowed to them by its memories of their love. But it was fine to plunge once more into life, into the struggle. On this splendid morning he seemed to hear the roar of London in his ears, and there was welcome in the far-off, imagined murmur.

He came on to the green lawns in front of the Pavilion and saw his lodging. His heart leapt up. On the little balcony over the shop front, which led out of his sitting-room, Gertrude was standing waiting. She saw him and waved her hand.

He ran up the stairs. How good this was, how wonderful—to come back to *her*!

Roland held his wife in his arms. Her tall, slender figure was robed in a long tea-gown of dusky crimson. Her abundance of dark red hair was loosely coiled round the small Greek head, a wealth of hair such as St. Paul may have seen in some girl when he spoke of it as a glory.

"How nice and cool you are, darling!" she said, looking up at him with great dark eyes fringed with long lashes, eyes which were simple and held no secrets. They were full of love now as they played over him, taking in every detail of his ruddiness and health, finding new delights in him as he in her.

She surrendered herself to be kissed with a little sigh of happiness and content. All this girl's hopes, thoughts, desires were centred in Roland. Her whole being focussed in him like a beam of light focussed on a prism—and sending out how many treasures of light and colour at the impact!

"I had a glorious swim, dearest, and I don't think that I ever felt fitter than I do this morning—and hungrier."

"I went into the kitchen, dear, and I did so want to cook the kidneys myself. The woman hasn't an idea of how to do them. But she was so cross and banged the things about so that I fled. Roland, why do these sort of women make themselves so objectionable?"

"Why, don't you see, dear, it's their only possible way in life of asserting their own personality. They have to spend all their time in a hurried effort to satisfy their lodgers' wants. We have all sorts of ways in which we can impress our own individuality upon people, either consciously or unconsciously. Conversation, music—oh, dozens of ways. A woman like Mrs. Brown has no way, but this showing off of temper and independence. I never resent that sort of thing very much. It's so easily under-

stood, really. In fact, one ought to sympathise with it!"

"How clever you are. My boy is cleverer than anyone I have *ever* met. All the same, Mrs. Brown is a horrid old thing now, isn't she? I know one thing, no servant of mine shall ever dare to behave like that when we get into our own home!"

"To-morrow!"

"Yes, to-morrow. Roland, dear, when we really get home and settle down you won't grow tired of me, will you? You know I'm not clever like you are. I can cook and manage a house, mother saw to all that, but I don't know about any of the things you know. Even now I can't quite remember whether the Romans or the Greeks came first. Promise me you won't get tired!"

The ratification of the promise was interrupted by the arrival of the landlady with breakfast. How charming Gertrude was, Roland thought. Her pretended fears, her confessions were delightful. He watched her swift capable hands arranging the table, touching this or that until chaos became order and good taste became concrete.

There was a new pleasure in talking to his wife, airing his little theories about life, hearing his own voice and finding his words accepted as absolute truth and the revelations of a new philosophy.

Most freshly married men experience this complacent joy. In the economy of married comradeship it has been arranged for us that, if nowhere else, we can reinstate ourselves in our own con-

viction of our superiority at home ! It is a pleasure which married men share with schoolmasters and possibly kings—the pleasure of the unquestioning audience.

As he sat down to the meal, Roland rejoiced to think that enshrined in this lovely body *was* a simple mind and soul which were as wax to receive his impress, his to mould and form as he would.

He knew nothing of the times to come, when he should lean on her wisdom and the deep philosophy of womanhood. He foresaw none of the occasions when her outlook upon life would be a citadel in which he would take refuge and seek advice. As yet he worshipped without full comprehension, as men do until trouble and danger come.

Then, and only then, is the truth of the mystical union revealed. Then, and only then, do they receive the real solace of the Sacrament.

"There are three letters," Gertrude said ; "but you shan't see a single one of them till you've had something to eat. I'm sure it takes it out of you far more than you realise, to have these long swims in the early morning. You *must* be careful of your health, darling. I hope you haven't overtired yourself."

Fortunately Roland's breakfast was satisfactory. He was allowed to read his letters.

The first one that he opened was from his sister Margaret. She wrote from Bedford Park, announcing that the house was complete and ready for the lovers.

"Tell Gertie that I think she will find everything ready now. I am going back to Lennox Gardens to-day to stay with uncle and aunt for a month and go to all the concerts. I can't say how glad I am to throw off the responsibility of looking after your future ménage! I am not domestic, and it does seem a waste of time to bother about sheets and blankets and wall-paper. Uncle is having a fearful lot of trouble with Patrick, who has got into some disgraceful row at Harrow and will probably be expelled from the Hill for ever and a day. Lady Honoria, of course, takes the boy's part—little beast!—and I suppose my part will be to smooth matters over as well as I can. What a nuisance boys are! Thank Heaven, I'm not married—except to my fiddle. You must telegraph the time of your arrival at Turnham Green Station to the servant I have engaged for you—Martha Reynolds. She will have a meal ready. She seems a decent sort of girl, and tells me that she goes to church regularly, which I suppose is a healthy sign—if she *does* go.

"Good-bye. Good-luck to you both in your new home. I've done *my* best.

"Ever your affectionate,

"MARGARET."

Roland laughed as he finished the letter.

"I can imagine what a trial it must have been to poor Margaret," he said. "The domestic virtues are not her strong point. They never are with artistic people. It's been very good of her to set our house in order for us."

Gertrude did not answer at once. She was not fond of Margaret. The girl's outlook on life, her passionate devotion to music, the smart and cynical way of talking that she had learnt in the Spekes' house, all alarmed Roland's wife.

Gertrude had lived a life very remote from modern movements. She knew little or nothing of the

girl of the day. Time had seemed to stand still in the Oxfordshire vicarage where she had spent her life. Nothing had happened there save seed-time and harvest, winds in their varied tempers, rain and sun. She had lived quietly and happily, occupied with pleasant household business and very simple pleasures.

"I don't quite see," Gertrude said at length, "why Margaret should find household affairs such a bore. She seems to worship music and nothing else."

Roland laughed lightly and opened another letter. It was from Father Grogan.

"You will, of course, have seen" the letter began, "the way in which the press has received the disastrous news of the census. At no time in my remembrance has the question of population been taken so seriously. Those in authority, the far-seeing economists, are in a state of alarm and apprehension. Sir Arthur and I have been in some private conferences during the last week with various leading people, especially with Sir Michael Manichoe and Dean Gortre. Yet, already the excitement, the public excitement, I mean, is beginning to die away. The mass of men in that stuffy, boring den of false issues, the House of Commons, are merely pawns in the political game of their leaders. The leaders themselves are simply playing an exciting and fascinating game, and the welfare of the country is only the name of the game and not the object. Moreover, the pace of political life is so great, the minor details of government and policy so innumerable, that the discussion of a vast question such as that of racial suicide seems impossible. The man in the street—that is, the man with voting power—is quite supine and uninterested. He has not imagination enough to realise the truth of Sir Arthur's figures or what they mean. 'Nothing much can happen in my time. I'm going to turn my attention to



questions that will benefit *me*, while I live'—these are the commonplaces of speech to-day. A war, which means a fall in consols and a rise in the price of bread, stirs up the voter and makes him act at once. The swift decadence of his country stirs him not at all. And this is not because the average Englishman is unpatriotic. It is because he is stupid. A decadence that takes fifty or sixty years to consummate itself seems a thing requiring no immediate attention. Yet any student of history knows that such a decadence is swiftness itself.

"You will wonder why I am writing this to you, and why I have, as you see, so much more to write. As you read this letter you will see my purpose and realise how individually important to you this letter is. Therefore, my dear Roland, read all I say with care, and bear with me to the end."

"Dearest," Gertrude said anxiously, "have you had bad news? Are you in any trouble? Tell me, let me share it, whatever it may be!"

Roland looked up at his wife. His thoughts were still on the letter, a number of single sheets clipped together by a brass pin. His forehead was wrinkled, as it always was when he gave his special attention to anything. His eyes were dreamy. He saw his wife's lovely face bent into concern and it brought him back to reality.

"My dear child, no!" he said, laughing. "What bad news could I have! This is a letter from Father Grogan, a long letter about a movement, a social movement, he seems to be inaugurating, and he wants me to give it my special attention."

"I'm so glad," she answered. "For a moment I really thought something had happened. How wise of Father Grogan to consult my boy! You

see, I'm not the only person who knows how clever you are! Now I'll go away and get ready to go out. You can read your important letter in peace, and then we will go and listen to the band."

She left the room, looking lovingly at him till the last moment when the door hid him from her sight. Roland went on with the letter.

"You will see, therefore, that though there has been, and doubtless will continue to be, a great deal of windy talk on these matters, there is no organised body of men and women, no league, no union, either religious or political or both, which is devoted to dealing with the question, to rousing the national conscience and fighting the neo-Malthusians tooth and nail.

"Wifehood—which generally means motherhood—is the predominant profession of women all over the world. The future of the world, and of course of any state in it, rests upon the quality and the quantity of its children. A prominent sociologist has just written—'If the conditions under which the profession of motherhood is exercised are silly and rotten, our fleets, our armies do no more than guard a thing that dies. In Great Britain, now, I think they are more or less silly and rotten.' Let us admit that this writer is correct. He does no more than voice conclusions at which even the most superficial student of the census returns must have arrived.

"What is to be done, then? How are we who are Christians and love our Lord, citizens who love our country, to fight the present conditions?

"That is what a band of people, including those I have mentioned, are discussing. They have arrived at a definite conclusion.

"A great league is to be formed of English men and women. Great names will be at the head of it, it is to be national. I have already pointed out to you that even the revelations of the census have not stirred the ordinary

person. His patriotism has not been roused, and, you may be certain—as I am certain—that no question of national expediency on this point *will* stir the ordinary person, who is either indifferent or actually engaged in helping England's decadence by the restriction of his own family. A league started on the grounds of expediency and the common good alone would be an egregious failure.

"Utilitarianism never fired a great moral movement yet. It never will, because, before a man becomes a national utilitarian, he must get over *personal* utilitarianism. And in this case of the restriction of family, the degradation of marriage, *personal* utilitarianism is directly opposed to national welfare, and the personal wins.

"We must come back to the one Power and Force over the hearts and minds of men and women. We must come back to religion.

"Here is the Church's great opportunity. There has never, perhaps, in the whole history of the Church in England been such a chance given to her. Our crusade must be a crusade made in the light of the Incarnation, under the auspices of God the Holy Ghost—the *Lord and Giver of life*.

"Do you begin to see what I mean, what we hope for? The part of the Holy Spirit's work, which we recite in the creed, has been largely forgotten. Lord and Giver of Life! We are about to revive the recognition and memory of the Fact. We are going to use this cardinal point of Christian belief as our watchword and battle-cry.

"The gradual decline of literal belief in the Incarnation, the growth of a Protestantism which is on its way towards Unitarianism, the spread of Unitarian doctrines under other names, among the varied sects of dissent, have meant that an appalling disregard of life as the gift of God, its Author, has come among us. It is because you and I believe that Jesus was God as well as man that we insist upon the sacredness of human life.

"To-day, the loss of thousands of lives in a battle is printed as a piece of casual news. There is no particular sense of horror in the minds of anyone. Murders are committed every day in momentary bursts of passion over

trifles. Suicides increase, not only when some long-continued misery may seem to give a shadow of excuse, but when there has been some trivial disappointment. And so, leaving out a hundred other instances, one comes down to the truth of which every priest, every doctor, and every nurse is aware, the frustration of God's intention of child-birth—the reason for the terrible disclosures which you and your colleagues have given to the world in your census returns.

"Our league will be, therefore, a great *Church League*. We shall invite every English man and woman to join it, who believes that Christ was God. This is the only way in which we can make such a society do its work and accomplish its end. Directly we begin to allow the political altruist who has no definite belief in Christianity to join us, so surely our influence and opportunity will begin to decline. Compromise is no use whatever. We shall be bitterly assailed, and for a time we shall not seem to make much headway. I say *seem*, and for this reason. People who belong to us will not advertise their membership. The press, which is not interested, as a whole, in religious affairs, will not understand our aims, nor will it be—so I imagine—in sympathy with them. And any movement that has, as this will have, the improvement of sexual morality, will be fought by the methods of ridicule and contempt. But this will be but surface, and in time the influence of our work will not only be felt, but seen. The wizards of figures will be at work once more. Sir Arthur and his nymphs will prove to England what we are doing for her.

"All this that I am writing now is fragmentary, hasty and incomplete. It is a sketch, an outline. And now I come to the actual purpose of the letter in regard as it affects *you*.

"The movement is definitely settled upon. I am not able, as yet, to give you more precise information as to our founders and sympathisers. But briefly, owing to the munificence of Sir Michael Manichoe, the financial side of the matter is one that is arranged for. We can provide an army service corps for the campaign. The expenses of offices, printing and general organisation are assured already.

"We have been looking round among us for a man who

shall become the acting secretary of the movement. We are agreed that such an one must be a person accustomed to the detail of organisation. He must be a gentleman accustomed to move in good society, he must be hard-working. These three or four qualifications are not too difficult to find in combination. But in a movement such as this, much more is required. We must have a Christian who is living a life under the Christian discipline, and in the hope of the world to come. And we must have a man who is not in the least ashamed of his profession of faith. Especially do we need a man in whom bureau activities will not kill a real and definite enthusiasm for the work to be done—a man who will do office and organising work with the sense that he is being protected and guided by the Holy Ghost.

"I am empowered by Sir Michael Manichoe, and with the approval of Sir Arthur Childe, to offer this position to you. It will be guaranteed to you for a fair number of years, and the salary will be considerably larger than your present income. It rejoices me, my dear friend, to be able to put in your way, at the outset of your married life, this opportunity of increased income and a position which will bring you in contact with the great and influential people who will be with us.

"But far more do I rejoice in the hope that here you will find your mission and life work, that abiding in the shadow of the Almighty you will strike a great blow for Him, for His Church, for England. I discern the fighter in you. Here is your battlefield. If it so seems good to you after prayer—ask God quite simply if He will tell you if you are fit to undertake this great responsibility—it is my earnest hope that your own private and public life may be welded into one harmony, that the experiences of husband and father may give you knowledge of and reverence for the highest ideal of marriage; and that, finally, you may impress your convictions and make your mark upon your generation."

Thus, with the writer's love to Gertrude, the letter ended.

Roland sat silent and motionless. The sunlight poured into the room, he heard the laughing voices of children at play upon the lawns outside.

His first sensation was one of shame. In the new joy of Gertrude and the first inexpressible sweetness of possession, of physical and mental companionship in this world of sunshine, soft airs, and flowers, he had forgotten all outside things.

The world had only held him and his love.

Each night ere he sank to sleep by his wife's side he had thanked God for the almost stunning happiness that he was experiencing. But until that very morning the world of duty, endeavour, the world where blows were struck for God, had seemed very far away.

He was a man who had already been on the fringe of great matters. His intimate life with Sir Arthur Childe and the men the Statist lived with had given him a balance of mind and an appreciation of high issues.

Young as he was he had realised the gravity and importance of human affairs, had not sought pleasure only, as most young men of his age did, could be smitten and fired with an ideal.

The mood of self-accusation passed. He recognised that he had been unfair with himself for a moment.

Then the prosaic words of the letter, rugged and straightforward in expression as it was, caught hold of him. He saw, with quickened imagination, what this thing might mean. A vista of future happenings spread before him, his place in the movement seemed a high and honourable chance, the invitation to it like a trumpet call.

Yes! should not he who was beginning a life with so lovely and beloved a creature by his side, throw the strength of his manhood into this fight against those who would degrade marriage, rob it of its spiritual meaning, take God from it? To help in this with all his heart and mind for the sake of his country and his Faith . . .

His eye kindled, the blood mounted in his cheeks.

A month ago he would not have been able to feel this in the manner and measure in which he was feeling it now.

He had not been *married* then, only engaged.

The keen and subtle brains that had been observing him this long while, and had destined him to this end for a year or more, had chosen their time well.

His eye fell upon a postscript to the letter which he had not noticed before.

"It has been determined to call our Society the '*Confraternity of the Holy Ghost*.'"

There was in that name something which sent the blood pulsing more swiftly through his veins. For the very name of the Paraclete has this power over the minds of men.

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It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. The day, which had begun with such opulent promise, had come to full summer fruition. After the reading of Father Grogan's letter, Gertrude had returned ready to go out.

Roland was still in his mood of strong purpose—the mood in which he had seen vistas. With all that newborn sense of delightful intimacy that he had learnt so sweetly, during these happy days, he burned to tell his wife of the new prospect and the high resolve which had come to him that morning.

"We will go," he said, "for our last long Devon walk this afternoon. But this morning I have something to tell you, and I want to tell it to you while we are sitting down somewhere in the sun. Where shall we go?"

She had learnt to be responsive to his moods, to gather his wishes and intentions from the tones of his voice. Now, she knew that he had something out of the ordinary to say.

"The best place, dearest," she said, "would be the Capstone, don't you think?"

"How right you are!" he said, almost as if he imagined she knew what he was about to tell her. "That is the very place. From the top of the Capstone we shall see the whole of these sunlit waters. From Hartland Point to the shores of Wales our eyes will take in a big sweep. And I have something very big to tell you, dear. It is fit and right that I should tell it you up on a hill, like this. Have you ever thought—I have never thought until just this moment—how many great things have happened on hills? It was on Sinai that Moses met God. It was on a hill that our Lord was tempted, and it was on a hill that He died. And, in art, a hill has always been the symbol—the material symbol—of high events that take



place in the mind! ' *Silent upon a peak in Darien* ' you remember. I remember some lines of Milton which I learnt for *Rep.* at school. I think they ran something like this: 'I shall detain you no longer in the demonstration of what we should not do, but strait conduct ye to a hillside, where I will point ye out the right path of a virtuous and noble education: laborious indeed at the first ascent, but else so smooth, so gracious, so full of goodly prospect, and melodious sounds on every side, that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming.' "

She took his arm with a hand that trembled a little. She heard that something new had come into his voice, something strong, male, and informed with an unusual excitement and throbbing of the mental pulse.

What this might mean she did not know, but went out, dutifully, to hear. She experienced with a delicious first knowledge that pleasure of submission a woman knows when she realises her husband not only as friend and lover, but as master of the world-purpose which is to influence both their lives, and as the priest of his own hearth-stone.

It was not long before they had mounted the "zig-zag" path cut in that monstrous rock they call Capstone Hill at Ilfracombe.

When they had won the summit they sat on the close-cropped emerald turf, pneumatic to the tread as if some life principle was at work immediately below, and looked out far over the splendid, shining sea.

Far down the band of the Pavilion had begun

to play. The harmonies floated up to them through the sea breezes, robbed of all the vulgar appeal popular music has even to people who are bent on serious matters. Coming to them through the sweet sea winds, the chords had no more than the gentle sound-bursts of an Æolian harp heard in a wood.

At first Roland had had a momentary fear. How was he to tell this pure and radiant wife of his of the horrors that went on under the cloak of "marriage"? How should she, who was so stainless, bear to hear of the foulness and the terrible degradation that these fine brains and mental rulers of society were about to fight? And, as he was confronted with the necessity of explanation to *her*, he realised for the first time how dark were the ways of those who had not the illumination of which Grogan spoke on their way through life—the illumination of the Incarnation.

Roland had always revered Womanhood. Now he loved one woman with his heart's blood. That love, that Woman, had become as a lense, or rather prism, through which life flowed and was resolved into its true colours.

In his thought he found suddenly that the material difficulty and the Divine emotion were fused! He saw the Incarnation in epitome! Oh, this was indeed a morning of mornings.

Once more through all his consciousness floated the mysterious title of the Third Person of the Trinity.

Then he began to tell Gertrude how he was to be the Secretary of the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost.

No one climbed the hill. The "simple sheep"

cropped the grass. The winds whispered, the gracious ships went up and down from Bristol and the Atlantic, some to haven, some to those deep and lonely waters where the most simple mariner hears the going of God in the wind and knows Him near—and so knows Him near to the dear ones at home.

As Roland told his wife what things were done, her face blanched. It is always so at first. All men and women of the world know well how the shielded and the sensitive experience an almost physical fear when the darker facts of physical life are revealed to them for the first time.

But that mood passed. Ignorance was never able to masquerade as innocence yet, and Truth, even in its ugliest manifestations, has never harmed a pure heart that is pure because it is Christian.

When she knew, when she realised, her mind was, as it were, suddenly released from a security which, it had half-known, was but the security of inexperience. She was able to take a wider survey of the truth of life and make recognition—as she surveyed the teeming plain of fresh experience—of a higher citadel and a greater security which awaited her hard by, and where she might be full of pity, indeed, but serene and at rest.

What Roland said on that summer morning, with the manifold beauties of the world so fresh, so visible, all around them, served but to bind their young and natural love in stronger bonds. The love of man and maid, untroubled by greater issues than just the sweetness of their love, was now caught up out of their individual unity and

selfishness, and made an engine, a contributory force, which was to take its part in the battle for purity such as theirs, for love such as theirs, for the inviolate sanctity of marriage such as theirs.

In that hour the design of living for others, the resolve to do so, the sense of Duty to the Christian Commonwealth, was born.

Two lovers on a hilltop in a Devon watering place! This were an ordinary sight enough.

A tall clergyman in grey tweeds with a rather disdainful and aquiline face, came up on the top of the hill. A very beautifully-dressed woman was with him. He was a peer's son, she from a smart yacht which had come over from Barry. Both were very eclectic and superior people.

At the moment when they gained the summit, Roland had taken his wife's hand. They were looking into each other's faces—it was the actual moment in which they ratified their vow to serve humanity as the leaders in London had pointed out the way. It was the actual moment in which man and wife consecrated their lives and their endeavours to the holy cause of Marriage.

"Look," said the clergyman, "at that couple. Aren't they typical, Lady Marjorie? One always meets this aggressive form of suburban courtship in a watering place of this sort! 'Spoonings,' I believe they call it. People of that class always seem to invite the whole world to witness their affections. He'll kiss her in a minute—I'll bet you anything you like."

"I'm not interested," the woman said. "Let's walk down that path towards the sea."

They moved away, laughing together at what they imagined they had seen. Laughing as Glumdalclitch laughed at Gulliver with her name of *Grildrig* for him.

People of another order, in short.

Yet if those two superficial and fortunate ones could have known, they had been present at a moment fraught with tremendous consequence to England and to the Cause to which, one of them at least, was a vowed adherent and soldier.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was after lunch, and they were climbing a long white road, bordered by flinty little twenty-pound villas, which led out of Ilfracombe towards the woods of Chambercombe.

It was odd to see a town stop abruptly as if ruled off by the tape of an architect. They saw it now. Here was the end of a street, and the end of Ilfracombe. Before them a Devonshire lane sank down into a thickly-wooded valley.

A glorious cloud-phantsmagoria, infinite in colour and form, crawled over the deep woods below. They turned into the lane. A little brook tinkled unseen through the beech fern, trefoil, and ragged-robin which hid it—a brook that seemed to be laughing like a lonely girl at her own thoughts. As they went deeper and deeper into the embracing shade and silence of the trees, by the high hedge banks so brilliant with chaste and simple flowers, they began to hear the wood doves saying "Hush! Hush!" all around. A rabbit hopped across the path; far in the dim recesses of the woodland they heard the harsh merriment of a magpie.

All the way they had been talking of simple and intimate details of the life that they were to lead together in their own house—the life that was to begin for them to-morrow. The consciousness of the morning's resolution on the hill by the sea was with them still. It lay lava hot, deep in their hearts. But they did not talk of it. They understood each other thoroughly, now it was time to be simple and gay.

Soon the solitary way led them into a long avenue of trees which ~~locked~~ and interlaced above their heads in wanton and luxuriant profusion.

"This is becoming quite romantic," Gertrude said. "Don't you feel, dearest, as if you were on the verge of some adventure, some romance of the woods? I do. I shouldn't be a bit surprised to see a knight in full armour come riding through the trees, singing '*Tirra-lirra*' like Sir Lancelot. And then that magpie we heard just now, surely that was the enchanter who lives in an impenetrable thicket guarded by snakes!"

"Yes," Roland answered, "the wizard of the wood was exulting over the captive princess——"

He stopped suddenly and pointed before him half in surprise, and half in mock-serious correspondence with her mood.

They had come suddenly upon a silent house. Two tall stone pillars guarded a gate of twisted ironwork. Through this they saw the courtyard of a very ancient manor. The roof, of the three sides were steep and moss covered. Tufts of grass grew up from cracks in the stones of the yard. The wide doors of the entrance were flung open

beneath the heavy mullioned archway, and the whole place was utterly still save for the whispering of the mighty elms which grew all round and towered far above the weathered Tudor roofs and cupola.

There was no sign of life whatever about the place. No cat sunned itself on the steps, no smoke rose from the chimneys, there was no clank of distant stable bucket upon tiles. It was as though the folk of the old house had rushed out on some hot afternoon like this, ever so many years ago, and had been caught by some sinister power in the wood. This was how Roland put it to Gertrude as they looked into the courtyard through the gate. Knight and squire, page and dame, would never come back to the manor any more. They lay in a magic swoon in the maze of the enchanter for ever and a day. And the door still stood open if perchance some adventurous mortal of another age might seek shelter and habitation in a place so haunted.

There was a great block of granite outside the gate, and the mellow influence of the afternoon, with its long lights striking the grey lichened surfaces of the house, prompting them to rest and watch it for awhile, they moved towards the stone.

"Let's sit down here," Gertrude said. "We shall have a splendid view of that old house, and be able to see if anyone does live there after all."

The block of granite was some three and a half feet high, but there was a convenient ledge which served as a step by which to mount it.

Gertrude stretched out her foot. Roland watched her, rejoicing in the grace and ease of his

wife's movements. How pretty the small foot was in its brown shoe, how slim the ankle in its brown open-work stocking! He was watching her foot when he saw that a patch of the granite seemed even more vividly marked than the rest. The fellspar, hornblende, and mica of the stone seemed arranged in a regular pattern. Gertrude stepped upon the vivid patch.

Immediately it became alive with movement. A flat head rose in a sudden coil of enmity and struck twice at the instep of the foot—the girl had stepped upon a male adder that was basking in the sun and could only be distinguished from the rock on which it lay when in movement.

The blow of the viper, like the flicker of a whip-lash, happened in a second of time. In another second Gertrude had slipped and fallen back into Roland's arms with a scream.

He laid her down quickly on the grass, telling her to be brave, and with fingers that trembled excessively he whipped out his handkerchief. He had been carrying a light walking cane. He snapped it over his knee and made a rough tourniquet, twisting the linen by means of the stick until it sank deep into the flesh above the ankle and made her gasp with pain.

"Keep quite still, dearest," Roland said in a voice from which all the life and expression had died away. "An adder has bitten you. It will be all right."

Keeping the tourniquet tight with the left hand he managed to unfold a pair of pocket scissors with the other and ripped up the stocking. There



was hardly any sign of the actual punctures which the needle-like hollow fangs had made. But the instep was already beginning to swell.

He put his lips to the tiny wounds and sucked out the poison.

Gertrude moaned a little. When he raised his head he saw that she had fainted.

His heart was beating furiously. In the silence of the dell he could hear it like distant and muffled drums.

He was in a terrible state of fear for her, and of impotence also.

What could he do? He dare not relax his grip of the stick that tightened the bandage. If once the poison that remained in the veins were to spread he knew that a long illness might result. Yet his wife lay there unconscious from the shock and the sun beat down upon her white face.

A great blue fly settled on her cheek. It was horrible to see, and he brushed it away with his hand.

As he crouched there, filled with a perplexity and a sense of helplessness that he had never known before, he heard a distant sound.

It came from the deserted mansion in front of him, the sound of someone moving inside, a "click" like the click of plates.

He sent a long and eager call trembling into the courtyard.

As his frightened voice died away, absolute silence fell once more over the mysterious house. The noise within ceased. Once more he cried out, and this time the terror in his voice seemed to echo

round the ancient gables and startled him. A second or two afterwards Roland saw that a tall figure stood in the open doorway, though there had been no sound of its coming.

He stared at it in utter amazement, forgetting for an instant that it had appeared in answer to his call. Never was there a more un-English picture and more incongruous with its surroundings. For in the door of this old Tudor manor-house stood a native of India in full Eastern dress, a piece of the Orient transplanted to this Devon solitude. The Indian was tall and lean. He was dressed in glistening white linen, with a white turban and white *cummerbund*. His beard would have been white also, for he was an old man, had it not been dyed a rich orange colour.

The figure was so unreal and fantastic in its English setting, its appearance had been so noiseless and sudden, that the young man hesitated for a moment. Was this indeed some house of enchantment, were the jesting words of his wife true? The thought of her stirred his brain again to action.

"My wife has been bitten by a snake!" he shouted. "She is unconscious. Come and help me with her, for Heaven's sake!"

The Indian came gliding up the path towards Roland. He wore white canvas shoes, which made no noise on the stones. In the intense brilliancy of the afternoon sun the white figure cast a shadow that was purple. He passed through the iron gates without a sound, and, bowing quickly to Roland, knelt down by Gertrude's side.

He nodded approval when he saw what had been done. "The mem-sahib will not have much pain, sir," he said in very fair English. "That has been done which should be done. Moreover, the poison of these serpents is not strong poison. I will now help to carry the mem-sahib within the house and we will rouse her, and my master will do what remains to be done."

With a sense of enormous relief Roland thanked the grave and courteous old man, and with his help began to carry Gertrude towards the house.

As they went over the threshold a delightful coolness enveloped them. They passed through a lofty, stone-floored hall and turned into a smaller room.

There was a couch here, and the two men placed Gertrude upon it. "I go to bring water and brandy and to tell my master," the Indian said. Roland looked round the room. It was furnished as a study. The walls were covered on three sides by books. A crucifix stood upon a small writing table. The place was rather dimly lit, as sheets of damp linen had been hung over the windows outside, but the whole impression it gave was that of austerity, as if its owner cared little for ordinary comforts or was too poor to afford them.

The coolness of the room seemed to be reviving Gertrude. She moaned a little and moved a hand, when the door opened and the Indian returned with a copper bowl of water and a sponge and some brandy.

With deft fingers, as if it was his right, he began to trickle the water over Gertrude's face. Her eyes

opened at length and she saw Roland and her dark attendant.

"Where am I?" she said dreamily. "I can't remember——"

Roland explained quickly what had happened.

"My foot seems as if it were burning," she said in a weak voice as Roland held a glass of brandy to her lips. "Oh, it's so painful, dear!"

The spirit brought some colour into the pale cheeks, but her lips quivered in the effort to repress a cry of pain and the voice was thin and weak.

The Indian was sponging the swollen instep when the master of the house came in through the open door.

Roland rose from his knees and went towards him.

He saw a tall elderly man with a gaunt and almost fleshless face and a hooked nose like the beak of a hawk. The chin was clean-shaved and the thin lips were set in the resolute lines of one who had suffered and was strong. The eyes of the man held Roland in a moment. They were large, very dark, and full of meaning. It is a rare thing to see eyes that are constantly alight with thought and feeling. The eyes of most people are only "lit up" occasionally. In this man they were always alight, almost blazing, Roland thought.

"I am most sorry to hear of this unfortunate accident, sir," he said in a slow, deep-toned voice. "I have lived most of my life in India and know a good deal about snake bites. The bite of an adder is never really dangerous, though it may make anyone very ill for weeks. I hear you have sucked

the punctures and applied a tourniquet. That is very good. There is, however, one more thing to be done, and with your and your wife's permission I will do it."

With Roland he approached the couch. Gertrude turned her head with a faint smile.

An extraordinary thing happened. The man caught hold of Roland's arm and swung him round with a sharp single cry. The dark eyes flamed, the thin, firm lips began to writhe, the whole length of the man shook as if in sudden passion.

Roland snatched his arm away, startled and alarmed.

The tall old man looked once more at Gertrude, he made one or two attempts to speak, but could not.

Suddenly he sat down abruptly on a chair by the wall. His long brown hands gripped the seat on either side of him; coils of muscle sprang upon the backs of them as he did so. The whole body of the man seemed to become rigid.

Roland watched him in great mental confusion. What could this sudden seizure mean? At first he had thought he was being attacked, now it seemed that his host was in the throes of some fit.

It was a scene Roland never forgot. His wife's pale and terrified face showed—a white wedge of pain and consternation—at one end of the room. The tall Indian was bending forward, his brown face ashen grey, his hands flickering before him in uneasy pantomime, a low torrent of Hindostanee pouring from lips that had become livid with fear.

The old man on the chair sat rigid and trembling,

making no sound. Little beads of sweat began to start out on his forehead, and in the dim light which lay over all the bizarre scene they looked like little black pearls.

The sufferer's eyes stared at the opposite wall of the room. They blazed with thought, with a remembrance so vivid and severe that it seemed to burn the very phosphates and water of which they were made with a material burning.

Never in real life, never in the greatest triumphs of the actor's art had Roland seen such terrible ecstasy of emotion. Irving in the "Bells," Sara Bernhardt as Marguerite Gautier, had been able to show him nothing like this. The sudden and unnatural violence of the whole business suggested the inevitable departure of personality, of *soul*, from the case and veil of flesh.

For nearly a minute the silent paroxysm continued. The words of the Indian died away, the only sound in the room was the hum of a giant bee that had flown in through the door and circled round and over the group of people with its heavy musical drone.

With a jerky movement the tall man's head moved to the left, quite independently of the body, which remained rigid as before. It was precisely the movement of a waxen figure or a mechanical toy.

The head was now turned directly towards the writing table. They saw the eyes change in expression. The look of fierce remembrance died away. They were now looking at some visible object in the present. Following their direction,

Roland saw that they were fixed upon the copper crucifix that stood on the table.

Was it Roland's fancy only, or was there indeed some powerful influence passing from the symbol to the mind of the man in the chair? Roland never knew. But in after life, and especially at a time when the circumstances of that day were brought before him with a rush of memory and realisation, he always liked to think that possibly some actual influence, some psychical current, unapprehended by his grosser sense, had indeed been the means and instrument of his host's recovery.

For, as he looked at the crucifix, the agony died away from the man's lips, the rigidity passed from his limbs and left them trembling. His hands went to his face and hid it for a time, and at length, with the stiffness of a man waking from a long sleep, he rose from his chair.

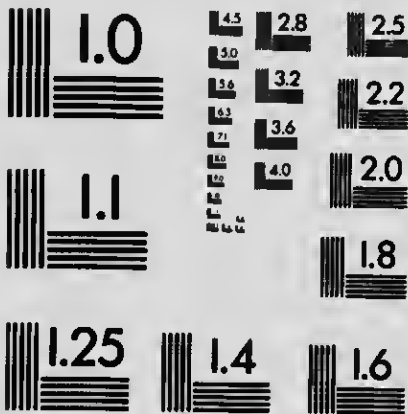
"How can I say, sir," he began, "and to you, madam, the measure of my distress? I could never have foreseen such an unfortunate and unseemly occurrence as this. But I assure you that I was unable to prevent it. For a moment my whole being had passed from my control. I had received a sudden and very terrible shock. In the face of this poor lady I saw the face of one," his voice struggled for firmness, "of one dead long ago and under circumstances of tragedy. My thoughts are ever dwelling upon that other lady, for I loved her very dearly. And to see, in this seclusion in which I live, the very image of her, was too great a shock for me to endure. I had not expected any such reminder of the past. I had not





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imagined that such a chance resemblance as this was possible. Forgive me, madam."

He had addressed the last few words to Gertrude. She lay on the couch, exhausted with pain and excitement, but with a smile on her lips, and looking straight up into the old man's face.

It was almost as though they had an understanding—these two so strangely met.

"There is nothing to forgive," Gertrude said. "I am very sorry——"

The host turned to Roland. "And while we stand talking here," he cried with a sudden change of manner, "this poor child lies in pain of her snake-bite! Come, let us relieve her."

He turned to Gertrude. "I know all about these cases, my child," he said. "Can you bear a little pain now—only a very little, nothing so bad as the pain of a tooth-drawing—in order to save some weeks of pain and inconvenience?"

"Do anything you wish," Gertrude said. There was a strange confidence in her voice, an absolute trust in this man. Roland heard it and wondered.

The host drew a razor from his pocket. "When Ramjee came to me with the news of the accident," he said, "I sent him with the water and brandy, and went to my room for this," he tapped the razor. "I propose to make two or three clean cuts round the wound in order to induce free bleeding. Immediate relief will follow. The pain will be nothing. It is the recognised cure. Would you prefer to do it?" he held out his hand to Roland.

Roland looked at his wife. Then he shook his

head. "Please, if you will," he murmured; "you are very good."

"It's really nothing at all to do," the old man said cheerily, kneeling down by the side of the couch. "There! You felt nothing hardly—did you?"

"Have you done it, sir?" Gertrude asked.

"Two deep cuts," he answered. "Now we will sponge the place."

There was something deft and delicate in his manipulation. There was something very reverent also.

In the light of their host's sad and curious confession, both Roland and Gertrude became aware of the extreme chivalry of all he did.

The atmosphere of the whole room had changed. From the unwonted, disturbing, and alarming, it had changed to quiet friendliness. The young couple felt glad to be there.

In an hour's time Gertrude was infinitely better. A messenger had been sent to Ilfracombe for a carriage and they were awaiting it. The host had said that Gertrude would be quite fit to travel to London in the morning. He gave them a few simple directions as to future treatment, and pronounced her complete recovery within a week.

The Indian servant had by now taken some deck chairs out into the courtyard in front of the house. The sun was sinking, the heat had given place to coolness, the first sweet heralds of evening came in gentle airs.

Once more a picture was focussed on Roland's brain, and one which he and Gertrude always remembered. It had the quality of peace after storm, and evening when a day of stress was done.

In a low, level voice their host said a few parting words.

"My name," he began, "is Mordaunt. For many years of my life I was a soldier in India. We shall never meet again, I suppose, in this world. Perhaps we shall recognise each other as friends of a day in one more fortunate. I do not know if you, my dear sir, and you, madam, who have brought to me memories that are so sweet and bitter, so bitter and so sweet, are at one with me in the Christian and Catholic faith? But if you are you will understand me when I say that '*I believe in the Communion of Saints.*' To me such an asseveration opens new realms of thought to the soul. You will excuse a lonely and pedantic old fellow if he tells you that when he repeats those words he seems to enter within the veil. All the hope of his life, for himself and for others, lies in those words. The Seen and the Unseen, Earth and Heaven are united in a spiritual fellowship. The horizon of one hope is indefinitely enlarged. I trust that if ever death may part you in this world, that will be the constant hope and strength of the survivor—as it is mine. And I beg you to forgive me for speaking thus on high matters on an occasion of this sort. I live always alone in this half-ruined house which has belonged to my forefathers. My tongue is not used to the small talk of chance encounters. And you, my dear"—he turned to Gertrude—"have come to me out of the unknown with the very form and face, aye, and voice also, of one I loved. So you will permit me to have my will in talk during the last few moments that we shall know each other here,

"You are, you have told me, a young bride and groom. I can see in your faces a very strong love is between you. Let an old man advise you that there will come times and occasions when—though your love may seem as strong as ever—you may be tempted to do things which, though you know it not, will loosen and may dissolve that sacred heritage you have. I cannot say more. You will not understand me now. A time may arrive when my words will have meaning for you. Remember always that marriage is the most sacred thing our human life can know."

His voice, which had grown quiet and more quiet, had sunk almost to a whisper. The wonderful eyes looked dreamily at the painted evening sky, which was beginning to glow above the tops of the elms.

Then Gertrude leaned from her chair and put both hands upon one of the old officer's arms. With a hushed voice she began to tell him of Father Grogan's letter, of what Roland was to do, to consecrate his life to do.

Roland heard the words which came from his wife's lips, and his whole heart awoke to reverence and to wonder.

The charity of thought, the purity of expression, the high and tender eloquence, showed him in her a depth of comprehension, a nobility of mind, the flame-like purity of a young matron, which struck him with a great awe.

It seemed as if the vow that they had vowed on Capstone Hill was now welded into the whole fibre of their joint lives, and was ratified in the presence of angels,

Gertrude ceased. Mordaunt took one little white hand in his sinuous brown fingers and lifted it to his lips. His head was bowed over it for several seconds.

There was a silence. Roland broke it.

"We are to call our Society," he said, "the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost."

Mordaunt rose to his feet. He was very tall and slender in the long lights the afternoon. The sagacious knight, Don Quixote de la Mancha, might have looked thus.

The wonderful eyes began to flame and glow.

"Ah!" he cried, "That is the finest name of all. May that complete and mysterious Force be with you all in the great world to which you are going and the great work which you are going to do. *'The Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you.'*"

. . . . They heard the crunching of wheels upon the gravel of the lane outside.

A carriage had arrived from Ilfracombe.

The last they saw of their host was a tall figure leaning against one of the gate posts of the old house. He had given them his blessings, now he waved them a farewell. But it was a dreamy gesture, and he seemed once more to be lost in thought.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day Gertrude was sufficiently recovered to make the journey to London and their new home at Bedford Park.

## BOOK II.

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### CHAPTER I.

MR. JUSTICE SPEKE AND LADY HONORIA. FIVE  
YEARS AFTER ROLAND'S MARRIAGE.

ABOUT five o'clock in the afternoon Lady Honoria Speke sat in her own room taking tea.

Long curtains of silk, the dull green colour of jade, shut out the November afternoon, a fire of small cedar logs glowed, rose-pink and amethyst, in an iron basket.

Lady Honoria was a tall graceful woman, with hair as black as the bog oak of her native Ireland. Her eyes were very large and blue, and rather fretful in expression, often fretful when she imagined that they were merely sad. The mouth, which was the shape of a Greek bow, was rather tired and drooped when, as now, she was alone. Her whole air was listless and bored.

She sat looking at the fire, and now and then stretching out her hand to the little nacre-encrusted table on which the tea stood. Her hands were

covered with rings, but not with the ordinary bands and ovals of diamonds and pearls. She wore rings of dull pewter, in which curious blue-green stones were set, a heavy gold ring that had been found on the finger of a courtesan at Pompeii, on which the words, "AMAVINUS, AMAMUS, AMABIMUS," were engraved, and a ring of worn iron which was studded with orange and violet spinels.

She was a woman who detested the obvious and ordinary, and who loved beautiful things only when they were strange and rare.

Her room—which she would allow no one to call her *boudoir*, and for which she had exhausted herself in the effort to find a new name—reflected her temperament in every way. Up to a certain height the walls were covered with biscuit coloured canvas. Then came a narrow beading of wood painted an old ivory white. Above the walls were washed with faint green, an elusive memory of that transparent copper-green one sometimes sees in sunsets over the fens of Ely or the treacherous sands of the Wash.

All of the pictures on the wall were expensive and rare originals, but they were not such as would commend themselves to ordinary culture and, perhaps, a thoroughly healthy taste.

There was a pen and ink drawing by Beardsley, the picture of a young girl in a large black hat standing by the statue of a satyr in a wood. The delicacy of line was faultless, the harmony of the composition marvellous. But the unhappy talent of the artist had managed to show an evil and smirking sensuality in the young face that made



some people shudder, so soulless and bestial was it—even in its beauty.

There was a "Nocturne" by an artist who was said to surpass Whistler in the painting of diaphanous mists; a portrait of a ballet girl by Jan Van Beers, which in its brilliant impudence and cynical vulgarity struck the refined mind as with a physical blow; and next to it a simple pastoral scene by Algernon Talmage, a thing flawless in its beauty and purity of tone, its breadth and sense of repose. It seemed almost an insult to this picture that it should be hung in such a room as this, and the fact betrayed something freakish and insolent in the mind of the person who had decorated the place.

The carpet of Lady Honoria's room was a brick-red Persian rug, splashed here and there with great gouts of peacock blue. The chairs were all low, and padded in unexpected places—Gillow's last word on such luxuries—hothouse roses stood in copper bowls here and there on little tables, the room was lighted entirely by candles, long white candles in silver holders that had once stood on the altar of a church.

Lady Honoria rose from her low chair in front of the fire and moved towards a little writing table, on which were some letters that must be answered. She looked at one or two, and then put them down. The people who had written to her did not interest her just then. The various esoteric clubs to which she belonged, the eclectic little coteries, the societies for the exploration of bye-ways of culture or superstition (bye-ways that sometimes led to very strange

places indeed)—none of these seemed to have their usual interest or grip.

She had been upon some unusual business this afternoon, visited some folk with other ideals than hers, and with whom she was not in sympathy, and the irritation of such a meeting remained with her. She went to a narrow cupboard of carved oak, a "find" during an exploration of an old house at Ghent, and unlocked it with a key taken from a drawer of her writing table. She took out a long narrow bottle and poured some of the contents into a tiny gilded liqueur glass. The liquid smelt like a tangerine orange and looked like ink. It was Amer Picon, a tonic intoxicant that was very fashionable in Lady Honoria's set just then—deadly stuff enough, a sort of sol-sublimated absinthe, but Verlaine drank it and its effects were revivifying!

Then she found a tiny cigarette made of tea and began to smoke it. This habit, also borrowed from the sex-worn demi-monde of Paris and Vienna, was fashionable just now.

Lady Honoria was not a vicious woman, nor was she a slave to any injudicious habit. But she was always on the look-out for new sensations, careless at the time whither they might lead or what the moral aspect of them was.

She was clever, far cleverer than most of the people by whom she was surrounded. But in her efforts to escape from herself, from certain thoughts and longings that were never very far away, she allowed herself to be led into many follies and extravagances. She was excited and pleased for

a time at each successive distraction. But each palled at length, and, her eagerness fed by failure she would plunge into turbid waters in the search for some new thing.

She called her way of life "expressing her temperament." It was the jargon of her set. But in silent night watches, when thought stalks beyond reason and hideous possibilities become hideous facts, the phrase was no armour against a conscience in unrest and pain.

The daughter of an Irish earl, she had married the brilliant young barrister Basil Speke, attracted by his agate intellect, the strength and directness of his social tact, and the inordinate ambition to succeed which she perceived in him. Young Speke, five and twenty years ago, had been a man of a commanding presence. He was a witty and delightful companion, had to the full that half-mocking deference, that light modern substitute for the chivalry of the middle age, which pleases a clever and imaginative girl of the upper classes, because she discerns in it a somewhat deeper sentiment beneath.

His family was sufficiently good. His income as a rising junior was beginning to be large.

The Earl of Erse was not a representative peer, nor was he a wealthy one. His daughter had made experience of two London seasons under the wing of her aunt, Lady Jane Cruden, who had married Mr. Cruden, the wealthy Liverpool engineer. It was thought a very fairly satisfactory engagement when Honoria accepted Mr. Basil Speke.

In the eyes of all the Erse family the marriage had been well justified. Speke had increased in

eminence and prosperity at the Junior Bar. Against the advice of many of his legal friends he had taken silk. He had been justified in the step. In the first year of his nephew Roland's marriage, he was beginning to be known as one of the leading King's Counsel.

In the fifth year, owing to a sudden mortality among the judges and a fortunate combination of political circumstances, he had been elevated to the bench. It was said everywhere that the appointment was a "job." Nothing like it had been known before. There was a dignified outcry in the columns of the responsible press. But the responsible press had long since ceased to be widely read. It was an era of young men. What in 1905 had been an impossibility became a fact in 1910. The three or four great newspaper syndicates which had created a class of readers who only thought in the head-lines of their favourite halfpenny journals had altered the old balance of affairs. They influenced the voters and so controlled the mass of public opinion. It was the era of quick promotion and young men.

Basil Speke, two months ago, had become Mr. Justice Speke in the Law Reports and Sir Basil Speke in private life.

Lady Honoria dropped her cigarette of tea into a cave of glowing cedar wood when it was half finished. She didn't really like cigarettes made of tea, but to smoke them happened to be the thing in her set, and she was sincere enough to carry on her pose when alone, in the somewhat futile effort to convince herself of its reality.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come," she called. It was part of her personal ritual not to say "Come in."

The door opened and her husband entered.

He was a man of medium height, dressed in a lounge suit of dark grey tweed. His face was clean shaved. The keen and arduous life he had led had made gashes in his cheeks, lines which seemed oddly at variance with the rather full and youthful mouth. He was slim, and as he came into the room did not in the least suggest the rather terrible figure a judge has in the popular imagination.

Yet during the last few weeks many of the great hawk-faced leaders of the bar, and many a miserable wrongdoer between two warders, had realised the force of this brain hidden behind a curious but not instantly compelling mask. Perhaps there is a virtue in a horse-hair frame to a face; perhaps ermine and a high seat have influence. Who can tell! Nevertheless, Mr. Justice Speke was already beginning to falsify the predictions of the envious, and the psychologist alone could have said that this was due to no accident of costume or environment.

The Judge came into the room rather quickly.

He had a halfpenny evening paper in his hand. Lady Honoria saw that there was an acid smile flickering in the corners of his full lips. He sat down on an ottoman by the fire.

"I have been trying a West End palmistry case," he began in a quiet and level voice. "If you ever read anything but the *Occult Review* you would have seen the reports of it. An impudent

charlatan, calling herself *Madame Paula*, who has had a place in Bond Street, has been prosecuted by the Commissioner of Police in a sudden access of zeal. The case has been wasting the time of the court for two days. Why on earth these people shouldn't be allowed to practise on the credulity of fools, I don't know. Still, I didn't make the law which has apprehended them. You will be interested to know that a shrewd young gentleman who was retained for the defence read out a list of what he called 'celebrated Society ladies' who had consulted this creature—a clever enough woman I must say, judging by her demeanour in the dock. The last name on the list was your name. There was, of course, what this rag"—he tapped the newspaper impatiently—"calls a sensation in court. I will leave the paper for you to read and reflect on. You will find that though you have very nearly succeeded in making a fool of me, you have quite succeeded in making a fool of yourself. Really, Honoria, I should have thought you were too clever a woman to have done anything of the sort. Of course it doesn't matter very much. The Duchess of Romney is in the same box and several other well-known women. And again, no one has time to remember anything for more than three days. Still, I do ask you to be more careful."

"How very unfortunate," she said. "Everybody went, so, of course, I went too. And really the woman did tell me some extraordinary things. I couldn't have foreseen the ridiculous police prosecution, could I?"

"You are very adaptable, Honoria," he said, "and if we had begun to live a rational life in the first instance, I daresay we should have been quite happy people. As it is, we manage to make the best of things. You have your interests—such as they are—and I have my work—such as it is."

There was a silence in the warm and luxurious room.

The soft light of the candles played upon two distinguished and two very tired faces. For a moment there was a hunger in the eyes of this celebrated man and woman.

A hunger for what?—they were both acquainted with people who could have told them, both were afraid to search the depths of their own souls and find out the truth for themselves.

A log of cedar, half eaten through by the fire, fell with a crash and burst into flame. Husband and wife saw each other clearly in the sudden illumination.

Lady Honoria got up and walked over to where the Judge sat.

"I am awfully sorry, dear," she said. "But really one does these things to kill the time."

"I know," he answered. Then there was another silence.

"It is a very good thing," he resumed at length, with a flash of that sardonic humour which had made him feared. "It is an excellent thing that Time soon kills people who are always trying to kill him. I suppose you have never thought of turning your activities and your considerable talents to doing some good? It would look becoming

in a judge's wife, if there is no other reason. A new painter has been discovered, Madame Paula has been found out, you have invented a fresh card game. But the poor still stand where they did."

She sat down again with a weary sigh. "Don't mock me," she said. "The time has gone by for either you or me to alter our way of life. We have been too busy getting on in the world all these years. We haven't let anything stand in the way of that."

"Let's change the subject," the judge answered. "This morning I had a most unpleasant letter from the Dean of St. Boniface about Patrick."

Lady Honoria flushed uneasily.

"The man is a pedant and a fool," she said hastily. "I summed him up during Commemoration Week. He's not fit to be Dean of a college. He has no sympathy with the ideals and pursuits of young men. If you had sent Pat to Christ Church as I wanted you to, you would have saved both of us no end of worry and misery. What does the man write about now?"

Sir Basil took a letter from his pocket-book.

"There is no need to read the whole of the epistle," he said drily, "and the man writes English as if he were writing in Greek character, while the size of his words reminds one of those misdirected geniuses who can write the Book of Genesis upon the back of a postage stamp. I'll give you a sentence here and there:—

"... the college authorities really see no other course but that of rustication open to them, in the event of your



son continuing as he has begun. It is with great pain that I write this letter, but it is my duty to do so. Mr Speke does no work, nor does he take any healthy part in any of the college athletic clubs. He has been proctorised several times for being found in hotel bars during the evening, and few theatrical companies come to the theatre here in which he does not seem to have female friends, whom he is constantly entertaining in a more or less public manner. He has lately been implicated in a gambling affair which has resulted in the ruin of a young scholar—and a very promising man—of this college, who has lost everything in the way of future prospects owing to roulette. I need hardly tell an old Boniface man that the traditions of the college have always been on the side of considerable freedom for young men of good family and prospects. It is not our policy here to discourage a certain amount of rational luxury, to put it frankly. Rich people send their sons here and wish them to live as they may expect to live when they go down—of course, within reasonable limits. But a man *must* live in a gentlemanly way—he must do *something*. Mr. Speke is wasting his whole life here in sordid and unworthy amusements; to put it as plainly as possible, in the pursuit of lower class young women, in gambling, and in over indulgence in drink. This cannot continue, and I shall be glad to have your views on the subject."

While Sir Basil was reading the letter with satirical emphasis, Lady Honoria gazed moodily into the fire. Her eyes began to brim with angry and hopeless tears.

"Where does he get his horrid low tastes from!" she cried. "Not from you or from me!"

"Certainly I never remember running after barmaids at any time in my career," the judge said with a bitter sneer.

The tone of his voice cut like a whip. It seemed to rouse the motherhood in her.

"Ah, no," she said, with a quick look at him. "Neither your failings, nor your virtues, have been amatory ones."

His lips hardened. "What do you mean, Honoria?" he said, in the voice of the lawyer, the hard vibrant voice of the courts.

"Oh, you know very well!" she said. "There is no need for any explanation between us. We agreed when we were married what sort of life we were to lead together. You didn't want a large family to spoil your career when it was beginning, and now what have I got? You've got your work and all the excitement of that. I've got just my amusements and the daily misery of seeing our poor wretched boy going to the Devil! And you tell me to go and work among the poor! Good God, to work among the poor!"

She began to laugh, a laugh so hollow, mirthless, and cold that the man who had been present at so many tragedies and remained untouched, began to tremble. He recognised the note, but with an essential difference in the recognition now. It had come into his own life, that was all.

"If we had had a family, do you think they would all have been like Patrick?" she cried. "If I had daughters and sons growing up round me like Roland's wife . . ."

"What of Roland's wife?" he said wearily.

"I've been there to-day," she answered. "I drove down after an early lunch."

"I see," he answered kindly. "Honoria, you're all nerves. You've been upset by an unaccustomed spectacle—a middle-class Paradise in active opera-

tion! Now, my dear, sit down and smoke a cigarette with me and tell me all about it. What on earth is the use of scenes? Can they alter anything? And would you really alter any of the conditions of your life if you could? I very much doubt it. Let's make the best of the very considerable benefits we *do* enjoy. As for Pat, well I've got a plan which will kill or cure that young gentleman! By the time I retire and go to the Upper House, I don't doubt that he'll be a man fit to succeed to the title. I'm going to be rough with him, Honoria! A little emotion does you good! You are looking wonderful to-night! You are just the girl you were on the day we were married in the little church at Erse!"

He sat down close beside her and took her hand in his.

The genuine admiration in his voice, the magnetism of his whole manner, soothed and quieted his wife. Her outburst had been very real. For a moment her womanhood had spoken from beneath the veneer of an artificial and decadent life.

"A mother is a mother still,  
The holiest thing alive."

So Coleridge sang the Truth in graceful words. And in the heart of this brilliant woman of the world the starved instinct still lay dormant. Her cry of reproach to him had been very bitter.

But the passion of the moment rose like a sudden flame and sank again. The kindly words of the strong man she loved still, and who loved her in his way and had always been kind to her, quelled

the flame. She surrendered herself to a moment of confidential intimacy, a luxury of companionship which was a rarity to both of them in the crowded and exigent life they led.

"I thought I would drive down to Bedford Park and see Gertrude Speke," Lady Honoria began. "I wanted to take the children some toys and some fruit—they are always so grateful for anything of the sort, don't you know. And, besides, Emily Verschmidt wanted me to skate at Prince's with her and I wanted to be out of the way. I hate Prince's. So I drove down. Roland was away, of course, at his office, but Gertrude was in and all the children. Five of them, Basil!"

"How terrible!" the judge answered, with genuine commiseration in his voice. "His salary at this precious Confraternity can't be more than five hundred a year. Five little brats ranging from one year old to five—phew! And quite a poky little house, of course?"

"Well, no; the house is a fair size. Rents are cheap down there, you know. It's where the better class of actor lives, and journalists and publishers; interesting people in a way. The house has a roof of red tiles and odd little gables. It's what is called 'artistic,' I believe, by the local tradesmen. The children have a huge garret at the top of the house to play in. Roland's study—she showed 't to me—is downstairs. Do you know, Basil, I believe it's all nonsense what Dr. Ninian Newton goes about telling everyone about losing one's figure if one has a family! Gertrude was looking in splendid health and her figure is perfect still. All these

children seem to have done her *good*! They really are such dear little things. Bernard, the eldest, is a little laughing thing exactly like one of Donatelli's angels. He wears little holland knickerbockers and a holland blouse, and he sat on my lap and kept laughing and kissing me . . ."

Her voice failed for a moment. Something seemed to stab the heart of the man who sat by her. It was a physical sensation. He pressed her hand. She went on with her story.

"They were *delighted* with the toys, and Gertrude was so pleased with some gowns and things I took her. She says she will alter them and make them look like new. They are quite poor, you know. Roland has five hundred and fifty from his office and a hundred of his own. His life is heavily insured, and every year they put away a hundred pounds for the two boys' education. They are entered at Winchester. Gertrude manages with two servants, a little nursemaid, who looks more like a rag-doll than I should have thought it possible for a human being to look, and a general servant. She seems in the highest spirits though, simply bubbling over with them. Before I went, Roland came home, bringing a friend with him. He had left the office early. He seemed awfully glad to see me. I asked him to bring Gertrude to-night, but she wouldn't leave the babies. So Roland is coming without her, and he's bringing his friend instead."

"Who was the friend?"

"Oh, quite a discovery, Basil," she went on with increasing vivacity. "A charming person.

Angus Evan Tulloch, the writer. Of course, I knew his name, just as one knows about the Monument, but I'd never read anything he had written. Of course, he belongs to quite another period, the Dickens and Wilkie Collins period. I suppose we should laugh at what he does now."

"I know all about him," Sir Basil said. "There are a good many people who wouldn't laugh at him—outside your delightful set, Honoria, of course. He goes away for *The Times* when there is anything very special, his weekly causerie in *The Umpire* is quite the last thing of its kind in London. It's solid and well-informed and full of ripe experience. Really, when the whole press is full of the facile impertinences of your epicene young friends, Honoria, the writing of this man is a God-send."

"Well, he's promised to come with Roland to-night, and you can talk to him. Such a fine man. Six feet one, clean shaved, snow-white hair and a mouth that is always twitching with some really funny story or idea. He's a personality. Even in a crowd like there will be to-night he will be *most* effective. He told me some splendid stories. He has known everyone. He helped Disraeli out of the House of Parliament once when he'd had so much to drink—Disraeli, I mean—that he could hardly walk. And when Cardinal Newman was failing at Birmingham he went down to interview him on some political question, and they disagreed, and the poor old Cardinal grew so cross that he threw his bowl of bread and milk at him! He told me a delightful tale about the poor old Bishop of Lincoln. He'd put his portmanteau in the

baggage room of one of the big stations, Paddington, I think. You know there is a long counter, and to prevent confusion they have letters up above, 'A to E,' 'F to K,' and so on, just as they do at Mudie's. When the poor old man went back for his bag he stood at the wrong place at the counter—he's very short-sighted. 'What name?' the porter asked. 'Bishop of Lincoln,' the Bishop answered. 'Go to L,' said the porter! The poor Bishop was terribly shocked, and sent five pounds to the Railway Mission the next day!"

The wrinkles in the judge's face became accentuated and he chuckled with delight. "I shall make a point of talking to your friend this evening," he said.

"You won't mind dining in your study?" she asked. "Of course, all the downstairs rooms are in the hands of Gunter's people. I was just going to have some soup here before I dress."

"Then, if I may, dear, I will have something here with you. Some soup and chicken would do. Suppose I ring and order it."

Lady Honoria's maid answered the summons, and in a short time the simple meal was brought.

Sir Basil never drank anything but hot water, and dyspepsia had robbed the table of any pleasures it might have had for him. In the middle of the luxury in which he lived, his own tastes were those of an anchorite. He smoked an occasional cigarette, and now and then took a morning ride on the tan in the Park for the sake of his liver. The swindler he would send to prison on the morrow would hardly live more simply than his judge.

The more material joys of existence had little part in this man's life. He had lived to win a high place in the world, and he had done so at an early age. And in the midst of the pomp and circumstance in which he lived, with the prospect of still greater things before him, Sir Basil Speke was just beginning to wonder if his achievements were worth the trouble after all.

As he sipped his hot water and crumbled his toast he looked round the rich room, filled with delicate apricot light, at the beautiful woman who sat near him, and a sudden contrast came to his mind's eye, a picture conjured up by his wife's words, a picture of the child-ridden house at Bedford Park, the house that "is called 'artistic' by local tradesmen."

He was not a man who allowed himself either the pleasures or the perils of imagination. He thought imagination, like prayer, a dangerous drug that unsettled the mind. Almost as soon as the vision came to him, he asserted his mind's control and banished it. It was this warm and enervating room—how could women live so softly?—this extreme and harmonious calculation of luxury, that had influenced him for a moment. No wonder his wife was always immersed in some new doctrine or phase of frothy fashionable thought! Who wouldn't be, living like this?

Thus ran his thoughts.

But he saw that Lady Honoria was pleased at his presence and had quite recovered herself. He was naturally a very kindly man, and he began to make the most of this quiet hour together with her



which was such an unusual occurrence. She, at any rate, should have the best of the hour—he had always given her the best of everything for twenty years—except perhaps of one thing.

"Tell me who you've got coming, dear," he said, "And what you are going to do to amuse them?"

"Well," she answered, "of course this is the first big crowd we've had since you got your judgeship. It's a sort of official reception, don't you know. But you can slip away after you've been on show for an hour, if you want to. The Duke will come about half-past ten and stay for twenty minutes. After that it doesn't matter. Oh, everyone is coming. People one really *would* like to have, and people one just asks on an occasion of this sort, mere society people."

"Are all your crew of oddities coming?"

"I wish you were a little more interested in modern movements, Basil," she answered. "Yes, my oddities, as you call them, are all coming. For some reason or other that I don't pretend to understand, people of real genius seem to like to be at parties where there are a lot of smart people. I shouldn't have asked any of my real friends on a purely official and necessary occasion like this, if I didn't know that they would be offended if I didn't. Though what the *real* aristocracy, the aristocracy of *intellect*, can see in the aristocracy of the Blue Book I never could understand."

"I can very well," he replied. "Well, go on, dear."

"I've got Spaggetti singing for the general crowd.

She's not singing this week at opera, and I've got her for fifty guineas by a little judicious flattery. And for the more interesting people, I've arranged with Emily Verschmidt that she will recite Verlaine's '*Colloque Sentimental*' to an accompaniment of muted harps under the direction of Humphrey England. You know he is the boy all London is raving about. He plays all sorts of strange instruments and simply makes them *speak*. He has been studying the Japanese fiddle. It only has one string. Yet a week ago, at the Tyringham's, he played for a whole hour, interpreting Petrarch's single phrase '*Sono l'Amore, difida di me.*'"

"How insufferably dull! What a stupendous waste of time!"

"Oh, you don't understand, Basil. It's no use explaining subtle beauties to you. You see everything in the cold dry, coarse light of the courts. You know nothing of the artistic life."

"Except where it often leads a man, Honoria. We learn strange lessons in those courts sometimes. I shall not easily forget the sight of a leader in the world of 'art,' which you speak of so reverently, as he stood in the dock and the judge was sentencing him. It was many years ago now, before your time, but I shall not easily forget the protruding eyes and the face the colour of a brick. Only the year before the man had been a guest at the table of the judge who sent him to prison."

"Oh, don't strike such a harsh note," she said with a little shudder. "It is astonishing how, in England, art must be obvious and stodgy before people think it's respectable. The ordinary English

mind thinks that anything in art that it can't understand is devilish!"

The judge laughed at her vehemence. These questions seemed to fill his wife's life. She could actually get excited over them! They seemed so immeasurably trivial to him. Yet he knew that she was clever. How was it that nothing more worth doing interested her?

He looked at the eager and still lovely face with the balanced glance of critical judgment, the look he cast upon the people he was to sway or influence in his profession. Again he asked himself the question, and found no answer to it. Yet had his eyes been opened, those mental eyes which all the world knew were so incomparably keen, he would have found the answer in a flash.

His nephew Roland could have told him.

The answer was in the room even.

He had finished his frugal meal and stood with his back to the fire looking round the room.

"Hullo!" he said, pointing to the corner of one wall, "that's new, isn't it? I don't remember seeing that before."

She followed his glance. Upon a bracket an Indian idol squatted. Its face wore an indolent and cunning smile, there was something indescribably sinister in the droop of the eyelids. And above this evil thing hung a crucifix carved in ivory.

"Ah, yes," she answered eagerly. "That was Emily Verschmidt's idea. Isn't it symbolic? Buddha and Christ, the two idols of the East and the West, both superficially hideous, and both with an inner beauty!"

Sir Basil did not answer. Christianity meant no more to him than an ordered system for the government of states. But there was yet something in his wife's careless reference that gave him a shock. To use the crucifix as an item of decoration in order to emphasise a bizarre idea gave him a shock.

Husband and wife were both blind. Human and natural love had not caught them and bound them together. There were secrets in their mutual life which Father Grogan was telling the world were hideous secrets. And not knowing the wonder of human love, unblemished, unrestrained, how could either know or even faintly understand the Wonder of that Love which is both human and Divine?

All that Sir Basil said was: "I don't suppose that juxtaposition would please some of your friends among the clergy, though the Cross has a higher place than Buddha. I suppose, by the way, you've got a big contingent of parsons coming to-night?"

"Oh, yes. Two Bishops and Monsignor Ffolliott from Westminster Cathedral—he's the Cardinal's secretary, you know. Then Canon Escott is coming, and Father Grogan."

"Roland will be in a congenial atmosphere then. Do you know, Honoria, that our worthy nephew has become a real force in the land? I meant to tell you before we dined, but we talked of something else. This League or Confraternity, or whatever they call it, has caught on tremendously during the past two years. It was received with peals of

laughter at first, of course. But Sir Michael Manichoe got influential people to join, a man with several millions can always do that sort of thing, and the thing began to grow. It was a stroke of genius to couple the name of the Holy Ghost with the thing. It is astonishing what an enormous proportion of English men and women are chained to the old superstitions still. Half the cranks in the country belong now! The Bishops have waited until they have seen that the thing was a success, and now they are coming in too. Half the crack-brained parsons in Crockford are preaching 'be fruitful and multiply!' And now comes the cleverness of the whole thing. The astute folk at the head of it, Manichoe, Childe, and Co., floated it successfully as a religious movement—and anyone with sufficient impudence could revive cow-worship and make it succeed in this enlightened land—and *now* they're beginning to work the political gag as well. When they've thoroughly welded politics and religion, as they are in a fair way to do, then they will really become a power. We shall see Parliamentary candidates elected for the size of their families before long! Sir Arthur Childe has begun to frighten the people about the fall in population—and I allow it is big—and the whole gang are working up a kind of frothy sentimental patriotism in the silly public mind. Add female religious hysteria to this, and goodness knows where it will end. They are putting our worthy nephew into Parliament! He's standing for a northern division on a cry that will exactly appeal to the class of voters he's trying for. 'Have as

many children as you please, and make the State pay for them,' is what it comes to in effect. For example, a man and his wife pay just the same income tax on their joint incomes whether they have no children or a dozen. A home with no children pays no heavier rates than one with a thriving family. Roland, my dear Honoria, is going to change all this. Under the protection of the 'Holy Ghost,' and with the backing of that renegade Jew Manichoe he is going to become the apostle of the idle, shiftless, careless poor, and shout 'BREED! and we do the rest!'"

Lady Honoria laughed. "I can see that Roland will become quite a swell," she said. "But why are you so bitter about it? We have always liked Roland and been friends with him, even when he did so badly for himself over his marriage—Adelaide Tyringham was dying for him."

"I'm bitter because I am constantly confronted with successful humbug. As for Roland, I didn't think the lad had it in him. I'm not angry with him, Heaven forbid! He will be one of the national heroes some day—like Dan Leno or General Booth—one of the people a man in my position has to meet and be civil to."

"But, Basil, I'm sure he is sincere. And he only gets £500 a year."

"Which would be doubled to-morrow if he wanted it. He is well advised to stay poor at present. As for sincerity—what is it? A man can hypnotise himself into believing in anything, while he is making a success of it. I have seen dozens of hard-working, honest, respectable burglars sentenced to penal

servitude with the utmost suavity and goodwill on both sides; men who were good fathers and husbands, with no vices whatever—except, of course, their little professional failing. No doubt these people looked upon their trade with pride and not the slightest misgiving. They took the risk of imprisonment just as the miner takes the risk of fire-damp. It's all a question of environment. Surrounded by the sort of people who surround Roland, anyone would believe in this mad propaganda. Look at the names they've got! Don't you remember in 'Vanity Fair' how well Thackeray puts it? Sir Pit and Lady Jane Crawley are asked to a party at that notorious old blackguard's, Lord Steyne. Both of them are thoroughly respectable and religious people. 'Where we see such people as the Bishop of Ealing and his wife,' Sir Pit says, or words to that effect, 'you may be sure, Jane, that *you and I* can't be far wrong!'"

"Well, all the 'gang,' as you call them, are coming to-night, together with plenty of other people on whom you could, no doubt, exercise your wit for hours. Still *you* needn't be bored. You can talk to Angus Evan Tulloch, and dodge Father Grogan and Sir Arthur Childe."

"On the contrary, both these two are extremely interesting men to talk to, both markedly able. I like them, though I differentiate between their absurd superstitions and poses and the men themselves. Grogan is a common law leader spoilt in a priest. But if you *do* want to do me a kindness, Honoria, keep that man Escott away from me. I draw the line somewhere."

"There!" she answered with a sort of triumph, "that only shows how utterly you misplace people and how wrong you are in your estimate of them. Canon Escott is a *persona grata* at court. He will have the next bishopric; he is the most eloquent preacher in the Church. Now, Mr. Grogan is all very well. He's a popular name, no doubt, but he's not anybody *really*. Not in society, I mean. He will never become a bishop."

"No, unless the Church is disestablished. Such a man might be Primate then. Escott is all you say. I have heard him preach myself in St. Paul's. I've seen dry old K.C.'s with tears in their eyes at his eloquence. It is wonderful. His English is perfect, he has the voice of a silver bull—not bell, you'll observe. But for all that, the man is a humbug. There is something radically wrong about him. What, I don't know, and am not interested to know. But all the world will know before very long."

"I never heard even you in a more cynical mood than you are to-night."

"I shouldn't call you an absolute idealist, Honoria, except about the fad of the moment. But you have been in the pure atmosphere of Bedford Park and seen the happy and prolific young matron *chez elle*. No doubt I jar. Well, I will go and dress. I shall slip away after half-past eleven. I must sit up till two or three with my notes. I have a judgment to give in the morning."

"Very well. There is going to be a second supper, just for a few friends, when most of the crowd have gone. But they won't be people who will interest you."



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The judge was turning away, when, moved by some unwonted impulse, his wife came up to him suddenly. She put her arm round his neck and kissed him.

"Do your best for poor Patrick," she said.

He went away to his dressing-room, which opened out of his study.

For some time he sat alone before the fire.

There was no one to see the agony upon the face of the proud, wishful and worldly man. His cynicism was all gone now. Nothing lingered round his lips but pure pain. There was nothing in his eyes but despair.

For to this all men must come when the son of their loins walks in dark paths and makes friends with sin. And his keen, powerful brain had now no illusions about his heir. He had been a psychologist and analyst all his life ; he sat in ermine and scarlet because he was just that. So he had no illusions about his son. He knew him for what he was, a degenerate and foul-minded fellow, whose very weakness became strength when he linked arms with the evil things of the world.

Oh, for another son!—a second hope of perpetuating the name he had worn, a clean and worthy son!

Oh, for a daughter, a good and gracious girl, who would love him . . . twine round him . . . Too late! Too late for ever too late. He had chosen to restrict the purposes of God. God's inexorable law was grinding him.

Too late!

His valet came into the room.

The judge noticed that in his buttonhole the man wore a tiny black disc. It was almost indistinguishable to anyone who was not looking at it.

Sir Basil pulled himself together. No one, not even his wife, had ever seen his moments of agony. The valet was not to see them, and the judge was not aware of the host of silent and pitying witnesses who saw. He did not believe in the Communion of Saints.

"Well, Collins," he said. "Have you been decorated by a foreign government, or are you a Rechabite, or some sort of esoteric teetotaller? What's that thing you're wearing in your coat?"

The valet was a married man. "It's the badge of the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost, m'lord," he answered: it was his pride to give his master his judicial title.

The judge turned on the man with a livid face. It was the first time he had done such a thing.

"Go and wear it in hell!" he cried in a fury of passion. "Leave the room, and never come into my presence again wearing such a thing. I don't have you here to wait on me in fancy dress!"

\* \* \* \* \*

When the man came back, pale and trembling, his master apologised to him. It was characteristic of Sir Basil that he was not in the least embarrassed.

"I am sorry, Collins," he said, "but I have had a trying day and my nerves are a little upset. I did not mean to speak roughly to you, and it was wrong of me to do so. By all means be a Merry Andrew if you wish!"

## CHAPTER II.

GROUPS AT THE JUDGE'S PARTY. SMART PEOPLE,  
DECADENT PEOPLE, AND PEOPLE WITH A  
PURPOSE.

THE great people had gone. The Duke had driven home through the keen frosty night to his palace. The judges, and generals, bishops, and promising young members of the Government, aged sixty or so, were on their way home to bed.

In fact, Lady Honoria, as she went round the rooms, congratulated herself that nearly all those official friends she had been constrained to ask to this first large party after her husband's appointment, had left. "Really interesting people" remained, though even now there was a large sprinkling of celebrities who did not owe their fame to the fashion or fad of the moment.

The judge's wife moved among her guests with a radiant face. Her beautiful eyes glowed with happiness and interest. She had not a care in the world, it seemed. She wore a gown of green satin, embroidered with grey beads and black diamonds, and the train of her dress was of grey, lined with shimmering silver tissue. Save perhaps for her

friend, Mrs. Emily Verschmidt, there was no more beautiful woman in the rooms, and many fair faces graced them on this night.

Canon Escott, the great preacher, a tall portly man, with the head and clean-shaved face of a Roman emperor, watched Lady Honoria, as she marshalled her friends for an entertainment that was to take place in another room. By his side Emil Verschmidt, the millionaire, was standing. Verschmidt was a slim, withered little man, with a face like a monkey, save for the fact that his semitic blood gave a certain dignity even to his ugliness; the Semitic and Simian types rarely mingling in human, and never in animal life.

He wore black bone sleeve-links and studs, and a turned-down collar like a Swiss waiter. A mean, keen little man in short, but one to whom princes and politicians came in times of stress.

No one knew what Mr. Emil Verschmidt was worth. Everyone knew that the financial house of Verschmidt and Schmölder was a real power in European affairs.

The little monkey-faced man might have been sixty years old. But neither age nor youth had written information upon the shrivelled mask. He seemed born as he was. One could not imagine a change in him.

Canon Escott watched Lady Honoria's progress, and turned to the millionaire.

"What a beautiful woman our hostess is," he said in the powerful silver-toned voice that thrilled vast multitudes in the Abbey or in St. Paul's. "Perfect grace, is there not? Of all the women

here to-night I have seen hardly anyone so lovely. What a fortunate couple Sir Basil and his wife are, Mr. Verschmidt! As we middle-aged people go, they are young. The husband has already achieved almost the highest position England has to offer to men of character and talent. The wife is well-born and beautiful; they have a son, who will perpetuate their name," he sighed, as if the spectacle of so much well-being contrasted with his own lot.

Yet Canon Escott was the most eloquent and popular emotional preacher of the day. He had written a "Life of Christ," over which the uneducated wept and which had sold in many editions. Speculative journalists had long said that he would be the next bishop—though for some unaccountable reason, perhaps his indefinite political attitude, successive ministries had passed him by.

The Jew looked up quickly at Canon Escott's sigh. "Very beautiful," he said, "and very fortunate."

There was something lacking in his concurrence, and in a moment the quick-witted clergyman realised why.

Lady Honoria passed, talking eagerly to her great friend, Mrs. Verschmidt. The financier's eyes were fixed upon his own wife. Canon Escott saw with a somewhat cynical amusement the almost humble and dog-like adoration that displaced the usual cool and rather sinister scrutiny.

All sorts of stories were told of the millionaire and his young and beautiful wife. Emily Wilson had sold herself, her talent, and her beauty. That, of course, was obvious. Many men envied Mr.

Verschmidt what he had been able to buy. With the hard knowledge of experience, everybody wondered what the end of it would be. Everybody expected a delightful scandal, though as yet they had not been gratified. But it was sure to come, people said. It was well known that Mrs. Verschmidt lived a life in which her husband had little or no part. The bitter and envious moralists among the middle-class always spoke of her and her friends as champagne corks floating in cess-pools. Among her own set it was recognised that Emily Verschmidt was a leader in everything that was new, outré, and daring.

"A beautiful pair, Mr. Verschmidt," said the clergyman with unction. "How they complement one another! They are regnant, two queens! 'O dea certe' is what every man must say when he meets either of those two!"

The florid compliments evidently pleased the little man. He grinned with pleasure.

"I see the time has come for the recitation," he said. "My wife is to recite a new translation of Verlaine's poem, '*Colloque Sentimental*,' to the accompaniment of muted harps. It is a new idea. Shall we go and find a place?"

They moved away together and joined the crowd of people who were pouring into another room.

The whole house was alive with colour and perfume, with the sounds of laughter and talk. The great rooms were filled with flowers. Jewels gleamed and shone in the apricot light, the black coats of the men gave tone and value to the whole picture, providing that so necessary touch of sombreness

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without which proportion is lost. In Lady Honoria's set, preoccupied as they were with material and visible things, the delicate refinements of life, the proposal, recently made, that men should wear coloured evening coats was received with a storm of indignation. People spent several weeks, and an enormous amount of earnestness, in preaching the tone-values of black, the *absolute necessity* of black—wasting enough force and energy on the propaganda to found a hospital or endow an almshouse.

A small stage had been erected at one end of the room, into which the guests were pouring, a stage draped in dark grey curtains. A row of footlights screened by glass tinged a greenish-grey, threw an odd light upon the hangings.

When the people were seated and standing at the back of the room, the harps began to play very softly.

Dr. Ninian Newton, the fashionable ladies' physician, who was sitting next to Lady Honoria, purred with pleasure.

"Wonderful!" he whispered. "The very ghosts of harps, heard in a place of shadows, profoundly shaded from tempest and from sun!"

His mistress gave him a quick glance of thanks. "I knew you would feel it, doctor," she whispered, in answer. "You understand."

The doctor purred again. He did indeed understand the jargon of the hour. It was his business to understand it. He would not have attained his somewhat questionable eminence with a certain section of society women if he had not understood and made use of his knowledge.

The judge, who was standing by the door of the room talking to Angus Evan Tulloch, smiled. "Spooks and spectres, Mr. Tulloch," he said with a sneer.

"Ghosts and visions!" answered the veteran, his massive, clean-shaved face intent and thoughtful over a new problem in foolishness, as he considered it. Many people glanced at the gigantic old man with the white hair and twinkling eyes. Fortunately none of them could measure the watchful contempt that was beginning to pour in upon an honest and able soul who had seen but little of modern decadent vagaries.

The harps thrilled and sobbed in a wail of welcome, and the audience saw that the beautiful Mrs. Verschmidt was suddenly come upon the stage. She was dressed in some diaphanous and colourless material, her face and hands were artificially whitened; in the wan light from the footlights she looked unearthly and unreal, though lovely still.

"A beautiful spirit come back to visit the world! The dead Alcestis!" Canon Escott murmured to Mr. Verschmidt.

The little man moved uneasily and shuddered. His face was pale and unhappy.

The harps continued their monotonous and muted music. The melody they played was like a wind in late autumn when the fields are bare and winter is at hand. It was mournful and had an undercurrent of hopelessness, absolute hopelessness, that was suggested with great skill by the composer.

The misty figure on the stage swayed a little



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and began to grow more and more misty. Sheets of gauze were falling between it and the spectators and gave it the illusion of fading away.

The people were quite silent.

Suddenly there was a sharp noise which sounded like a cry strangled into a cough. The lights had been put out in the room and no one could quite say from whence it came. Everyone recognised the note of hysteria.

Canon Escott alone knew that the harsh, unnerving sound had proceeded from Mr. Verschmidt. But he kept his information to himself.

Certainly most of the people in the room were becoming influenced, half hypnotised, by the monotonous melody. A few minds kept alert and unconvinced. The Judge, Angus Evan Tulloch, Roland Speke, who sat with Father Grogan and Sir Arthur Childe, Dr. Ella Low, the woman and woman's doctor, these were uninfluenced. They were a small minority.

A thin pencil of greenish light shot out from the side of the stage and fell upon Mrs. Verschmidt's face. For the first time the audience were able to see her make-up in detail. It was a marvellous piece of work. The beauty remained, but it was rendered tomb-like. The wax-yellow of the face savoured of death, the lids of the eyes were tinged with purple.

Clarkson had been there to paint the woman's face; the art of the thing was consummate. It was a piece of the brutal and soulless realism of the day, a realism that went hand in hand with the wildest credulity and superstition—a true and

significant note of a day that could believe in a fortune-telling harlot in a Bond Street flat, but *dare* not believe in God.

The music gave a sudden shiver. In a thin hopeless voice that seemed as if it came from a great distance, such a voice as Edgar Poe describes in his terrible "Case of M. Waldemar," Mrs. Verschmidt began to recite.

"Into the lonely park, all frozen fast,  
Awhile ago there were two forms who passed."

She paused. All the time she had been speaking the mute sobbing of the harps had continued. It went on now without a break, but the cessation of the human voice gave the sorrowful music of the strings a new emphasis.

"Lo, are their lips fallen and their eyes dead,  
Hardly a man shall hear the words they said.

Into the lonely park, all frozen fast,  
There came two shadows who recall the past.

'Dost thou remember our old ecstasy?—

'Wherefore should I possess that memory?—"

'Doth thine heart beat at my sole name alway?  
Still dost thou see my soul in visions?—'Nay!'

'They were fair days of joy unspeakable,  
Whereon our lips were joined?—'I cannot tell.'—

'Were not the heavens blue, was not hope high?—

'Hope has fled vanquished down the darkling sky.'

So through the barren oats they wandered,  
And the night only heard the words they said."

The voice ended. The gauze screens began to fall thickly, the light to become more spectral and

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wan. The figure faded away. In a few seconds all was darkness.

The harps still went on with the hopeless and monotonous melody, which was like the drone of bees in the silent room, where the people sat without a sound.

Then, with the precision and suddenness of a pistol shot, in the middle of a bar, the melody, which had been hypnotising the audience for twenty minutes and had woven itself in their brains, was cut off. Many of the people did not know that it had stopped. They heard it still.

The lights were turned up.

The guests came out of the room quietly. They were not able immediately to shake off the influence of what they had seen.

But as they came out into the large panelled hall, built in imitation of the hall of Erse Castle in Ireland, two wide open doors and waiting footmen showed that supper was ready. The vista of innumerable little tables, set in artificial groves and alcoves of orange trees and palms, banished the morbid and artificial melancholy. They had had their sensation, extracted another experience from the flying hours—here was still one more! Supper! Champagne to reanimate flagging spirits, bisque to warm the blood.

As the guests entered a small band of piano, violin, and 'cello began to play light music of Donizetti.

Lady Honoria and Emily Verschmidt prided themselves on being psychological artists. They left no detail to chance. Everything was carefully

thought out, and the precise effect this or that event would have calculated to infinite powers.

The sudden burst of talk, laughter, and discussion was almost rowdy. It drowned the gay lilt of music.

The people began to sort themselves out into parties of five or four, each at a separate table.

The Judge still remained with Angus Evan Tulloch. He saw his nephew pass by, talking to Dr. Ella Low.

"Come along, Roland," he said, in a high good humour which the contemplation of modern follies always induced in him. "Come along, Doctor, you two and Mr. Tulloch and myself will make a four."

They sat down laughing and talking together. The five years of Roland's married life had altered him. The pleasant, healthy face was pleasant and healthy still. But it had lost some of the contours of youth and gained in power. It was now moulded and set. His life, occupied as it was by one absorbing purpose, had given him personality and force. He was a man to be remarked anywhere.

Dr. Low was a woman of forty perhaps. She was tall, slender, wore spectacles which hid a pair of penetrating green eyes, and had a large humorous mouth. Spinster as she was, her profession had robbed her of any air or flavour of spinsterhood. Her work had induced a sort of vicarious motherliness in her. And this, joined to the manner of a doctor of high capability and renown, gave her an odd and compelling charm. The woman was eminent. Not eminent in the way Emily Verschmidt was, or any members of Lady Honoria's set. These

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were the toy celebrities of an hour, clever and decadent folk who had floated into notoriety on the flood tide of some modern fad—often of some modern impertinence.

Dr. Low was known as the third most skilful gynecologist in London. She only attended women, and, as circumstances had decreed, her practice was among the wealthy of this world. She was an active and important member of the chief council of the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost.

Brilliant, strong, modern, she yet bowed her head in church. Each and every discovery she made only confirmed her certainty of Christian verity. Her whole life was dedicated to the cause of Purity and to the contest with unworthy members of her own profession, who yielded to the lusts of wealthy and luxurious women of society. Her friends were legion. All that was best and noblest in the womanhood of the upper classes regarded her with something like veneration.

But she had subtle and bitter enemies also. She was supping in the midst of the enemy to-night. A few yards away, at an adjacent table, sat Dr. Ninian Newton, her arch enemy. If Dr. Low was light, Dr. Newton was darkness. More than once they had fought together for a human soul, for there was no blacker name in the confidential books of the Confraternity than the name of Dr. Newton. Not only was he the public and avowed antagonist of the vast organisation that was labouring for the Purity of Marriage, but he was the private mainstay of the party in society that feared and hated the disclosures that were

being made of their mode of life, the light which was beginning to flood dark places and show the hideous things there.

Four fine humans were at this table, with its orchids, its gleaming glass and silver.

This good and brilliant woman, the splendid old man who had won himself a place in letters which, even yet had not been stormed by the younger generation, the trained soldier of God and publicist, the fine and logical legal brain which had been set so high in the ranks of the Commonwealth—these were four of the Elect, the "People Who Mattered," intellects which England could not do without.

They were all a little tired at first, all a little occupied with their thoughts, and busy arranging their impressions.

The Judge struck the first spark.

"Well, Mr. Tulloch," he said, "and what do you think of the performance you have just been watching?"

"As the text," the writer said, "for my next week's causerie. Don't think, Sir Basil, that I am here to find matter to write about. I hope I have never abused hospitality. But the entertainment has suggested some reflections. I am an old fogey, you know. I see things with eyes not perhaps quite attuned to the *dernier cri*!"

"My dear sir," the Judge answered, "if this morbid exhibition of wasted talent has suggested anything to you it has done something that such affairs don't generally do. People say that there is a good purpose in everything—Roland's friend, Mr. Grogan over there, is always telling me that

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whenever I meet him. I shall begin to believe it! But do let us have your reflections."

Tulloch considered gravely for a moment. He took himself seriously, and he was one of the few people who had a right to do so. He was interested in serious things, and though his sense of humour was acute, it did not obtrude upon moments dedicated to more valuable aspects of life. He had received an invitation. He saw that Roland, whom he loved, and Dr. Low, whom he respected without quite understanding, were waiting.

He laughed.

"Sir Oracle!" he said. "Well, if you do want to hear my conclusions, I will give them to you as briefly as possible. I shall amplify them in print! To me this performance is a symbol of the unrest which comes whenever impulse can get its fill. Why do those unhappy run so fast? To escape their shadow. The whole thing is an anarchistic production of superfluities. It's a result of the despotism of ennui over people who have not been trained and won't submit themselves to public duty."

"I certainly take the view that it is a silly exhibition," the Judge said, "but I don't pretend to go as deep as you, Mr. Tulloch. Psychological deductions are dangerous in law, you know!"

He spoke lightly, if he did not feel lightly. But he had hoped for the mocking or cynical note. He did not want to be too much in earnest. He had been too near to serious things in the early part of that evening.

His light remark met with little response. Three earnest faces confronted him.

"Confound it," he thought, "I am not going to be amused after all—and I needed amusement. This fine old fellow looks like the Prophet Jeremiah and will talk like him if I let him. I'll try the lady. And what is your view, Dr Low?" he asked.

"Pathological!" she answered with a snap. "I've been at work, Judge, adding to my notes on hysteria. The experience has been most profitable, I assure you. I have seen seven instances of exaggeration of involuntary mobility and diminution of will power! The emotional, sensational, and reflex movements have been in excess while the voluntary have proved quite defective. I could point out half a dozen women in this room who will suffer from *globus hystericus* when they wake up to-morrow morning."

"What an uncanny knowledge!" Roland said laughing; "and pray what is *globus hystericus*?"

"Feeling as if you'd swallowed an apple whole," the Doctor answered, "and serve the silly creatures right! I am very glad that Gertrude is occupied at home with the chicks. *She* won't suffer from a spasm in the coccyx to-morrow morning!"

Sir Basil chuckled. He was going to be amused after all. "How difficult it is," he said, "to get away from the personal point of view. We all look at Emily Verschmidt's performance in different ways, and yet we all seem to have got something out of it! It's an ill wind—and so on."

"Talking of the point of view," Tulloch said, "I remember an instance, a rather grim one, of the total difference in the mind's eye which may



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exist in two people. When the Bill was passed making public executions illegal and providing that they should be carried out within the precincts of the gaol, I was a young man on the staff of a daily paper in the Midlands. Almost the first execution to be done under the new rules was to occur in W——, where I was. It was my duty to attend to report it, together with another journalist who came down from London and represented a news agency. We arrived at the prison in the early morning and were stationed at the foot of the scaffold—in those early days a raised erection, not as now, a mere trap-door in the floor of an outhouse. I remember watching with a fascination of horror the nineteen—I counted them—newly-tarred steps, gleaming and sombre in the morning sun. The procession of warders, doctor, chaplain, murderer, and hangman came out into the yard. The clergyman was a young fellow, and he was drunk. The regular chaplain was ill and had been compelled to find a substitute. The poor young man had been endeavouring to get courage to go through the ceremony by taking brandy. He was quite unaccustomed to anything of the sort, and it had effect on him. He stumbled up those nineteen, creaking, tarred steps with a horrible 'I am the Resurrection and the Life' which was agonising. When the murderer came to the foot of the steps with his arms strapped up, he stopped. 'I don't think I can get up these steps,' he said in a weak, servile voice. A great unimaginative brute of a warder, who walked by him—meaning to be kind—gave the poor wretch a great slap on

the back. 'Oh, you'll get up all right, old fellow,' he said in a jovial voice. 'Make a heffort, my boy!' The creature stumbled up, and was stood on the falling floor, while the gibbering chaplain went on as best he could, and while the hangman, in a pair of washleather gloves, was putting the rope round the man's neck, he began to pray. The murder was a particularly sly and cruel one, the criminal had been hard and unrepentant right up to this last few moments. Now he was in an agony of fear. I never saw fear like it. Brought face to face with immediate death the creature began to plead for mercy in a thick, fawning voice to the God he had flouted or disbelieved in all his life till then. It wasn't repentance, it was sheer dreadful funk! 'O Lord, I never meant for to kill 'er; never do it again, dear Lord; don't send me to 'ell, Lord; I never done it; I'll never do it again—' Mercifully the executioner dropped him through the floor and cut him short for ever. Next day the two accounts of the execution appeared. I told it as it happened, showed the world a sickly and cunning scoundrel in the last agony and punishment of fear. My colleague, with perfect sincerity, stated that '*the condemned man met his death with Christian resignation and fortitude!*' "

He stopped and lifted his glass. He had told the story with remarkable dramatic emphasis and was tired in the throat.

No one spoke for a moment. The story had held them. The brutal truth of it hurt, and it gave rise to many reflections.

It is so rarely that anyone is brought face to face

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with naked truth! When that does happen, as it had happened now, there is at first a bewilderment, then the revelation seems to shed a light over many other things and ideas which are seen in different proportion, in all the profundity of their real relation to life.

The Judge broke the silence.

He drew in his breath as one who inhales a mountain or moorland air. "Ah! Mr. Tulloch," he said, "your tale is terribly real. It isn't often I hear anything so real as that! I wonder what would have happened if we had put you up on the stage, after Emily Verschmidt had faded away to wash the paint from her face, to tell that story!"

"Nothing at all in my opinion," Dr. Low said. "The folk I've been watching to-night would simply have thought it vulgar and tedious. Too much fact, my dear sir. They don't want fact. They can't assimilate it any more. It's meaningless they want—well, muted harps!"

"Really," Roland said, noticing something curiously strained and attentive in his uncle's face, "we strike a harsh note to-night, don't we?"

Sir Basil paid no attention. "Well, Doctor," he said, "since we *are* analysing our friends all round, how do you account for all this artificiality and decadence? That's what it amounts to, you know."

"Quite simple," she answered, in the tone of one making a retort rather than a reply. "I speak for the women, I know nothing about the men, but if you want it, Sir Basil, here it is. The society women here to-night who have been rejoicing in

the morbid nonsense we have just seen, are all departing from what Dr. Hyslop, the nerve specialist, calls the *rôle of Nature*. This type of woman *won't* have children. As a doctor, and specially a gynecologist, I know exactly the functional changes this makes in the brain. As a scientist, I am speaking of hard fact. It's not surmise or conjecture at all. I repeat it's fact—fact I have learnt in practice and *post-mortem* ! ”

“ Medical statistics are the one form of statistics one can't get away from,” Tulloch said. “ Do you know that out of the 177,000 mentally deranged people in England, 93,000 were women in 1905.”

“ You all seem very well up in these matters,” the Judge said.

“ Tulloch and Dr. Low are members of the executive committee of the Confraternity, uncle,” Roland said gravely. “ We have some terrible facts among our statistics.”

“ Really, Roland,” Sir Basil said bitterly, “ you are a very successful person. I seem to hear of nothing but your precious league all day long. I caught my valet wearing your badge this evening ! ”

“ Good fellow,” Roland answered. “ I should certainly keep him and give him ten pounds a year extra ! He's a man in earnest ! ”

“ I will remember, Roland, when I feel generous. Now I wonder if you people will think me very rude if I slip away ? I have a judgment to pronounce to-morrow, and I have a couple of hours of work in front of me. Don't think me rude, but no one will notice me if I vanish quietly now.

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Mr. Tulloch, I hope to see more of you. Good-night, Dr. Low. Roland, I want to have a quiet talk with you next week. Dine with me at the club will you, one night?—not the Athenæum, they won't let us invite strangers and make them comfortable—at the Oxford and Cambridge. I'll send you a line."

He bowed and moved away, going slowly among the merry tables of the supper room, giving a word here, a jest or repartee there, a suave, accomplished little progress.

Arrived in his own study, he once more drew up his chair to the fire, and sat in bitter and remorseful thought, with the letter from the Dean of Boniface in his hand.

Lady Honoria had reserved a special table for herself and her friends at supper.

It was set in a deep alcove among palms, somewhat out of sight of the other tables, and was arranged for four people.

On one side Emily Verschmidt sat with Dr. Ninian Newton, on the other Lady Honoria with Mr. Humphrey England, the originator of the Verlaine performance, at her side.

Mr. Verschmidt had not been invited into this retreat. He sat at the other end of the room, with Canon Escott, Father Grogan, and Sir Arthur Childe—a somewhat incongruous party.

Emily Verschmidt was tall and languorous. Her hair was a dark gold, her complexion that of a brunette. The almost perfect mouth drooped a little, and her manner was weary. She spoke and moved as if she was tired of life, though she was

very conscious of occupying a sort of holy of holies. She was most "advanced," kept a copy of Beaudelane's "*Fleurs du Mal*" bound in Nile-green skin by her bedside, and sucked honey from many strange flowers.

Humphrey England was talking. He had a slight Irish brogue and a very carefully melodious voice. He was clean shaved, his hair was arranged low over his forehead, and to the keen, detective eye there was a suspicion of powder on his cheeks.

"Yes," he said, "it is quite true, Emily. Dr. Ninian has been with me to see him. He has allowed me to tell something about him to-night to you, though not all."

"You promised us some news to-night," Lady Honoria said. "Now do be a good boy, Humphrey, and tell us as much as you can."

"I have found," he answered with great deliberation and intense seriousness, "a teacher with a message that is marvellous."

"Oh, Humphrey," Mrs. Verschmidt said, "is that all? For a whole fortnight you've been promising us something new and delightful and wonderful, and it's only a new religion!"

Mr. England had a lump of amber jelly upon his plate. Inside it was a prawn—no longer in its armour. He extricated it with great deliberation, ate it, and asked if he might have some chambertin as he was tired of champagne.

"Be quiet, Emily," Lady Honoria said. "He'll tell us nothing at all if you worry him, and I'm sure there must be something worth hearing. He has kept us on tenter-hooks for days."

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"What I have to say is quite serious," England answered. "It's nothing at all like anything else I have ever had anything to do with before. I intend to devote my whole life to it."

"I believe it's Satan worship," Mrs. Verschmidt said with a yawn. "Nothing else would interest Humphrey to that extent. There's a thick dusk undeveloped spirit (I've observed) owes me a grudge—remember your Browning?"

Lady Honoria looked crossly at her friend. Emily was tired and silly. That was evident. She was "no good" to-night. "Tell me by and bye," she said to Mr. England, with a private touch of her hand.

Mrs. Verschmidt rose. "Sorry, Honoria," she said, "but I'm really too dead for anything. My nerves are all to pieces. Humphrey, forgive me for chaffing, but the strain of that show was intense. One feels Verlaine so terribly! And I did it at your suggestion. Don't leave me out if it's anything good, will you?"

"All right, Emily. I quite understand. And you were truly wonderful to-night! I will come and tell you to-morrow afternoon. It really is very important."

"Very well. Dr. Newton, could you look in to-morrow morning? I shall be almost a corpse. I shan't be fit for anything unless you can put me together."

The doctor purred something, and the beauty knew that he would be at her house with "something" in the morning which would give her new life. To some women Dr. Newton was actually

a dispenser of new nerves and spirits. He came, you drank something, and, lo, in half an hour you were another person!—often a more desirable consummation than the sufferers knew!

"Where's my imp?" said Mrs. Verschmidt. It did not take long to summon the millionaire. His eyes had been fixed on the alcove for a long time. He was at his wife's side at once—with such silence and celerity that his wife's contemptuous epithet seemed to have some foundation in fact.

They went away. Lady Honoria came out with them into the hall, and their carriage was soon found among the dozens that were waiting outside.

As she walked slowly back to the supper room, where people were sitting about at different tables, and everyone was now smoking cigarettes, Lady Honoria could not help thinking what an odd couple the Verschmidts were. A slight and momentary qualm came over her, a distaste for her surroundings and friends. It was, she thought, the result of her emotion before dinner—dangerous and unsettling. Still, as she went back and began to talk to Humphrey England, she had an abiding sense of calamity and fear. Nerves again! Dr. Newton must call in the morning.

Humphrey England was sitting alone in the alcove. Dr. Newton was going the rounds of the room laughing and joking with his friends and patients, gathering useful information, in short, pursuing his usual assiduous campaign.

People who were apt at placing others and were not blinded or influenced by liking or prejudice, said that Humphrey England was the cleverest



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fool in London. He dabbled in all the arts, not as executant, but as critic, amateur, and showman. He was always discovering some new pleasure or emotion that was so fresh to jaded minds and so perilously near a vice, that he was in great request among those who lived for pleasure. He was very wealthy, very useful, and most enthusiastic. Whatever he took up he believed in for a time, and it was only by chance and good fortune that he had remained, as yet, unenslaved by any of his vagaries. He was not immoral, he was non-moral, a product of the hysteria of modern life. There were plenty of cultured young men like him in the time of the Roman decadence, and the scholar will recall pungent phrases in Martial or Petronius that might label this young man of the day. He was perfectly kind and generous to everyone, and if fate had sent him to Stonyhurst instead of to Eton, he would have made an excellent Roman Catholic priest. He might yet save himself, some folk with minds too broad and charitable to shun the leader of a frivolous and esoteric set would say now and then. If only his mind was not too warped and fantastic, he might be saved. But no one knew how far his distorted views of life had gone, to what strange places his "sightless soul" had already strayed.

"Now let us talk," Lady Honoria said. "Tell me everything. Emily was tired and out of temper to-night."

"We ought to forgive her," he answered with reverence in his voice, the reverence with which some men speak of their religion or their love.

"How wonderful she was! A supreme artist! The 'estranged sad spectres of the night' seemed thronging round me as I listened."

"Quite so, Humphrey," said Lady Honoria rather brusquely, "but do leave poor dear Emily alone now and talk to *me*. Now what is this revelation of yours? Is it really anything serious? Does it matter? Heaven knows that we all want something to enliven us just now."

"That isn't quite the spirit in which I want to tell you of what I have found," he said. "It is something far more fiery-coloured than any passing aspect of art could ever be. It is something flame-like and wonderful, something from the inscrutable East, one of those mystic Orient forces that now and again—but very rarely—come to our Western world."

Lady Honoria was impressed. The young man spoke slowly, without the quick and excited enthusiasm that was his wont. His voice and manner were really impressive. He was obviously moved.

The quick, imaginative woman was stirred. She discerned something unusual.

In the parched and weary search of her life for new sensations, she had become abnormally eager.

"Go on, Humphrey," she said.

"I have met with a very strange and wonderful personality," he answered. "I have never met with anything like it before. We have been wasting our time, Lady Honoria. We have all been bowing down to the little gods in the ante-chamber of the Temple! Now I am only at liberty to say a certain amount to-night—to prepare the way for more.

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In a week's time those who are worthy to know everything will assemble in my house. They will be introduced to my friend and join him or not, as they please. Those who accept his message are to see something so wonderful, and even terrible to our ideas, that their whole attitude towards life will be altered. The very word 'Life' will have a different meaning for them."

"You are strangely excited, Humphrey. You almost frighten me. I have felt that something was going to happen all this night."

"Something very wonderful is going to happen," he said gravely.

At that moment there was a general rising from the tables. Everyone was tired, everyone wanted sleep. "Stay," she whispered. "Sit here. I'll go and get rid of all these people, and then you can go on. Do you mind?"

"I'm here for that," he said.

Lady Honoria swept out of the alcove. She had a whispered and confidential word for her especial friends, a gracious farewell for those she did not know so well.

Sir Arthur Childe had gone home to Bedford Square some time before; Canon Escott had left at the same time. But the tall and portly figure of Father Grogan, muffled round the throat, stood by Roland and Angus Evan Tulloch. The lady doctor was with them also.

Lady Honoria was surprised. These four people were not among those she thought would have remained so late as this.

They were incongruous—she felt in some subtle

way—among the crowd of hooded women and cloaked men who were getting into their carriages.

"Good-night," she said. "Father Grogan, you are quite dissipated."

"I'm going home with Roland to-night," the clergyman answered. "I have to give an address at Richmond to-morrow, and Roland is putting me up at Bedford Park."

"We are all going to walk," Roland said. "It's freezing hard, but there isn't a breath of wind. Dr. Low is coming with us as far as Kensington, and Tulloch, as you know, lives next door to me. Good-night, aunt. Thank you awfully for coming down this afternoon, and for the things you brought Gertrude. She's delighted."

A footman opened the door. Nearly all the carriages had gone by now. The lamp light burned clear in a windless and frosty night.

The keen air came into the warm, scented hall, a breath of the real world outside this luxurious house, so full of subtle modern weariness and unrest!

"A fine night!" Father Grogan said, squaring his board chest and snuffing the exhilarating air from which the smoke and fog of day had gone.

"A fine night!" Dr. Low answered, slim and active in the blue hooded cloak which covered her simple evening frock.

The night which came pressing into the hall was more vivid and life-giving than any of the costly wines the guests had drunk that night.

Roland's eyes sparkled. His strong athletic figure braced itself, he looked like a man about to fight and win.

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"See! Winter comes, to rule the varied year!"

he sang in a clear, jocund tenor. It was a fragment of a glee he had learnt many years ago in "choral" at school.

And, lastly, the huge, white-haired veteran of letters spoke in a hale and happy voice.

"Therefore, my age is as a lusty winter, frosty, but kindly!"

With many good-nights the four passed out of the house.

Lady Honoria shivered.

"Shut the door, Thomas," she said. "It's freezing hard."

She went slowly back over the soft carpets to rejoin the fantastic young man in the empty supper room.

How cheery and happy these four were! She pictured them striding merrily through the silent, echoing streets. It was a picturesque exit, she had seen that at once. It was full of colour, incident, and strength.

Roland's joyful and musical voice lingered in her ears. "*See! Winter comes!*" The sound was stronger and came quicker to the heart than the monotonous melody of the muted harps.

Yes! they were strong, these four —

The butler met her at the door of the room where the guests had supped. There was enquiry, mingled with a dumb reproach, in his sleepy eyes.

"Oh, you can all go to bed," she said. "I will turn out the lights myself—one switch controls all of them, doesn't it? Yes; good-night, Drysdale."

Lady Honoria entered the supper room. She could not at once see the alcove where Humphrey England was sitting, but the rest of the room was quite empty of life.

The lights shone on deserted tables, on drooping flowers, cigarette ash, disordered plates, the wreck and débris of a feast. Chairs were pushed this way and that. It was horrible! she thought.

The decadent was sitting quietly where she left him. He was smoking, his glass was full of chambertin, his smooth face untired and uninfluenced by his surroundings. He was a complete and imperturbable person. Lady Honoria was conscious of a certain admiration for him. Calm was impressive, whatever sort of calm it was, in the welter of her own thoughts.

"We can't stay here, Humphrey," she said. "It's too desolate. Come up to my room, there will be a fire there. It will be cosy."

Humphrey England started. He had really been engrossed, his hostess saw it was not a pose.

"I've been lost in a vacuum of speculative thought," he said. "Wherever you like, Lady Honoria."

She led the way through the almost violent disorder of the deserted room. At the door she snapped the main switch and sudden darkness came.

They went up the broad stairs together, their evening shoes sinking into the Persian web and woof which covered them. It was all rather ghostly.

"Let's say good-night to Basil," she exclaimed suddenly.

The Judge's study was in the same corridor as

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his wife's room. She tapped at the door and went in, followed by England.

Sir Basil, in a dressing gown, was sitting at a writing table. His face was vividly illuminated by a reading lamp. A mass of papers was in front of him, and his brow was lined with anxious consideration and thought.

He looked up. "Hallo," he said, "I thought everyone had gone to bed long ago. What is it, dear?"

His tones were dreamy. He had suddenly been caught out of an intricate legal maze into actual life. He looked at her with placid affection.

She went up to him, and, for the second time that night, put her arm round his neck. "Just to say good-night, dear," she answered. "Humphrey and I are going to have a chat. He has some confidences to make."

The Judge looked at Mr. England with that amused and half-interested regard he would have given to a poodle. "You'll both of you be dead tired," he said. "Good-night, dear. Good-night, Humphrey. We can give you a bed here, you know, if you don't want to go back to Berkeley Square."

He nodded kindly, and in a moment was deep in his papers once more. Humphrey England came and went about the house as he pleased, like any cat. He was not very much older than the Judge's son. There was nothing strange in so late a sitting in this house, where so many strange things happened.

Lady Honoria and her friend sat down on either

side of the still glowing fire. Humphrey generally breathed a deep sigh of contentment in Lady Honoria's room or made some remark upon its "wholly satisfying" beauty. To-night, his hostess noticed he was too engrossed even for that.

"All I can do to-night," he said, "is to tell you who and what sort of a person you are going to meet. The stupendous change he is about to make in life I must say nothing of. I am pledged not to do so. The revelation must come from his lips alone. Lady Honoria, have you ever heard of the Brahmo Somaj?"

For a moment she imagined that Humphrey was talking of some new curry or pickle. He was a known epicure. "No," she said, rather bewildered; "what is it?"

England pulled a card from his pocket. Some dates and other memoranda were written on it.

"'Brahmo Somaj' means the 'Church of the one God,'" he said. "It is the name of a religious body in India. This body has had a curious history. I've some notes on it here. One can divide it into three periods, up till ten years ago. The movement started in 1830. It was founded by the Rajah Rammohun Roy, who died in England three years afterwards, that is in 1833. I want you to remember that. For a few years little or nothing was heard of the sect. It appears on the surface again in 1842 under a learned ascetic known as Debendro Nath Tagore. In 1850 Debendro issued a work called the 'Brahma Dharva,' or 'Religion of the one true God.' It became the bible of the sect. Everyone studied the lessons and mystical philosophy of



Theism that it contained. It was said that there was another book, too profound for ordinary students, which Debendro had compiled. But nothing definite was known about this. In 1859 a youth named Keshub Chunder Sen joined the Brahmo Somaj. It was at once evident that he was a person of extraordinary talent, and he gained a great ascendancy in the body. He spoke English perfectly, and often delivered extempore addresses in the language. Debendro became influenced by him, and his own power began to decline. In 1866 Keshub left the mother society and started a new one entitled the 'Brahmo Somaj of all India.' All that was most cultured and learned in the old society left it with him. A small Hindu sect became raised into a comprehensive religion, which was capable of influencing minds of various races and civilisations."

Humphrey stopped for a moment to relight his cigarette.

"I hope there is more behind all this, Humphrey," Lady Honoria said. "So far you have only succeeded in reminding me of the horrid little books one learnt history in as a child. 'Lanfranc's influence now began to be on the wane,' or 'We now see Cardinal Wolsey at the height of his power.'"

"We are coming to the third period of the movement now," he answered. "Yes, there is something coming! In 1870 Keshub Chunder Sen visited England and received a most cordial welcome from persons of all classes. He published a book in English, and books were written about him.

Sophia Dobson Collett—who sounds like a nursery rhyme!—published 'Indian Theism and its relation to Christianity.' Then there was Miss Cobbe's 'Hours of Work and Play,' and so on.

Lady Honoria felt ill-used. She was being kept up to hear a dull record of a respectable Anglo-Indian religious movement which had not even the picturesqueness of Madame Blavatski and parlour miracles. Humphrey was not usually boring. She gazed into the fire while he continued, hardly listening to him, wondering, as a matter of fact, if her boy at Oxford was sleeping sound in his ancient college room.

But in a minute or so England's story became more vivid and actual. . . . "And before he went back to India, Keshub went down to Devonshire and stayed with some people in an old house there. When he returned to his own country his influence and brilliancy stopped. The sect languished, to-day it merely exists as a sort of philanthropic agency. A sudden change came to the leader of the whole thing. What had happened was this.

"Keshub when he seceded from Debendro Nath Tagore had taken the secret and unpublished part of the Brahma Dharva. This he had always kept and studied, adding to it here and there as he made new psychical discoveries. It was the inspiration of his leadership and the secret of his power. One can imagine, for instance, if Canon Escott had got hold of a fifth gospel which no one else knew of and which explained the other four, what a use he would make of it in sermons and

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interpretation of dogma! Keshub had something of the sort.

"He was robbed of this in Devonshire, and died in India broken-hearted.

"Twenty years ago, that is in 1890, the book went back to India in the hands of a European of great talent and deep learning, who was determined to master its secrets. He realised, early in his studies of it, that he had got hold of something which was not in the least what it appeared to be. The book—it is in manuscript—was shown to the late Professor Max Müller. He was the greatest European authority on Sanscrit, you know. Max Müller would not pronounce definitely upon the thing. He dare not, in fact! What he *did* suggest to the present owner of the book was half in joke. 'One might almost imagine,' he said, in a letter from Oxford, 'on glancing at this interesting MS. that one had indeed recovered the lost part of the "Artharva-veda" itself!'"

"And what's that, Humphrey?" Lady Honoria said, interested now and fascinated by the strange hints of the young man.

"The sixteenth part of the 'Artharva-veda,'" he said gravely, "is the most wonderful part of the sacred writings of India. Two thousand years before Christ it seems to have passed out of the hands of the Vedantins. It is that part of the mystical writing that is said to have been milked from fire! This, and nothing else, this world-treasure, this incredible wonder, was what was stolen from Keshub in 1890. *The sixteenth part of the 'Artharva-veda' itself!*"

He rose from his chair. His eyes were curiously alight. He looked younger and it was obvious that he was profoundly moved.

He bent towards Lady Honoria, speaking quickly with a catch of the breath. "You are going to meet the man who has that book," he said. "The man who has learnt all its strange and awful secrets—the man who has power! Yes, Lady Honoria, wonders are dawning for you and me! Soon we shall see with other eyes than now, soon we shall begin to mutter and ponder incessantly the mystic syllable 'OM!'"

Thus was the Judge's wife told of her high and coming fortune; thus did she add a final experience and sensation to the others of this varied night. Thus did the hurried hypnotic voice of the decadent tell its stupendous secret, while a new dawn was beginning to tremble in the livid winter sky.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE WALK HOME, AND THE MEETING WITH THE MAN IN FURS WHO RAN FROM THEM.

MUCH earlier in the night the wind had blown all the fog away and the sky was powdered with golden stars.

The pavements rang like steel under the steps of the wayfarers. It was freezing hard, but no rain had fallen, and walking was easy. London is never at rest in East or West. Late as it was, as the four people moved among the great squares and houses of Vanity Fair they saw the rows of carriages waiting and the huddled figures of the coachmen sleeping in their great capes of black fur.

But as they stretched out and drew away from the most fashionable quarters the streets became very still and the size and majesty of London made itself felt in their hearts as it can never do in the day.

Every now and again they met a policeman going his rounds and flashing a bull's-eye lantern on the doors of the silent houses, steadily keeping his vigilant patrol that rich and poor might sleep in peace.

The yellow eyes of a prowling hansom gleamed at a corner, a stout woman in black with a horrible face crept along some railings, lost, hopeless, *papillon de nuit*.

Father Grogan began to talk. It was easy to talk and to listen in the long steady swing of their progress, it was easy to talk of great things and issues in these vast silent spaces with such a starry heaven above. All were of those—no large company our city streets witness—who know how to walk. Roland was an athlete from Oxford, Angus Evan Tulloch had tramped with wild soldiers in the Balkans and knew how a man marches to Larissa when fear is the only tonic in his blood; the clergyman was hale and strong, with a natural dignity of mind that acted upon his muscles and forbade anything but a worthy progress; and as for Dr. Ella Low, who walked better than any of them, she walked as she lived, inspired and trained by an accurate scientific knowledge of how to do it.

"All these poor dear people," Father Grogan said, "remind me very much of a bumble bee on a window-pane. One sits by a window in summer-time which is half open. The bee comes in, flies round the room, finds that it is no place for a decent bee to spend much time in, and attempts to get out. He spends ten minutes in futile efforts to fly through the glass, though, if he only knew it, he's only got to go an inch or two higher to gain freedom without any trouble at all."

"I know," Dr. Low answered, in her quick, decisive way. "Silly little insects! I always

catch them in my handkerchief and pop them out, willy nilly."

"It's the best way with some temperaments," the priest said. "As for many of our friends this evening, I firmly believe that most of them are naturally religious enough. They have the talent for religion. The reason that their religion has become saturated with doubt is not because their intellects are incapable of appreciating evidence, but because their conduct is penetrated with license."

"They've got that chronic melancholy which comes over all civilised races who are beginning to believe no longer in God," Roland said with a sigh.

"I wish I could take them into some places where I've been," Angus Tulloch said. "Wouldn't they howl and whine to their Creator then! That epicene young fellow who arranged the tableau, for instance. I suppose they are a corrupt lot."

"At the next private meeting of the council it will be my duty to read the confidential report," Roland said. "You'll be appalled."

"Certain other people will be considerably frightened," said the doctor grimly.

"It's a painful necessity I suppose," Father Grogan said with a sigh, "to warn some of these men."

"To scourge them from the profession!" the Doctor answered vehemently. "It is with the greatest joy and relief that I know we are going to take private action. It is a duty. That unutterable scoundrel Ninian Newton was purring and posturing at Lady Honoria's to-night."

"Beast!" growled the journalist. "I saw him."

Father Grogan was silent. His three friends were full of noble indignation and active fight. He also was a man of action, but he lived more with the unseen than they. His heart was very heavy.

"The Prophets, though dead," he said at length, "can and do speak. 'Read the Word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.'"

"Fine words," said the writer; "grand, grave words. Ah! there were men then."

"And are still, thank God," Dr. Low answered. "We've got the middle classes, at any rate. They are sound, though the upper middle classes are beginning to imitate the highest classes just where they fuse and overlap. We are in Kensington now"—she waved her hand round her. "In 1872 the birth-rate of Kensington was 31.7 per thousand inhabitants. In 1903 it had dropped to 18 per thousand; in 1904 to 11.1; and now it is 7 per thousand!"

"Yes, that's quite true," Roland answered. "But we are beginning to grip now. We have become a force. Public opinion is moving, it is being stirred. Great men who sneered at us are coming in. The Bishops are realising which way the wind blows and hurrying to be put on our lists before they have to appear late-comers. The politicians are joining, not because they care very



much about anything but the mere game of politics, but because they daren't ignore us any longer. We shall see what we shall see!"

"We shall see a great Christian revival," said Mr. Grogan. "Consider this—whenever the individual is brought face to face with Christ, if he will take, there is something to receive—a power that can change him for the better. We know how Christianity began, and where. It has two motive powers that I can find in no other creed—man's infinite sorrow and his unconquerable hope. Without it what is left to anyone but 'the guess of a worm in the dark and the shadow of its desire'? Our campaign, and the *necessity* for our Lord that lies deep in nearly every heart, fuse together. Sir Arthur Childe has proved Malthusianism and the restriction of families to be an *economic* fallacy. But that is not enough. John Stuart Mill, in 1872, said that 'little improvement in morality can be expected until the producing of large families is regarded with the same feeling as drunkenness or any other physical excess.' He was quite wrong. The ablest brains in 1910 all agree to that. But with less able brains, quite incapable of accurate thinking, such words may have weight. For such as those, Christianity provides an answer. It is easy to prove what our Lord would have thought, and doubtless thinks to-day, of the Malthusians. It is easy to prove what God thought of it when He said 'Be fruitful.' It is easy to prove what Nature thinks of it even. Dr. Low can prove it."

"My new pamphlet on sterility is nearly ready," she said grimly. "I am going to *frighten* these

foolish, empty-headed women. Frighten them with physiological and pathological *fact*! It is just as you say, Mr. Grogan. There can be *no* conflict between what we know of Nature and what has been revealed to us of Religion. It is only people of limited vision, and who do not know anything about the philosophy of Christianity, that say so now. A study of Nature teaches me *how* many things happen, but not *why* they happen. For that I go to the Faith."

They were talking thus, gravely and earnestly of the things which influenced all their lives, when Dr. Low arrived near her own house (where she lived with two sisters and a brother, who held a post at the British Museum) and bade them good-night.

They watched the tall, hooded figure going down the street with its graceful and resolute step.

"Such women are the very salt of the earth," Roland said.

"How our Lord must love her!" answered Father Grogan.

"And many men would, had she not devoted her life to maternity," said the writer. "Modern life has robbed life of some of its beauty, but it has added others," he continued thoughtfully. "What an uplifting and wonderful thing it is to see this woman denying herself the joys of marriage and the help of a good man, living a lonely life because she has such a great heart. Think of the hundreds of mothers who bless her name, the hundreds of sufferers who owe her a debt they can only pay with thankful tears! The vestals of old Rome,

the pious virgins of the beguinage, and now—this incomparable lady! Indeed, Mr. Grogan, God must love such as she, and I make no doubt that the great angels that Victor Hugo saw round Jean Valjean attend her in all she does. A spiritual bodyguard that none dare face, great swords before which every evil and harmful thing must fly!”

He spoke with deep emotion, and he had a voice which, in its quality, allowed his emotion to express itself. Roland reflected how the man's literary talent enabled him to put beautiful thoughts into adequate words. He wasn't afraid, and didn't hesitate, to incarnate his thoughts. It is the privilege of the literary temperament, just as it is, sometimes, its curse.

They had progressed some way down the road which runs from Hammersmith to Richmond, and on the right of which, when Turnham Green is reached, Bedford Park lies.

Here the character of London had changed. An even larger arc of starlit sky was visible. Trees, now barren of leaves, stood in the gardens of houses that had an old-fashioned charm. The lamps shone on something more free and spacious than before.

And all three men noticed that the silence was greater. Here, and by this hour, everyone was sleeping.

They talked no more. All were beginning to feel the strain of the walk. A misty air was coming up from the river and beginning to rob the keen winter's air of its exhilaration. Air is no longer tonic when it is damp; they felt the influence at once.

Moreover, the conversation of the earlier part of the walk provided sufficient food for mental rumination. Each man was sifting and arranging it, and each in his own individual way was getting his own particular measure of good from it.

Just before they came to Ravenscourt Park they heard quick and decided steps in a side street which they were approaching.

As they drew near, a tall figure came out into the main road. He drew near to the three friends, and when he had reached them, almost beneath the light of a street lamp, he stopped and spoke.

"I wonder if one of you would give me a match?" he said in a cultured voice, which immediately arrested Roland's attention by its rich vibrant quality.

It struck Roland like an echo.

"I think we are provided, sir," said Angus Evan Tulloch, and pulling out his own box he offered it to the newcomer.

"I am extremely obliged," the man said, taking out his cigar-case. "I wished to smoke to keep out the night air and could not light my cigar. Nor did I expect such good fortune as to meet with travellers at this hour."

He spoke with a measured cadence, a certain pedantry even—the sort of voice that is affected by young dons at Oxford. But the strange *vibrant* note made his speech a thing to be remembered.

"Vibrant"—whose voice had he said was the most vibrant voice he had ever heard? Roland thought. He remembered saying so to Gertrude, he remembered using the very word.

The stranger took a step up to Tulloch and held out his hand for the matches. All three of them saw, as the lamplight fell more directly on him, that he was tall, elderly, and dressed in a very heavy fur coat, the astrachan round his neck, wrists, and down the centre being extremely thick. The whole thing was just a little more pronounced than an English gentleman would wear in a London street. It was foreign, more suited to Warsaw or Moscow.

The man lit the match and began to suck at his cigar.

The light showed his face quite plainly.

It was an aquiline, emaciated face, distinguished, and very worn by trouble or experience. The amazing thing about it was the eyes. Though they were merely directed to the end of a long cheroot, they seemed to blaze with life intelligence, magnetism—none of the three men could agree afterwards as to what was behind them, what gave them their power.

The match had but hardly flared up when something seemed to snap in Roland's brain. "It was just like pulling up a spring-blind," he told Gertrude afterwards; "click! and a flood of light pours in."

An old and startling episode came back to him like an unheralded flash of lightning in a clear sky on a summer night. An episode of his early married days, one which his active brain—his conscious brain—had almost forgotten, but which remained stored up in the cells of his memory.

He saw once again a white heat of sunshine, an ancient Tudor house in a lovely Devon lane, and a tall Indian in a dress of gleaming white gliding

down the path. He saw Gertrude's pallid face with the shut eyes. And, more vividly than all, he saw the face of his strange host of that afternoon.

It was the face of the man before him now. Line for line, contour for contour, eyes for blazing eyes, he saw the face of the man who had fallen into a physical agony at the sight of Gertrude.

He gave a sudden sharp exclamation, almost a cry.

The other three members of the group started.

"Why," Roland said in a high voice, "we have met before, sir! Don't you remember me? Don't you remember my wife who was bitten by the snake—at the old house near Ilfracombe?"

The stranger had stiffened. His two arms had dropped to his side; both match and cigar had fallen. His head was bent forward, as if he were listening with great attention. His face was now in complete shadow.

"I gave you my card," Roland went on. "Surely you remember? You are Mr. Mordaunt!"

At the last word the man's head was suddenly lifted, jerked back it almost seemed.

His face was the same face of terror, as the lamp-light fell on it, as Roland had seen in the little room of the deserted Devon hall.

Father Grogan had started back in alarm. Evan Angus Tulloch was watching the man's face with a keen, hard scrutiny.

The relative positions of the group lasted, perhaps, for five seconds—a long period in an emotional crisis.

Then the man slewed round without a word of

explanation, with no vocal sound whatever, and began running down the road towards London with long and almost noiseless strides.

In blank amazement, and something like fear, the three friends watched the flying figure until the darkness and growing mist hid it from view.

Then Grogan and Tulloch turned to Roland for an explanation. Both faces were pale.

Roland began to try and explain. But his sentences were disjointed and he could hardly give them any coherent narrative. The executive talent of the journalist came to the rescue.

"We are quite close to home now," he said. "Wait till we are within doors, Roland. Then you can tell us what all this means. March!"

He stepped out with vigour. Roland and Father Grogan followed him mechanically.

They came at last to Roland's house. Tulloch's was next door.

It was a pleasant little residence, surrounded by laburnum and acacia in full leaf during the summer months. The roof was of red tiles, the windows were mullioned and filled with leaded panes of glass, there was a wooden porch.

The three men went up the little drive to the door all was dark and still. He let them into the hall, making only the faintest noise with his latch-key.

Gas was burning dimly in a square lamp of blue glass.

"Come into my study," Roland whispered. "There is sure to be something to eat there if you're hungry, and some whisky. I don't want to wake Gertrude or the children. It is nearly morning."

Like conspirators they followed him down the passage. It was carpeted, but of the little noise they made Roland contributed the greatest share. The two big and portly men who followed walked like cats.

He turned the handle of his study door and they entered.

A clear fire glowed upon the hearth—Mrs. Battle herself would not have disdained such an one.

A kettle purred gently upon the coals, soft light filled the comfortable book-lined place from two lamps on either side the oak mantel.

Upon one half of the writing table a cloth was spread. There were a couple of dishes of sandwiches and a tantalus. Glasses stood upon a copper tray, and hard by them was a little silver bowl of sugar and a lemon cut into pieces.

Gertrude never forgot anything. She thought out the least detail that contributed to simple comfort. It was her recurring pleasure to embroider the daily task with love, to illuminate it with the dainty arts of the housewife, to decorate it with her life purpose of making Roland happy.

All three men felt her recent presence in the room as they came into it.

They began to eat and drink. The walk had been tiring, the glitter of the party which preceded it had robbed the brain of a certain portion of its phosphorus, the body of its oxygen. And then had come the bizarre incident of Ravenscourt Park.

How good the sandwiches were! How excellent the toddy that old campaigner Angus Evan Tulloch brewed. "The kindly fruits of the earth"—yes,



there was a definite place in human, and so Divine, philosophy even for such small things as these.

"And now I will tell you my story," Roland said.

At that moment there was a tap at the door.

Gertrude came in. She wore a long dressing-gown, her hair was coiled loosely round her head, her eyes were radiant with the new freshness healthy sleep had given them. She was adorable thus, this happy young wife and mother roused from her dreams by the return of the one man she loved.

"No!" she said in answer to their protestations.

"I couldn't hear you. Honestly I couldn't. You must have been splendidly quiet, all of you. But I *knew* Roland had come back. I always do know, and it wakes me up like an alarm. Now have you all got everything you want? Can I get you anything else?"

She radiated kindness and the gentle influences of home.

All in the room were dear friends. The lateness of the hour, the comfort and colour of the room, the sense of rest after mental stress and toil made these last moments before sleep more delightful than anything any of the four had known that day.

And all their physical and mental pleasure, all their sense of spiritual and mental well-being was centred in and came from the young wife and mother who was so kind and dear, so lovely as she had risen from sleep to welcome them.

Roland told his story of the past to Father Grogan and Angus Evan Tulloch. He told the events of that night to Gertrude.

They all agreed that it was no time to discuss or analyse them. To-morrow they would hold a council and decide what this might mean.

Tulloch stepped over the low wall which divided the gardens of the two houses.

Father Grogan went to his own room, and knelt down to say his prayers and bless this happy house.

Husband and wife went into the night-nursery, which opened out of their bedroom.

The little children were all sleeping sound.

Long lashes lay upon rounded cheeks as smooth and delicate in colour as the inside of a sea shell.

Tiny hands lay curved and pink upon the coverlets as the light of the candle fell upon them.

"Aren't they beautiful!" she whispered with a catch in her voice.

"Yes, because they are yours!"

"Yours and mine, beloved!"

"Mine and yours, sweet wife!"

Then they also went into their own room and knelt in prayer.

The old white-haired writer in the next house was also saying a word to Almighty God.

Priest and writer, wife and husband—from all these, prayers were ascending to the "Great White Throne."

All over the world, at all hours of dusk or sunshine, dawn or latest dark, faithful souls are praying to God.

## CHAPTER IV.

### DR. NINIAN NEWTON'S NASTY DAY.

MR. HUMPHREY ENGLAND lived in Berkeley Square. He had inherited his house from his grandfather, and dwelt in it with great pomp and luxury.

It was a beautiful place, ridiculously too comfortable and artistic for a young unmarried man, society mothers said. These good women longed to make a clean sweep of the strange people with whom the young man surrounded himself. Out they should go, these poets and painters, musicians and esoteric quacks! A bouncing maiden should be installed there instead, the doors should be thrown open to ordinary decent healthy people, who lived for eating, drinking, dancing, shooting, and slander. In short, Humphrey England ought to marry and take the place in society to which his birth and fortune entitled him—take it with a wife at his side.

Mr. England by no means shared this opinion. He was happy enough with his varied and short-lived enthusiasms for this and that, his pursuit of some new thing in religion or art; some ideal too

odd or illusive to be grasped by the ordinary mind. Like Napoleon, he was an honorary member of all the arts and religions, and his generosity and simple—if momentary—faiths endeared him to many people.

On a morning, about a week after Lady Honoria's party, Humphrey invited Dr. Ninian Newton to breakfast with him.

The young man liked the society doctor, found him adaptable and willing to enter into his enthusiasms. In a variety of ways Dr. Newton was useful. He heard of any fresh craze before anyone else, picked up all the gossip of Humphrey's set, and could produce the charlatan of the moment within an hour.

The two men sat at a round table in Humphrey's breakfast room. During the last fortnight the place had been redecorated. The rooms in this house of freak and fancy always were being redecorated. Now, the room in which the two men sat was as Indian as the skill of a Regent Street firm and the short time allowed them could compass.

The walls were covered with panels of the flat brick reds, deep chromes and blues, which form the basis of Indian art. A sentence from the Mahabharata was inlaid with gold over the arch of the doorway, an arch in which the centre was raised above the choral, and from which a golden curtain hung. The ceiling of the room was now concave, emblazoned with painting and gilding, and lattice work of olive-green and gold formed a dado round the walls.

Humphrey England sat at breakfast in a long

robe of blue linen, a pundit's robe, and his smooth essentially English face beamed at Dr. Newton, who was in ordinary morning dress, from beneath a turban of thin white muslin. An Indian servant (from Whiteley's) came noiselessly into the room now and then with dubious looking *plats* served in shallow dishes of silver. The atmosphere of the room was rather too close and scented, since a brass pot of spices was set over the thin blue flame of a silver methyl lamp, shaped like a serpent, which shed a smoky fragrance over everything.

The meal was nearly over. Nothing could exceed the urbanity or pleasure of the young man as he lit a cigarette.

He waved his hand to a long stool of teak on which was a pile of books.

"When you are gone, Doctor," he said, "I shall begin my hours of mystical study. I have there translations of the *Mīmāṃsā* and the *Panchatantra*. It is as well to become thoroughly saturated with the spirit of Sanscrit literature before commencing the actual studies our teacher will direct us in. Don't you think so? One must be *thorough*."

"Quite, quite, my dear Humphrey. And, as you say, we are on the brink of some tremendous revolution. I don't go as far as you. The scientific temperament is sceptical, you know. But I am inclined to believe in your friend. And from what I saw of him, he really is a remarkable man. Whether he can perform the stupendous miracle he hinted at, I don't know. The thing is too incredible to believe. If he has really discovered the secret he claims to have found in the old manu-

script—then the man is king of the world almost ! Thanks, I will take some liqueur—if it's not Indian, that is. No, Humphrey, of course it *can't* be true ; though, of course, it's extremely interesting."

"You are going to see him to-night ?"

"Yes, he has invited me to call upon him. He is quite welcome to convince me if he can. And, of course—I think you know my honesty of purpose, Humphrey?—once convinced, I *should* become an active member of his circle."

"One of the most valuable members he *could* have, Doctor. And he will convert you. I *know* it ! We shall have you with us. Debendro—as he chooses to be called, though some day we shall know his true name—has powers that as yet you know nothing of. I am forbidden to speak of them. You must learn the reality of them from the master himself."

The young man spoke with dreamy earnestness, almost as if he were under some hypnotic influence.

"I shall preserve an open mind," the Doctor answered.

England bent forward and touched the other on the knee. "You will be one of us !" he said with gathering excitement. "All my intimate friends *must* join us. You especially, Doctor, who have been my friend and companion on so many intimate occasions—I should be almost heart-broken if you did not."

"I promise you I will listen to Mr. Debendro with grave attention," Dr. Newton answered. "And if I am convinced you shall have the first news of it. And now, my dear boy, I must leave you. I have many appointments to keep and

much to think of. My carriage will be waiting. Remember that I shall do my utmost, and good-bye till to-morrow."

He left the odd and scented room and came out into the hall of the house. The butler who was there told him that his carriage had been waiting for twenty minutes.

With a smile of thanks as the man opened the door, the Doctor descended the steps, entered his brougham, and was driven rapidly away.

It was a coupé brougham, with no front seat, and one could sit far back in it. Dr. Newton did so, with a heavy sigh.

His face was plump with good living, but not grossly fat. The urbanity of his smile and the sympathetic candour of his eyes were two of the causes of his popularity with a set of people who could bear nothing that was harsh or rugged. Everyone agreed that he was a distinguished-looking man, that he was witty, tactful, and had the manners of a gentleman. No one knew anything of his origin, nor did he ever speak of it. His degree was that of L.R.C.P., and he held no other, a most unusual thing in a medical man with a West End practice.

What that practice was would have puzzled many people exactly to define. The smart women of Lady Honoria's set were always sending for him. When any of them became seriously ill, someone else was called in. To many of these people he seemed as much a friend as a physician. He was in many boudoir confidences, knew a hundred secrets, catch-words, and allusions, was the sort of

person who kept, and was kept, as much out of the way of husbands as possible.

His position in the medical world was anomalous, though it was not generally known in the outside world. Hardly a respectable practitioner would speak to him. He was regarded as a dangerous and unscrupulous quack, and many keen eyes were watching him day by day.

He was ubiquitous, but his practice was not really as large as it appeared to be. It lay entirely with the idle and sensual women who had refused family ties and the public duties of their position, who lived only for sensation and morbid pleasures. To these people he had become indispensable.

Through what crooked paths and over what miry ways he had reached his present dubious position it is not necessary to say. But that it was dubious, dangerous, and insecure none knew better than he did. The fickleness of these women was proverbial. He might blackmail more than one of them, but he would lose the rest. And if that happened he perfectly understood that he would never get any other patients. Where else in England—unfortunately Dr. Ninian Newton knew very little French—would he find a crowd of rich and idle women who retained him to pander to this or that vice, to give them a brief strength for pleasure by means of dangerous drugs, to sell them the energy for a week's wild enjoyment at the expense of a year of life?

Nowhere else.

And even as it was, people of the fast set were beginning to nod and whisper when he passed by.



People in his charge had collapsed suddenly and died. Others, beautiful women full of fire and life, had suddenly shrivelled and grown old. Wrecks with active life over, their husbands had closed the great luxurious houses in street or square, and gone away with the victims. They were never seen any more, these ladies who had drunk deeply of Dr. Newton's cup. Other doctors went about saying that their veins were sodden with strychnia and powerful poisons. At any rate, they had gone. Never again would they listen to muted harps or thrill their nerves by such like vanities. They were drawn, yellow, and old now, and were wheeled into church at fashionable watering-places in bath chairs. They spent long hours gazing out over the sea, seeking a healthful anodyne it could never give them, and knowing that their husbands whom they had flouted in the days of their beauty, those husbands to whom they had refused to bear children, were away in pursuit of madder music and merrier times than they could give. And they would sit longing for the sound of a child's voice, for a little hand to hold while little legs trotted behind the slow-moving bath chair. Barren, bitter, and alone, they would sit, and sometimes through a broken heart Lord Christ would enter in and give them peace of pardon. But others died with bitterness and cursing.

This also Dr. Newton knew.

For long he had been realising some powerful influence and agency working against him. It was invisible, impalpable, but he was always meeting it now. He was headed off in many directions; once or twice quite lately only a combination of

cunning and good luck had saved him from serious trouble. His friends, Lady Honoria's set, were still loyal to him. But their loyalty had got to the stage when it must be actively exercised in his behalf. It had been theoretical hitherto—he rather doubted if it would stand the strain of practice.

He knew whose hand was against him, and why. The Confraternity of the Holy Ghost was at work, and his own frail pirate barque had come athwart the bows of a great armed ship. He did not under-rate the power or importance of his enemies. Their grip on society was growing too marked for that; all that was best in society was joining them.

He leaned back in the carriage that was taking him to Mrs. Emily Verschmidt's in Park Lane, and his face was haggard. All the urbanity had gone from the face, all the candour from the eyes. It seemed thinner—haggard and terrible.

The Doctor was heavily in debt. Of late several women whom he had for long attended had suddenly broken up. They owed him large sums on which he had been calculating. Their husbands had met his requests for a settlement with curt refusals and an intimation that should they hear any more of the matter they would take an early opportunity of laying certain facts before the General Medical Council.

Newton had been living beyond his means for a considerable time. The house in Harley Street, the horses and servants, were horribly expensive. He lived like a doctor who was a fashionable consultant though he had no general practice and no consultation work whatever. And there was another

expense that no one knew anything about, a small establishment elsewhere, small but costly enough.

The man was at his wit's end for money. He had imagination and sensitive nerves. These enormously added to the misery of his position. He saw everything trembling in the balance. The sword of Damocles, the writing on the wall, the mills of God—all these grim symbols raced through his quick brain, and little beads of sweat came out on his forehead as he thought of them.

Well, there was still Humphrey England, he reflected with a slight sense of relief. Properly handled, Humphrey would save him financially. And once let him pay off his debts, he would be more careful, get a sum of money in hand for emergencies, feel the power that a deposit account at the bank gives to sensitive nerves and frightened consciences as well!

It was quite obvious that he must profess this ridiculous new Indian religion that Humphrey was fathering. It was a great nuisance, but it had to be done. He had played many such antics in his time. It was all part of the game. But he did not in the least like what he had seen of the new prophet, this European with an Indian name. Charlatan the man was, of course. They all were. But he seemed of more strength and power than the others. Dr. Newton had dominated Madame Paula, and people of her class whom society took up for a time, easily enough. From what he had seen of Mr. Debendro at Humphrey England's house, he thought that it would not be an easy matter to dominate him.

The coupé stopped at the great house in Park Lane.

Dr. Newton got down with alacrity. It always cheered him to enter the portals of the millionaire in this august neighbourhood. It showed that his position was not so desperate after all. His fears dropped from him as he went up the stairs, his urbanity and dignity fell over him once more. For the moment he really imagined that he was a great physician paying a visit to an illustrious patient. And, indeed, he looked the part very well.

After all, the Verschmidts were great people. Nothing could alter that fact. Everyone respected a man with the Lord knew how many millions. Dr. Ninian Newton respected him most of all.

It was usual on the Doctor's constant visits that he was taken at once to Mrs. Verschmidt's boudoir. The footman who opened the door bowed deferentially and handed him to the major-domo, who greeted him with respectful familiarity and took him to the mistress of the house.

To-day there was something a little embarrassed in the man's manner. The Doctor noticed it at once with an inward shudder of apprehension. He was always noticing these things with a hungry watchful eye.

He was not taken to Mrs. Verschmidt's room, but shown into a small library and asked to wait a moment.

It was a formal book-lined room, with few traces of use or occupation, and he had never entered it before. The contrast with the warm luxurious nest

he had expected to enter was great. It was ominous also and chilled him.

There was no sound but the monotonous ticking of a big marble clock over the fireplace. He wished that it would stop. It got on his nerves, and each beat was like the blow of a hammer upon a sensitive part of the brain.

The door opened suddenly and Mr. Verschmidt came in. The Doctor felt a great throb of fear. He cringed in mind and body before this great man of four feet eight inches with the face of a monkey and—probably—a minor dynasty in each pocket.

"Ah! good morning, my dear Mr. Verschmidt," he said, extending his hand and trying, but with poor success, to writhe his mouth into a smile of greeting. The words stuck in his throat as if they had been gouts of treacle, his tongue was dry and rubbed harshly on the roof of his mouth.

Mr. Verschmidt put his hands behind his back.

"Now understand, Dr. Newton," he said in a quiet, but very peremptory voice, "that your visits to Mrs. Verschmidt will cease from to-day. I do not mean to have you in the house any more. If you will oblige me by sending in your account, I shall instruct my secretary to send you a cheque immediately. But understand once and for all, that I forbid you this house."

"May I ask——" Newton began with dry lips and a pallid face. Even as he spoke he cursed his own inability to appear controlled. He knew the figure he was cutting as if he had seen it in a mirror, a figure of cowardice, fear, and guilt.

"I should hardly think that necessary," the

little man said with a bitter smile that cut his wizened face into two parts and made him look horribly and preternaturally intelligent. "I know the sort of reputation you have and the sort of things you do. It occurred to me to look into your career the other day. I am a Jew—you ought to know something about our people—and I have my own views about the conduct of my household. There is no need to say more. If you want me to speak out I will though. Ah! I see you understand me perfectly. You shall not come between me and my natural hopes. And be careful that I do not find it necessary to crush you altogether. It would be a very easy thing to do, Dr. Newton. You know it as well as I do. Good-morning."

He pressed a bell, and when a servant came told the man to show Dr. Newton to his carriage. The big, plump man seemed smaller as he went down the steps. His clothes seemed to hang loosely on him, he walked jerkily. The man opened the door of the brougham. Dr. Newton entered, and as he did so, the servant threw a tiny envelope of a pale lilac colour upon the seat.

Immediately the carriage drove away.

With trembling fingers the Doctor opened the note.

It was written in pencil, and he recognised the odd affected handwriting at once. It was from Mrs. Verschmidt.

It ran as follows :—

"My Imp has been talking to some fool or other, and **has** been prejudiced against you. I mean to

pay him out in exactly the way he won't like. He's said brutal and coarse things to me. Don't you worry in the least. I will see that everything comes right. We can meet at the Speke's when my disgusting little creature is in the City. I was never more angry in my life.

"E. V."

With a hand that still trembled excessively Dr. Newton put the note away in his pocket-book. It was a grain of comfort, though the memory of the millionaire's face stabbed. There was a quiet force in his manner. He did not speak of his wife as an angel to be worshipped afar off any more. He spoke of her as his wife, as other men did. And there was something new in his eyes, something the Doctor recognised at once, something he often saw with cynical amusement or disregard. There was fatherhood in the eyes of the little Jew—the strongest passion of his race, the noble racial instinct that knits the Tribes of Israel together still.

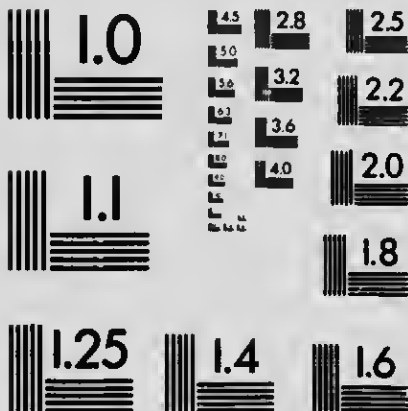
The Doctor pulled the check string, and told the coachman to drive home to Harley Street. He had several patients on his list, but he could not force himself to go through the ordeal. He was too shaken for that. None of them would be any the worse for his absence. He looked at his list. Lady Layton had a cold, and wanted him to cure it. Mrs. Sallie Bliss had been going the pace too hard, and wanted a tonic—not the ordinary tonic, but Dr. Newton's tonic. Mr. Platt-Burgoyne needed some "advice." Yes, they could wait, one and all. He was in no mood for such people now.

He drove up to the door of his house and sent the carriage away. While he was feeling in his





## (ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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pockets for his latch-key, which he could not find immediately, a shabbily-dressed man, belonging, apparently, to the clerk class, came over the road to him.

"Dr. Newton, I think?" he said with a sharp scrutiny. The Doctor answered him. In a moment, with a single mechanical movement that suggested a conjuring trick, the man handed him a folded white paper. "A writ to appear in the High Court, Dr. Newton," he said, and turning round, walked quickly away, his duty successfully accomplished.

The Doctor found his key and entered the house. Lunch was laid for him in the dining-room. He sat down and opened the writ. It was issued by a firm of solicitors acting for a money-lender, to whom he owed nearly six hundred pounds. He had a shrewd suspicion that this unwelcome summons was only the first of many that were imminent. His credit was severely shaken, and a single appearance in the law courts would altogether destroy it.

He looked gloomily at his lunch.

A partridge, stuffed with olives, and a white truffle or two cooked in dry sillery, and served up in napkins, half a bottle of Pol Roger, '74, and a morsel of Brie. The fire was blazing with logs. On a table by his arm-chair was a silver box of his special cigarette tobacco, a pale, straw-coloured tobacco from Salonika, straight and silky as a girl's hair. He was surrounded by all the little luxuries he loved and lived for.

And his thoughts went far beyond the walls of his comfortable room. They went to some hideous grey place where there would be no soft raiment

or exquisite food, no beautiful women to make him their confidential friend, no music, laughter, and gay nights.

The hell of the sensual man is a very complete hell. All lusts of the flesh grip the soul, and body also, in such a powerful vice that the mere thought of living bereft of them comes with a terrible vividness.

Anything was better than that!

Like all of us, Dr. Ninian Newton was an idealist. He would have sold his soul for money—and, as Mirabeau pointed out of someone else, would have been well advised in exchanging such dirt for cash. But he was, nevertheless, an idealist. Truth and purity, love and charity were not his ideals. Good wine, expensive food, pretty and frivolous women were. Now he saw his ideal slipping away from him—sliding away rather, with the speed of an avalanche.

He could not eat. The bird tasted like sawdust, the wine was bitter as quinine. He moved to the fire-side and began to smoke, wrestling with his fears; seeking an escape from these slowly closing walls.

Financially, he thought that with the exercise of ingenuity and tact he saw his way. He needed at least two thousand pounds urgently. But as yet he had never approached any of his friends with requests for a loan. He was a vain man, he had always liked to appear unembarrassed in money matters, and to move among his wealthy and pleasure loving friends as free from worry as they. He had been profuse, also, returning hospitalities either at his own house or the Carlton. He had always endeavoured to sink the professional man in the gentleman of position and of means.

Now the moment had arrived when he must play another game.

Humphrey England must provide the immediate sinews of war. Dr. Newton had little doubt but that his friend would do this. To make assurance doubly sure, he was prepared to humour the young man in a pretended adherence to his last caprice.

He meant to join the devotees of the person who called himself Debendro Nath Tagore. First the Doctor intended to find out what was this gentleman's "little game." It was, he concluded, the same as Madame Paula's little game, or that of the ingenious mystic from Malaga, Señor Hoit-sema, who had for a time been a personage in Lady Honoria's set, having discovered—as he said—the secret charter of Count Christian Rosenkreuz and the means by which he preserved vitality till the age of 106.

The "little game" was, of course, the ordinary one. The game of the open pocket and the itching palm. Nevertheless, in this case the Doctor was not quite sure.

This latest potential, Mr. Siudge, was not as the others were. He was certainly a gentleman by birth. Doctor Newton, who had only been a gentleman long enough to get quite accustomed to it, divined the fact with the certainty of his kind.

And the newcomer had a marvellous personality also. The Doctor knew the enormous sensation he would make on his introduction into Lady Honoria's set. There could be no doubt about it. No one had seen anyone quite like him before.

This being so, Newton was more than ordinarily

uneasy. He would not be able to dominate this person, he imagined. And when two sharks are engaged in the single pursuit of an object, there is generally difficulty about the division of the spoil.

And Doctor Newton wanted all the spoil.

Nevertheless, he was far more at ease in regard to the question of money than in regard to the other and greater peril.

He knew very well under whose observation he had come.

The Confraternity of the Holy Ghost was at work.

His face grew clouded and ugly in its hate, in its deadly fear. His very existence was threatened. The medical profession was changing its attitude towards these questions. Five years ago there were distinguished medical names on the committee of the Malthusian League. Five years ago, in an article on physical regeneration in *The Malthusian* a celebrated doctor had proposed that in order to solve the question of physical decadence, the unfit should "be instructed as to the direful consequences of their reproduction, and how they may enjoy all the privileges of love, to which they are entitled by right, without passing on their unfitness to another generation."

No well-known doctor would dare to write like that now, whatever he might think in private. Public opinion was entirely changing. People like Doctor Ella Low had changed it—as far as medical men were concerned.

Dr. Newton had always been an enthusiastic advocate of the limitation of families. The smart women, among whom his practice lay, did not want

to have children. He had always been their councillor in the matter.

And in public he had defended a position which was really the result of private subserviency and greed, of a hatred of the teaching of religion, by loud and confident economic statements.

"Surely," he was always saying, quoting from Lord Derby in 1879, "surely it is better to have thirty-five millions of human beings leading useful and intelligent lives, rather than forty millions struggling painfully for a bare subsistence."

From the first he had been an open enemy of The Confraternity.

But so were many eminent and worthy physicians to whom God had not spoken.

It was not for that *alone* that the hand of this powerful organisation was pressing so heavily upon him.

A servant had come in and thrown new logs upon the fire. The short winter's day was nearly over. Darkness was now falling drearily over London outside. But the glow of the pine and cedar-wood threw a ruddy light upon everything in that rich and comfortable room. It threw its light upon the figure and the face of the fashionable society doctor in his low, luxurious chair. And the face was pallid and grey. It was the face of a man who goes in some great fear.

At nine o'clock the doctor's brougham came round to the front door. Wrapping himself in a heavy overcoat, for the night was raw and bitter cold, and wearing a soft felt hat well pressed down over his forehead, he ordered the coachman to drive him to Hammersmith railway station.

In all the glare and noise of the triangle, with its huge public-houses and brilliantly lighted shops, he dismounted and sent the carriage away.

After asking a few questions from an impassive policeman, he turned and was lost in the roaring crowd.

Five minutes afterwards he was walking down a dark and echoing street towards the river bank, and the tall, old-fashioned houses that still stand there. The fog was thick and damp, and enfolded him as with a cloak. The sparse gas lamps glimmered faintly through it.

As he stumbled onwards, the luxurious and ease loving person from the known and lighted streets of the West End began to realise the immensity, and also the sinister loneliness, of London.

He was on an odd and disreputable errand, in an unknown quarter of the metropolis to him, the sport and possibly the prey of a destiny and occasion that was both dangerous and malign.

Oh, for the home-like room at Harley Street, the heavy curtains drawn, the candles burning softly in their silver holders, comfortable fire upon the hearth;

He breathed in the damp river fog, and it set him coughing violently. A breath of even damper and colder air than before warned him that he must be close upon the wide stretch of water, and that the street was nearly ended.

He could distinguish no more faint and spectral flickers ahead from the gas lamps, and as if to confirm his suspicions the long, melancholy ululation from a steam-tug suddenly sounded through the dark.

The doctor was standing still in great perplexity and disgust, when he heard footsteps drawing near. In a moment more he saw a man, carrying a jug frothing with beer, loom up in the sickly rays of the last lamp.

"Can you tell me if I am anywhere near Alexandra Mansions?" he asked, in a voice that shook with cold and the general disturbance of function to which he had been subject throughout the day.

"Why, certainly," the man answered, with the half contempt of the untutored mind at finding anyone ignorant of a fact so patent to itself. "Two more yards, and there y'are. Foller me. I'm the caretaker, I am."

He took a few steps, opened a great door in the side of a high building of flats, and led Dr. Newton into a large and cheerless lobby, half full of fog and badly lit. It was one of those huge barrack-like buildings of flats which are springing up all over London in which Dr. Newton found himself, places in which a fairly-commodious dwelling-place can be rented for some five and forty pounds a year.

"I want flat number 25," the Doctor said. "Where is the lift?"

"There ain't no lift in Alexandra Mansions. Are yer kidding yerself as you're in Victoria Street? Up three flights, turn to the right, and you'll see the number on the door."

He went away. Dr. Newton mounted the bare stone steps which echoed mournfully. At the head of each flight, long corridors with drab walls, and most economically lit, stretched away into terminal gloom. The doors of the flats were all closed, and



no windows looked out into the corridor. As he walked down it, seeking the number he wanted, he heard the tinkling notes of a piano, muffled, through the wall. Then came a high tenor voice, singing. It was a most welcome sound in the gloom of this prison-like place.

At last Dr. Newton found number 25, and pressed the button of an electric bell in the lintel of the door, pressed it with very mixed feelings indeed.

It opened almost at once. A man-servant ushered the guest into a small, warm, and comfortably furnished hall, lit by a cluster of electric bulbs.

A greater contrast to Dr. Newton's expectations of what he would find in this somewhat poverty-stricken building could hardly have been.

On this side of the door of No. 25 he might have been in Jermyn Street or St. James's.

The man showed the Doctor into a small and cosy smoking-room. The fire burnt clear and bright, the chairs drawn up to it were covered with tiger-skin, the electric lights shone on a delightful little bachelor room, full of every contrivance for comfort and repose.

With a sigh of intense physical satisfaction, the sybarite sank into a chair and held out chilled fingers to the blaze. A little copper kettle sang a merry tune at him as he did so.

In all London there could hardly be a more comfortable, ordinary and well-ordered little smoking-room. It suggested nothing that was fraudulent or bizarre. The Doctor's apprehension began to melt away.

"Come, come!" he said to himself, "I see no very dubious nor difficult enterprise in this. All will go well, and I shall use this gentleman to my own ends in the pleasantest manner in the world!"

At this moment there was a rap upon the door, and the discreet man-servant entered, carrying a tray.

"My master, sir," he said very civilly, "begs that you will be good enough to wait a little longer for him. He is finishing an important letter. He tells me to bring you in a bowl of soup, it's a clear consommé, sir, as you must be chilled by the weather outside."

With deft fingers the man brought up a small table by the side of the Doctor's chair. He took a decanter of sherry from a little side-board.

"If I may advise, sir," he said, "I should pour a glass of sherry into the soup. I made the soup myself, sir, and I think that would just——"

He poured the wine into the bowl as he was speaking.

Dr. Newton sipped. "Excellent! Excellent!" he said, with the fervour of real conviction. "Most kind of Mr. Debendro. The right thing at the right moment."

The man left the room with a slight bow.

The Doctor finished the soup, lit a cigarette, and stretched out his feet to the fire.

He was perfectly happy.

So easily can the slave of fleshly things be influenced and soothed!

Then the door opened once more, and the person

who called himself Debendro Nath Tagore—explaining always that he had taken the name of a former leader in the Indian sect to which he belonged for definite purposes—entered the room.

He was a tall, elderly man with an emaciated face and large, arresting eyes. There was nothing of the hawk or the schemer in his appearance. He seemed, rather, the devotee, and a distinguished fanatic—if fanatic indeed he was—at that.

"A man to reckon with," the Doctor thought, experiencing the same impression of force and power as he had at the first meeting with his host at Humphrey England's house. "A man to reckon with, and one who will go down with our folk because he is not only a personality, but so obviously a gentleman as well."

"I hope William has made you comfortable, Doctor," Mr. Debendro said in a quiet voice that yet seemed humming with reserved power, a voice with two surfaces to it—so to speak—one conventional and the other real, the real flashing through the false every now and then.

"Quite, quite," Newton answered. "And very many thanks for thinking of me. You've made yourself deuced comfortable here, I must say."

Debendro moved his hand with slight impatience.

He drew up a chair to the fire, lit a cigarette, and smoked for a minute or two in silence.

Then, quite suddenly, the Doctor became aware that two eyes like lamps were turned full upon him with a powerful scrutiny, or menace, perhaps.

Was it menace?—the Doctor's comfortable mood began to shrivel up and go. It was as though this

man had turned a microscope upon him, and he felt uncomfortably small and germ-like.

But, in the moment of his uneasiness, a reflection that this man was, after all, an adventurer came to his mind, and with the thought his native impudence asserted itself.

"You know how to make good use of the remarkable eyes that Nature has given you," he said.

Debendro regarded him thus for a moment more. Then he threw his head back and began to laugh. It was a laugh like the wind going through tight wires.

"I like that!" he said. "I like that! Oh, I see that we shall get on very well. You are astute, my dear sir." He laughed again. But the Doctor realised that there was a horrible detachment in the laugh. It was quite cold. *The man was thinking of something else all the time.*

That was unnerving. Dr. Newton liked to be taken seriously.

It was unnerving, but the soup and sherry had acted as a nerve tonic and irritation was the prominent sensation in the Doctor's brain.

He made an effort, leant forward, endeavoured to imitate the other's blazing scrutiny as well as he was able, and spoke.

"Now, Debendro," he said, "what is all this? Humphrey England has told me a little, but not much. You have roped in Humphrey England—no very difficult task, by the way, for a man of your ability and personality. You want to rope in—excuse the expression—a lot of other people in society, all friends of mine. I don't want to know

the details of your conjuring tricks or your dogmas or what not. I want to know exactly what your little game is, how far you want to go, and how far your little game clashes with *my* little game."

He sat back in his chair with a satisfied smile. He had, he felt, made a point. He had put his cards frankly on the table, and awaited a response. Quite unconsciously, all his suavity and urbanity of manner had gone from him. He spoke coarsely, vulgarly, like the adroit and sensual rogue he was.

The tall man took some papers from the breast pocket of the grey lounge suit he was wearing.

He ran his eye over them.

"Let me see," he said in a meditative voice. "Goodale, Whyte, and Goodale served a writ on you this morning. That was in the matter of Cohen and Krauss. Then there is five hundred, more or less, to Simpson for wine and so on—excellent caterers, by the way! Take it all in all, you must have a couple of thousand pounds. Quite that, I should say, as far as I know."

Newton could not speak. He felt once more the sharp stab in the heart that he had known that morning when Mr. Verschmidt had walked quickly into the library at Park Lane.

The tip of his tongue, quite white and bloodless, came out in the attempt to moisten lips that felt as though they had been fried.

Debendro tapped impatiently on the carpet with his foot.

"Good heavens, man," he said, "don't show mortal funk in your face like that! You are flabby with rich living. I had given you more self-control.

Do you imagine I know all about you by occult means? I assure you that it is nothing of the sort. Finding that I had need of you, I simply engaged an astute member of an enquiry agent firm to go into your affairs. There's the whole mystery. I find you want money, and I find that you are in imminent danger from other sources. It is all quite simple. And, in order to have you quite at my disposal, I have spent a little money in buying up some of your debts. It may sound melodramatic, but it is very ordinary indeed."

Newton's face relaxed of its tenor, but it became a sickly parody of complaisance.

"You want money," his host went on. "I don't."

The Doctor looked up quickly. He saw, in his host's face that he was perfectly sincere.

From that moment he ceased to regard him as a dangerous man.

Mr. Debendro quite appreciated the change in Newton's attitude. He became confidential, even friendly in his manner.

"Let us talk," he said.

The Doctor's eye fell upon a tantalus and upon the shining kettle by the fireside.

His host rang the bell, and ordered the man to make some toddy for the Doctor.

"I want your assistance, Doctor," the tall man said. "Your assistance in a complicated business. I have you pretty well in the hollow of my hand"—he extended it with an expressive and chilling closure of the fingers. "Therefore, I can count upon you. But if you help me, I shall help you in other ways."

I shall set you on your legs financially, I shall restore your somewhat tottering credit and celebrity, even with your own particular branch of society, and more than all this—if I read you right—I shall give you the opportunity of revenge and triumph over the people who are pressing you so hard. You know, I believe, of a certain Confraternity?"

The Doctor made the motion of spitting. His face puffed out into swift malignancy.

"Good," his host said dispassionately, in the manner of one marking a symptom he had perfectly expected and was not at all surprised to see.

"Then listen to what I want you to do for me. Your marvellous tact, your social position and skill, will, I am sure, Dr. Newton, pull us both through as difficult but as an exciting an enterprise as any two men of talent have embarked on in modern times."

Shrewd as Newton was, this gross flattery reinstated him in his own good opinion of himself. He saw the net no longer, forgot the gyves, and began to answer his host with a patronage to which the other, his object gained, was perfectly indifferent.

"Trust in me, Debendro," said the Doctor, "and I will see you through in your scheme, whatever it may be."

"I am about to obtain an ascendancy over society," said the tall man, "which will be extraordinary in its extent and power. I shall lead all whither I will."

"And if I may ask," said Doctor Newton, "where will that be?"

"To the true faith!" he was answered; "to the mystical faith of the Brahmo Somaj!"

The man's eyes, which had been cool and brilliant, flamed up at his words. They showed a sincerity that it was impossible to mistake, a conviction, an ideal.

The Doctor was immensely relieved. All was plain sailing now. The fanatic is only dangerous when one thwarts him. This man merely wanted to convert silly society men and women to some esoteric Indian religion. With what joy and thankfulness would the Doctor help him in this great work, become the lieutenant, financial secretary, let us say, of such a mission.

"Quite so," Dr. Newton answered. "The Brahmo Somaj! the religion of the future!"

"Now, I cannot gain many influential people whom I wish to gain unless I do so by means of some startling manifestation. I intend to convert society, not because society is the class most worth converting, but because it is the most influential. Doctrines held by it soon filter down and become general. Men and women of this class will not spend the time and thought necessary for conviction. But they can be convinced by one bold stroke. That is what I have been long planning. My plans are ripe, and you are to assist me in them. I deplore the necessity of using means of deception, even in a good and holy cause. But I have thought this question out long ago, and discussed it with our friends in India. I need not enter into it now. I propose, Dr. Newton, to die and rise again!"

The Doctor looked steadily at his host. He had



a poor opinion of anyone who was prepared to go to any lengths for an idea, for something one couldn't touch or see—eat, drink, or embrace, that is. It showed a mental weakness somewhere. Here, it seemed, was mental weakness run to seed. He remembered that delusions of grandeur and power were an early symptom of general paralysis of the brain—he looked steadily at Debendro Nath Tagore.

"No," the man answered impatiently. "I am not on the verge of dementia. You will not say so in a moment. What I propose is well within the bounds of possibility. A combination of circumstances makes it possible for me to seem to die and rise again two days afterwards. This may be tested by strict scientific evidence. There is no flaw in my scheme. None whatever. What will happen, or seem to happen, is this. In a week's time, at a meeting of the people whom Mr. Humphrey England is recruiting for the Faith, I shall die in their midst. *Really* die—not be drugged to simulate death. You and other doctors will certify to my death. Everyone in the room will examine the body. In three days' time they will be afforded an opportunity of witnessing to the absolute fact of dissolution again. The first signs of decomposition will have set in."

"If you can do all this, you are a very remarkable man, my dear sir. But if you manage to die at a séance, how about an inquest?"

"It could be held and a post-mortem made. I should prefer it. It is quite unlikely that I should be able to die at an actual meeting. But I shall be within two or three days of dying. The actual

death would take place, in any case, in the presence of all the believers. Then, if you like, an inquest. After that, cremation. The urn containing the ashes will be sealed and given into the charge of a responsible person—yourself, for example. The faithful will wait a week, knowing that at the end of that time I shall rise again."

"Some of them will believe *anything*," the Doctor said thoughtfully.

"Within a week," Debendro continued, "everyone who has seen the death and been present at the cremation will assemble in Mr. England's house. The urn will be brought, prayers from the Brahma Dharva will be recited, the company will await me in darkness."

"Darkness!" said the Doctor. "Ah!"

"I shall be standing in their midst as the last prayer is offered," the tall man concluded simply.

"And then?"

"Then what has been done, without possibility of doubt, will be noised abroad gradually. The church will grow, my power will be unquestioned, there will be a spiritual revolution!"

The eyes glowed wildly once more, the vibrant voice was fierce in its intensity.

"If you could possibly do what you say," Dr. Newton answered, "all this would happen. You could rule people, you could command *anything*. And, moreover"—his voice became stirred with the so glorious vision—"I, as your friend and lieutenant, I could, er, spread the light, don't you know, and with my society influence rope in any number of converts to the fold!"

"It is the place I have assigned you in the movement," the host answered with quiet assurance.

The Doctor thought of a capitation fee!—Fifty pounds a convert, say. Oh, it would be delightful. But the vision fled in a moment. It was too splendid.

"I wish it could be done," he said with a sigh of regret. "There are infinite possibilities in the thing. But it's no use, you know. I am one thing, at least. I am a man skilled in drugs! But no drug I know would even do more than simulate the *rigor mortis* for an hour. And then it would be attended with great danger. And no hypnotism would work it either, Debendro. Charcot and all the Frenchmen have never gone beyond the experimental stages. You never know how the thing is going to work. Why, Maskelyne and Cooke couldn't work a thing like that with all the looking glasses and magic lanterns in Europe. There would be too much *after* evidence necessary. The proper tests to establish the scientific fact of death, the post mortem even! No, it's no good."

"You quite forget, Dr. Ninian Newton," said the host, "that I have not asked you here to suggest a means by which my plan can be carried out, but to compel your co-operation in one which is already complete in every detail—and to offer you power and wealth for such co-operation."

The cold certainty of the man was reassuring—his personality was wonderful!—but his contempt was hard to bear.

"What am I to do?" Newton asked sullenly.

Debendro drew his chair close up to the chair in which the Doctor sat.

For nearly twenty minutes he spoke rapidly into his guest's ear. There was no sound of articulate speech, only the continuous hum that one can hear when a telephone receiver is pressed to the ear and one is waiting to be connected to some distant point.

Newton's face was a panorama on which his thoughts threw their effects.

The sullen look changed to alertness, the alertness to strained attention. An almost painful intensity of concentration gave way to dawning triumph, mingled with immeasurable surprise. When, at length, his host threw himself back in his chair, exhausted, the Doctor's face was set into lines of excited purpose and enthusiasm.

He became painfully agitated in his effort to express himself.

He caught hold of Debendro's lean brown hand.

"Mr. Mor—Debendro," he whispered, "I am with you till the end, the very end. It is marvellous, wonderful. It is *certain!*"

Little more was said between the two. Newton received some bank-notes from the other, together with a letter sealed with a crest that is not unknown to the heralds of the west country.

Last words were said in the long, bare corridor outside the flat. It was filled with fog, empty and desolate.

"We shall have everything ready here, Doctor."

"And I shall start for Ilfracombe to-morrow morning."

"Good-night, Doctor."

"Good-night—Master of the Brahmo Somaj of the world!"

The Doctor stumbled down the echoing concrete stairs, out into the dark, deserted street, and so, with hurried, tremulous footsteps, to the roar of Hammersmith.

The public-houses had only twenty minutes more in which to remain open.

The music-hall and theatre had vomited their crowds, who were clamouring for drink; the traffic in the streets was deafening as the last electric trams clanged and swung away, the omnibuses started with a clatter and a jar.

Moved by some uncontrollable impulse, the Doctor pushed his way into the gaudy, glaring saloon bar of a great public-house.

He must be in a crowd, the riot in his blood, the mental intoxication, needed lights, music, a roar and a swirl of hard, vulgar and tumultuous life!

He was the king and lord of all these folk, he felt as he crushed into the glare of crimson, gold and innumerable mirrors.

His loose and undisciplined imagination, the wild imagination of the pure sensualist frenzied by possibilities of which an hour or two before it had not even dreamed, thrown from its insecure poise and balance by a sudden reversal of fortune, filled him with an exhilaration he had never known before.

He pressed to the gleaming mahogany counter with its shining glass and silver, its powdered, painted barmaids rushing backwards and forwards

in the last mad fury which descends upon such places as these just before closing time.

With trembling hands, he took his goblet of brandy and drained it with shining, exultant face.

He stood among a mob of third-rate bookmakers, flaunting harlots, music hall comedians of the fourth class, young fools from the city—a welter of sordid pleasure-seekers. He laughed as he drained his second glass.

People began to look at him as he stood there—this tall, well-looking man—an obvious “toff”—with the radiant face.

“’Ad a good dye at the rices,” said a poor, painted, over-dressed creature to the man with her, a short, stalwart, animal in loud tweeds.

“I expect!” he answered. Then turning to Newton, he lifted a battered, merry and impudent face to him.

“’Ere’s luck, cocky!” he shouted. “Luck, fun, and a fiver! for you’re a gentleman, *you* are!”

Someone had put a penny into a huge orchestrion which stood against the wall. It thundered out a popular music hall air.

The half-drunken crowd began to sing the words—

“So I sed to ’er!”  
“So she sed to me.”

*Ensemble:*

“POM POM!  
“POM POM!

“For a loife of Gayetee!

“A splash and a dash is rather rash,

“—Now sye ‘so long’ to all your cash,

“But—

“POM, POM, POM, POM, POM.”

Newton stood there laughing. He joined in the vulgar thunder.

As the chorus died away amid laughter and cheers, a heavily-built man in his shirt-sleeves followed by another in a frock coat, came pushing systematically through the crowd.

Both men were shouting in a harsh, mechanical manner, and with cessation—

"Time, gentlemen, please!"

"Time, gentlemen, please!"

They all poured from the great garish place into the street. The manager and the potman followed the herd, pushing them out. The last person had but crossed the threshold when iron gates clanged behind him.

The great arc lights which hung round the building went out suddenly.

Newton hailed a cab. As he pushed over the pavement towards it, a tall figure brushed by him. He did not see it. Angus Evan Tulloch was walking home to Bedford Park. The great head was sunk a little on the breast. The fine brain was far, far away from this sweltering arcana in which it moved.

The writer had been to solemn evensong at Father Grogan's church in Bloomsbury, and afterwards he had taken supper with the priest and Sir Arthur Childe. They had sat talking quietly, as men who wear the armour of Christ talk. Awed, hopeful, waiting and wondering.

Now the old veteran of letters was striding home through midnight London, with his thoughts far away. In but a little time, he knew that he would

have to enter his appearance and give account of what he had done. After all the changes and chances of his mortal life, he would have to begin again as a neophyte in the New Life.

He was enquiring within himself if he would be worthy to be a postulant, if he had learned enough here, and trained himself sufficiently, to start *there* as an admitted student.

He was thinking of himself with great humility, and of our Lord with infinite love and trust.

So he jostled Dr. Ninian Newton. Turning, he saw him getting into his cab and recognised him.

"That beast of a doctor," he thought, and straightway dismissed the man from his mind with only a passing wonder at his presence so far from the scenes of his activities and crimes.

The hansom sprang Eastwards.

Angus Evan Tulloch marched steadily Westwards.

The man in the tweed suit, stupefied by the cold air, which brought the alcohol he had been drinking over him in a flood, sang mechanically on the curbstone—

"POM, POM, POM, FOM, POM."



## CHAPTER V.

### THE TWIN BRETHREN MEET. A LINK CHAPTER.

"You've brought him up most successful, sir, if I may say so," said the valet.

"It was a long journey," Dr. Newton answered; "though by engaging a special coach I avoided the change of carriages at Exeter. But care and medical knowledge made it possible."

"Quite so, sir," said the valet.

"The end will be soon, Sahib," a tall old man broke in.

He had very white hair, his mahogany-coloured face was shrivelled with age, though his dark eyes were still alert and bright. He wore a long overcoat of dark grey stuff and a turban was twisted round his head.

"Well, well, my good fellow," the Doctor answered. "It must come to all of us, don't you know."

The Indian bowed and said no further word.

The three men were sitting by the fire in a small room of Debendro's flat. The place was simply furnished with chairs of American bentwood and

the floor was covered with linoleum, except where, by the fire, a rather brilliant hearthrug lay.

The Doctor, in fact, was relegated for the moment to the servants' room.

The long journey from the far West of England was over. The special and arduous circumstances which had obtained during that journey were over too. Dr. Newton had carried out the first part of his instructions with skill and success. He sat and purred with the respectful servants, English and Asiatic.

After an hour had passed he looked at his watch.

He went to a bag which stood on a side table, took a bottle from it and a graduated glass in a leather case. He poured some liquid from the bottle into the glass.

"Take this digitalis in to the patient," he said to Debendro's man with an uneasy frown, "and tell both gentlemen that I absolutely insist the patient should retire at once and I am waiting to assist him to bed."

The man bowed and left the room.

\* \* \*

The old Indian, crouched by the blazing fire, before which his lean yellow hands flickered in uneasy pantomime, looked dreamily at the Doctor.

"Trouble not at all, Doctor Sahib," he crooned. "No drugs will save or harm. The Colonel Sahib is here to do what he has to do, so that he may learn the truth before he dies and enters into the dream of Brahm. There is no fret or haste. All things are so arranged as they will be. Think you that we came hither without a purpose, knowing that we

are on the edge of death? Peace, sahib. Drugs avail nothing, no nor any care. Peace! What the Colonel Sahib must do at the bidding of this madman that he will do. And he will do it as thou knowest doubtless, so that he may meet his lady, the mem-sahib, purged of all bitterness and hate, as I had told him long, long years ago would he but hear me. For she was true, and this madman . . ."

His voice died away into low mutterings.

"Yes, yes," the Doctor answered, "your faith in your master is magnificent. Does one good to see it, and so forth. But if I am to keep him alive for several . . . , I must be allowed to administer—" the valet r . . . ned.

"My mast and the Colonel beg you will give them ten minutes more, Doctor," he said.

Newton frowned. Then, for want of some occupation with which to employ hands that were twitching, he caught up the poker and thrust it into the fire.

The coals blazed up with a splutter of light.

The wrinkled Indian crouched closer to the blaze and began to croon some sentences to himself. His profile was like a mask of heated bronze.

The English valet sat immobile and watchful.

Dr. Newton waited the call for his professional services.

\* \* \* \*

In the smoking-room the man who called himself Debendro Nath Tagore stood with one arm resting on the shelf of the mantel. He was looking down at someone who lay stretched in a long steamer chair, someone who in form and feature, in the

worn, emaciated face, in the liquid intentness of the brilliant eyes, resembled himself as two blades of grass are alike or twin ears of corn.

In the chemistry of Nature these twin brothers had been made so that none could tell one from the other. Such cases are rare, though not so rare but that almost everyone can recall an instance in his own experience. Nature is ever reproducing her types, we see it on every side in the vegetable and animal kingdom, occasionally in the human.

On the face of the man in the chair, Colonel Mordaunt, of the ancient Devon mansion, there was a wild and flickering hope, alternating with spasms of something almost like hate as he looked up at his brother.

"James," he said in the vibrant and magnetic voice that either shared, "you were always cruel and hard, harder than the grave to which I am going. For the love of God in Whom I trust tell me that you are not lying to me."

"I have said it, Charles. I await your promise to do what I have asked. When you have sworn that you will do it, then I will give you the proof. Cruel am I? Yes, perhaps I have always been cruel. But you have not sat for years making mats in the prison at Calcutta. You are going to die now, but I have died a thousand times. I have died every time the sun rose or the wind blew. No, I am not cruel, I am just; just even as the One without a second is just. And you whom I loved in those far-off days, you abandoned and deserted me, threw me away, left me to die. I have paid for my sin. I have paid fully for all

that I did. For what does the holy Brahmo Somaj teach? *'Man stands in imperative need of salvation from sin, but not of salvation from punishment when he has sinned. However entirely God may, and ever does, accept our repentance, He must yet punish us for our sins in order to deliver us from them; and instead of weakly praying to escape His purifying discipline we should dutifully accept it as the truest sign of His fatherly love.'* Thus it is said in our holy book, the *Brahma Dharva* of the Brahmo Somaj."

His right arm was raised as he recited the words in the long priest-like chant of his belief. His whole face was spiritualised by the fervour of his belief, the strength of his fanaticism.

Colonel Mordaunt shuddered. "And have I not paid?" he said. "For long years I have lived in sorrow, thinking that the woman I worshipped was evil, vile, and treacherous. If I was hard to you, life has been very hard to me, James."

"Charles," the other answered, "when six weeks ago I found that you were living still I sent to you to tell you that out of the mists of the past I brought you a message. It was but three months back at Pooree that I recognised the old man Nanak Shah in the Somaj. I was preaching the Truth there before setting out to this country—no homeland to me now—as a missionary of the One without a second. I sought Nanak Shah after the prayers, and from him I learned the whole truth and compelled him to give up the papers he had. I came to England, and for days I wrestled with myself. 'Why shall I give him peace?' I asked myself, 'who gave me no help in my hour of punishment

and darkness?' And then I learned that you were dying. I saw how I might force you to help me, to give me the power"—there was a catch in his voice at the word, a catch of hysteria—"the POWER I must have over the souls of men and women in high places! And that is the price you must pay for the knowledge that will let you die in peace."

Mordaunt shuddered. He heard the note of madness in the voice of this wild brother of his who had sprung out of the midst of the past to torture him with bitter memories.

"You have already told me," he said in a weak voice. "You have already told me that she was pure. Why, then, should I pay this price of lies and trickery?"

There was no conviction in his words. James Mordaunt knew he was on the point of yielding. The agony of desire to know the whole truth lay over his face.

"Do not deceive yourself, Charles," he answered sternly. "If you know no more than I have told you the torture of your last hours will be a thousand times more terrible than any you have known. It will be the torture of uncertainty. And if there should have been a daughter born to you?—a daughter married and bearing a child of her own? . . ."

Colonel Mordaunt sat up in his chair. A sudden light swept the pain from his face as mist goes before the sun.

"I have seen her!" he cried. "God gave me that grace and I never knew! I have seen her

five years ago by chance, the daughter of my wife's daughter!"

"It is possible, Charles," the other answered indifferently. "Your daughter was born after your wife had left you. She was sent to England and married an English clergyman. So I learned in India. But, come, give me your answer. Will you know the truth before you die? Will you swear to help me if I give you the letters?"

"What must I do?"

"Just this, and no more. You must go to an hotel near Berkeley Square. The Doctor who brought you here will attend you. You will remain here until the end is imminent. I learn that it can be predicted within a day?"

Colonel Mordaunt nodded. It was not death, the mere fact of death, that troubled either of these brothers. They had both died many times.

"When it is a day off you will be moved to this hotel. You will be entered there under the name that I have taken, the name of our most pious priest, Debendro Nath Tagore. Certain people will be at your bedside when you die. That is all. If you can speak, you will say nothing to them. There is no more."

"I have made a will," the other said. "I had drawn all the money I have left, and had destined it for my servant who is with me. But now, if you can find this girl for me, this grand-daughter of mine I saw in Devon five years ago, you must give it to her. But send the *hamal* back to India and give him a little to live on. I will explain it all to him. He will obey my wishes, for he loves

me. I will give you the money. You will do this, James?"

"Yes, Charles."

"I can trust you, I know. You were honourable in your dealings—though this wild fraud is evil . . . I do not know . . ."

He struggled with himself.

James Mordaunt leaned forward. "Think of *her*!" he said.

The dying man was conquered.

"I swear to you that I will do all you ask," he said in firm tones. "And now, oh now, for the love of God! the papers!"

The other unlocked a strong-box which stood under the sideboard and gave him a bundle of faded letters and other papers.

The old man's hands trembled so that he could but hardly grasp them. At the touch of the sheets he gave a loud, sudden sob.

At this moment the door was flung open and Dr. Ninian Newton came swiftly into the room.

The valet followed him carrying a glass upon a tray

The Doctor ran up to Colonel Mordaunt and forced the liquid between his teeth. The face was growing ashen-grey as he did so.

"Fool," he hissed at Debendro, in his excitement and eagerness. "Have you no sense at all! Another fifteen minutes of this strain and it would have been all over with his chances. Help me to get him to bed."

Mordaunt was quite conscious, but very weak, when he was finally disposed in his room.



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He lay pale and chill, with his hands holding a bundle of papers to his failing heart.

He could not read them as yet, but they seemed to bring him peace at last.

"He is safe?" Debendro asked the Doctor when they had returned to the smoking-room.

"Yes, for a time. But a repetition of such imprudence would ruin everything."

"It is all over now," Debendro answered, and then he said to himself dreamily and in a different, almost boyish, voice, "Poor old Charlie—this is his second wedding night."

Dr. Ninian Newton shrugged his shoulders and poured himself out some whiskey and water.

## CHAPTER VI.

LADY HONORIA SPEKE AND MR. HUMPHREY ENGLAND  
IN A CELLAR UNDERNEATH NEW BOND STREET.

FOUNDED in 1908 by an enterprising genius, who was also a shrewd opportunist. "THE MOOD" in New Bond Street was a great success.

The "Mood" was a tea-shop with a unique character. Realising that constant variety and excitement had become a necessity of every nerve with a certain section of society, M. Buol, an adroit Swiss caterer, determined to take advantage of the fact.

He took a large establishment in a fashionable quarter and opened it as a place where one could have afternoon tea.

The idea, as set forth in the prospectus and carried out in the internal arrangements, was this.

Everyone taking tea at the establishment was to be enabled to enjoy it, and other light refreshments, in an environment which was in harmony with their mood at the moment.

There were thirty or forty different rooms in the place.

For example, it was possible in summer-time to sit in an underground chamber called an "ice

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cave." The illusion was that one was in the centre of an iceberg. The walls appeared to be of solid ice, through which the rays of the sun came in a flood of cool, prismatic colour; or, if moonlight was wished, one turned an electric switch and the light changed. People sat on blocks of imitation ice, in which odd-looking sea monsters had been frozen; the air was delightfully cool, and the entrance to each of these grottos—there were three of them—was guarded by a stuffed Polar bear.

There was the Baudelaire room, where the decadents drank tea and smoked it, modelled after that mysterious chamber of which the author of "*Flowers of Evil*" said:—

"The strange ethereal chamber, dim and rich,  
Dim as a dream, rich as a reverie,  
I knew it all of old, surely I know  
The floating twilight tinged with rose and blue,  
The moon-soft carved niche  
Whence the cold marble, wan as memory,  
Slopes to the wine-sweet bath of cold dark fire,  
Perfumed with old regret and dead desire."

There was the room with the glass floor, through which one looked as one trod and saw captive figures holding up chained hands in supplication. Many women found it thrilling and pleasant to exercise this mock disdainful cruelty—to feel like a Marquise with her serfs before the French Revolution.

There was a room like the cabin of a ship that rocked gently from side to side if desired, while the "lap, lap" of waves could be heard; a room of mirrors, which multiplied one's personality so much that it was said a curate having strayed into it by

mistake went mad and imagined he was at a diocesan conference for the rest of his life.

For people of simple tastes, there were Chinese rooms, Japanese rooms, rooms copied from the Escorial, the Vatican, and the Petit Trianon. Rooms of all shapes, sizes, colours, perfumes, sounds, could be found in this fashionable and morbid toy, "The Mood."

It was a bright winter's afternoon as Lady Honoria Speke drove towards the tea-shop with Humphrey England.

The air was keen and hard, the sun had not altogether gone, and Bond Street was full of smart women in furs. In winter the fashionable part of London gives the stranger and observer an effect of solid wealth and luxury that they do not convey even in summer-time, when everyone wears a brilliant costume. The same sense of contrast between luxury and poverty is not so immediately apparent in warm weather.

As Lady Honoria's hansom stopped in front of "The Mood," the huge, well-fed commissionaire, who hastened to put a basket shield before the wheel, drove away a thin and filthy vendor of mechanical toys with a curse. The judge's wife and earl's daughter descended from the cab wearing sables that had cost five hundred pounds. The curb-stone hawker shuffled away aching with cold, and itching as his thin watery blood trickled sluggishly through his veins. The rough words of the tea-shop porter stung him also. The porter had told him that he *smelt* bad. The wretch knew it and was ashamed. He knew also that if this

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tyrant had slept where he had slept he would have been the same.

Both Lady Honoria and her companion were grave in manner and serious in face. Humphrey wore a coat of astrachan and a hard hat, a warm voluminous coat. But he seemed pinched by the cold, if his face was any index to his sensations.

The double doors of the tea house opened and closed behind them.

Immediately they were in another world. In a long lounge the air was warm and perfumed. The noise of the street had utterly ceased; instead of it, they heard the sounds of a piano and violin. In a recess in the wall two capable musicians were playing a *caprice* of Grieg. Well-dressed folk were sitting here and there in deep chairs talking in low tones, while tall and well-looking waitresses moved noiselessly here and there over the heavy carpets.

It was a violet winter, everybody wore violets and used essences of these flowers.

The warm air was heavy with the scent of violets.

Two swing doors and a curtain or two barred them from the street. That was all. But, though he had haunted this part of Bond Street for two years, the vendor of mechanical toys had not the slightest conception of what the tea-shop was like inside. He could not even have imagined it and was as far from it as from Mars.

As Canon Escott would have told him, space is only an idea.

"Now where shall we go, Humphrey?" Lady Honoria said anxiously. "There is so much to say, and I *do* want to say it in the right surroundings.

That is so important. Do you think the Indian room perhaps——?”

“No,” Humphrey England said, “that is too obvious. It would destroy our impressions rather than accentuate them. Our thoughts are throbbing with the distant Orient, the holy and mysterious land of the Brahma Somaj! To place ourselves in Indian surroundings would be too much what the ordinary person would do. It would be the first thing to occur to him. We must find a contrast, a great contrast.”

“You are so right, Humphrey,” Lady Honoria answered. “You are always so right. How much you get out of life! how completely you realise your own personality and enable other people to realise theirs!”

Humphrey's face remained grave, but he smiled inwardly with pleasure. He knew that he did indeed understand life. It was a beautiful science in his hands! and it was very pleasant to be told this in the velvet voice of sincerity and admiration by a beautiful and fashionable woman.

“One moment for thought,” he murmured. “I shall have it in a minute.”

The two stood there for a minute while Humphrey England thought out the proper environment for their mood.

The faculty of being interested in small things is a great one—so the philosophers of domestic economy tell us. If that is so, these two people were very enviable. It was a pity that Angus Evan Tulloch was not there to observe the occasion. His bitter and scornful laughter would have certainly struck a “new note,” and given the people sitting

all round one of those fresh sensations for which they were always longing so ardently.

The street hawker in the outside world was also interested in trifles at that moment—though, of course, as in the case of Lady Honoria, what is a trifle depends upon the individual point of view.

He had drifted back to the door of the tea-shop. His brief resentment against the porter was forgotten. It takes a certain heat in the blood to nourish the sense of injury, and the hawker's blood was very cold.

Some passer-by had thrown a cigar end, almost at the feet of the commissionaire, and the hawker's eye was fixed upon it. He sidled up and bent down towards it, looking up into the porter's face as he did so with exactly the look and gesture of a dog who is uncertain if it is permitted to snatch the bone or not.

"Can I 'ave it, guv'nor?" he asked in that frightful voice which has been so humorously described by a celebrated comic singer as the "gin and fog" voice, but which made Victor Hugo weep when he heard it.

The giant in the uniform was in a more genial mood, someone had just given him a shilling. "Right O, covey," he said, "but don't you get a coming too near."

"I have it," Humphrey England exclaimed at the same moment (in another world). "We will go to the prison cell!"

"How delicious!" Lady Honoria said. "And, of course, I see your point. There we shall have no distractions. There will be nothing to trouble the eye or the senses with colour or beauty of form,"

"Yes. *There* we shall be able to realise the great and awe-inspiring events of the day."

They went along the lounge together, and a waitress conducted them down two or three passages.

They came to a door.

"I will take your order now, madam," the girl said. "Then if you will kindly go down the steps you will find the warder."

Humphrey England gave an extensive order, which included caviare sandwiches and liqueurs. Then he pushed open the door.

A short flight of steps, with whitewashed walls, dimly lit by a single gas jet, led downwards.

"Come along, Lady Honoria," Humphrey said, in extreme delight. "I believe this is the most realistic of the lot."

They descended gingerly. There was a realistic smell of chloride of lime.

At the foot of the stairs a man, dressed as a prison warder, with a bunch of jingling keys at his side, was sitting on a stool.

He jumped up when he heard them coming.

"Now then!" he said in a hard, brutal voice.

"Inside."

He unlocked a ponderous iron door and showed a cell some fourteen feet by seven. It was lit by a gas jet. High up in the wall opposite the door was a small window of frosted glass, heavily barred. Two stools stood by a small deal shelf, which projected from one drab wall and served as a table.

Some shining tin utensils were arranged in a careful row upon another shelf. In the corner underneath this was a roll of rough grey blanket.



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The door clanged after them. They heard the heavy bolts slip into place.

Then there was dead silence for a moment.

"Almost *too* real, isn't it?" Lady Honoria began.

"That man really made me shiver."

"He used to swear at the people at first," Humphrey said cheerfully, "when they first started this. He is an artist in his way, I feel sure, and thought he would give the last touch of local colour. But someone objected and spoke to the manager, so it had to be stopped."

They sat down on the two stools, and for a moment neither had a word to say.

The place was a perfect reproduction of a prison cell. Its dreariness and harshness silenced them at first. Yet, supremely ridiculous as they were—as all pure hedonists must often be in their mad groping for sensation—neither of them could see it. The sense of humour is not a strong point with such people. They mistake the inversion of a truism for the humorous as a rule.

But Humphrey England had been right in his choice of a place in which to talk over the events of the early afternoon. They could talk of nothing else here. Trivial chat was not suggested by their surroundings.

They had both come from a meeting of some twenty people at Dr. Ninian Newton's house in Harley Street.

All the guests had been prepared by rumour and surmise for a week past. They had all known that something very extraordinary indeed was going to be said or done; that they were to meet a person

who professed to stronger powers than any of the latter-day prophets they had known.

It had got about all over a certain section of society that something far out of the usual was afoot, that there were likely to be strange happenings. The Doctor could have filled his rooms three times over, had he wished. But few more than twenty guests had been asked. These were all, however, representative folk, and would spread the strange tidings among their friends.

"It was wonderful, Humphrey," Lady Honoria said, with real feeling, not untinged with fear, in her voice. "I am still bewildered. It was all so unexpected. You had led me to expect nothing of the sort, you know."

"Is not Debendro wonderful!"

"There is no one like him," she said with conviction. "How inspired he was as he spoke of the Faith!—the splendid, mystical faith of the Brahmo Somaj!"

"It is very enthralling," England said. "But, of course, in the first stages it is very difficult."

"Is *is*, Humphrey," she answered. "I felt that. And I am very glad to hear *you* say so, because I know you have been studying it so deeply and so long."

"Yes," he answered with a tired sigh, "nearly a week of unremitting labour!"

"But in a good cause," she replied fervently. "For my part, I did not attempt to follow his exposition very carefully. I was enthralled by the man himself. He told us that he was only giving us the most incomplete and hurried sketch of the doctrines he hoped we should all believe and practise before long."

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At this moment the door was thrown open with a loud and resonant clang.

The mock warder entered, bearing such a meal as prisoners may dream of but never see. His roughness was gone now; it was impossible to sustain it for more than the time required at the opening ritual. The subserviency of class was too strong.

The door closed once more. Lady Honoria poured out tea into fragile cups of egg-shell china. Humphrey England lit a cigarette.

For a minute or two neither of them spoke. Lady Honoria's hands flitted here and there over the tea things. The diamonds on her fingers glistened and shone in the dreary gaslight.

Then she put down a cup with a decisive gesture. She looked her companion straight in the face.

"Debendro is marvellous," she said. "His eyes are the very concentration of power and belief. He is one of us, too—whatever name he may have among the Indian mystics. It is quite unmistakable. He believes what he teaches—and, indeed, it seems worth believing. But, *what do you think, Humphrey?*"

"Frankly," he answered, "between us two, I don't know *what* to think. If he does what he says he is going to do——"

"Then," she answered, with a vibrating voice, "oh, then, Humphrey, all life will be changed! The world will become a different place. We shall all think differently, live differently——"

Her voice weakened on the last words, and died away into doubt.

"One can see that he is dying," Humphrey said,

with a heavy sigh. "How piteous it is, Lady Honoria! That lined and worn face, those blazing eyes, the voice that seems too spiritual and ethereal for a gross material body—like the voice of a soul, not of a body of flesh and blood! Yes, he can't have long to live. And Ninian Newton told me privately that it may be a question of days. It's heart disease, you know."

"He told me so, too," Lady Honoria answered. "There can be no doubt about it."

Again the couple were silent.

"Do *you* believe?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know!" she said. "I would give anything to believe that what he says is going to happen *will* happen."

"So would I," he replied. "How charming it would be to belong to the inner circle of a religion that had proved itself in such a stupendous way. Modern life would become strangely romantic then. Oh, it would be delightful!"

Humphrey England did not often jar on Lady Honoria. But he did so now.

The man caught at each passing phase of thought in order to amuse and distract himself.

So did Lady Honoria. But there was more in her hot and eager grasp than anyone else knew or she herself understood. There was a deep yearning in her nature, an unsatisfied yearning. Whence it came and what it meant she did not know. Dr. Ella Low or Father Grogan could have told her, though. And this yearning urged her to find solace and completion in something in which she could believe and throw her whole nature. Art had failed

her. She had, for a time, at least, closed the door of her heart to the knocking of One Who was waiting to enter in.

Other folk could have told her this, but she did not realise it.

Dr. William Barry had explained it all in his clarion-like and unforgettable article in the *National Review* in 1905:—

"The spirit of anarchic individualism that cries 'No God, no Master,' is needed to tell us why Englishmen and their wives, once dedicated to a blameless and lasting union, have fallen into the pit which Malthus or his followers dugged for them. Wherever unbelief has taken hold, or doubt saps the ancient creeds, there Malthus reigns instead of Christ."

Lady Honoria had never read Dr. Barry, nor had she ever cared—or dared—to listen to the sayings or read the writings of those who led the "Confraternity of The Holy Ghost."

"Oh, Humphrey," she said in reproach. "Charming! Delightful!—what slight words for so great a thing!"

He did not in the least understand her vehemence. He knew nothing of her yearning, of the void in her heart. He knew nothing of any profound emotions. Beneath the heavy crust of affectation, he was a foolish and simple young fellow with no more power of emotion than a butterfly or moth—if we understand moth or-butterfly aright.

But Humphrey always said the adroit thing when he was confronted with a situation or an attitude he could not understand.

"Ah, Lady Honoria," he murmured, pouring some

liqueur into his glass, "what wonderful capacity for emotion you have! Your soul is as sensitive and delicate as moonlight falling upon a bronze of Nero in the palace of the Louvre!"

She was half-pleased—she had accustomed herself to this sort of thing for so long. But she was impatient still.

"But is it *possible*, Humphrey?" she said. "No, I don't mean that, of course it isn't possible as far as our experience goes. But will it happen? Tell me!"

"I don't know," he replied with obvious sincerity for once. "The man is so compelling that when I hear him talk I am almost inclined to believe him. Then, when he's away, though I am most interested in his doctrines, I find it impossible to think he knows what he is talking about. 'He's entirely charming,' I say to myself, 'but he's an inspired madman.'"

"What strikes me," she answered, "is this. He says, in effect, 'I don't ask you to join me or to believe in me until I've done what I've promised. Then you *must* believe in me.' He simply tells us to wait for a few days. He is dying. There can't be any doubt about *that*. He is going to die and he is going to rise again from the dead—to come to life again—so he says."

"The most significant thing about it, to my mind," England said, "is that Ninian Newton believes in his power. Ninian is marvellously artistic. But he is practical as well. He's a hard-headed man of science, too!"

He might have added, "and a hard-headed man of business, too"—but he was loyal. Ninian had

certainly obtained a very large cheque that morning at lunch. But, after all, he evidently wanted it—poor old chap—and it was no very great inconvenience to lend it. Humphrey wouldn't be able to have the Brahma Dharva—the sacred book of his new religion—bound in a cover studded with Indian rubies. That was all. And in three months dividends would be due again . . . . .

"Ninian is brilliant," he said.

"We shall see what happens," said Lady Honoria.

"There is not long to wait. I could not stand the suspense if there were. But it is horrible to think of that poor, dear Debendro believing in himself so, and dying in a few days! How terrible it would be if he *can't* come to life again!"

"As you say," he replied, "we shall know soon. I don't think much of this caviare, I shall speak to Buol about it. Yes! we shall know soon. And the comforting thing is that, one way or another, there can be no possible doubt about what does happen. You heard what Ninian read from the paper after Debendro had finished his exposition, and lay down on the couch again?"

"In a sort of way, Humphrey. But I was looking at the poor fellow most of the time and wondering if he oughtn't to have his medicine, or if it wasn't time for his barley water, or whatever they have when they're ill, don't you know?"

"Well, listen, Lady Honoria. What Ninian read he read at Debendro's request. It amounted to this. When the poor chap is dying, Ninian will send for as many of us as care to go, and we shall see him actually die! It will be horribly unpleasant—

full of grue—but you can see we must be there. And it's Debendro's own wish. We are to take another outside doctor to certify to death, and, if we wish it, to conduct a post mortem."

"How—how, *beastly!*" cried Lady Honoria.

"But don't you see how necessary it is, Lady Honoria?" he said eagerly, his fickle and vivid mind entirely taken up by the new picture, the situation in which he would be one of a committee to obtain exact legal proof!

"In a case of this sort, a unique case in which a man claims to do what no one has ever done, to reconstruct the ancient Christ myth, in fact, and make it true, legal, actual, and scientific, proof of death is absolutely necessary. There would be no value in such a miracle as this, no after value, I mean, if any doubt could be thrown on its genuineness."

The poor man is so confident!" Lady Honoria said—almost tearfully. "As I was coming away he pressed my hand and made me promise to come and see him die. If he can't come to life again he will be so frightfully disappointed!"

"Afterwards," Humphrey went on, absorbed in the grim details, "afterwards, we are to take the body to Woking, and it is to be cremated. Should we wish it, the coffin is to be opened at the very mouth of the furnace so that we can be sure. The urn containing the ashes is to be given into Ninian's charge. He will seal it with his own seal. Then, a week afterwards, we are all to meet. The urn is to be placed upon a table, and prayers from the Brahma Dharva are to be recited in darkness—our eyes must not see the transformation from spirit



into matter until we are adepts. Ninian thinks that in our present imperfect state of knowledge the actual visual sight of something our minds can't in the least comprehend would probably kill us!"

He stopped, exhausted by his own flow of enthusiastic talk, by the relish he had put into it and felt.

Lady Honoria's lovely eyes were wide open, fascinated by the weird picture her friend was drawing.

"And then!" she hissed out, "and then!"

"Then," he answered, "*Debendro will stand among us once more, to be with us as our teacher and leader always!*"

The iron door clanged open.

The warder, with his peaked cap in his hand, strode deferentially into the cell.

"Beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but would you be wishing to engage the cell for another Hour? There's several parties been arstin' after it, sir. A gent and two ladies is in the Harctic cave now only waiting their turn!"

He stood attendant on their wishes. In his eyes gleamed the anticipation of tips, the bunch of shining keys jingled against his fat sides.

Lady Honoria and Humphrey England looked at the man in surprise. They had quite forgotten where they were.

Truly this tea-shop was well named the "Mood"! How many moods and momentary emotions had this couple fallen into—and out of—during the last hour?

It were difficult to say.

Humphrey came to himself first.

"Right oh!" he said cheerfully. "Bring me the bill, will you? Oh, I see, thanks. Here you are. The half-crown is for yourself. Really, your manner as we came down the stairs was excellent. Excellent! You really must be quite a remarkable man. In fact, I wish to know more of you. I am Mr. Humphrey England, 22a, Berkeley Square—here is my card. Come round to my house some evening when you are off duty, and tell the butler I sent you. I will speak to him. I expect I shall be able to make you useful in some way or another."

He walked cheerfully out of the mock prison, and led Lady Honoria to the upstairs regions of light, perfume, and music.

The lounge was brilliantly lit now. The music was still going on, but in the outside world it was quite dark.

Snow was beginning to fall also.

"Heavens! how late it is!" Lady Honoria said. "I shan't have a minute to dress. Basil and I are dining with the Lord Chief Justice. I must fly. Get me a cab *quick*, Humphrey, and tell the man to drive as fast as he possibly can."

They went out together, and stood within the doorway.

The commissioner, now wearing a long overcoat and an oilskin cape, whistled twice.

A hansom came clattering up, and Lady Honoria got in.

She waved her hand, and the cab disappeared in the snow, which was now falling much faster, through the gloom.

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"Christmas weather, sir!" said the porter jovially, as he raised his call to his thick lips and blew two piercing blasts upon it.

Humphrey got into his own cab, and was driven rapidly towards his house in Berkeley Square.

He meant to spend the evening in "getting up" another chapter of the *Brahma Dharva*.

Like Mr. Gilbert's naval hero in "*Pinafore*"—"it was his duty, and he did."

The snow began to fall more and more heavily. It fell in great flakes as big as walnuts.

The last guests left the "*Mood*"—which did not keep open after seven o'clock.

The commissioner began to pull down the iron blinds with a long pole with a hook in the end.

Bond Street was almost deserted. The commissioner, filled with thoughts of a hot supper at his house in the Vauxhall Bridge Road—it was tripe, to-night—whistled cheerily. He whistled the popular song of the hour the pom, pom, pom, pom, pom song!

The poor hawker, who had been shivering in an adjacent doorway for some time, came out and shambled towards Oxford Street through the thickly falling snow, coughing as he went. . . . There might be something doing in Oxford Street, outside Frascati's p'raps—he'd got to get his doss money yet.

So the cold afternoon sank into bitter night.

So the bitter comedy of the afternoon was over, over for ever and a day, passed into a merciful oblivion!

## CHAPTER VII.

### MORNING-PEACE IN BEDFORD PARK.

BREAKFAST was always ready at eight o'clock in Roland's house in Bedford Park. The meal was ever a feast. Everyone was hungry. Roland, because he worked hard with his brain and required fuel for it, Gertrude because she was in that perfect health that is often the joy of young mothers happily married and with no great cares, the children because they were worthy offspring of their mother and sire.

Some of Roland's friends were amazed at the breakfast meal of the Spekes. It seemed to argue a lack of real mental power on Roland's part, they thought dimly. Tea and toast was the proper convention for a man who lived by his brain. They would sit in plaintive wonder at the happy board, illustrating the great truth that underlies the ancient story of Prometheus.

For how many brain-workers, writers and artists who steal fire from heaven as Prometheus did, must pay the precise penalty the son of Clymene paid! Daily the eagle of a sedentary life preys

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upon the liver; and yet a world which of late years has been reading the story of Carlyle's domestic life, is agitating for the dismissal of ancient classic fable from the schools!

Roland preserved his health by constant walking to and fro between the offices of the Confraternity in Norfolk Street. He maintained the ritual of the morning cold tub—not always an easy thing in the abominable little bath-rooms of London houses—he never smoked cigarettes or took any alcohol until evening came.

Each morning he came downstairs with those "clear eyes of youth" that Homer sings of, with a firm hand and cool blood.

He worked extraordinarily hard, and was surprised at the strange simplicity of the methods by which a man can keep himself in perfect health, and make his body a fit chalice for the wine of life that is so bountifully poured out for many of us.

He was a man who had never "sowed any wild oats," and his happiness and vigour came from that. Plenty of young men who have "lived their life," as the silly, deceiving phrase will have it, settle down to decency when they marry, and remain in good health until they reach a green old age. It is their children who suffer.

Roland's four children were witnesses to his past career. The tiny, happy little creatures were brimming with energy and force. It seemed marvellous to husband and to wife that those little pink and white bodies could be the reservoirs of so much actual *life*. They brimmed with the very essence of vitality, and at times the mysterious

fluid seemed to have a power, a strength and duration that was almost explosive.

Roland had said once to Gertrude that if the inherent vitality of his eldest boy could be converted into gun-cotton, the child could blow up the Houses of Parliament—and probably the Abbey as well.

The children, from little Roly down to the baby, were a recurring wonder to husband and wife. Parents are always surprised at their offspring. When they come, the father and mother can never understand *why*. A physical process is not a sufficient answer. There is an underlying wonder still.

When a man and a woman are joined together in holy wedlock—"wedlock" is a beautiful word, "marriage" smacks of the civil contract, to-day—they begin to perceive, as children come, that God the Father is giving them an especial, and, as it were, private Revelation of Himself.

If their spiritual ears are open, they discern harmonies. They catch a faint echo of the music that a great Law makes in its existence and progress. And if their hearts are full of the spirit of that "prayer of humble access" that is recited at Mass, they perceive dimly the welding of Natural and Spiritual Law.

They realise, faintly perhaps, the unutterable Harmony between matter and spirit.

And thus, in God's ordinance, they begin to learn what the stupendous Fact of The Incarnation means.

God became man. All pure and worthy things that a man does are part of his inheritance of the Godhead.

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Nothing is common or unclean.

All married people who accept our Lord, know that God reveals Himself to them, in the mystery of Procreation, in a special and intimate way.

Gertrude and Roland knew this. It was Roland's life work to preach and promulgate this truth to the world.

The happy pair abode under the shadow of the Almighty, and dwelt under the defence of the Most High.

They were members of the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost. The Lord and Giver of Life ruled their twin lives.

They knew the Truth that the rushing wind and fiery tongues told outwardly, at the festival of the gathered harvest, of the fulfilment of the promise of the Father.

The four dear children were at once symbol and occasion of what they knew.

\* \* \* \* \*

Breakfast had begun.

The baby was still sleeping overhead. But Roly—the heir of four—Arthur, the tiny but wisely sentient godson of Roland's old chief, and Gertrude, the lovely and inarticulate morsel of radiant joy, sat in tall chairs round the board.

Mother Gertrude, fresh and young as a flower in early spring, gave her grace to one end of the table.

Roland was opposite to her. Roly was at his right hand.

Roly bent forward, leaning out over the bar which kept him safe in his high chair, and put up his face.

Roland, *pere*, gravely felt the tip of that engaging button the little fellow called his nose. There was a silence in the room.

"Is it cold? is it cold, fader?" the little boy asked anxiously.

"Beautifully cold, my son," Roland answered at length.

There was a shriek of joy.

This scene was repeated every morning. The butcher, George Henry Collins, had presented Roly with a loveable but mangy pup—which was ever after known as "George Henry Collins," or as near to it as the infant lips could get. Roland had doctored the little beast to the best of his ability, and was wont to test the state of its health by the coldness of its nose. Little Roly imagined that this examination not only diagnosed health, but assured it, and the prognosis had become an important daily event.

Then there were the letters to be opened. This was little Arthur's morning to have the stamps. Roland produced the marvellous pocket scissors from their little "red leaver house." Six grave and interested eyes regarded him. Click! and they were opened, snick, snick, and the stamps were cut out of their envelopes and handed to the expectant infant, who examined them with serious interest and crumpled them in his little pink, prehensile fist.

What little Arthur wanted the stamps for, what he imagined that they were, or to what use he subsequently put them, no one ever knew. Little Arthur kept his own counsel.

Dr. Ella Low said that he liked them because they



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were a beautiful colour and could not bark, and being very wise in infant matters, no doubt she was right.

The eggs had come from Lynton. Roland's mother sent a neat tin box full every week. Each egg had a little cage all to itself to live in, and the unpacking of this box on Saturday mornings was an event. The eggs were excellent!

Gertrude had made a great brawn. However much you cut it, as Roland pointed out to his eldest son, you kept on coming to lovely little rings of white and gold egg. How they got there no one knew but mother, and she could not be induced to tell. It was a secret!

The children loved a secret. Their little lives were full of romance. Secrets were a great part of it. They generally meant something good to eat at the moment of disclosure.

The meal was passed in this way. To father mother and little children it was a half hour of sheer delight.

Those of us who in later life can remember the simple ritual of a home like this one are very blessed in such memories. Those of us who can recreate it for themselves and give their children the brightness that they themselves knew in the happy and memorable past, are blessed indeed.

It is trite, no doubt, to sing the praises of home. Fools sneer at the home-keeping man who finds the supreme joy in wife and child and home. It is a note people are rather ashamed to harp on to-day. The greatest poets and singers the world has ever known have sung of home and hearth as something

sacred and divine. Homer and Virgil, Shakespeare, Hugo, Browning, to these the domestic life was the supreme good.

Even that kind, shiftless, bohemian "Poor Oliver Goldsmith," who never had a home, could write—

"Such is the patriot's boast where'er we roam,  
"His first, best country, ever is at home."

The Emily Verschmidts and Ninian Newtons of life cannot understand this. They do not want to understand it. They sneer, and as such people have an influence and importance quite disproportionate to their actual value, they are listened to and imitated.

The press chronicles their doings and echoes their sayings. Repetition ensures a certain reputation, and many folk really believe that the frothy, cynical sentiment of fashion is representative.

There is no Burke to-day to write—

"Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chink, whilst thousands of great cattle repose beneath the shadow of the British oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field—that, of course, they are many in number—or that, after all, they are other than the little, shrivelled, meagre, hopping, though loud and troublesome insects of the hour."

Roland was not troubled by any prevailing sentiment or attitude. The world was simple for him and for his wife. The health and joy of the

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body, the unhindered union of two souls, were their's with God fostering and nature inciting and applauding.

When breakfast was over, the children kissed their father and went away. Roland sat down to smoke a pipe and glance at the day's news before leaving for London.

He had not been alone with his paper for very long, when Gertrude came back, bringing Dr. Ella Low with her.

The doctor was white and tired in the face, but her manner was as bright and active as ever.

"I have been attending a confinement in the Park," she said, "and have been up all night. Everything is all right now, I'm glad to say, so I thought I'd look in on you on my way home. I shall go by train; I didn't know what time to order the carriage."

"I'll bring you some tea in a second," Gertrude said.

"Would you, dear? I should be glad of it. Well, Roland, how are the chicks?"

"First rate, thanks. Their health is wonderful. Baby grows every day. He's a fine fellow—not quite so fine as this, though." He handed her his newspaper, pointing to the picture of an enormous infant among the advertisements. "Little Johnny Davis, aged nine months," Dr. Low read out with disgust. "Fed from birth on Mellger's infant food." She flung the paper down.

"What a miserable lot of people get born in England!" she said. "We are a horribly degenerate race. That monster in the picture is *fat* enough,

but I'd bet my stethoscope he's rickety! Women won't realise their duty. These patent foods have a most important bearing upon the physical degeneracy of England. The physical future of a child depends upon its treatment during the first few weeks of life. I've got a big poster, made from a photograph, of one of these artificially fed babies. Do you know what I do with it?"

"No, what?"

"Use it in my lectures to the students at the Maternity Hospital as an example of a rickety child! A lot of mothers won't nurse their own children because they are misled by these posters."

"But all mothers can't nurse their own children, can they?"

"Not all. But far more than most people imagine. Professor Herbert Spencer recently gave a lecture to the medical profession on the subject in the St. Pancras Town Hall. He said that seventy-five per cent. of mothers are able to suckle their children, but in the upper circles of society not ten per cent. do so! These creatures are all grown too dainty for their uses! The vulgarity, the mental vulgarity that shrinks from the obligations of Nature almost makes one weep. Now, I ask you, Roland, is there anything in Nature more simply beautiful, more full of power to induce reverent and noble thoughts than the sight of a mother with a child at the breast?"

"I know of nothing," he answered.

"And women are ashamed!" she cried with a scorn that was almost tearful, "ashamed, or un-

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willing to waste the time! How the Madonna in Paradise must pity them!"

Gertrude brought in the tea and some toast.

The Doctor fell upon both without a moment's loss of time. "I quite forgot to eat," she said. "It was such an interesting case. This tea is delightful. I wish someone would write a pamphlet upon the chemistry of tea-making."

"Very few people can make tea fit to drink," Gertrude answered. "Servants *never*. They won't take the trouble."

"Precisely the reason why they *are* servants and have not risen in life," the Doctor answered. "Of course, tea-making is all a question of temperatures."

"That, and nothing else," Gertrude answered, "provided, of course, that your brand of tea suits your local brand of water. Without harmony there, the whole attempt is useless. Then everything depends upon the precise heat of the tea-pot, the fact of an entirely fresh supply of water being poured into the kettle each time, and the pouring of the water on the tea at the exact moment when it boils. Let water boil for five minutes, and you will never get a decent cup of tea. All the life and stimulating power seems to have gone out of it."

While the two ladies discussed this and kindred matters, Roland had picked up his paper and was finishing his pipe. When he rose to go, Dr. Low said that she would travel with him as far as Gloucester Road.

The children appeared in the hall, even the baby made his appearance in the nurse's arms, while Roland put on his overcoat. There was a succes-

sion of furious embraces. Warm little arms held the father's head tight against tender little cheeks, baby voices twittered in words of love and farewell.

The last vision Roland and the Doctor had, as they turned out of the gate into the frozen boulevard of the Park, was one of the mother with the baby in her arms, and the three shrill-voiced atoms grouped round her waving their hands.

It was a picture which had grouped itself into perfection under the pale rays of the winter's sun.

"I can understand," Dr. Low said, "the reason that our Lord, when He wanted to point out the path which led towards perfection, told us that we must become like little children."

They talked about Roland's children till they reached the station—Roland could not spare the time to walk this morning—and then the conversation changed to a discussion of the affairs of the Confraternity.

There was some little time to wait for the train—there was a fog at Richmond—and they had leisure to talk undisturbed.

"Who do you think has joined us, Doctor?" Roland asked, with the enthusiasm and glee of a schoolboy. "Only yesterday, too."

"Hardly any name you could mention would surprise me," she answered. "Except, perhaps, that of Dr. Ninian Newton!"

"Well, it wasn't that beast, certainly," Roland answered. "But it was someone who surprised me very much. It was Mr. Verschmidt, the Jew millionaire!"

"Really! He will be valuable."

"Won't he! It was so odd. He came bustling into my room looking like an abnormally intelligent monkey who had just made a corner in nuts. For some reason or the other, he seemed as pleased as Punch. He was smiling and chuckling and rubbing his hands. I suppose he'd made fifty thousand pounds before breakfast, or something."

" 'I join you, Mr. Speke,' he said, 'quite as an unsectarian member, of course. I don't play at Christianity or compromise with incomplete Deism and call myself a Unitarian, like some of our people. I'm a Jew, and a Jew I shall die. But on social and economic grounds I believe thoroughly in your propaganda. Women should rear up children for the service of the State, and for the happiness of homes. England needs it. I may be a Jew, Mr. Speke, but I am a patriotic one. I was born in England, I am a naturalised English citizen, and I'm a patriot. There is an idea about that Jews are not patriotic, that they are a menace to the State when they settle in great numbers. That is only a half truth. We make money, but we want to be citizens—if we are allowed to be. A great many of my people fought for England against the Boers, remember! ' "

"The Jews are very much misunderstood," Dr. Low answered. "They are a chaste people. They take a high view of the duties of maternity, at any rate. Yes? "

"Well, he pulled out a cheque book and gave me five hundred pounds! And he promised to sit on the platform at our Albert Hall meeting next spring. I told him all he wanted to know about

the work, and he seemed quite delighted. I never saw a little man in such high spirits or so pleased with everything. I quite took to him. He seemed quite simple and natural. It wasn't at all easy to realise that one was talking to the acutest financier in Europe."

"I suppose not," the Doctor answered. "I am so glad, Roland. It is a great recruitment. Of course, it's quite obvious why he joined."

Roland was hurt, he misunderstood her. "Oh, I think that's hardly fair, Doctor," he said. "Nothing such a man as that could do would help him, socially. He's got everything in the world he wants in that way. He is far removed from the ranks of those rich men who have to push and struggle to get into things. He is in the centre of the web as it is."

"I didn't mean that," she answered with a smile, "you silly boy! Can't you see the reason? That beautiful, decadent wife of his, whom he worships, is going to have a baby!"

"By jove!" Roland said in astonishment.

There was nothing more to say. The quick feminine intuition had explained everything to him. He felt rather clumsy and lacking in vision.

The Doctor did not attempt to enjoy her triumph. She was too perfectly without a sense of self for that. She had made her point, and immediately turned the talk to other matters.

Roland began to tell her of a task that awaited him on that morning.

"Rather an unusual one," he said with a chuckle.

"I've got to coach the most popular and distin-



guished preacher of the day in a forthcoming sermon! You remember, of course, that Canon Escott has joined?"

"Perfectly," she answered. "I was at committee when his letter was read. Of course he has joined. The bishops are joining."

"I know nothing of his motives," Roland answered. "Though I won't question your opinion after what you've told me about my millionaire! But he's a great accession of strength. That man can stir multitudes and move them as hardly any living priest can. His eloquence is supreme; his power of reaching and rousing the human heart unique. Well, he has promised to preach at the solemn evensong in Father Grogan's church to be held for the committees and secretaries of the branches of the Confraternity. Admission is to be by ticket, and the secretaries are each bringing a doubter or luke-warm person. Canon Escott is coming to me for an hour to-day to make notes of statistics and facts to weave into his sermon."

"I have heard him preach," Dr. Low said. "As you say, it's wonderful. But I distrust emotion in religious matters most heartily. My knowledge tells me exactly what it means. There is a physiological cause for it, it can be diagnosed with extreme accuracy. Religious emotion and sexual emotion spring from the same causes, and are, in essence, much the same. That is, an identical state of the nervous system will produce either. Do you know that the first frequently degenerates into the latter, Roland, even during the same period of influence?"

He did not answer at once. "Doctors know

strange things," he said at length.... "Science strips life of many of its illusions. Leave me a few!"

"As many as are good for you," she retorted. "Science strips life of some of its illusions, but only in order that it may lay the truths of life bare and patent. The more we analyse the phenomena of religious habit, the more we understand how God really works and means us to work. Has it ever struck you what these marvellous sermons, when priest and audience alike are torn and broken with emotion, must mean to the priest who delivers them?"

"A sense that he is doing God's work, I suppose, that the Spirit has descended on him bidding him speak."

"Perhaps," she said shortly. "Once in a blue moon! Do you really suppose that *every* time Canon Escott gets up to sway and hold a multitude—or any other popular, emotional preacher—that the Holy Spirit inspires him and gives him all his fervour? Consider what that would mean. It would mean that the man was saint enough to be the *continuous*, never-failing mouthpiece of the Holy Ghost. Does experience show that the Paraclete works thus? Nothing of the sort. I repeat that I distrust emotion as a regular method in religious work. And I am very, very sorry for the exciting cause of it—the preacher."

"Why, exactly?"

"Have you ever realised that an abnormal nerve-strain requires an abnormal nerve-state? That this has got to be constantly produced in some way?—sometimes, it is a certainty, by *physical* means.

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Take the emotional actor. I say without hesitation, that in nine cases out of ten, he has to keep his powers at concert pitch by some toxic influence, alcohol or what not."

"Then the inference is——"

"Here's the train," she answered. "You must draw your own inferences, my dear Roland. A smoking carriage, please. I always travel in them just now—though it makes me cough. I'm producing a little monograph on tobacco amblyopia, and I look for symptoms in smoking carriages."

With his mind somewhat disturbed, Roland helped the lady into a carriage.

The carriage was full of prosperous city men, *en route* to dull and worthy toil. There was little opportunity for conversation.

On his part, Roland didn't want to talk any more just then. He wanted to digest and assimilate the thoughts—the facts, rather—that the scalpel of this brilliant woman had laid bare.

Roland's temperament was entirely synthetic. Analysis was not his special talent. But, to use a homely simile, when someone had cooked a dish for him, he could turn it into very good blood and sinew.

He looked at the doctor, who sat opposite to him. She was very tired, exhausted indeed, by the skilled and arduous work of the night. Her eyes were closed, and the face was lined and worn.

In its essentials, the face was that of the able and cultured spinster. Nature sets a certain stamp upon the face of the unmarried woman. Sometimes the stamp is mocking and unlovely, sometimes it

emphasises a spiritual denial. In this case one saw a strange fusion of material fact and spiritual correction of it.

Here was a woman who had renounced the personal happiness of marriage to become the aid and comfort of a thousand wives, the foster-mother of a thousand babes.

Roland had a whimsical fancy. "Here," he thought to himself with reverence, "here is the perfect AUNT!" No . . . . . that wouldn't do, either. Even the kindest of jests didn't apply.

The woman was August!

. . . At Gloucester Road she skipped out of the train with a nod and a pre-occupied smile. She was thinking of something or other. Some new problem seethed in that capable brain—some plan for making people happier and better.

Roland wondered what it was, as the swift electric motor carried him to the Temple Station, and the interview with the famous preacher who had the head of a Roman emperor and the voice of a silver bull!

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SECRETARY OF THE CONFRATERNITY AND A JUDGE OF THE HIGH COURT. A CONVERSION, A MARRIAGE, AND A DEATH.

THE offices of the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost were at the river end of Norfolk Street, on the first floor of a florid building of terra-cotta brick and tiles.

The rooms were all together, opening into a tiny hall, and the whole suite was commanded by a single door which opened in the main corridor of the building.

When the society had been instituted, Sir Michael Manichoe and other wealthy patriots and churchmen had subscribed a capital sum for the maintenance of all bureau charges. The small subscription of membership was used purely for the purposes of propaganda, and large as the income from this source had become, it was constantly augmented by private donation.

The professional organisers of popular charities spoke rather bitterly of this rich and wealthy society. "It was," they said, "taking public

money to maintain a mere idea. No one benefited by the sums of money that flowed through the coffers of the Confraternity but the lecturers and officials employed, and the printers who produced the mass of literature that was distributed and sold."

As one entered, a room to the right showed as a waiting room, opposite to it was the clerks' office, where two men and a girl typewriter sat. There was a large committee room, a storeroom for books and pamphlets, and, lastly, Roland's own room.

This was a big and cheerful place, with a deep embrasured window, in which one could stand and look up to the Strand or down to the river, where the barges, with red pitch-pine masts, went slowly down the tide.

The room had been furnished luxuriously in every way. The colours were harmonious, the scheme of design considered and consistent. Roland's friends used to tell him that he was housed like a cabinet minister.

Roland arrived in Norfolk Street at half-past ten. By half-past eleven he had dealt with the enormous mass of correspondence that awaited him. The more important letters had been taken down in shorthand, those which need not be personally answered were sorted out for the clerks; those requiring consideration and reference placed in a drawer to await a convenient time.

Between half-past eleven and twelve the two lecturers who were regularly employed to tour the country and explain the objects of the society had called with notes and reports. Mr. Platt, the young

Oxford fellow, was one. It was his part to treat of the subject from a historic, economic, and patriotic standpoint. To-day he had just returned from Yorkshire, where he had been supporting one of the candidates in a bye-election, who was pledged to raise the population question in Parliament and to join the organised party who were determined to reduce the income tax, and subsequently the rates, in the cases of large families.

The other lecturer was in priest's orders, a Mr. Stowell, who was a member of a religious community at Oxford. He had become the regular preacher and propagandist of the Confraternity, dealing with its aims from the spiritual, the Christian point of view. Like his lay colleague, this pious and eloquent man spent his life in incessant travelling from place to place, preaching, lecturing, organising local branches. He rushed through England teaching in such a way that no thought of evil was or could be suggested, in a way which dissipated the dark shadows of ignorance, which stilled unholy curiosity, and left the soul to gaze with awestruck reverence as the light of God illuminated the holiest thing on earth—the birth of souls.

These capable servants of the cause had but a few brief moments in which to deliver their reports, plan out the itinerary for the next few days, and receive abstracts and epitomes of new statistics and facts which were constantly being prepared for them.

By mid-day both were driving to termini of the railways which would see them in different parts

of the country that evening, at work and spreading the light.

As twelve o'clock was striking on the Law Courts clock, Canon Escott was shown in.

At the moment Roland was glancing through a report of a sermon Canon Escott had preached the night before in a church at Pimlico. He had only time to see that it was one of extraordinary eloquence, that, according to the headlines of the newspaper which had thought it worth while to publish the report, "Grave men were moved to tears," when the preacher himself appeared.

Roland welcomed him warmly.

"Won't you take that chair by the fire, Canon Escott?" he said. "You'll find it comfortable. You look worn out."

The tall man smiled, rather faintly, and sat down. He leaned his head against the padded back of the chair and closed his eyes for a moment. The massive and regular beauty of the face, so purely Roman in type, had for a moment a curious effect on Roland. All the features were relaxed in weariness, and the man had a remarkable likeness to a popular actor. There was the same potential mobility, the same suggestion that the face was only a sketch of what it would be when it was painted and the lights were up!

"You must forgive me, Speke," Canon Escott said in his beautiful voice. "But I am a wreck this morning. My nerves are unstrung and my brain seems like porridge! I went through a great strain last night, and I have not slept."

"I was glancing at the paper when you came



in," Roland answered. "Indeed it was a strain. Really, you ought to have stayed away. Would you rather take some notes another time?"

There was real sympathy in his voice, a sympathy mingled with a profound respect. For Roland admired this famous preacher as he admired few other people. He had sat below him many times and felt his whole soul caught up to God by the fire and beauty of the speaker's words. It was a real privilege to be brought into any intimate contact with such an one.

"Are you sure I can't get you anything?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, I couldn't put you to such trouble," Canon Escott said, with a slight wave of his hand. Roland noticed that the hand trembled a little. "I will pull myself together. I oughtn't to come here and waste your valuable time by making an exhibition of myself."

He smiled faintly and sat up in the chair. Roland saw that he was really exhausted, near a state of nervous collapse, and he realised the effort it must have been to pay this visit, the strength of will and the sense of duty that had prompted it.

"I shall send for some brandy," he said, and without waiting for an answer he left the room and despatched the office boy—considerably surprised at his mission—to an adjacent hotel.

In a minute or two the lad returned with a bottle of cognac and a syphon of soda water.

"Now then, I insist," the younger man said.

With a curious sigh, a heavy and dispirited sigh it seemed, Escott rose and went to the table. He

poured out a peg and drank it off quickly, as though it had been medicine.

"So many thanks," he murmured. "I've no doubt I shall be better now."

The effect of the tonic was almost immediately apparent. Some colour came back to the cheeks, the eyes beneath the thick and curling grey hair brightened up.

As he sat down opposite Roland, on the other side of the great writing table, once more the younger man thought how strangely handsome and compelling his guest's presence was.

"Now what I want from you, Speke," the clergyman said, "are some actual facts and figures, some definite account of what you and your colleagues are finding out and tabulating. And I also want a short resumé of the methods of the Confraternity's propaganda. I am so recent a recruit to your ranks, you will remember, that I am not as well posted up as I ought to be. Of course, the subject is one that has long occupied my mind, as it has that of every thinking Christian and Englishman. I have been reading largely on the Christian aspect of it. Before you give me your facts, I will just indicate the lines on which I propose to preach. Then you can supply what is wanting. If God gives me strength and power, I want this sermon to stir those who hear it, to incite them to new effort and vigour."

He drew a silver-bound pocket-book of green leather from his pocket, and took out a sheet of paper.

"Christian teaching is quite clear," he said.

"I have been looking up St. Augustine. He is most unmistakable in his condemnation of the hideous practices so prevalent to-day. He states that any interference with the natural laws and results of holy matrimony is a horrible sin. Listen—

"*Quia etsi non causa propagandæ prolis concumbitur, non tamen hujus libidinis causâ propagationi prolis obsistitur sive voto malo, sive opere malo. Nam quid hoc faciunt quamvis vocentur conjuges, non sunt, nec ullam nuptiarum retinent veritatem, sed honestum nomen velandæ turpitudini obtinent.*" Such people as the saint speaks of use the noble state of wedlock as a cloak for their wickedness, while in the language of our Prayer Book they are not joined together by God, nor is their matrimony lawful."

He brought down his open hand with a heavy impact upon the table.

"I am going to tell the people this truth straight out," he said. "It is a duty. I don't care who is offended. We are all such cowards and prudes! With sins of this sort, the very persons who commit them are generally of too delicate ears to hear them called by their right names. *Sentimental* purity is not in the least incompatible with corruption of life. That the attempt has to be made to say these things in the pulpit I have no doubt.

"Women who interfere with the natural end of marriage—the bearing of children—are wives in name only. Men who require or encourage such acts are corrupters, not husbands.

"There, Mr. Speke," he continued, "those are the lines I am going to take. Uncompromising

lines, outspoken lines. Now give me such notes as you think will be useful to me."

Roland went to a row of pigeon-holes by the fireplace.

"Here," he said, "is a coloured chart of the Registrar General's returns of the birth-rate since the last census up to the present moment. You will see at a glance exactly what has happened. On the back is a map of England. This, you will observe, marks the various districts in various colours, according to the rise or fall in the numbers of births. Within the white circles are figures showing what the work of the Confraternity has accomplished. The small red figures show the number of members in each district, the black figures below show the consequent rise in population in those districts. By this plan we can show with accuracy the good we are doing. In all these places where our membership is large the birth-rate has steadily increased each quarter. It is still, of course, alarmingly low everywhere. But it is improving. We are waking everyone up all over the country. We are telling these people, who never considered the use of preventive checks from a religious standpoint, what the Scriptures and the Church enjoin. We are telling those who never thought of it from a patriotic and economic point of view, what a terrible danger the Empire incurs, and what inevitable social degeneracy comes from the system. Here you see it all in figures and colour. We issue a new chart every quarter. Each quarter, also, we issue a report which amplifies the chart, gives details of our work, and sums up the whole question—

with all the new lights that have been thrown upon it during the last three months—right up to the moment of going to press. Here is the current issue."

He took up a thick book bound in stiff paper, containing some three hundred pages.

"If you take this, Canon Escott," he said, "you will find the whole case stated clearly. I open it at the introductory article, for instance, which was written by Sir Arthur Childe and Father Grogan in collaboration. If you will let me read you a few lines you will see that this book will tell you everything you may wish to know.

... : There seems to be no doubt that what is called higher civilization is not favourable to race-increase. But after making all allowance for minor contributory causes, the fact remains, and is substantially proved in this report, that married people have come to regard a large family as a curse instead of a Divine blessing. The birth rates in London are instructive. *Residential districts, with fewest poor, show the lowest rates.* Hampstead, 16.6, and Fulham, 32.3, may be taken as typical districts at each end of the scale. Stepney, with its Jewish population, has a rate of 37. If the Aliens Bill is to prove its effectiveness—a thing it has hitherto entirely failed to do—it will need a clause compelling Jews to limit their families, just as their Christian (?) neighbours do.

"The misery of it all is that we find the practice of child murder—for such it is in plain English—defended by men of education: lawyers, medical men, and even priests, make no secret of their approval of it, if no more. And as working men become aware of what their 'betters' are doing they are not slow to follow a similar course, and the evil spreads. Our proper leaders, the Bishops, are only just beginning to awake to these

facts. Long ago they ought to have dealt with this matter resolutely and firmly. But apparently a grain of incense is a more terrible thing to them than the murder of an existing, if unborn, personality. We can only judge by their public utterances in the past, but we have yet to learn that, as a body, their lordships have spent a thousandth part of the time over this supreme question of national morality that they have devoted to minor ritual questions disapproved of by a certain section of the Church of England.\*

Roland stopped reading and looked up.

He saw that Canon Escott's eyes were on him and that he was listening intently. But at the same time the clergyman's hands were pouring some more brandy into his glass.

Roland made no comment, though he thought it rather odd. But he realised that he himself was practically a teetotaller and had a different code in such things.

"You see from that extract," he said, "that the report is full and complete. I believe you will find it invaluable."

"All you tell me is most interesting, Speke," the clergyman said. "I see I shall have no difficulty about my facts now. You are doing a noble work. I believe the Holy Spirit is with you," his voice trembled and a note of real and noble pathos came into it. "When I think of what England once was and what it is, I weep," he said. "The great, proud English race, our dear English race! once the very stoics of Christian Europe, famous as a people for manly virtues, declines more and more

\* NOTE.—This paragraph is a reprint from an article in the *Church Times*.

to be fathers and mothers, will not be worried with children, and can hardly be spoken of without shame. God grant that the Holy Ghost is indeed brooding over the Fatherland, that He will quicken the dead ashes into holy fire!"

Tears came into his eyes, the fine curve of his lips became relaxed and loose, the corners twitched.

He shook Roland very warmly by the hand, with no more words of any sort, and in a moment more the stately and distinguished figure had gone.

Roland sat down again, thoughtful and grave. The room seemed empty now that Canon Escott was no longer there. A few people, a very few, have an aroma of greatness—if one may put it so. Their very presence alters the aspect of a place and has a subtle influence upon the brain.

Canon Escott was one of these men.

Roland's eye fell upon the brandy bottle. He rang the bell and the boy came in.

"Lock that up in the cupboard, please, Henry," he said, handing the lad a key, "and bring me my lunch."

In a minute or two Roland's lunch was brought to him. He never ate much in the middle of the day. Many University men keep this salutary habit of the undergraduate days. Roland was one of them. His lunch was a glass of milk and a couple of sandwiches.

As he ate he thought of the man who had just left. He did not seem a happy man. There could be no doubt about that. He hadn't the cheerfulness of Father Grogan or Dean Gortre, the vice-president of the Confraternity. Then, again, he

seemed extremely sensitive. Roland was no Philistine. He had not any contempt for, or dislike of, manly emotion. He quite realised, for instance, the colossal hypocrisy which speaks of the *reserve* of Englishmen about their religion—speaks of it as if it were a commendable thing. He was quite aware that what was called “reserve” was nothing of the sort. It was cowardice and funk. People who talked thus were simply people who were afraid to speak out for our Lord, to confess Him.

Still, this sudden emotion, these facile tears—well, they jarred! As he thought them over, they jarred. He knew that they must have been sincere enough. The man wasn't posing in the least. But they lacked control. He remembered Dr. Ella Low and her oracular sayings on the high-perched platform of Turnham Green. Queer, certainly!

Then he dismissed the whole matter from his mind and sat down to solid work.

About three o'clock a messenger from the Law Courts hard by was shown into him.

The man carried a note from Sir Basil Speke. The judge begged his nephew to dine with him. “I want,” he said, “to talk over Patrick's future with you. I want your advice.” He suggested that Roland should call for him at the Law Courts at half-past five—he would be in his room till then—and they would go to some quiet restaurant where it would be possible to dine without putting on evening clothes.

Roland scribbled a note of acceptance. He had



not seen anything of his uncle just lately, and it was obvious that the Judge had need of him now.

There was a telephone in the house at Bedford Park. Roland rang up his house, in order to tell Gertrude of his altered plans. A maid servant answered him. The mistress was out, she was calling, but the message should be given directly she returned. Then came a shrill pipe of greeting, tempered with awe at a mystery. Little Roly was talking to his father, always a great treat. A smacking, staccato little kiss came all the way from Bedford Park to the worker in the warm room in Norfolk Street—right through the dark and fog of the afternoon to the comfortable office, with its bright fire and gleaming electric light.

At half-past five Roland said good-night to his staff, put on his coat, and walked up the narrow street to the adjacent courts of law. He was very well-dressed. He had the instinct for clothes, and he also, though he never thought about it, was a distinct "personality." The clear-cut face and the honest eyes remained to him as they had been in his youth. But all the features were strengthened and refined by work and responsibility. The mouth had settled into more capable lines, the dark red hair was turning grey at the temples.

He went round to the judges' entrance at the back of the Courts. His uncle had desired him to do so. The policeman at that high-arched door saluted and handed him over to an attendant. After a minute or two of walking down massive corridors with high groined roofs, Roland entered the Judge's room.

It was a high and noble room, panelled in oak, the oak ceiling was starred with carved and gilded Tudor roses. Sir Basil was sitting in front of the immense fireplace. On a table by his side was a cup of tea and some toast. He was reading the *Westminster Gazette*.

"It's very good of you to come at such short notice, my dear boy," he said with unwonted affection. "Sit down and have some tea. A quiet half-hour like this is worth a good deal after the stress of the day."

"Have you had a very hard day, uncle?"

"Well, I haven't had to think much. But I have been sitting in King's Bench Court Number One, and hearing judgment summonses. There has been a long procession of debtors before me, one and all trying to explain why they shouldn't be committed to prison because they can't, or won't, pay their debts. Three wretched youths were from the Universities. Tailors were suing them for preposterous sums. The harpies had waited for four or five years after they had gone down, and just when they were in decent positions put the screw on. Of course they ought to be paid, and they deserve their money just like other people. Still, I wish young men weren't such fools. I should very much like to know what Patrick owes in Oxford. People haven't begun to send in the bills yet. I expect I shall be very considerably surprised, and any surprise is a blessing in disguise nowadays! It gives one a mental stimulus, and life so rarely does that!"

He yawned and dropped his newspaper by the

side of his chair. Here, Roland saw, was another unhappy face. But how utterly unlike that of the distinguished clergyman who had been with him that morning! There was a better strength and self-sufficiency in Sir Basil's face. If he suffered he had learnt how to "suffer and be strong," he had learnt what Cardinal Newman tried to teach in his poignant verses.

"We won't go to a club," Sir Basil said, after a slight silence. "I want to be alone with you. And we can't go to any of the ordinary restaurants because we're not dressed, and because it's ten to one we should meet your aunt talking epicene philosophy with that young booby Humphrey England! Where can we go?"

"Are you game for a little French place in Soho? I don't mean any of the known places. It's a place where one gets first-class cooking, drinkable wine, and a varied meal for about half-a-crown each—three shillings perhaps."

"That will do very well, Roland. At any rate, we shall not be recognised. Shall we go now? It's after six, and I feel hungry."

The Judge rose, rang for his clerk, gave him some directions, and was helped into his coat.

Then uncle and nephew walked down the dim, echoing corridors, and descended the private stairs to the judges' entrance.

"Get us a hansom, please," Sir Basil said to the policeman.

"Yes, m'lud," he answered, with a nice distinction between the usual legal abbreviation and the respect of a very humble star in the legal heaven.

The cab arrived and the two men entered it. As they turned into Fleet Street a constable stationed on point duty walked out into the middle of the road and held up his hand. The immense traffic of the thoroughfare stopped to allow them to pass, and the policeman saluted.

"That's rather fine, uncle," Roland said. "It's a new experience to me. Don't you feel royal when they do that for you?"

"I'm afraid not," the Judge answered. "The pomp and circumstance of the bench always seems slightly ridiculous to me, though most of my learned brethren seem to revel in it. I suppose it is necessary. The scarlet and ermine, and all the rest of it, frightens fools. It was designed to that end, I suppose."

His voice was very weary and indifferent.

Roland said nothing more as they drove down the thronged and lighted Strand. The man by his side was in a somewhat grim and unhappy mood. He would not be led into light talk.

They arrived at the little French restaurant in Soho. It was a long low room, with a bright wall paper, reminding one oddly of the walls of a bedroom, and a tarnished mirror here and there.

A French woman sat at a desk by the door; she bowed and smiled as they went in.

The guests were all foreign, prosperous tradesmen of the French quarter. With their napkins tucked beneath their chins, they fed with vivacious relish and a hum of contented talk; man, wife, and child, each at their regular table and with

half-finished bottles of maçon, which had been preserved from the preceding night, before them.

A couple of waiters in short jackets hurried about from table to table, or shouted harsh orders through a hole in the wall.

The two men found a table set against the wall in a distant corner. They were able to see everyone, and to chat undisturbed.

The Judge began upon the matter which burdened him at once.

"I suppose you know that Patrick has been sent down from Oxford?" he asked.

"Yes, I had heard. But is it for a year or for good and all?"

"Oh, for good and all. He's thrown away his chance for ever. His life up there has been one long record of sordid viciousness. I saw the Dean of his college, a very decent and gentlemanly young fellow, and he was actually ashamed to tell me of all that the wretched boy has been doing. There isn't one redeeming feature in the case. He didn't even row in his torpid! Sly and lazy vice—that is my only son's career at Oxford."

Roland sighed.

"Some fellows can't stand Oxford," he said.

"It's too sudden a change from school. They haven't any sense of balance or proportion, and they come a most awful cropper. But it's a mistake to regard the failure in a University career as in any way irrevocable. Pat is only a boy still. His mind is plastic, and it is possible to influence him."

"I wonder if you're right!" the unhappy father answered. "I would give much to think so,

Roland, but I cannot. The boy is what the Americans call 'bone idle,' I believe. There is always hope for a vicious person who *works*. Work has such an ennobling effect upon character that few really hard-working people are wholly irreclaimable. That has been my experience at least. But Patrick is such a liar. He is sly and crafty in all he does, abnormally so for a boy of twenty. It is a bitter thing to say, but in many essentials he reminds me of atrocious young criminals whose trials I have been at. There is the same absence of any sense of duty, the same callous determination to get whatever the moment's fancy suggests without a thought of the consequences."

"He's behaved abominably, I know," Roland said. "But at twenty! Nothing is, or can be, irrevocable at twenty. Do not strike too harsh a note."

"God knows," said the Judge, "I try to look upon the bright side of things. But despair comes over me only too often. One or another of my colleagues on the Bench is always coming up to me in our tea-room or somewhere and telling me of some victory won by a son. 'My young rascal got his first in Greats, Speke; 'pon my word, I'm more nervous about it than I was over my own degree examination,' or else, 'My lad was at Windsor last week with his chief—the secretaries always go, you know—and the King spoke to him and said he heard well of him from Sir Henry. Very satisfactory, was it not?' And I have to congratulate some beaming old fellow, with a sick heart! I can't very well turn round and say, 'Well, my

young rascal has just been sent down from Oxford for drink, gambling, and making love to barmaids; he's as extravagant as Brummell, and as sly as Satan!"

"It's awfully hard," Roland confessed. He had never heard his uncle in so communicative and frank a mood. The utter dejection and misery in the voice and manner of this famous and successful man cut into the listener's heart like a knife.

"You've three boys, haven't you?" the Judge said suddenly.

"Yes, only one girl."

"Well, if one of those goes wrong you won't be left comfortless and alone when you are my age. When I was beginning life I scouted the idea of a family. I thought it would be a terrible drag on my progress. Your aunt thought with me, though it was I who influenced her—it generally is the man in the beginning. We determined to limit our family, and we did so. Now you see the result. I have got everything that I could get in the way of material success, almost. I am an instance of real, solid, unmistakable success! And I have absolutely nothing in the world that gives me the slightest pleasure."

He stopped for a moment and drank a little wine.

"I used to laugh a good deal at you, my boy," he said. "You'll remember how I used to poke fun at your society and your aims. It seemed to me ridiculous that you should devote your life to anything of the sort. *Pat was only fifteen then.* You have justified your attitude in every way.

Your name is known all over England, you will be in Parliament in a year, you are absolutely happy in your domestic life. Honoria always weeps when she comes back after a visit to you! The religious side of your propaganda means nothing to me. But how sane and wise a propaganda it is! I have learnt that by the most humiliating and heart-breaking experiences. Al' my hopes were centred in Patrick. The fortune I have accumulated, the name and title I shall probably be able to leave him, his mother's family—all these I regarded as things won for the boy. He was the conscious end and aim of all I did. Now, in middle age, almost all hope has gone from me. I am that pitiable creature, a man of active brain, high position, and good health who is without an object in life. I've got to go on without a reason

'Our acts, our angels are for good or ill—  
'The fatal shadows that walk by us still!''

Roland had never seen his uncle so moved before. He felt a profound pity for him. It was all so drearily, hopelessly true. Here was a terrible instance of the way in which God and Nature punished those who interfered with the law of function, which is the Divine law. What could he say to comfort Sir Basil? He could say very little. He could not tell him of the one true Solace of all human woe and trouble. He could not hold up the Crucifix to him. Sir Basil would not have understood or appreciated. It was too late now.

"What we have to do," he said, after a little thought, "is to find some way out of the present



situation, some way of disciplining Patrick and bringing him to his senses. What does Lady Honoria think?"

"Goodness knows!" Sir Basil answered. "We see little of each other, your aunt and I. Whenever we have to talk about the boy there is a mutual reproach in our eyes. We both blame each other for the past, we both realise what might have been if we had lived a proper life as husband and wife. Honoria should have had a family. Now that all hope of that is gone I can discern a talent for motherhood in her, latent and undeveloped, but existing. Failing that, she has taken up every whim of the day, every fashion of a pseudo-intellectual circle, and throws herself into them with a feverish energy. I never know what is going to happen next, I never enquire. It's no use. I refused to give her the chance of being a normal and healthy woman, I insisted that we should take means to prevent a family. Can I interfere with her doings now? I have a sense of justice, Roland. I try to be fair. My wife must do what gives her some interest in life. Starved maternity physically alters the brain. It creates a new and neurotic type—I have been reading Dr. Low's book on the nervous diseases of women. I cannot quarrel with Honoria for anything she does. And we are very fond of each other at heart."

"Neither of you have any definite plan for Pat?"

"Nothing as yet. Your aunt came to me yesterday in a rather breathless and excited condition, and told me that she believed that everything

would come right very shortly. She said that if we waited a little she knew of some influence that could be brought to bear on him, a wonderful influence. Roland, she informed me in all seriousness that some epoch-making event was going to take place quite shortly which would alter the lives of all of us. A new Messiah, as far as I could gather! Something from India this time. There is always something wonderful and new! But we stand where we did. Some new quack is always springing up with a fresh gospel—generally the gospel of grab, by the way. Your aunt assured me that *this* time she had got hold of the right thing, the Truth. I have heard her say so before. I pointed out that whatever one's private views may be, the Christian religion had stood the test of a good many centuries and seemed to provide all that was necessary for the devotional temperament! And I reminded her of poor Robert Llewellyn, whom I knew very well, and of his ending. You will remember the business, it must have taken place when you were at Oxford. Llewellyn got into financial difficulties and was bribed by a Jew millionaire to forge inscriptions that were to overthrow Christianity."

"Oh, I remember very well," Roland answered. "It upset things at Oxford terribly. People still refer to it as the time 'When it was Dark'—out of Genesis, you know."

"The spirit of unrest is abroad," the Judge said, "and I am beginning to believe, with your people, that the cause is not far to seek. I do not see this insane pursuit of the visionary and unattainable,

this hunger for mental sensation, in people who have families. You can put me on the list of your Confraternity, or whatever you call it, if you like, Roland, and I'll send you ten pounds. I won't wear the badge though! I'm hanged if I do. My valet, a faithful fool, does so, and he'd weep tears of joy while he was shaving me if he saw the thing."

It was very kindly and sincerely meant. Roland saw that. Sir Basil was convinced. Nothing else would have made him lend his name to the cause. It might be that some day the spiritual side of the question would come home to him as the social had done. Who could tell? Each day the secretary was confronted with some startling instance of what was going on in the minds of men. He believed that there was not the shadow of a doubt but that the Holy Ghost was working for them.

*"And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity; for we know not how to pray as we ought."*

Roland thanked his uncle. Then he said, "Now what are we to do with Pat? Is he at home?"

"Oh, no," the Judge answered. "Honorias likes to see smart-looking maids in the house. After what I have recently heard about my son, I couldn't trust him to be with us. And the whole environment is too enervating and luxurious for him. He is down at a tutor's in Essex, and to fill up his time until I can think of what to do with him, he's supposed to be reading for the Bar."

"A couple of hundred years ago," Roland said regretfully, "you could have locked him up and cut his vices out of him with a ground ash. It's a tremendous pity it isn't possible now. We are such

a soft and sentimental lot of people. Think of Pat as a pupil of old Roger Ascham, for instance."

"He'd have been a scholar and a gentleman by now! I've thought of trying him for the army, through the militia, he'd never manage Sandhurst. If only we could have a good war, like the Boer war! He might get a commission through volunteering. Lots of fellows did. I have thought of buying up some of his debts at Oxford and having him arrested for non-compliance with a judgment summons. I'd commit him for contempt of court myself, or get one of my brethren in the King's Bench Court to do so. A month in Holloway would do him all the good in the world. He'd begin to see things in their real proportion then. He doesn't understand the simplest facts about life as yet. I think that he would be more ductile, don't you?"

"Now I think that's a capital idea," Roland said. "It really would do good. It wouldn't get into the newspapers, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear me, no. That could easily be arranged. The whole thing wouldn't take three minutes."

"It's drastic, but it's sound," Roland said, delighted with the scheme. "Quite Shakespearean, too! And what would come afterwards?"

"Oh, a choice of serious application or a passage to New Zealand and a hundred pounds on landing. Half measures are no use. If he can't pull himself together now, he never will. But I think the shock of a few weeks in prison—and they don't treat debtors with any particular courtesy!—would bring about the desired result!"

Both men were somewhat cheered by the scheme. The problem did not look quite so hopeless now—and it must be remembered that they had dined. Both had an alert sense of humour, and over the coffee and kümmell they relaxed and drew verbal pictures of the young Oxford "blood" polishing his tins and sweeping out the prison corridors with an angry and terrified heart.

"When he is allowed to write—after the first ten days I believe it is—his epistles will be most interesting," the Judge said. "I must keep them from your aunt though. In any case she will be a difficulty. Honoria has a very tender heart, poor dear."

They agreed to walk home together. Roland would smoke a cigar with the Judge and then proceed to Bedford Park.

"Look here, Roland," the Judge said as they turned into Rupert Street, "I should like to do something for one of your children. I have great confidence in you and you have shown yourself to be a man. I have made a great deal of money, you know. Before I became a judge I was earning fifteen thousand a year, and all my investments have turned out extraordinarily well. That's the irony of the situation we've been discussing! Now I tell you what I'll do. Your little Roland is entered at Winchester, you tell me—the very best school in England, I wish I'd sent Pat there instead of to Harrow. Now I'll place a thousand pounds in trust for the boy now. By the time he's ripe for a public school, the income will have added to the capital. He shall have the use of the income,

and the interest from now till then, to help pay his school fees. Then when he goes to Oxford the thousand will pay for his whole time there and enable him to live decently. Let me know who your solicitors are and I'll have the whole thing arranged. I'll speak to my solicitors to-morrow. You and they will have the control of the money."

Roland could hardly thank him. The splendid and generous offer meant so much. He and Gertrude were always spending long evenings in discussing the futures of the happy little creatures that God and Nature, the "Vicar of God," had given them. Husband and wife built many castles in the air, with fond and gentle hope. The problem had always seemed an important one to them. Roland would never be rich. The work he was doing forbade more than a moderate and decent income. If he cared to sacrifice any part of it he could become well-to-do in a very short time. There was no doubt about that. His proved ability and power of work had made him extremely valuable. Sir Michael Manichoe—half-a-dozen great folk—would have given him work and a position that would place him far above financial care in a moment. But Roland was a man vowed.

This offer of Sir Basil's altered everything. He couldn't speak much. He wrung the Judge's hand. His uncle was scarcely less moved. It had not seemed such a great thing to him. Well! if he could not keep his own son, whom he loved, he would do what he could for his nephew's son.

For never had he felt more drawn to Roland than now. In his loneliness and misery the strong,

successful man was glad to rest for a moment on the other—to comfort himself with Roland's rich sympathy.

The Judge did not know where he might have found a greater and more August help. His eyes were blinded still. But, it is possible, that he was drawing nearer to the supreme and ultimate truth of life. A man who walks with God as Roland tried to do, radiates help and strength. The unhappy who have not yet learned of God, come to him, and find a faint foretaste of the comfort that, perchance, they will some day experience themselves.

The force of faith is like an electric current, it passes through soul to soul, as the electricity from body to body.

Pleased with each other, happy in a new seal of friendship and communion, Roland and the brother of Roland's father walked towards Coventry Street and Piccadilly Circus.

They walked towards a tragedy. Neither of them knew it, imminent as it was.

"God moves," it has been said with awe, "in a mysterious way."

As they turned out of the quieter street into the full glare and roar of the great pleasure-thoroughfare, they passed by a small and "fast" restaurant.

The doors had just opened, and a commissionaire was helping two people into a cab.

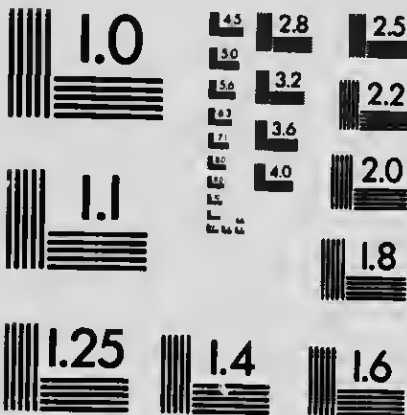
One was a woman. She was expensively dressed and in the worst of taste. That is to say, that no unprejudiced observer meeting with her would





# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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have placed her mentally as anything but a courtesan. She wore a large black picture hat, which shaded hair which was dyed yellow, and a pretty, impudent face.

With her was a slim and good-looking youth in a long coat, the colour of wet macadam. His hair was jet black and his clean-shaved face wore a certain jaunty recklessness that did not ill become it. It was an intelligent face and one that would be remarked in passing. But it wore an expression of defiance and war. One would have said that the young man was doing wrong, enjoyed it, knew it, and did not mean to stop doing it.

It was Patrick Speke, who had a large share of his mother's beauty, the beauty of the Earls of Erse and their women-kind.

Sir Basil saw his son first. He had imagined him safe in Essex with his tutor. Now he saw him in the centre of the most vicious part of London, raking hell with some disreputable girl of the town.

Sir Basil's face was suffused with blood. A furious anger informed it. The woman had just got into the cab, the Judge seized his son's arm. Patrick turned round—the sudden throb of his heart could almost be heard. He saw who held him. His face grew pale as linen, the moisture dried up on his lips, the colour seemed to pass out of his eyes.

Roland never forgot that picture of guilty and abominable fear.

"What are you doing here, sir, with that—that person?" Sir Basil whispered.

The young man tried to speak and could not.



“What’s up, Kiddie?” she said.”  
*First it was Ordained*

(Page 271)



He shook visibly. The pith seemed to have gone from the bones of his body and left them hollow.

He had become a ghost, a caricature, of the reckless, good-looking boy he had been but a moment before.

The commissionaire who kept the door of the restaurant had been on duty at the Law Courts not long before he had been shifted to his present work by the officer who commands the corps in its Strand headquarters.

He knew Sir Basil, knew who he was at least, and waited impassively to see what was going to happen.

Again Patrick Speke tried to answer his father; again he failed.

The woman in the hansom leant forward, wondering why her cavalier was so delayed.

She caught sight of his face under the steel-blue radiance of an electric arc, which made it look even more ghastly than it really was.

She skipped back on the pavement showing a length of brown stocking and a sudden glimpse of lace.

Roland noticed that. His brain was numbed, but he found himself wondering why ladies got out of cabs in such a different way from this sort of person.

The girl went up to Sir Basil and his son.

"What's up, Kiddie?" she said in a voice that was not entirely unpleasing in tone, though the Cockney accent was very marked.

"Another writ? What? Look here, mister, it's all right. Don't get your hair up. He's got

friends who'll see him through. Haven't you, Kiddie? Why, his father's a judge, Sir Basil Speke! Don't you worry. His lordship'll settle the claim."

Anxiety spread itself over the foolish, painted face.

Patrick Speke found a voice, a hoarse, frightened, and dull voice which pulsated like a drum beaten under a blanket.

"Shut up, Belle," he said. "This is my father."

The girl looked thoroughly frightened for a moment. Then her native instinct returned, the instinct of impudence, the lore that Gavroche in "Les Misérables" knew.

"Glad to meet you," she said. "It's premature, but it'll do now as well as any other time. Pat and I are on our honeymoon. Thought we wouldn't go out of town, don't you know, oof-bird not having spread his wings much lately. We were married at the Holborn Registry three days ago."

The Judge's arm fell as if it had been struck with a club. The flush faded out of his face—in parts. Here and there it remained and gave his face a curiously mottled appearance.

"Is this true, Patrick?" he said.

The wretched young man heard a note of doom in his father's voice.

"I—I was led into it, father," he said, half whimpering.

The girl turned on him.

Her arms were set on the hips of her perfectly-fitting tailor-made skirt.

"Ho!" she said. "*That's* it, is it, Twopence?"

Goin' back on your lawful wedded wife, are you?  
We'll see! Your lordship, he married me, a pore  
girl——"

People were gathering round, grinning, at a scene.  
A policeman strode stolidly along the pavement.

"Now then," he said in dull, uninterested, official  
tones, "pass along, please. Get into the cab,  
please, sir—you, woman, get him in. . . . Right,  
cabby; off you go!"

Roland and his uncle were left standing alone  
outside the restaurant. The policeman strode on.  
He could see that someone was being thrown out  
of the Leicester Lounge and hastened to investigate.

The Judge turned to Roland. He looked quite  
fifteen years older. His skin was now something  
that resembled unpolished pewter. He stooped  
and his eyes blinked as if the light was too strong  
for them.

Another hansom came crawling down the kerb.  
"I think I'll drive home, Roland," he said.

Roland helped him into the cab and closed the  
apron.

Then the Judge leaned out and spoke. His wan  
and tortured face became suddenly illuminated  
with a smile of singular sweetness and gravity.

"I shan't forget about little Roland," he said.

"I will arrange it all to-morrow. Good-night,  
dear lad."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Where is your mistress?" the Judge said,  
coming suddenly into the hall of his own house.

The butler was standing there, talking earnestly  
to the footman.

"Her ladyship was called for half-an-hour ago, Sir Basil," the man answered. "It was something very serious, sir. Two carriages came. Mrs Verschmidt and Mr. England and Dr. Newton was in one."

"Serious? What do you mean?"

"I understand, sir, as Mr. Debendro Nath Tagore is dying."

The Judge looked at the man with dull eyes and turned away.

The footman took his coat and hat, and he began to walk towards his study.

When he had got halfway up the broad flight of stairs that led to the upper part of the house from the hall, the butler's words penetrated to his brain.

So Mr. Debendro Nath Tagore was dying! And who the devil was Mr. Debendro Nath Tagore?

There was something irresistibly comic in the name and the circumstance.

He stumbled down the corridor towards his study, feeling the walls like a man who had taken too much of liquor.

Poor Debendro, and the rest of it!

Who the devil was Debendro? Why was he dying?

Comic wasn't the word for the situation.

. . . He began to be shaken by convulsions of horrid laughter.

The servants in the hall below heard the sinister sound and looked at each other in terror.



## BOOK III.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE FALSE DAWN.

It was ten o'clock at night in Humphrey England's great house.

A strange hush lay over the place. It seemed empty and yet expectant. Throughout the whole mansion all the doors of all the rooms stood wide open. Each room, passage, and corridor was blazing with light and absolutely untenanted.

All the servants had been sent away for the night and were housed at a hotel in Oxford Street. The rich dwelling was like the palace of the sleeping beauty. No life stirred there.

Humphrey England was in the Indian room. He was the only living person in the house.

Now and then he heard the beat of horses' feet as a carriage rolled through Berkeley Square. It was the only near sound.

How death-like it was! He went out uneasily into the wide hall. The stairway blazed with electric light, down the corridors he saw vistas of

open doors and lighted rooms. He looked nervously about him, listening intently.

Once he thought he heard a noise in the back part of the house, and started in fear, while the sweat sprang out upon his pallid face in tiny gleaming beads.

Once, as he turned quickly, a shadow seemed to slip cunningly away from him and vanish.

His fear grew stronger every moment. Terror lurked in the great house, an evil presence seemed to have come into it.

He longed to rush to the front door, to fling it open, to shout aloud and to hear human voices answer him.

Once more he returned to the Indian room. He walked round and round it, smoking a cigarette. Every now and again he looked at his watch. The hands moved very slowly towards eleven o'clock.

The facile and temperamentally simple nature of the young man was at this hour strongly startled and moved.

With all his subtleties of pose and all his cleverness, he was really very simple. As he paced round and round the gaudy Indian room, the sound of his footsteps hissed on the grass matting with which the floor was covered. As he passed either of the two open doors he sheered away from them instinctively or sent a frightened glance out under the archway. It was as though he feared something would spring noiselessly and swiftly at him.

With each crawling minute his alarm was growing. He could hear his heart beating like a muffled drum. His throat was sick with a thirst that no drinking could allay and he had the sensation of having eaten a handful of dry flour.

Time after time, in the rapid, pattering walk of fear, he cursed his folly in entering upon this wicked business—for so he now conceived it.

All his other enthusiasms and experiments paled before this one. Some of them had been harmless, a few questionable, and more than one worse than that. But they had never given him cause for much terror or any remorse.

His conscience had ceased to be his guide, and had become his accomplice, that was all.

For, though he would generally have laughed such an outmoded idea to scorn, he had a conscience—a little weazened grasshopper of a thing, no doubt, such as Mark Twain tells us he saw—but a conscience still.

Few people who know anything about life will admit that there is such a thing as a sincere and convinced atheist in the world. Not a non-Christian, not an "agnostic," but an ATHEIST. There are, of course, lots of people who say they are atheists, and say it with an arrogance that is strange in anyone who is confessing a limitation of temperament. But these people *have* consciences. They can offer no explanation of the fact. Heredity won't do, because if people with a Christian ancestry can really become atheists, in the process of overcoming one inherited impulse, they might, with equal likelihood, have destroyed the other. Once more, though there have been, and are, plenty of good men and women who don't believe in Christianity, none of them has ever been able, or ever will be able, to give a sufficient reason for living a good life, unless it is the Christian reason. All non-Christian systems of philosophy are illogical because

they are based upon selfishness, which is a moral flaw. Occasions are always rising when to do an evil thing would be pleasurable and expedient, and would not apparently harm any thing or creature. The non-Christian who resists the temptation does so with an entire lack of logic. He does so, in fact, because he has a conscience, because the God he denies has put this unexplainable *fact* into him.

Humphrey England's wisp of a conscience was working in him now. It had grown larger, had become an almost physical thing, and was pressing on his heart.

"Why," he thought with terrified bitterness, "oh, why did I ever mix myself up in this devilry? It must be that! If this man—or, rather, the man that *was*, and whom I saw die with my own eyes, saw cut open by a doctor in my greed for a new sensation, beast that I have been—if this dead thing *does* come to life to-night, it will be devilish! And something speaks within me and tells me that this incredible and monstrous thing *will* happen. The house is full of silent presences, horror lies over it like a pall. Why did I ever promise to stay here alone till the rest came?"

*Whish, whish, whish, whish*—a beastly sound his pumps made on the matting. Wasn't that someone laughing to himself, to *itself*, far away in the upper part of the house? The idol on the bracket there, the image of Shiva—the dead Debendro had always said "Shiv"—had suddenly taken an expression of astonishing malignity. Five minutes more, only five minutes more—they promised to be punctual . . .

It was getting quite clear and plain to him now.

This Indian magic and devilry was a fearful thing. One tampered with it and unloosed secrets and personalities that had sinister power over the hearts and destinies of men.

What was it they said in the service of the Viaticum—he had bought the service-book at Christie's because of the wonderful illumination—what did they say when unction was given—"Defend him from the darts of evil spirits." Yes, that was it.

The terror grew and grew in the unbalanced, morbid, and imaginative mind of the young man. He knew, or believed, that he was peering behind the veil which hangs for ever between the living and the dead. He believed, with a growing conviction that parched his throat and seemed to turn the blood in his veins to frozen pencils of crimson ice (Humphrey England's colour-sense was well developed) that he was doing all this with evil and malign assistance.

The smooth face of the watcher grew wrinkled, the permanent youth that always seemed its unalienable property was no longer a feature of the countenance.

Had there been any human eye to witness the degradation of fear that came over the young man, the enormous grotesqueness of the whole occasion would have filled the observer with amazement. The owner of this house had consciously lived and endeavoured to live a life that was bizarre and grotesque. He was paying the penalty now.

... A silvery and indistinct sound of chiming bells stole along the silk-hung corridors and reached the man in the Indian room. These soft and distant sounds came from the great clock in the

hall which *Varnier et Cie* had made for Humphrey. They exactly reproduced the music of the ancient carillon at Bruges.

England stopped in his haunted progress round the room. His drawn and pallid face was lifted in strained attention. One ear actually twitched like a dog's ear.

He did not know that his ear had twitched, but he felt a discomfort. He raised his hand mechanically to his ear, as though to brush away some insect which had settled there.

Yes! At last it was eleven o'clock. The chimes shivered into silence, and the hour was beaten out upon the deep-voiced tenor bell.

Almost simultaneously with the death of the final vibration, there came a thunder of knocking at the front door of the house.

England hopped away from the ground at the noise. Then his nerves recovered a measure of tone, and he ran hurriedly down the corridor into the hall, and unbarred the door.

Physically, he was still wrecked by the silent hours of waiting. Mentally, the flood of relief was so great that he felt almost joyous. It was as though he were welcoming guests and relatives to a ball!

Outside in the square he saw that six or seven carriages were drawn up. The horses were stamping in the exhilaration of the keen and frosty night air, the silver harness jingled.

England was running down the steps in glee, when the demeanour of the first party that alighted chilled him once more. It recalled him to the mysterious business in hand.

Lady Honoria Spcke descended with Mrs. Verschmidt. Two gentlemen were with them. Humphrey England knew neither of them.

Lady Honoria introduced them hurriedly. "My brother, Humphrey," she said, "and this is Mr. O'Malley."

Humphrey shook hands with Lord Erse and the journalist.

He knew that Dr. Ninian Newton had insisted that there should be some independent witnesses of anything that might occur—people who were not in Lady Honoria's set at all, people whose evidence should have weight, and people who would pledge themselves to silence until permission was given them to speak.

Lady Honoria's carriage drove away. She had given no orders for its return.

Humphrey had arranged, at Dr. Newton's suggestion, that the men at his own mews should remain awake and alert all night. They were to be telephoned to when carriages were wanted for the departing guests.

The first four guests came into the great silent hall with its brilliant illumination.

Emily Verschmidt looked pale and weary. Her face was a little drawn, its beauty was anxious. Yet England thought that the anxiety and tension had little to do with the occasion of the moment. He was sensitive to the thoughts and attitudes of others, and he thought that the beautiful girl had brought her own interests with her, rather than that she had come to seek interest in Berkeley Square.

Lady Honoria was changed. Her mature loveliness was more than "drawn." It was haggard.

Her eyes were wild. Her fingers hung limply from her hand, and the hand itself was not steady. She had the aspect that Rizpah must have worn.

Lord Erse stood a little apart talking to Mr. O'Malley, the celebrated journalist and editor, the member of Parliament for an Irish division of Liverpool.

The earl was a slim, dark, and quiet man, who loved and had long since given up the attempt to understand his sister. He was a Roman Catholic, though singularly broad-minded, and lived a Christian, unemotional, and gentlemanly life on his own estate.

O'Malley was a big, handsome, and exuberant Celt, grey-haired, grey-moustached, and with brilliant eyes.

"Rather queer, isn't it?" Lord Erse whispered, looking round the big empty hall.

"Delightfully ghostly," the journalist answered. "Quite the appropriate setting, don't you think? Will anything happen?"

"Of course it won't, my dear man," the earl answered. "The whole thing is humbug—must be."

"Well, I think so, too. Humbug isn't quite the word, though. I mean that all these good people are genuinely expectant of *something*."

"You're a fellow who weighs his words because he prints them," said Lord Erse. "No, it's not humbug, I suppose. Mania would be the better word, don't you think?"

"Yes; that will do. Still, Lord Erse, it's very interesting. I'm not sorry that I was asked as a layman in this extraordinary business."



"Well, I am rather, O'Malley. To have to go and watch that fine-looking old chap die, and struggle to say something, wasn't a very pleasant experience. You went to the post-mortem, too, didn't you?"

"Well, I had to, in a sort of way. In the remote chance of anything happening it was as well that I should have seen the whole thing from first to last. Dr. Newton insisted on it, in fact."

"That fellow is a regular member of the gang, though, isn't he?" the earl asked. "I asked Basil about him—my brother-in-law, you know—and from what he said I gathered that Lady Honoria and this doctor fellow were as thick as thieves."

"There couldn't be any possible fraud, though," O'Malley answered. "There is no doubt that Debendro is dead. And then, also, Doctor Layton, from Bart's, was engaged to help. He's here now, I see—over by that big clock. I suppose he's sworn to secrecy, like the rest of us. But if his evidence *should* be required, it would be quite conclusive."

Some twenty-four or five people had now entered the hall.

Humphrey England barred the door again.

He was acting upon strict instructions and a definite plan throughout the night.

The faces of the guests who had filed silently into the hall were all very grave. Greetings were made in low voices. There was none of the small talk of a social meeting.

Almost every member of the party was well known in the swirl of London life. The frivolous semi-cultured set was strongly represented, and already

there was a thrill and pulsation in the very air. All felt that this night, in some way or other, was very different from anything that had occurred in the past. This was no spiritualistic séance or thought-transference experiment. None of the usual psychical catch-words had been used, none of the cant of theosophy. Here was something utterly new, something with a promised element of marvel that transcended all the old worn-out fashions and tricks.

The man who had died was really dead. There was no doubt about that. Nearly all of them had seen him and spoken with him when he was alive, had heard him assert his claim to a vast knowledge and control of natural forces, had listened to his statement that in his keeping was the lost book of the Vadantic wisdom. Many of those now present had stood by the bed and seen the teacher pass away. Others had been at the crematorium and had seen the body in its shell but one moment before it slid into the furnace chamber.

And now—what would happen? No one could say.

Humphrey England went among his guests and in a low voice asked them to follow him. Coats and wraps were thrown down in the hall. There were no obsequious servants to remove them.

"Isn't it strange, dear?" Lady Honoria said to Emily Verschmidt. "The house is quite empty. All the servants have been sent away. All the doors are open and the rooms lit as though for a party."

"I am beginning to feel that very curious influences are in the house to-night," Emily answered in a whisper. "I wish I had not come. I do not

feel well enough, really. Do you think anything will happen, *can* happen?"

"I believe that something very awful and wonderful *will* happen," Lady Honoria answered. "I don't know why, but I do. Oh, Emily, if it is all True, think of what we shall know. Think of the power we shall have to set the crooked things of life straight. If death ceases to be, then time ceases also. Dr. Newton told me something of it. He told me what Debendro claimed. Debendro said that events do not move at all. They are always existent, both past and future. He says that *we arrive at them*, and it is not they which are happening!"

The company had now come into the Indian room. Few of them had seen it before. To most it appeared as a specially prepared temple for whatever was to happen that night.

England held a sheet of paper in a hand that shook continually. They were the notes of his instructions.

"You are all to sit round the walls," he said, "please. There are chairs and stools enough for everyone, I think. I am to ask you to talk just as you please until Dr. Newton comes, with, with, the sealed casket."

His voice shook with fear as he said the last words.

There was a responsive tremor all round the strange Eastern room.

Emily Verschmidt had been thinking over Lady Honoria's statement of Debendro's philosophy. She was fascinated by it. It was not too difficult for her to understand, and yet it was thought upon

a plane higher than the normal. The possibility was fantastic enough to interest a mind which had a curious twist in it, a bias in favour of the daring in speculation. . . . .

*"Events may be in some sense existent always, both past and future, and it may be we who are arriving at them, not they which are happening."*

Yes! it opened vistas of possibilities—it was a delightful theory. Her tired and beautiful face grew animated. It was still very weary, though. She forgot where she was and why she was there. She was interested in the emotion of her momentary thought.

"Why! Honoria," she said, "if that could be true, if we could get into the dimension when one could not only understand it but also *experience* it—why, then one could correct all one's mistakes—couldn't one? How utterly splendid!"

Lady Honoria looked at her friend. Her face became a lovely wedge of excitement and enthusiasm at the words.

"Ah! you see it!" she whispered. "Yes! that is the great secret. If Debendro returns to us to-night, if only he returns to us! then we shall learn the mysterious. We shall be full of power to alter and correct the past."

Lady Honoria's words were strained and intense. They were hissed rather than whispered. Emily saw that her friend was caught and held by a powerful nerve storm.

"Hush, dear," she said. "Don't be too hopeful. We will wait and see."

"I can't help hoping," Lady Honoria answered. "I feel sure that some revelation will be given to us

to-night, Emily. It *must* and *shall* be given! My boy Pat is in a frightful hole. If this comes, then . . .

Her eyes were glaring, she had a wild aspect.

Mrs. Verschmidt endeavoured to calm her.

Mr. O'Malley who sat near, had been watching the judge's wife. A strange idea crossed his sane and capable brain. He turned to impart it to his companion who sat next to him. Then, in the article of speech, he remembered that Lord Erse was a brother to this beautiful woman, who seemed so near that red Rubicon where what we call sanity is dissolved in the inexplicable change that is called madness.

At that moment Humphrey England came walking into the centre of the room.

He raised a hand, and there was silence.

"It is now half-past eleven," he said in a voice that was, at last, controlled to some sort of order.

"Up to the present moment, the directions of our late teacher, Debendro Nath Tagore, have been carried out with great exactitude. I hold in my hand a paper of instructions which Dr. Ninian Newton has handed to me—as they were given to him by our master, who is dead. All these instructions have been carried out by me exactly as they are written here."

He paused. The eyes of everyone in the room were fixed on him with intense interest.

"At nine," he continued, "all the servants were sent out of the house. For two hours I have been here alone. What I have experienced"—his voice had a shudder in it—"I cannot tell you now. At eleven, according to the arrangements made before-

hand, you all arrived here. In another fifteen minutes Dr. Ninian Newton, whom all of you know, will come bringing with him the ashes of our dead friend and teacher in a sealed urn exactly as he received them from the people at Woking. The casket containing them has never left his safe. Only one thing remains to be done." He glanced at the paper. "Will two of you go out into the corridor? In the room to the right of this you will find a small tripod table with a Sanscrit sentence from the Brahma Dharva painted upon it. This should be brought in and placed in the centre of us. Lord Erse, would you mind?—and perhaps Mr. O'Malley?"

The two men went out through the open doorway, over which some Tussock-silk curtains had fallen.

They brought back the table.

The distant carrillon in the hall chimed fifteen minutes before midnight. Once more the chimes died away, and as the guests listened with strained attention, they heard a beating upon the hall door.

"Will one of you go and let Dr. Newton in?" England said suddenly. Emily Verschmidt rose from her place. "I will go," she said in an odd voice. "I will go and let him in. I am not afraid."

Lady Honoria gave her a quick glance. It was almost as though the two women had some private understanding.

Then, with her peculiar gliding walk, the millionaire's wife left the room.

The silken curtains fell behind her with a soft *swish*.

And now a death-like silence fell over the twenty-

five people in the Indian room. They sat waiting, and there was no movement among them. Everyone was listening for the noise of footsteps in the corridor outside.

No one heard a sound when, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, the curtains were torn aside. Dr. Newton entered. In his arms he was carrying a large urn or vase, more than two feet high. Mrs. Verschmidt followed him.

Some instinct, some thrill, animated everyone. With a single, concerted movement they rose from their seats and stood in respect to and reverence for the contents of that which the Doctor bore.

Newton set down his burden upon the tripod. Then he turned towards the assembled people. Everyone saw, with an added horror, that the man's face was livid. His eyes glanced hither and thither. He went in some dire pain of the mind, and all could mark it.

And at that, and in the sudden presence of the urn with its strange contents, men and women sank once more upon their seats, and a universal sigh, half groan half sigh, rose to the painted ceiling above them.

Dr. Newton placed one hand upon the urn. He began to speak.

"We have come together," he said, "to make a trial of what is probably one of the most momentous experiments that has ever taken place in the history of the human race. In the wildest imaginations of fiction nothing more startling, nothing more apparently subversive of known law has ever been written. In the horror of Edgar Poe's 'Strange Case of Mr. Valdemar,' or the grim allegory of Robert Louis

Stevenson's 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,' there is nothing that seems so impossible in the realms of psychical phenomena as what we have come here to witness—I should say in the hope of witnessing. Speaking to you as a scientific man, I tell you with quiet certainty that what we have been led to suppose will happen to-night seems to me an impossibility. The scientific fact of death has been well defined by scientists as a 'cessation of correspondence with environment.' And I know of no organic cessation of correspondence with environment that has ever fully resumed its correspondence. But perhaps there are things above the laws of nature as we understand them and have classified them. It may be that discoveries can be made in the spiritual world, just as they are daily being made in the material world. The nature and properties of matter which we imagined were so surely defined fifty years ago, are now being revised each day by the savants. Thus, speaking as a doctor, and speaking to you under the pledge you have given of your absolute secrecy in this matter, I confess that I am entirely sceptical that anything which transcends the limit of ordinary experience will happen to-night.

"But we have all two sides to our natures, just as we have two facets in that jewel we call the brain. I will say to you that I have been profoundly stirred and moved by the teachings of the man we have known as Debendro Nath Tagore, whose mortal remains lie within this urn by my side. I have been privileged to penetrate further into the occult wisdom of the Vedas, to which he holds the



key—to which he *held* the key, perhaps, I should say—than most of you. For some reason, the dead teacher saw fit to make me more confidential to him than most.

"Now I will say this. In defiance of my experience, in defiance of my scientific training, I believe that in a few minutes we are all going to see a revelation before which all that has gone before must pale and wither. We are not going to see the triumph of spirit over nature. That must always be impossible. But we are going to see—as I hope and believe—an unknown law of nature put into operation for the first time in the history of sentient beings.

"That is enough to say. Whatever happens will happen at twenty minutes past twelve. Our dead master wished it so. He said to me, as he was dying, 'If I come back to you, if the wisdom of the Veda is true, let it be in the dawn of a new day. Let me come among you as a new day begins—a new day for the world which shall come into the fold of the Brahmo Somaj!' I will rest for a moment, my friends. As you may see, I am deeply agitated. Then I will read you the last paper of my instructions, the final statement before the moment of realisation arrives."

He tottered, rather than walked, to the side of the room, and sank into a chair.

Now everyone in the room was trembling. Some shook with anticipation, some with fear. But there was no doubt of the ecstasy of interest that possessed them.

"That man is in a deadly funk of *something*," Mr. O'Malley whispered to Lord Erse.

"I'm getting that way myself, 'pon my soul," Lady Honoria's brother answered. "Too real, this!—too real altogether. I don't like it a bit, 'Malley."

The eyes of the rigid watchers round the wall were fixed 'pon the great urn. Emily Verschmidt's hand stole into that of Lady Honoria.

Dr. Ninian Newton half rose from his chair, and then sank back again with a groan.

Humphrey England ran over to him and helped him up. There was a low murmur between the two.

Then, leaning on England's arm, Newton went once more towards the table.

A woman gave a short, half strangled cry of hysteria, which cut into the consciousness of everyone like a knife.

The Doctor began to read from a scrap of paper.

"We are to kneel," he said, "in honour of the One Who has no second. We are to kneel and pray that this night may be the night on which the Brahmo Somaj may spring up in England and sweep away all false religions. While we pray, in darkness, because our eyes could not bear the awful sight of what we believe will take place, while we pray, our teacher and master, Debendro Nath Tagore promises to return to us from the other world, to return to us having vanquished death, to return and lead us also into the sanctuary of wisdom and knowledge! Please kneel."

They all knelt, save only two people. These were the Earl of Erse and his companion, Mr. O'Malley.

Both these men were open and confessed members of the Roman Church. They worshipped Father,

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Son and Holy Spirit, and could not bow the knee to any other god.

And now came the last few moments. All the women in the room were sobbing loudly. The men had covered their faces with their hands.

All these weak and self-indulgent people were experiencing a moment of heartfelt earnestness.

"The feasting and the folly and the fun,

"And the lying and the lusting and the drink."

—these were exacting their nemesis at this moment. They knelt in terrified expectation of a false dawn. These people who had turned contemptuously from the Holy Cross were kneeling as the puppets of a lurking madman and a frightened knave.

And yet, so strangely does God work, with such balance and precision does the power of Christianity permeate and have its way with life, these nerve-racked fools were fixing eyes that were rapidly becoming hypnotised with fear and insane with selfish hope upon the urn which held the ashes of a Christian gentleman who had borne himself in the fight and struggle of life with fortitude, devotion and prayer.

The lights faded away. The white radiance of the electricity went out, and for a few seconds the red and glowing filaments in the vacuum bulbs glowed dimly.

Then everything was impenetrably dark.

No one could see how the long white fingers of the doctor were feeling over the surface of the urn until they found a tiny hole. No one knew how the thin wire connected with the pocket battery was

being thrust through the alabaster to meet the copper connection within.

No one knew that cunning and impious hands had mingled explosive powder with the ashes, that the urn, sealed with three seals, contained more than the remains of a dead man.

The soul of the dead soldier might, perhaps, have known what these unhappy and wretched confederates were doing to the ashes of the shell that had held it. Who can say? We may imagine that if Colonel Mordaunt knew he would have been filled with pity. He would feel pity because he knew Love now, he would feel no sorrow or alarm, because those who have recited the Creed in this world, and those who still recite it in the next know that "the Resurrection of the body" is a fact that no impious or meddling hands can alter.

. . . "There is a natural body and a spiritual body."

The voice of the doctor began to quaver through the dark.

He seemed to be reciting some formula or prayer. It was said in a language that no one knew.

In the dark, hands were outstretched till they met others.

People began to touch each other for comfort.

The room seemed to have become icy cold. All the warmth, the atmosphere of inhabitation, had gone from it in a sudden moment.

No one could see the lurking figure in the corridor, in its long black robe. No one could have heard the soft "click" of the oiled key as it was inserted in the latch of the distant door in the hall, no one

could know of the hand which was working the worm and wheel gear that opened all the ventilators in the Indian room.

Certainly no one could have estimated the scenic cunning of Dr. Ninian Newton, and the completeness with which that remarkable scoundrel had arranged for and thought out every detail and each contingency.

Emily Verschmidt began to sob loudly and more loudly. Her choking agitation of the throat mastered her control, and became horrible. She began to scream.

Only Lady Honoria and Doctor Ninian Newton knew why her nerves were wrecked so utterly, though perhaps Mr. Verschmidt, now in Paris and consulting with the French branch of the Rothschild house, might have explained this sudden surrender to the terror of environment had he been aware of it.

In the impenetrable dark the hoarse screaming of the woman was detestable. The icy wind that began to blow through the room and lift strands of hair from heads that were bowed, the disgusting and almost bestial clamour that filled the place these, all these, were frightful.

Almost everyone was beginning to rise. The tension was too great. . . . .

. . . There was a crash, a flash of light—an explosion.

Then, in a sudden moment, the room was filled with radiance once more. The electric globes shone out, the pitchy darkness seemed to leap away with a clatter and a shout.

The company was tottering. All the people were standing, falling, leaning on each other, swooning.

Every eye was full of physical pain from the swift alternation of dark and light. But through the streaming salt the people saw—this.

They saw that the green and vermillion matting was strewn with jagged fragments of alabaster.

They saw a tall figure standing among the ruin. A tall figure in a long black vestment.

The arms were outstretched, the eyes blazed with joy, the face was radiant.

A vibrant and tender voice shook out into the room.

"Sisters! Brothers!" it said, "I have come back to you. There is no death!"

They rushed up to the radiant figure—to touch and handle it.

Hardly anyone saw a shocking and abominable sight . . .

Lady Honoria, the judge's wife, the earl's daughter and sister, the intellectual woman, was down on all fours. She was *crawling* away towards the door of the room. Her face was turned towards the central figure, her mouth wore a cunning smile, and her tongue lolled out in derision.

Lord Erse caught his sister up and shook her in his arms. He was horrified.

She looked up at him in surprise. The beauty, the soul, came back to her face.

"Have I been asleep, Pat dear?" she asked, "or did I faint? . . . that was it. . . . The Master has come back, come back! . . . all will be well. . . ."

The man in the black robe raised his arms and blessed his disciples.

Outside in the corridor Dr. Ninian Newton was wiping his face with a large handkerchief.

"Thank heaven, that was over! Thank heaven, they'd pulled it off all right!"

He took out his cigarette case, lit a cigarette, and with a sigh of intense relief re-entered the Indian room. He wanted to temper the convinced disciple with the sangfroid of a man of the world. He saw that nearly all of the people there were bowing down before Debendro Nath Tagore. Not wishing to be out of the picture, and not inclined for worship, the Doctor slipped out into the corridor once again and resumed his cigarette.

He paced the heavy pile of the carpet, quite at his ease now. His acute brain was filled with rosy visions of the future. Fame, control, power, emolument . . .

Someone touched him on the arm.

He wheeled round, his face was pale once more.

But it was only Emily Verschmidt.

"I saw you go out," she whispered. "I want to see you and arrange——"

He raised his hand, forgetting his own easy patrol out of the scene of action. "My dear Mrs. Verschmidt," he said, "you *here*, after the revelation——?"

"Oh, be quiet," she answered impatiently. "It's all very wonderful, of course. But it doesn't matter to *me*! I want to talk of real things, *important* things."

Touching his arm she led him down the corridor.

Within the Indian room the guests were fawning upon their teacher.

Some of them were even wondering if there would be any supper.

## CHAPTER II.

VILE MEANS TO AN HOLY END—A SUPREME END.

SAINT PAUL'S, Bloomsbury, was crowded by the friends and secretaries of the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost.

Evensong had been sung, and the great preacher, Canon Escott, was in the pulpit, a stone bracket high in the sweep of the chancel arch.

The lights in the great church had all been turned low, but the altar candles shone on the green and gold of the sanctuary and led the eye to the spot where the soul also met its Maker, the supremely holy place in the House of God.

And again, high up above the people, was another focus for eye and heart, another place where tall candles shone. They shone on a crucifix nailed to the wall. The white suffering figure of our Lord hung on a Cross of dark wood. The candles showed the majestic suffering of God with a sharpness of definition that was poignant in its appeal to these hundreds of faithful women and men who loved and desired Him.

Below the symbol of God's pain, the massive head of the great preacher was. The face was very pale,



the eyes were half-closed, but from the curved mouth a flood of eloquent appeal was pouring, and the marvellous music of that so celebrated voice rang down the aisles and echoed in the far clerestory and distant painted roof.

The silence of the congregation was intense. There was no coughing nor shuffling of bodies in postures that were uneasy and constrained. The scurring magnetism of the preacher held them as it had held so many people in abbey, cathedral, and stately church for long years.

But it was not merely the words and eloquence of the preacher that held the congregation. The whole service had been full of beauty and solemnity. And these members of this Confraternity were nearly all very happy people. They lived a wholesome and natural life, the life of home, husband, wife, and child. No doubts or perplexities assailed them. They were true to the law of Nature, which is the evolution of the Law of God. They recognised the beauty of function, the sacredness of the human tie. But they saw it with eyes that were given an additional power. They realised the beauty of natural things so keenly and well because they saw them in the light of things which were spiritual.

*"The Paraclete, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things."*

These words were their charter. Each member of the Confraternity was believed in and recited the Creed knew that when he said, "*I believe in the Holy Ghost,*" he recognised the action of One

who was moulding his single life. Each believer was himself a temple to be prepared for the Master's dwelling. The same Spirit who shapes the course of the whole world, hallowed the soul and the body which were offered to Him for Divine use.

So the congregation on this night were moved and stirred to holiness and devotion by more than one impulse and influence.

Almost everyone in that audience listened to the preacher with supreme intellectual gratification, complete spiritual nourishment. They felt that they were undergoing a rich and memorable experience.

The pallid face, the heavy lids that drooped over the eyes, the grand and mobile mouth—all these were seen plainly by each and all in the yellow radiance of the candles in the sconces. The congregation thought with a thrill of awe and thanks that here, before them, was the instrument of the Holy Spirit, Who spoke through this man.

But there were others in the church, very few, who were uneasy and alarmed.

In the chancel Father Grogan sat in his stall and he was in fear. He had noticed that when the Canon rose from the oak chair within the sanctuary, which he had occupied during evensong, he staggered and must support himself by a sudden grip upon the altar rails.

He had seen also that as the preacher crossed the choir he swayed a little. The vicar was afraid that his distinguished fellow-priest was overworked and on the brink of a breakdown.

In one of the front pews—or rather row of chairs—in the nave, Roland, Angus Evan Tulloch, Dr.

Ella Low, and Sir Arthur Childe were sitting together. Dr. Low's face was sad and rather stern. There was something alert and expectant in her eyes. Once she leaned to Tulloch and whispered to him. He nodded in answer and his face was more grave than it was interested.

Roland was perplexed. He was enthralled by the preacher's words. But his subconscious brain seemed to be aware of some sinister fact which he was unable to define or name. Certainly he was not at ease.

Once he glanced at Dr. Low and saw with an unpleasant shock how hard and watchful the face of that brilliant creature was. "Just as if she were watching an operation," he said to himself, and shifted uneasily in his seat.

The memory of the interview with Canon Escott in the Norfolk Street offices kept recurring to him. He remembered certain circumstances of it that had seemed odd at the time . . . he kept pushing the thought away from him so that it should not make a distinct lodgment in his brain.

Canon Escott was drawing near his peroration. He had painted in scathing, burning words of reprobation and contempt those lustful married unions in which husband and wife have destroyed the reverence for marriage, and the purpose of it, by sordid and hideous devices to prevent the birth of children.

"Logically," he had said, "there is nothing but a sense of commercial honesty to keep a woman who has lost the reverence of marriage to one man. The obligation has no hold on her higher nature,

and when passion or convenience press the balance there is no sufficient reason why she should be very scrupulous ; while the man who uses his wife as a courtesan is not likely to abstain from others."\*

Then the preacher had dealt with the economic and social side of the question. He had produced a copy of the little monthly magazine called the *Malthusian* ; he had read passages from it and shown the fallacies of those who tried to regulate society and produce an Utopia in which God was ignored.

And when this aspect of the National Question was dealt with and set aside ; when the preacher had insisted upon the lessons of the census, the duty of patriotism, the claims of that great Empire which Englishmen had won, then his voice dropped a full tone and he began to tell them of the mystical truths with which God has surrounded the union of woman and of man.

He told them, in a voice so pure and noble that it brought the sudden tear to many eyes, of how Jesus had come to the cottage in Cana and sanctified the gay and simple wedding feast. Of our Lord's love for little children he told them also, and explained how that the Saviour was ever a lover of human love.

And then he began to speak of the august Patron of this Confraternity of Purity, he began to tell them of his thoughts about the Holy Spirit and the method of His work and influence with the minds of men—with the minds of those present at that moment.

\* NOTE.—These words are quoted from Father Black's outspoken and terrible indictment, "Marriage is Honourable."

He quoted the clarion words of a great bishop.

"*'I believe in the Holy Ghost.'* He who is able to make the confession stands as a listener to a Divine message. For him there is a meaning, however little he may yet be able to grasp it, in the sequences of natural law, in the confused conflicts of empires, in the distresses and anxieties and sordid cares of society.

"In the confidence of his Faith he will not close the least avenue through which one word of God may come to him. In the vigour of his hope he will bear the season of silence when searching finds no answer. In the breadth of his love he will welcome as fellow-helpers those who serve unconsciously the Creed which they deny."

At that moment, when he had made an end of the quotation, the preacher began to give his hearers his own beliefs on the especial Power and Work of the Holy Spirit. His beliefs were true, his spiritual knowledge real and profound. But the body that was to be the means of giving the fruits of its nobler side to the world was worthy to be the mouth-piece of Divine influence no longer at that moment.

The wave of alcohol which the unhappy man had taken to brace him to the splendid execution of God's work, the wave which his supreme mental strength had as yet pushed back, disregarded and swept away, now rolled over his brain.

He spoke a disconnected sentence or two, mumbled an indistinguishable word, turned half round in the lofty stone box in which he stood, and sunk to the floor of it with an inarticulate murmur.

Dr. Low bent to Angus Evan Tulloch once again.

"We were right," she whispered. "*The poor dear creature has been as drunk as a lord the whole evening!*"

Father Grogan's assistant priest hurried out of the chancel. With him went the principal bass singer, a florid fat man with a heavy black moustache who looked like a gross sensualist, but who lived the life of an anchorite and approached that of a saint.

They hurried up the stone stairs to the pulpit and carried the unconscious figure down. Other helpers were waiting, and took the limp body into the vestry.

Only four people in the church knew anything more than that Canon Escott had fainted.

There was a frightened murmur of alarm and sympathy.

It swelled and echoed throughout the great building.

Father Grogan came down from his stall.

He did not go to the sanctuary of the altar, but he stood on the chancel steps and gave the blessing that ends the beautiful and stately service of Evensong in the Church of England.

He raised his right arm and extended three fingers of his right hand in symbol of the Trinity and Unity in Whose name and through Whose commission he blessed them.

*"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all evermore."*

The clergy house was quite close to the church. Indeed it was connected with the vestry by a

covered passage which went through the small garden of the vicarage.

Canon Escott was helped up this passage by friends. He could hardly walk and seemed terribly dazed and exhausted, but he was not unconscious.

He was taken into the vicar's study, and they poured water over his face and made him drink *sal volatile*.

Roland, Dr. Low, Sir Arthur, and Angus Evan Tulloch had been bidden to supper after the service.

They waited together in the drawing-room, a bare bachelor place, until the vicar should come in to them.

At last Father Grogan appeared. He was greatly agitated, though, as it appeared to them, he was endeavouring to control his excitement and to present an aspect of the ordinary.

"Supper is ready, my dear people," he said, "and I do hope you'll go into the dining-room and have some. You'll excuse me for a short time, I know. Poor Escott's fainting fit has spoilt our evening, I'm afraid. I must go back to him in the study. But you go and have some food, please. Roland, take Sir Arthur and Mr. Tulloch into the dining-room. Dr. Low, I wonder if you'd come with me for a moment?"

Feeling that something untoward was afoot, and with a sense of great mis-ease, the guests crossed the hall and entered the dining-room.

Dr. Low and the vicar turned in at another door.

Escott was lying upon a sofa by the fire.

He was looking gloomily into the flames, quite in the possession of all his faculties, but his face

was livid, and every now and again a convulsive shudder shook his whole body.

As the two people came in he looked up at them with a heavy stare. The jaw, with its hint of an old Roman sensualist, seemed more jowl-like than ever. The man looked battered, dissipated, the spirituality had left his face.

"Ah, Grogan," he said, and there was now no melody in the voice which had a hollow ring in it, like the noise of a stone falling down a well. "Ah, Grogan, you've come to an utter wreck."

"My dear Canon," Father Grogan answered him, "for goodness' sake don't be so despondent! A fainting fit doesn't make a man a wreck! Ask Dr. Low! The church was over-hot, I expect. In that high pulpit the hot air comes up from below. I have felt it myself before now. You will be perfectly right after a rest. I've ordered the cook to make a bowl of soup for you. You'd rather have that than anything solid, I daresay. Here is Dr. Low. She will do anything she can."

There was a geniality and cheeriness in Grogan's voice that belied the expression of his eyes—those most tell-tale features.

The vicar was not a clever liar. He had tact, but his tact had never had dropsy and swollen into that which we call cunning.

Canon Escott looked drearily at him. Then, as he saw the certainty of his host's knowledge, his face became suffused not only with colour, but with torture—the torture of shame—also.

He laughed. It was a laugh that was terribly hollow, mirthless, and cold.



Then he said, in a voice that was so hopeless and detached from life that there was no shame in it. "You have found me out, Grogan. Don't pretend. It's kind of you, but don't pretend. And as for you, Dr. Low, you know very well what is the matter with me. I am a scientific case to you, no doubt!"

The extreme bitterness of his voice cut Mr. Grogan like the lash of a whip. It did not seem to hurt or influence the Doctor.

Grogan winced.

Then he went up to the sofa and placed a hand which trembled with eagerness and sympathy upon his guest's shoulder.

"Forget the past, my friend," he said. "You, who have been so valiant an expounder and teacher of the faith, must not fear. *'I know in Whom I have believed. I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.'*"

The stricken man half rose from the couch.

His eyes became suffused with tears.

The magic, the music, came back to his voice.

"Grogan!" he cried, "I love our Lord. I would die for Him to-morrow. But I have brought myself into a bondage in which I have to sin to live for Him. I am tied and bound by the chain of my sins, I can in no wise lift up myself, in no wise loose myself. Pride has wrecked me on the most sorry and sordid shore! God gave me the gift of speaking with influence upon the hearts of men. I glorified my power and set it up as a god before me. I found that I could not do all that my heart thirsted to do. I attempted too much.

"I sought to force inspiration of the soul by drugging the body. In order to preach to the multitudes with fire I began to take brandy. I kept on, I did the work I longed to do. But Nemesis has come. *God will not use instruments which are unclean.* To-night, as I presumed to speak fervently of the Holy Ghost, I was stricken down. I had my talent. It had been given to me to be powerful for good, for the God I worship still. And now I have thrown it all away. I'm a *drunkard*. Grogan—do you know what that means? I'm a *drunkard*, and I can't preach the Gospel until I am filled with wine."

He began to cry bitterly, with sobs that were not high in the palate as the sobs of a woman are, but deep, mournful sounds that broke from the chest.

"But, my friend," Father Grogan said with great tenderness, "you have been preserved from any open knowledge of what you tell us. It isn't too late, it never is too late. Stop preaching for a while. Take a year's holiday—your magnificent charities prove that you are a very wealthy man. God, who has gifted you so greatly will help you as greatly."

That angular and capable saint—Dr. Ella Low—had said nothing as yet. But now she pushed Father Grogan aside—not rudely, but with that supreme sense of capability to deal with an emotional situation that good women have.

She went up to the sofa.

"I wonder if you'd entrust your case to me, Canon Escott?" she said. "I only practise among women as a rule. But this case interests me. And, don't you know, it seems a duty to put you right

with yourself. You aren't nearly in such a bad way as you think. I can tell you that at once."

He looked up at her with his miserable and bedrabbled face. All its strength and purpose had gone. It was a wedge of wet weakness.

"Can you really help me?" he asked, in the voice of an unhappy child.

"Of course I can, Canon Escott," she replied in a firm and confident voice. "Your work has made you a neuros, that is all. I'm going to help you to be yourself! You'll stay here to-night, please, and I shall ask you to inhale the vapour from three drops of the nitrate of amyl. And to-morrow, if you will follow out the régime I shall prescribe for you, we will begin the work of cure."

The big and fine-looking man looked up at the Doctor with a little hope in his face. Then it died out, and he shook his head sadly.

"Ah, no," he said, "have I not fought with myself, have I not prayed? It is too late now. God has deserted me, it is thus that He punishes me."

The man was flabby, exhausted by what he had gone through. The note of self-pity had come into his voice. The doctor heard it, and her knowledge of this type of case told her what to do. She silenced Mr. Grogan with a frown as he began to say something sympathetic. Sympathy was a noxious and toxic agent in this instance.

"I know nothing of the history of your religious experiences, Canon Escott," she said sharply. "I am speaking as your medical attendant. God may

or may not have deserted you. But before you make such a statement it would be sensible to undergo some little therapeutic experience. We will see if He will reveal Himself in chloride of gold! I think that it is more than probable. I see the soup has come—drink it up, please, and then go to bed. Sleep between the blankets, and have the window wide open. A fire is being lit, and an india-rubber water bottle is being prepared. This you will kindly wear at the small of the back till you can bear heat no longer. Never mind if it blisters! You will find, Canon Escott, that Almighty God reveals Himself in very odd and unexpected ways and places. A doctor is a very practical theologian! And I say with all reverence and absolute sincerity that I have seen the Divine presence manifested by a bottle of Easton's syrup, and found a proof which is contributory to the fact of the Incarnation in the act of buying a railway ticket—don't let the soup get cold!"

The hard, keen, and yet humorous inflection of her voice acted as a strong tonic upon him.

He finished the soup and rose from the sofa. Something had come back to him, in a measure. He looked like a wreck, but already it was a wreck with hope of repair. The face was no longer brutal.

"I will do all you tell me, doctor," he said with a simple humility that was very impressive.

"Of course you will," she said with some asperity—or with the pretence of it. "Go to bed now, and in ten minutes I'll bring you up your medicine."

He turned to leave the room. Father Grogan held out his hand to his guest. There was a light

upon the priest's face, it was very cheery, hopeful and kind.

"Pray for me, Grogan," Canon Escott said in a low voice.

"Before the Blessed Sacrament," Grogan answered in a whisper. "It is reserved in the Lady Chapel just now, for there is much sickness in the parish. Before That, my dear friend."

The Canon turned and left the room. The priest and the doctor were left alone.

She turned to him exulting. "Isn't he a noble fellow, really," she said. "He isn't half as bad as he imagines. Of course, I had to be rude to him. But rudeness is a potent drug in nervous cases. I wish you'd read *Isis* Edis' manual of the diseases of women. You would know the psychology of disease then as few people do. I wish you knew his two chapters on hysteria and sterility! I have a theory that priests ought to be doctors as well. They were once, you know; and if in a time when science was in an elementary state, and could contribute few proofs of God, how much more valuable it would be to-day, when every single discovery shows that Christianity *must* be true. Yes, father, priests should be doctors and doctors should be priests, to-day!"

Father Grogan looked at the brave creature with singular tenderness and admiration.

"In some cases they are," he said, with meaning and affection. There was a great reverence in his face as he regarded Dr. Low.

This was the blossom and visible token of his spiritual love for her.

### CHAPTER III.

#### BY MIDNIGHT MAIL TO ILFRACOMBE.

LAUGHTER is the great agent that preserves the sense of proportion among us. A man who laughs knows that no one is entirely bad, just as he realises, with a half-humorous sigh, the stains upon the robes of saints.

In Roland's study, on a Saturday morning, there was loud and deep laughter. Angus Evan Tulloch was there, and both men were enjoying some hours of holiday. They proposed to go for a long walk, to Richmond or beyond, to see the delicate tracery of the trees against the livid winter's sky, to watch them reddening in the sun-rays, and to see the level expanses of snow in the park turn crimson here and there.

It was just after breakfast, that great meal in the house of Speke. The two friends were enjoying one of the cardinal pipes of the day, the after-breakfast pipe, and all was well with them at that moment, mentally and physically. Both had agreed to do no work that day. Roland had telephoned to the office of the Confraternity to say that he would not be there; the other carried his own work

about with him, and was at no man's beck and call. The great head of the writer was thrown back in an easy chair, his white hair made a pleasant contrast with the crimson leather of the back. His pipe, caught between first finger and thumb of the left hand, waved in the air to emphasise his hilarity, the whole face was one expansive smile. Roland sat on the other side of the fire laughing also.

The story that was exciting the friends to mirth was that of a glib curate who had given out in church that "the collection next Sunday will be for the propagation of the Jews in foreign parts." Angus Evan Tulloch was capping it with that of the golfing priest who said, "Here endeth the second hole," when Gertrude came into the room.

"Here is a wire for you, dear," she said, handing the orange envelope to Roland.

He tore it open.

Then he looked up. "I am afraid our walk is off, old chap," he said to Tulloch. "It is an awful pity, but my uncle wires that he is coming down before lunch and wishes to see me on an important matter. Curiously enough, he also says, '*Get Tulloch also if possible.*'"

Angus Evan Tulloch looked disappointed. "I really wanted some exercise to-day," he said, "now I suppose I shall have to compromise with a Turkish bath, but, of course, I will stay and meet the Judge. I wonder what he wants."

"I don't know at all," Roland said, "but you know, Tulloch, things are very queer in that quarter ;

indeed, over all that section of society, a strange cloud is hanging."

"So I have heard," Tulloch said, "all sorts of queer rumours are going about the clubs. If I know my London and have made good use of the last few months, there is going to be one of the big and semi-historical scandals that occur every twenty years or so in this country."

"I daresay you are right, Tulloch," Roland answered, "and I wish to goodness it was in our power to stop what is going on in London just now among a certain set."

"We'll wait and see what Sir Basil comes for," Tulloch answered.

"The curious part," Roland said, slowly filling his pipe, "is this—all these decadent follies and worse that are going on in Lady Honoria's set all seem to be mixed up or in some way connected with the Confraternity. Of course, we hear very queer things in Norfolk Street, things that outside people don't know, and I assure you, Angus, that the majority of the people in that set—the organisers of it, at any rate—are actively hostile to the Confraternity. Several of them are in our special book of people to be watched, and if necessary, warned. It is absolutely necessary in some cases, as you know, to do this. I only wish that it was as criminal to teach the uninstructed the mechanical processes of neo-Malthusianism as it is to practise the other methods of preventing birth."

"The things differ, my dear Roland, in degree, though not perhaps in intention. One thing *must* be stopped by Law, the other by moral means.



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"Roland and Gertrude standing by him watched  
the familiar scene."  
*First it was Ordained*



You can't make people good by Act of Parliament, but you can prevent too flagrant, and, specially, too *open* a violation of a natural law. One can at least prevent the intervention of a third person. But I always think that the Confraternity did wisely in accepting the advice of the best doctors and adding to its work of teaching the moral and social aspect of the population question—a sort of Police Department for the detection and prevention of the other thing. But, for heaven's sake, don't let's talk about these questions this morning. The sun is coming out; I feel like an elderly robin. Call the children to let him chirp!"

The children came, as fresh and fragrant as those winter rosebuds with which the German maidens deck their hair at Yule. They climbed over the journalist—he was a mountain to them—a man-mountain, like Gulliver, and full of unexpected surprises. Roland and Gertrude standing by him watched the familiar scene with the pleasure it always gave them.

Tulloch began to sing to the children in his deep and resonant voice. He sang them little nonsense goods of his own composition, adapted, as he always said, to the precise capability of the infant mind. For instance—

*"A naughty old lady once jumped in a train;  
When the guard pulled her out, she just jumped in again."*

*"An indolent soldier would not rise from bed,  
So they stopped his allowance and cut off his head."*

But the song which Angus Evan Tulloch always

maintained was his *chef d'œuvre*, and which the children, indeed, preferred more than any other, ran as follows :—

*" A railway embankment went up in the air,  
When they got to the top there was nobody there."*

This, the journalist would always declare, was the most perfect song for infants ever written. " You will observe," he was wont to say, " that it has no moral lesson, always a distasteful thing to the infant mind. Yet it presents a concrete and definite picture of continuous action, it does not specify who 'they' are, and therefore it stimulates the child's brain to visualise an unknown quantity. On the emotional side we have the disappointment of finding nobody there when the top was reached, and the song leaves an open question which may well employ the budding mind as to whether anybody *will* make their appearance there in time to come. Finally, the most intelligent child will be compelled to ask what would be the result in the event of an advancing train ! "

Mr. Tulloch and the children were heartily singing this refrain, their small and chirping pipes harmonising oddly with the rich bass of the virile old man, when a housemaid opened the door and Sir Basil Speke was shown in.

He came up with a faint smile to Roland and shook him heartily by the hand, he kissed Gertrude affectionately, and bowed to Tulloch.

The Judge seemed incredibly broken and old, the lines in his face had become gashed, its colour was livid, the eyes seemed shot with an actual

vibration of pain, one could see the pain moving in them in different lights; he was bowed also.

He smiled at the little children, or rather he tried the mouth of laughter, but failed miserably.

Realising by instinct, rather than by comprehension, that here was an alien presence, the children scampered away.

Roland pulled up a chair to the fire and his uncle sat down. With a kindly word or so, Gertrude left the room, and the three men were alone. Sir Basil took one of Tulloch's cigars and lit it. The smoke seemed to soothe him somewhat, and he gazed thoughtfully into the fire as if he were collecting his thoughts.

Then he began to speak.

"I want to consult with you two," he said, "about a very extraordinary and malevolent influence which has come over the society in which my wife moves. I am no altruist, and the fads and follies of the people with whom Lady Honoria has chosen to throw in her lot are really nothing at all to me. But when my own household is affected, and when, to a set of domestic affairs already sufficiently miserable, other and even worse troubles are added, then I really think it is time to do something. I have come to you two first because Roland knows all my private affairs and has been good enough to assist me in them more than once; secondly, because I know you, Mr. Tulloch, as an honourable man with a definite position in the world, a friend of my nephew, and in many ways a man to whom any public move-

ment, or perhaps I ought to say, the conduct of a campaign against any *sinister* movement, may very well be entrusted. Are you willing to listen to me?"

Tulloch bowed. "I am quite at your service, Sir Basil," he said; "and, of course, I have a pretty shrewd idea as to what you are going to say."

The Judge puffed slowly at his cigar, then he bent forward and patted the palm of his left hand with two lean fingers, as he made his points and told his story with the brevity and yet thoroughness of his legal training.

"First of all," he said, "I must speak a word or two about myself, for Mr. Tulloch's benefit. I suppose you know, Mr. Tulloch, that my only son, for whom I had great hopes, has married an unspeakable woman, and is utterly lost in every way." Tulloch bowed again with grave sympathy. "And I suppose," the Judge went on, "that you have seen the morning papers?"

"Not yet, Sir Basil," Tulloch answered.

"Nor have I," Roland said, "but they are on the table."

The Judge took up the nearest one, opened it, turned to the page in which the police reports were printed, and read out the following paragraph:—

Before Mr. Harrison this morning, at Bow Street, Patrick Ballinrobe Speke, twenty-two, described as of no occupation, was charged with an aggravated assault upon his wife. During the late hours of Tuesday evening a constable on duty in the Euston Road heard shrieks coming from a small private hotel

known as the Cosmopolitan. Making an entry, he found the prisoner standing over his wife, who was bleeding profusely from wounds in the face and neck. When charged with assault, the prisoner, who seemed to be intoxicated, made no reply. Inspector Matthews stated that the young man was the son of an eminent judge. He was remanded for enquiries and for his people to be communicated with. The woman, who was conveyed to the Charing Cross Hospital, is said to have recovered, the injuries being but superficial.

Ronald groaned. "Wretched boy," he said; "you will have to get him out of England, uncle."

"Oh, of course," the Judge answered, with a slight gesture of the hand, as who should dismiss the whole matter, "that goes without saying, but I want you to see, Mr. Tulloch, that all hopes in the direction of my son must be definitely abandoned. I have made my mind up to that some time, but I must now touch upon something ever more serious to me. I suppose you know, Mr. Tulloch, that something very queer is going on in society now?"

"One can't help knowing that, Sir Basil, if one is in the way of hearing things at all," the journalist answered. "What it actually is, I *don't* know."

"Well, to put it shortly," the Judge answered, "a large part of what is known as smart society has taken up an impostor, who pretends to extraordinary psychical powers. That, of course, is nothing new; Sludge is a recurring decimal; but this man pretends to far more than all that. He has undoubtedly acquired an enormous influence over the women and effeminate men who are sitting

at his feet. Lady Honoria, for instance, is in a state of nervous hysteria that makes life almost impossible. Dr. Low went to see her the other day, ostensibly to make a friendly call, and she tells me that my poor wife is on the brink of nervous mania. Lady Honoria constantly says that all will come right with our unhappy son. She firmly believes, as far as I can gather, that this impostor can, and will, work some miracle. Dozens of other women in society are in much the same case. There is an abnormal nerve wave passing over all of them, and it seems to be engineered and managed by that sleek and scoundrelly Doctor Ninian Newton, who is acting as a sort of *aide-de-camp* to the Indian impostor's campaign. I have seen the man once or twice, casually, and his personality is certainly very striking. He must be a gentleman by birth, and he has spent a good deal of his life in India. He pretends his esoteric powers are of Eastern origin. In order to find out the reason of this man's extraordinary influence, I tackled young Humphrey England, whose house in Berkeley Square is a sort of *rendezvous* for the whole tribe. Without very much trouble I got the whole story out of him.

"It seems that this person, who calls himself 'Debendro,' has actually convinced a large number of people that he has risen from the dead. He died, it was stated, in a certain small West End hotel, in the presence of his adherents and of several independent witnesses. He was afterwards cremated at Woking, a post-mortem having first taken place. The witnesses were present on this occasion



also. Then a week or so afterwards the man *actually reappeared alive*, in Humphrey England's house, from the urn containing his ashes."

Angus Evan Tulloch was leaning forward, his face a mask of keen attention, his pipe lying on the floor between his feet. He gave a quick sign of comprehension at the Judge's last words. Ronald began to laugh.

"It does seem preposterous, I admit," said the Judge. "As I tell you, it must seem so. But I have done more. I have actually been and seen the independent witnesses themselves. Now, mark what I say. Each one of those independent witnesses—doctors, journalists, etc.—all agree as to the facts. Apparently the thing *must* have happened. They saw the man die, they saw the post-mortem performed, they saw the cremation take place, and they saw the man come to life again. My brother-in-law, Lord Erse, as cool and hard-headed a fellow as you could find, tells precisely the same story. The whole thing has been kept more or less of a secret, though, of course, rumours are leaking out on all sides. The influence of this Debendro, and his jackal Newton, is as sinister and improper as it well could be. It is deranging my wife's mind, and the minds of many other men's wives. It must be put a stop to. Now is this anything in your line, Mr. Tulloch? And will you help, Roland? If so, I will put you in full possession of the whole facts I have gathered. You, Mr. Tulloch, have the press behind you, and that is a great engine."

Roland answered eagerly, "For my part I will

do my utmost, for my aunt's sake, and for the sake of counteracting the influence of this man Newton. The Confraternity has very nearly caught him once or twice in criminal practices, and, moreover, he is one of the most active disseminators of the worst forms of neo-Malthusianism in London to-day. We would give anything, in fact, to have him discredited."

"I," said Angus Evan Tulloch, "am all agog at a mystery of this sort. It possesses the necessary psychological element to interest me, and to probe it to its depth will be both a public service and a journalistic 'scoop.'"

"Very well, then," the Judge answered, "I should say that the first thing for you to do will be to meet the gentleman. If you will call at my house about nine o'clock this evening, you will be sure to see him. I understand that Lady Honoria, and a few of the elect souls who are worshipping at this very fishy shrine, are to receive their master in my house. You will make all your own arrangements, of course. I will have the details I have already gathered ready for you when you come. And, for God's sake," he ended, in a tone from which all ordinary notes had gone, "for God's sake, stop this business before it is too late!"

There was a terrible strain in his voice, his throat twitched, his lean hands gripped his knees like claws.

Then, with a few more words, he rose and left them. Famous, high in the world, brilliant, and a broken melancholy man!

Some such thought must have come to the elder

man, for with a deep sigh and an expressive gesture of his hands, he quoted the famous lines—

"Ah, brother, have you not full oft  
Found, even as the Roman did,  
That in life's most delicious draught,  
*Surgit amari aliquid?*"

Then there was a silence. Both of them were thinking of the brilliant wreck who had but lately gone from them.

In his own person Sir Basil manifested one of the most ironical contrasts that this modern world has to show. Ironical, indeed, yet one which recurs with ever-increasing frequency in the swirl and turmoil of modern life.

The silence was broken by a sudden alertness on the part of the journalist. He dragged himself back from his reverie, so to speak, and sat up, prepared to discuss the business which lay before him with Roland.

"What do you make of it, my dear boy?" he said.

"It is very queer," Roland answered, "and, really, do you know I don't see my way out of it at all. One thing I *do* see, however, that we must pull it through somehow or other."

"Oh, that's quite certain," Tulloch answered; "all my instincts are aroused. I will see an editor or two during the afternoon, and choose our medium for the publication of any results—provided, that is," he continued, "that publication will be advisable or necessary. Personally, I think it will, in the public interest; but, at the same time, we must

remember the extremely delicate nature of the whole thing. Curiously enough, in the current number of *Truth*, there is a veiled reference to what is going on. Listen to this—

Some years ago, when I had occasion to make a few remarks on the Mahatma craze, I said it was, at least, harmless. It could not do anybody much harm, and acted as a sort of aperient dose for a large number of the people who require a nonsense pill before they are capable of assimilating any intangible truth whatever. An esoteric society, which is merely run as a fad for the people who are ready to swallow anything for the purpose of passing the time, is not such a very terrible thing after all, though it is fair game for anybody who comments upon the follies of the day with his tongue in his cheek.

A man who is merely a "quack" in a legal or technical sense stands on a totally different footing from a man who is a quack in the sense that he is a humbug, a swindler, or a cheat. The promulgation of Astral nonsense does not make men or women quacks in that sense. But now and then we come across astute and unscrupulous opportunists, who victimise the silly and impressionable section of society in quite another way.

Rumours reach me, at the present moment, of some very extraordinary proceedings in a certain mansion in the Berkeley Square district. It is not my business to comment upon the private doings of people who wish to employ their time in any craze or hobby, but when these doings lead to far-reaching results, then it is the journalist's duty to investigate. It is not necessary to say any more at present. I will merely state that some members of my staff are investigating a series of circumstances and pretensions which on the face of them seem very extraordinary indeed.

In a week or two I hope to publish the results of my enquiries.

"Now, what do you think of that?" Tulloch said.

"Obviously our man," Roland answered; "but if *Truth* is on the war-path, there is no necessity for us to go out too."

"Well, we have promised," Tulloch answered, "and the thing appeals to me immensely. It is obviously all on a par with that disgusting exhibition of hysteria at your uncle's house—when the millionaire's wife recited to the music of those infernal harps."

"Very well, then," Roland answered, "we will follow it up. I think I am justified in giving the time, in the interests of the Confraternity, because it is fairly obvious that Dr. Newton is more or less at the bottom of the whole thing, and that man *must* go. Sir Michael Manichoe has determined upon it. The fellow is a pest and a scoundrel."

"We will go to Sir Basil's house this evening," Tulloch answered, "and see what there is to be seen. Then we will discuss what we shall do. Don't let's conjecture any more. Let's forget the whole thing and take our walk this afternoon."

"Very well," Roland answered, "now let's go and play with the children."

As wise men can, they pushed away all the thoughts and doubts of the morning, and spent the rest of the time till lunch in one of the supreme pleasures that simple-minded men can know. That is, in playing games with little children.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tulloch and Roland were waiting in a small morning-room at the right hand side of the hall in the Judge's house.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening.

The lights were low, but a glowing fire threw a flickering radiance on the heavy curtains over the windows, the copper bowls of winter flowers, the mirror above the mantel. Every point of metal in the room caught and reflected the flames till it was filled with odd lights and shadows, which, in the strained state of their nerves, seemed bizarre and unreal.

There was an unpleasant sense of espionage in the situation. Roland felt it especially. He did not like it. He felt that he was there on some detective and unworthy business, and the whole thing fretted him. Still, the excitement of the moment was not to be shaken off, and he could see that Tulloch was no less powerfully affected by it than he himself was.

Sir Basil's valet was waiting in the hall outside, looking through one of the narrow windows by the side of the door which commanded the lamp-lit steps outside. Suddenly the man came noiselessly into the room.

"Mr. Debendro is coming, gentlemen," he said, "Mr. England's carriage has just driven up. If you will allow me I will turn the lights out, then you can see Mr. Debendro without being seen. His Lordship thought that would be best."

There was a *click* as he pressed the electric switch, and immediately Roland and Tulloch stood waiting in the glow of the fire alone. They saw the butler walk pompously over the carpeted floor of the hall—though they had heard no sound of a bell.

He opened the door. There was a sudden influx

of chill air, which the watchers inside the morning-room felt, or thought they felt, and a tall man, heavily muffled in furs, was shown into the hall with considerable deference by the butler and a footman who had joined him.

The footman helped the stranger to take off his coat.

His back was at the moment turned towards the half-opened door of the morning-room, where the two spies were standing breathless, motionless, and ashamed.

Then the man turned round.

The lights in the hall shone full upon his face.

Roland clutched Tulloch's arm with an uncontrollable spasm of surprise. He found that, simultaneously, the heavy hand of the larger man had descended on his shoulder in a vice-like grip. They heard each other panting in the dark. Both shifted their feet and Roland began to tremble.

This Debendro was none other than the mysterious stranger they had met long after midnight in the Hammersmith Road—the man who had asked for a match for his cigar, the man who had fled from Roland down the silent, lamp-lit street—the man with the blazing eyes and the vibrating voice.

The involuntary sounds the two watchers made in the morning-room obviously did not penetrate to the ears of the man in the hall. He leisurely followed the butler and disappeared from the little theatre of their vision.

They stood waiting in a breathless silence for a moment till the valet returned.

He switched on the lights and gently closed the door.

"That's 'im, gentlemen," he remarked, with the air of a showman who has done his duty.

Then his eyes fell upon the faces of his master's guests, and he started in surprise at what he saw.

To this humble member of the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost, Roland Speke represented all that was august and wonderful.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but you look very unwell. Can I get you anything?"

"No, no," Roland said, "I'm all right, thank you. I—that is we—I—er—you may go now, thank you very much. Tell Sir Basil that we are quite satisfied, and shall have some news to communicate to him before very long."

The man went away.

Both Roland and Tulloch had brought their overcoats with them into the morning-room. They put them on hurriedly.

"Let's get out of this as quickly as possible," Roland said. "Where shall we go?"

"All my clubs are too far away," Tulloch said, "and I am not at home in this district. Let's find the nearest bar."

They went out of the great rich house, and, turning down a side street at right angles to the park, soon found a hostelry much frequented by the butlers and upper servants of the district.

Pushing open some swing doors, over which hung a lamp bearing the legend, "Saloon Bar," they entered a quiet room with red plush seats and a counter with gleaming glasses and copper-bound



urns of spirits upon it. The plump and prosperous-looking manageress of the establishment greeted them with a civil smile. Tulloch ordered something or other, and the friends sat down by the side of a gas-fire and looked strangely into each other's eyes.

"Now, Roland," Tulloch began in a thick, agitated whisper, "what does all this mean? You have the keys of the situation, you know more about it than I. But there is no doubt about it whatever, that the man we saw just now is the man who ran away from us on the night of Lady Honoria's party. Such a personality is quite unmistakeable—you heard him speak to the butler—it was the same voice even. You will remember also, that the next day you told me the story of how you had met the same man in Devonshire when Gertrude was bitten by the adder. You told me his name, but I forget it."

"Mordaunt."

"Yes, that was it. The owner of that old deserted Tudor mansion. The fellow who was so kind to you and Gertrude. What can all this mean? You are succoured by a polite, elderly gentleman in the wilds of Devon, five or six years ago. You meet the same man on a winter's night in London after all that time. He doesn't seem to know you, and you address him by name. He turns and flies from you down a London street like a hunted hare. You find the same man again, as an honoured guest in your uncle's house, and as an impostor of the darkest and most sinister type. He's having an abominable influence on society, and is being run by a notorious and decadent young

fool, together with a scoundrelly doctor who's on the verge of a shameful breakdown. What does all this mean?"

Roland shook his head.

He had no words left. His pulses were thumping like sudden drums. He could not think coherently. The shock of it all was so great.

The stout lady of the bar came round from behind it, carrying two glasses in her hands.

"You gentlemen's forgot your drinks," she said with motherly insistence.

Roland took the proffered tumbler. Here at least was a concrete fact, for which he couldn't be sufficiently grateful at such a moment. He drank eagerly, with a muttered word of thanks.

"Cheer up, dearie," the good woman said, rattling the heavy bracelets on her wrists, "better luck next time. The 'orse that goes down to-day may trot in to-morrow, and at a price that will make up for a week of bloomers; though racing's a mug's game, as I always tells my 'usband."

Roland was rather lost in these cryptic utterances, but the wily Tulloch was perfectly at home.

"He'll be better in a minute," he said confidentially. "'Chasing isn't like the flat, and you never know your luck. Leave him to me for half-an-hour."

The good lady withdrew, after a compassionate smile at the good-looking young man who seemed so upset.

Roland smiled faintly.

"The whole thing," he said, "knocked me down for a minute. Now what are we to do?"

"Obviously," Tulloch answered, "the very first move in the game is to go down to Ilfracombe. Can you find the house again, Roland?"

"Oh, yes, I am sure I could, if it is still there."

"Very well then, we shall find out *something* there—something to go on. There is a mail train for Exeter which leaves Paddington at midnight. We shall arrive at Ilfracombe early on Sunday morning, and have a whole day to investigate. It is now nearly ten. We have time to take a cab home, pack a kit-bag, and be at Paddington to catch the train. Pull yourself together, old man, and we will start at once."

\* \* \* \* \*

In after years, when it was all over, and they looked back at these occurrences as dim, forgotten things—yet still as things which had once had a strange, a significant influence upon their lives—the two friends never forgot certain definite scenes in their rush to find the truth of a great lie.

There was, for instance, the arrival at Paddington, as the bells of London were tolling midnight.

There was the great station—empty of its usual bustle—bereft of its hurrying multitudes, seeming silent under the wan and ghostly light of the arc lamps. It was a strange hour. As yet the great space reserved for Smith was not filled with the hurried clerks who packed the morning papers for the West. The few passengers that promenaded the long vista of echoing platform were muffled in thick coats, and, indeed, seemed half asleep. The book-stalls, the rooms of refreshment—all the places which are so contributive to the life

of the terminus in day—were blind and closed. It was all forlorn—wan and forlorn, and over all brooded the suggestion that they were men who were setting out upon an adventure and who knew not how it would end.

They always remembered that.

Then there was the long, sinuous, and easy motion of the great machine that tore through the night, sometimes purring like an enormous cat, and other times shrieking in the ecstasy of its own power. Then dawn, coming with ragged, leaden clouds, fringing the pale rays of a sun which seemed almost to despair of rising upon such a storm-tossed, winter world.

Exeter—the one refreshment room open—tired anæmic girls, with straggling hair and sulky mouths, pouting with the desire of sleep, serving them with coffee in a mute and unavailing protest against the tyranny which called them from warm beds upon such a cheerless Sabbath morn. The little lonely, empty train which went clanking down the line to windy Barnstaple. The Devon orchards, remembered in blossoms, in grateful heat, in pink and white and green—now bare and stark, with iron branches against the windy, pewter-coloured sky.

And then, after the wide pool with its whistling, early awakened sea-birds—its long bridge and grey sleeping town—the run to the little winter watering-place among the swelling and rounded bosoms of the hills. No longer did they see those green and gracious contours, which charm the eye and fill the heart with hope of a laughing summer sea, when they are to be ended and slip towards the

shore—but now a grim and weary moorland, cropped by tired sheep, and the sinister whistling of the storm raging from Cardiff to Lundy, from Westward Ho! to Hartland Point.

And after, the melancholy early morning walk to the hotel. The mail cart, packed with its drab bags, passing them as they went, and alone waking the echoes of the sleeping town. The grumbling old porter, the cold and chill bedrooms into which they were shown—the misery and discomfort of it all, which took away from their enterprise the last vestige of keenness, the last shred of romance. No longer did they feel that they were hot upon a high mission for the good of society and the private benefit of a family. It all seemed dull, sordid—a mockery. And they themselves, dwindled in their own vision, seemed bedraggled wayfarers and twin figures of fun.

They remembered all this in after years, and would comment upon their sensations to each other with smiles of amusement and recollection.

But they did not smile at the moment of realisation.

\* \* \* \* \*

And, more than all, they would recall their progress upon that windy Sunday morning, down the bare lanes, from which the leaves had gone, the hedge flowers perished, and where the ferns of warmer weather had turned to brown and wilted things.

They would remember how they came out before the ancient Tudor mansion, so bleak and weary on the winter's day.

They would remember their feet upon the gravel pathway, the breaking of the winter weeds beneath them, and their sorrowful entry into the draughty, whistling hall of the deserted house.

And, lastly, the dying Indian, crooning his last farewell for his dead master, telling them in hard and hurried sentences, wracked with the steel cough of the Eastern man whose lungs are frozen by unfriendly airs, how and why the great imposture had been planned.

These were the memories Ronald Speke and Angus Evan Tulloch always shared together.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### DISMISSAL OF CERTAIN ANGELS.

THE devotees were growing in number.

"Society," as Dr. Ninian Newton put it with a chuckle, "was coming in."

There could be no doubt about it, Debendro Nath Tagore was doing all that he had meant to do.

It was known on all sides that in a week or two the new holy book of the reconstituted Brahmo Somaj was to be placed in the hands of the disciples of the church and its Master.

Everyone was aware that stupendous secrets were to be revealed. For the first time in history a grammar of the Unseen was to be placed in the hands of the initiate, and then, oh, then! the Master was to show all who were worthy how they also might be as he was, do what he had done, and rise from death as he had risen from it. Even that!

For no one disbelieved in the miracle. There could be no disbelief possible. They had seen with their own eyes, they *knew*.

The immediate result of belief in the doctrines

and esoteric power of Debendro Nath Tagore was an agreeable rout—if only a temporary one—of the imp Conscience. One could pursue one's pleasant lusts now with perfect immunity. The stern bogey God, with His horrible tomb—and the penal appartus afterwards—He was a myth after all, like Zeus in Lempriere! And what a comfort *that* was.

Debendro was going to make everything right; one need die for no longer than one took gas at the dentist's, one would wake up "feeling ever so much better, don't you know," and begin all over again.

A wave of madness had fallen over these people who knew so little of God's ordinances. It must not be lost sight of that they were all thoroughly ignorant from a spiritual point of view, as ignorant as owls. They simply could not realise what the Incarnation meant. They had no Faith, nor had they a philosophy, to tell them of the logical consequences of this material immortality, provided such a thing could be. They only thought that now they might eat, drink, and lust in their own refined and exquisite way without end and without fear.

Newton and his chief were far too astute to admit a sane brain into the ranks of worshippers. The vowed secrecy of the band, broken as it was, of course, often enough, was yet a safeguard against the intrusion of a hostile element.

Debendro claimed royal, or even higher honours. There was a ritual surrounding him. He held mysterious courts, when women worshipped him. Newton was arch-priest, while the bland and smiling figure of Humphrey England was never far away.



That young gentleman was supremely happy. None of his vagaries had ever given him such exquisite joy as he now experienced. His light, cheerful and ductile brain revelled in the mystery of his environment. The Master was housed under his roof in Berkeley Square. At all hours messengers, ambassadors, visitors were arriving. Humphrey felt his house was the hub of the universe, had become the sacred spot from which the fountain of Truth was to burst forth and reinvigorate the dusty, thirsty world!

At the restaurants where the young man was still occasionally seen, he wore an air of gravity flavoured with chastened joy. Many were the gracious and beautiful heads which bent to him in supplication now. "When can I see the Master, Humphrey?" "Oh, I am longing for the next revelation—and is *he* well?" "Is it true that we are all to be gathered together on Thursday to hear the Master?" and so on.

That the picture is by no means overdrawn every student of London life for the last twenty years will readily agree. And the mere recorder of social fact will leave the question, or the statement rather, at that point.

The psychologist goes farther. He analyses, and if he is cognisant of the Christian system of philosophy, he begins to find a *raison d'être*.

All these women, and the few men who had joined them in the worship of Mordaunt, had certainly been brought up as Christians, insasmuch as they knew the outside facts of our Lord's life. When their own life opened from childhood they found

it a most glorious, varied, and many-coloured feast.

Well-born, wealthy, with keen palates for pleasure, all the best that the whole world could give was theirs to make experience of and to enjoy. For some years they took with both hands. Every sense was gratified, and young bodies, brains, and blood revelled in an arcana of pure delight. God was forgotten—save as a subject for artistic treatment, women talking of "That wonderful ivory Christ at Christie's, early Florentine, you know."

Women who pursue this life of ceaseless pleasure, this abnormal life, cannot endure any absence from the race after it.

They would not have children. The husbands who had purchased these beautiful animals did not want to see them damaged by the racking pains of Nature. The husbands concurred, Nature was out of date, God was forgotten. Dr. Ninian Newton arrived with his little black bag and hideous wisdom. He told the gay ladies what the unscrupulous chemists of London and the Provinces were telling their poorer sisters of tenement and slum.

All went well until the recurring delights of fashionable life began to pall upon jaded bodies, which were constantly endeavouring to get into correspondence with Nature and were constantly being thwarted by warped and distorted brains.

The contest produced a definite physical state, well-known to competent doctors, well defined by them. The mind once more took its colour from the state of the body, which in early health it had

been able to guide and control. There was, in fact, civil war in the Temple of the Holy Ghost.

At this state, satiety and functional disturbance induced a restless craving for something which should bring peace to the soul, something that should rekindle the light of an Ideal in lamps long since rusted, leaky, and broken.

The Ideal was still there. Then, as at first, the Cross hung in the sky of the world, the persistent knocking sounded at the door. But the conditions of hearing the Appeal were changed.

Tied and bound by the chain of their lusts, these men and women could in nowise unloose themselves. Nor did they want to do so—on the terms which were offered by God.

They wanted to wallow until the last moment, and then to be turned into spotless angels by a Divine conjuring trick.

Earthly lusts barred one and all from surrender.

Debendro flashed upon the scene, Debendro with his Ninan Newton, his Humphrey England!

And, behold, these women who turned away from the radiance of the Incarnation, bowed down eagerly to this sorry crew, wrapped themselves round with the comfortable assurance that they might go on doing exactly as they liked and that it would all come right in the end.

One need not even bother about a death-bed repentance and the last gripping hope of the "Backstairs!"

The workers of the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost in society, priests, wise and Christian women, men who saw far and loved our Lord, found an

immediate check and bar in the progress of their difficult and delicate work.

Men and women who were beginning to listen, beginning perhaps to have some glimmering of the shame and evil of the hideous things they had been doing, fell back easily and quickly into the old paths.

A strong force, subtle, secret, and invisible was at work. Society, at any rate this section of it, was going back. More, it was developing a powerful and active hostility to the Confraternity. Ninian Newton was leaving no stone unturned in his efforts to overthrow the influence and work of the Confraternity.

He was a villain without a sense of proportion, always the most futile kind of villain to be. Nor had he even a sense of humour. He had not the slightest conception of the power and force of Christianity in England. He saw his own immediate and tiny circle and imagined it was a zone.

As has been said, the Doctor had no sense of humour—though ladies vowed he had a pretty wit. He could see nothing grimly ironic in the spectacle of a sly and sensual rogue, always on the verge of detection, going up against one of the foremost Christian organisations of the day—Ninian Newton *contra mundum optimum*, the neo-Malthusian and abortionist, trying—as Heine says somewhere—trying to bore a hole through Mont Blanc with a boiled carrot !

\* \* \* \*

Debendro, now definitely and easily "The Master," was holding a reception or court. The function had begun at midnight in Berkeley Square.

## DISMISSAL OF CERTAIN ANGELS. 341

Humphrey England had thrown two drawing-rooms into one—nothing delighted him more than to wreck a party wall in the interests of a new religion—and a splendid apartment had resulted. This was known as the Hall of Audience.

The Master, in turban and linen robe, sat upon a small and low stool of Indian teak, set in an apse hung with tapestry on which the mystic syllable, OM, was many times repeated in dull gold.

The stool was a throne. Humphrey England had wished to erect a glittering chair and canopy, but the Master had refused. To choose this lowly seat was a symbolic act and typified humility.

The devotees, many of them in Indian costume, filed before their chief or squatted beside him on cushions, telling their secret troubles. There were the most initiate, the more largely favoured.

Every now and again, at a signal from Debendro, sullen Indians beat monotonously upon oval drums, and the assembled disciples raised their voices in the hymn of the Brahmo Somaj.

The air was hot with Eastern perfumes, the few lights set in the dome-shaped roof threw a flickering and uncertain light upon the moving and hysterical throng. It seemed, indeed, that but little was needed to set the dim, diaphanous figures whirling in a fantastic Dervish dance—or, indeed, any Oriental devilry of passion and fierce movement.

Mrs. Emily Verschmidt stood by the heavy Benares curtains which led out of the Hall of Audience into the latticed passage beyond.

She was in evening dress—she had just come on from a party to this dim, fantastic place—

but wore a long kimono-wrap of thin black silk over the whiteness of her neck and arms and the gleaming brilliants in her hair.

She was talking to a hooded Eastern figure, suggesting in its poise of secrecy and alert attention the minion of some princess at a *bal masque* in the Louvre, when sinister things were done by king and cardinal.

A smooth, purring whisper, which could only be heard by the person to whom it was addressed, came from under the cowl. The voice was Dr. Ninian Newton's voice.

"Very well," Emily Verschmidt whispered back, "at three. Angélique will be waiting and will let you in."

"You are sure?"

"Of course, of course. Mr. Verschmidt is in Paris, and will not reach Charing Cross till four in the afternoon."

The hooded figure glided away through the moving dusk.

Emily Verschmidt pulled the heavy *portière* aside.

At that moment a single electric sun began to glow out with a red light in the dome. Its rays were directed upon the figure of Debendro in the apse. He had risen.

His arms were uplifted in blessing, his eyes were blazing, sonorous Sanscrit words vibrated and came bursting from his lips.

The stolid Indians seated round the walls beat upon their drums of snake-skin, the crowd of people bent low.

Emily saw the whole thing in one vivid tableau.

Then the heavy curtain fell behind her, shutting it all out for ever.

She hastened down the wide passage with its walls of green lattice-work and vermillion lacquer. Her feet, in their slippers of white satin, hissed on the purple and yellow grass matting with which the floor was covered.

At the end of the passage was a heavy door. On this door was a tiny lock not much bigger than a postage stamp, which, nevertheless, by some ingenious artifice of Chubb, rendered the massive structure inviolate.

A tiny silver key was attached to a ring she wore. She inserted it in the lock, there was a clicking of clock-work and the door swung slowly open.

This was Mr. Humphrey England's newest and most delightful toy. Words cannot tell of the immense satisfaction with which he saw it installed. Each of the disciples had a key—which was delivered to them in a little service (during which much valuable spice was burned) by Debendro Nath Tagore himself.

As the door opened into the central door of the house, the outside world—the commonplace ordinary world of a wealthy London household—came back with singular suddenness.

To Emily Verschmidt it came with a sense of immediate relief. She was a cool and self-centred person. To-night she was occupied with important personal affairs. She had not abandoned herself to the sensuous mummeries that were going on behind the locked door and beyond the rude, silent passage.

Butlers and footmen were talking together in the hall in guarded tones. The trained suavity of their professional voices was not quite abandoned, but the shrewd Cockney was more apparent than usual.

She heard a fragment of their talk.

"I'd give a bit, Mr. 'Utchinson, to know what's going on beyind that door."

"Peeping Tom never came to no good."

"When I was in Paris with 'is lordship I went to a place w're you could look through an 'ole in the wall, and——"

"'Ush! 'ere's someone comin'."

The men stood up respectfully.

Hutchinson, the butler, chosen by England because of his extraordinary complexion—which the young man said was exactly like that of a duck's egg, seen through a veil of black gauze—came up bowing.

"Is my brougham here, Hutchinson?" she said.

"I will find out, ma'am," the man answered. "Can I send for some soup, ma'am? It will come in a moment. The night is very cold."

The beautiful girl thanked him graciously. She was always kind to servants, the one habit, she sometimes said rather bitterly, in which she betrayed an upper middle-class origin.

She would not have any soup, though; as a man brought her heavy sable wraps from the cloak-room, she shivered a little.

The motor brougham was at the door, and as she passed out her own footman ran up the steps.



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She entered the warm-padded nest, brilliantly lit by electric light, and the door closed noiselessly behind her.

Curtains of green silk were pulled over the windows—this was the night brougham and had cost Mr. Verschmidt two thousand pounds—and without a jar the machine started and began to move swiftly and silently towards Park Lane.

She was in the midst of crowded London. The streets of the West End were full of carriages, the pavements thronged with people pouring out of the restaurants and bars. But the lovely woman who sat in the carriage might have been a thousand miles away. No sight or sound of the seething midnight world outside reached her. All she heard was the low musical hum of the electric force as it bore her back to her palace, and to—what?

That was the question she was asking herself.

The woman's thoughts were rioting within her. Behind that lovely mask, known in two capitals as one of the fairest in Europe, a great contest was going on. Her brain was a battlefield.

She had forgotten the mystic pretences of Debendro and the fantastic business of the hall with the locked doors as soon as she had left the place. These did not trouble her. She regarded the whole thing from first to last as one of those amusing and temporarily absorbing incidents which gave such a life as she was leading, and liked to lead, another touch of colour and sensation. This last event was more exciting than the others, and it was more inexplicable also. But that was all.

Her thoughts were concerned with one of the

greatest personal problems of her own life—one of the greatest that had ever confronted her.

Emily Wilson was the daughter of a colonel in the army, who, with but small private means, had retired, when his time arrived without further promotion, as "General" Wilson.

The soldier lived quietly and decorously in West Kensington with his wife, who was an invalid and a saint, and his two daughters, who had been to school in Germany and were now at home and "out," enjoying such rather ordinary society as their father's somewhat limited means could give them.

Emily, the eldest, was lovely and ambitious. Lucile was pretty and perfectly happy wherever she found herself. Lucile married a captain in the Staff Corps, and went away to India, returning after two years with a beautiful little boy. Emily refused a wealthy young stockbroker—Eton and Oxford—a soldier, a doctor, and a barrister in good practice.

Her parents applauded her. There was no one good enough for their brilliant and wonderfully beautiful daughter.

The girl began to go further afield than the old people cared to go. Her aunt, Lady Linquest, took her up, and she began to be talked about and to meet a class of people quite alien from the Kensington society at home.

The little Jew financier met her. His abnormal ugliness had, of course, proved no bar to a marriage with the greatest beauty and some of the highest birth Europe had to offer. But he had never been

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caught in even the most glistening nets. Here he thought he saw his ideal at last. The girl was poor. She was not even distinguished, but was just a lady, a lady of that sane and valuable upper middle-class, which keeps the balance of English life sweet and true. Mr. Verschmidt was not an ordinary millionaire who drew vast wealth from some great commercial enterprise. He was of *La Haute Finance*, the aristocracy of the foreign banking world, the world which rules Paris and Vienna, and has its say when wars are to be begun, or great South American States are to be bought, sold, or put into revolution.

He could offer a grand-duchess things which she might never hope to have without him.

Emily Wilson accepted the five feet of concentrated power with the grotesque face.

The women of many countries envied her, and her mother pined away and died, at what that sweet and gentle lady knew for its true worth, a hideous mockery of God's sacrament, a sale of the body more open and shameless than almost any she had known of before.

Mrs. Wilson's last words were words of love and warning to her daughter. In the quiet bedroom at West Kensington she had prayed her to be good. "Try and love him," she had whispered. "You must love him now. I have had long talks with him. He loves you tenderly, and he is a good fellow. I did not think that anyone so rich could have a tender heart. Bring him to our Lord, dear, as the Jews of old came to Him."

And much more of this sweet, unworldly wisdom

did the pious dying lady pour into the ears of the hard-hearted and brilliant girl—not hard at that moment, but with melting heart and prayers of remorse and penitence fluttering on her lips.

And one other thing did the mother whisper into her daughter's ear.

"Some day, dearie, God may give you a little one; then"—there are words so sweet and holy that the pen must not write them!

These were the words that were echoing in Emily Verschmidt's ears now, as the silent and wonderful machine bore her to her home.

Suddenly she bent forward in her seat and pressed a button hidden in the leather cushions of the carriage. A flap fell, and a mirror was revealed, while at the same moment a tiny electric light, shaded by a silver shell, glowed out above.

Her face was haggard by the poignancy of her thought.

She saw and shuddered.

Memory came pushing, pushing its way into her mind.

The dying saint, with God's light on her countenance, the gentle, natural hope that her daughter should go the way and know the pain and glory of womanhood. . . .

Mrs. Verschmidt snapped the mirror back. Mother was of another age and time. No one had children now if they had other interests. . . . Emil was ridiculous, he was bourgeois . . . then there was the dreary illness, when one would be out of everything . . . the drag on one's time afterwards . . .

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With a frightened gasp she caught at her bosom. What was that delusion?—why were her nerves in such a state? Dr. Ninian had assured her . . .

*She had felt for a moment as if tiny hands, soft and tiny hands, were touching her there.*

With all the power of her arrogance of mind, her distorted outlook upon life, she spurned and struggled with the sense of motherhood. She feared it; with a deadly fear, she realised that she was yielding. Sweet! sweet! unutterably sweet——

She entered her great house with a face so hard and bitter, so lovely and triumphant in its evil resolve that the very servants quailed at her look and endeavoured to hide the nameless fear they felt when they saw her aspect.

The angels who bring the soul to children who are about to be born, and who watch each mother lovingly long days and weeks before her travail, fled sorrowfully away from that house.

Angelique, the French maid, with the parrot nose, the little intelligent eyes, and a mouth like the mouth of a crab, came tripping into the boudoir.

The mistress and the maid held confidential discourse for a time.

And at three o'clock in the morning Dr. Ninian Newton came shuffling through the gloom by the Park railings. And Angelique opened the doors of the mansion and let him in.

## CHAPTER V.

### EXIT A BEAUTY AND A BEAST.

DR. ELLA LOW lived in Earl's Court with two sisters, one of whom was an invalid and the other a nursing sister among the poor of that quarter. There was a brother also, who held a post in the Egyptian Antiquities Department at the Museum, a dreamy youth, whose thoughts were always far away with hawk-faced kings and princesses who went down the Nile in royal barges to the drone of the syrinx and the clank of the sistra, many thousands of years before our Lord came to Palestine.

The invalid girl kept the house and looked after the servants, for the Doctor had no time for domestic affairs.

But busy, famous, and occupied as this good woman was, she found an inexpressible sweetness in the quiet things of home, the well-ordered comfort of it, the love and admiration that her sisters and brother gave her.

Money was the last thing thought of in that household, though there was no lack of it, yet the large earnings of the Doctor meant that when she

was able to spend a quiet hour or two at home she spent them in rooms that were beautiful.

It was half-past four in the afternoon, and the Doctor was at home. In front of the fire a little octagonal oak table stood, covered with those feminine luxuries ladies provide for afternoon tea.

Laura Low, the invalid sister, was pouring out for the Doctor.

There was nothing masculine about the distinguished gynecologist as she lay back in the low arm-chair by the fireside. The woman, then as always, was essentially feminine. Her abrupt and downright manner was the product of feminine strength—not masculine assumption. She never pretended to belong to a third sex. She sat as a woman sits, she held her tiny cup of Sumatra china as a woman holds it.

Her great intellectual power, the temperamental force that had raised her so high, had not unsexed her. The face was lined with thought, it is true. It was informed with the self-reliant, *executive* instinct. But it was so permeated with love and kindness that it bore the unmistakable imprint of womanhood in its glory and its flower.

"The vicarious mother" was what everyone who loved her called the Doctor.

Laura was pouring out the tea. She was a plump and merry-faced girl, who didn't at all suggest the invalid, though her sister knew of the creeping paralysis that was growing ever nearer and nearer—knew of it, and fought it desperately with all the skill of her science and all the power of her prayers.

The pretty room was all terra-cotta and green. The pictures were framed in unpolished ebony with a thin rim of gold where the actual paint impinged upon the frame. The piano was a little black "Bord" piano. It had been on Lord Lelant's yacht, and he had given it to the Doctor when she had left the ship after a cruise in the Mediterranean, when poor little Margaret Trink had faded away despite Ella Low's care, and had been taken to the cemetery at Malta.

There was some old oak—especially a mediæval chair, shaped like a Roman curule chair, spoil of an English monastery—and, lastly, the fire-place came direct from the Morris shop in Oxford Street.

Sweet Laura was purring with pleasure.

"It is so splendid to have you all to myself for an hour or two, Ella darling!" she cooed. "One can't grudge you to the patients, of course, dear, but I do love to have you here, eating tea-cake just like an ordinary person!"

"I have four hours to be with you, sweetheart," the Doctor said. "How nice you've made this room. The colours are so restful. It's good to be quietly at home sometimes—braces one up so for work."

"And it's such a raw, dull afternoon, too."

"Is it? I had not noticed."

"You never do notice weather much, Ella."

"Only from a professional point of view. The thermometer is generally my only gauge of what is fine weather and what isn't. Though," she went on dreamily, "I have known neurotic cases in a crisis killed or cured by sunshine or a dark day."



She got up lazily from her chair. Every movement showed that she was intensely enjoying these rare moments of physical ease. For a minute or two she stood over her sister, stroking the smooth dark hair and thanking heaven that the girl knew nothing of the world's evil, of the grim and hideous wickedness that she herself met each hour on her way through life.

Then with a slight sigh she strolled to the window.

"Yes," she said, looking down the long street of fine but monotonous houses, "yes, it certainly is a very depressing afternoon."

But few wayfarers were on the pavement. A slowly ambling hansom cab crept along one curb. These were all. Above the houses at the end of the street a quarter of a mile away, the gaunt half-circle of the Great Wheel rose from the Exhibition grounds.

As Dr. Low gazed down the rather forbidding vista of this typical brick cañon of London, her thoughts were far away. She saw nothing of what her eyes were resting upon—until. . . .

A speck appeared at the end of the road.

The Doctor started. In an incredibly short space of time, an actual couple of seconds it seemed, the speck had leapt into size. It grew large as she breathed. In a moment more she saw that a powerful motor-car was rushing down the street, coming towards the house like a shell.

Already at the far end of the road windows were thrown up, heads were thrust out, the doorsteps were covered with people who had run out of the houses.

In a flash the huge machine had come to the Doctor's door. It leapt up in the air, as a crouching thing in green leather with no face put on the brakes. The whole car travelled some eight feet without touching the ground, came down with a crash, ran groaning for some fifty yards past the house, and stopped.

Before the thing was finally at rest, an odd little hatless figure, which had not been seen before, rose up, rolled out, and began running towards the Doctor's door.

The watching woman saw at once that it was Mr. Verschmidt, the famous financier.

He ran crab-wise, and with a jerky, leaping motion.

His face was a dusky-grey, mottled here and there with patches of dark red. His lips were black and his eyes protruding.

Dr. Low recognised him at once. She had just time to see that he was tumbling up the steps, and she caught a fleeting view of people running down the street towards the car, when she had grasped the situation.

In a moment she was in the hall, wrapping herself in a cloak, and pressing one of her brother's caps upon her head.

She caught up a large leather bag—her "emergency" bag—and, as the man outside was beginning to beat a furious tattoo upon the door, she opened it, ready and equipped.

In his fear and almost insane excitement the millionaire nevertheless understood. A deep sob of relief burst from him. He tried to speak, but words would not come.

Then he ran over the pavement like a squirrel, to where the clanging, panting car was standing. Dr. Low hurried after him.

She found herself pushed suddenly upon a soft leather seat, had a sensation, more than a vision, of the little man hopping in beside her—and suddenly found the street rushing away behind her, and that the voices of the angry crowd, which had almost approached the machine, were heard no more. They had suddenly ceased to be.

The return journey to Park Lane had begun.

For years afterwards the frightful peril, the hideous and unnatural exultation of that ride, was a recurring memory to Dr. Low.

Every nerve seemed stamped with it. Whenever she was the least out of tone it would come back to her in a wave of physical sensation.

For months afterwards, in the lurid light that was shed upon all the proceedings of that day, the newspapers referred to the "millionaire's ride."

Since motoring became familiar, nothing like this terrible progress through town had ever been done—would probably be ever done again. Of course, as was pointed out over and over again, luck was extraordinary; a combination of circumstances existed during those few minutes that might never exist again. Again, the superhuman nerve and skill of the man that drove the engine was an enormous factor in the case.

He became, after the enormous fines levied upon him were paid, the greatest authority on motor-racing in the world.

His reputation was made, his fortune absolutely

secured, in exactly five minutes and thirty-two seconds.

For, incredible as it seemed to everyone, that was the exact time it took the car in its journey between Earl's Court and Park Lane.

This was through the thick traffic of a London afternoon.

Never once did an actual block of the traffic occur.

The car *leapt* at the smallest openings. It circled round the fastest-moving vehicles, left the occupants gasping with fear, and was far away in the distance humming like a wasp before they had time to realise what this frightful thing might be.

It shovelled the greasy hill from the Albert Memorial to Hyde Park corner behind it as a hen spurts the dust; it went over the broad, traffic-studded space in front of St. George's Hospital and the Green Park like a streak of light.

The policemen stood gasping, the omnibuses seemed to be motionless, like grand stands at a race, and all the people on the roofs stood up and forgot to shout.

The thing went so furiously through London that the very horses in the cabs and carriages had hardly time to rear before the terror was gone.

No single accident occurred of any kind whatever.

The enormous audacity of the proceeding might have been a contributory reason to the immunity of London. The supreme skill of the driver, magnetised into super-man by the urgency of the case, and the intensity of longing and command that burned in the powerful brain of the little lurking

man beside him was no doubt the prime factor in the astonishing result.

The actual steel and aluminium, copper and rubber of the machine was for once informed with fluid thought and the power that poured from a man's brain. It became not merely the servant of a directing hand, but the mere outward symbol of a soul, responsive to each vibration of the psychic force that radiated to it through a lesser man from one who was in a transcendant state of sublimated will.

Here was a supreme modern instance of the saying, "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains."

There was a wild upheaval.

On two wheels the car leapt into Park Lane. One long drone and the goal was reached at last, with a great, jarring crash as the car fell back on the pavement.

Verschmidt leaped out. He put strong arms round a motionless bundle on the floor of the car.

Then he saw Dr. Low's face. It was quite calm, though very white. The eyes seemed heavy with sleep.

"Are we there?" the Doctor asked dreamily.

"Yes," he answered—"you brave woman! A horrid fear came to me that you might have fainted."

"Oh, no, Mr. Verschmidt," she answered in a voice that was quite free from tremors, though it was numb, lacking life and timbre. "Oh, no, I've been saying my prayers all the time."

The door of the house opened, and a group of servants with white faces stood waiting

The chauffeur lay motionless over the steering wheel of the car. Mr. Verschmidt gave the butler some directions, and, as several policemen came running up by the park railings, he withdrew Dr. Low into the house.

"You must take something before you see Emily," he said, in a low, hurried voice, which had a definite control now.

Dr. Low shook her head.

"I've got all I need here," she answered.

Kneeling down, she opened the bag, which was shaped like a dressing-case. She took a bottle from one of the padded compartments, poured a little sal volatile into a graduated glass, added some water which was in a carafe on the sideboard of the room in which they were, and drank off the mixture.

"Now," she said, "take me to her."

"To save her life," he said in an agonised whisper, and all the way up the splendid staircase, with its statues and priceless pictures, the millionaire pattered at her side with the same words.

"To save her life—save her life!"—it was like the gentle hissing of escaping steam.

\* \* \* \*

Three hours and a half had passed.

Mr. Verschmidt and Dr. Low stood facing each other on either side of a writing-table in the financier's own room.

The Doctor was weeping bitterly. Mr. Verschmidt's face was pale and calm. A slight smile flickered about the thick Jewish lips. Somehow or other, all the ugliness had faded away from the face, died away as a fire dies out.

"Poor darling!" the Doctor said between her tears, "poor, poor darling! Oh, pray and believe, sir, that she is in Paradise with the Holy angels, that Our Lady is welcoming her. Poor dear, she didn't know what she was doing. She couldn't know—it was that man. . . ."

"All is well, dear Doctor," the millionaire answered, in a slow, level voice.

"And I *must* tell the truth upon the death certificate. You do see that?—don't you? I must. It is my duty, it's stern, hard—and I'm not that—but I *must*. My whole life—all my convictions, my duty to my calling—all tell me that I must."

He looked up, as from some private thought, as if he had but half heard her.

"Yes, yes," he said quickly, "what does that matter? Do your duty. I assure you that I would ask no more from you than that. It matters nothing. *But didn't you hear, Doctor? Didn't you hear? She said she loved me dearly before she went away!*"

\* \* \* \* \*

Dr. Ninian Newton sat alone in the dining-room. It was the moment of coffee—beautifully made, thick, Turkish coffee, with transparent, sherry-coloured sugar-crystals in it, from Barbadoes.

He was reflecting, in mellow, after-dinner ease, that this was the best of all possible worlds. There was now no single cloud upon his horizon. Money difficulties existed no longer, his influence had sprung from nadir to zenith, all was well.

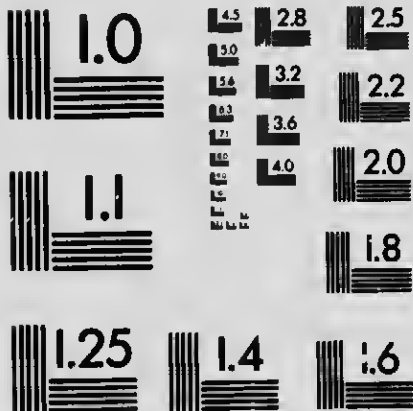
He felt in clarity and kindness with all men.





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He felt good, really a *good* fellow. He would gladly and sincerely have done anyone a kindness at that moment.

There is no kinder or better-hearted fellow in the world than your sensualist whose lusts and desires are gratified. It is in times of trouble and fear that remorse comes, and that the fox and the wolf awake within him. It is then that he is to be dreaded and shunned.

The Doctor felt quite virtuous to-night. His self-satisfaction was reflected in his face, which was calm and dignified. As he toyed with the stem of his liqueur glass he presented a picture of the benevolent physician at home, musing on his high calling by the flickering firelight, which would have been worth hundreds of pounds to the editor of a Christmas number.

Indeed, had there been but a single small child playing with a golliwog upon the hearthrug, such a picture, with the title, "Daddy, where's mother gone?" would have been the success of the year at the Academy.

The door opened, and the Doctor's man, a servant he had but newly engaged, came noiselessly into the room.

"A gentleman has called, sir," he said. "He would take no denial, though I said you did not receive patients at this hour. I showed him into the consulting room."

"Dear! dear!" Dr. Ninian answered. "Then you did very wrong, William. It might be anyone—someone about a subscription, or a book-cavasser for the Bible in illustrated monthly parts."

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They get themselves up like gentlemen on purpose. You should be more careful, William."

"Oh no, sir," the young man answered eagerly. "This gentleman is quite a gentleman. He's driven up in a carriage and pair, sir, everything jest so, sir!"

"Oh," the Doctor answered, "of course, of course. I am sorry, William, I did not quite understand you. I will be with the gentleman in a moment."

The man bowed and withdrew.

Dr. Newton rose slowly from his seat with a half sigh. The memory of that wood pigeon *en casseroles*, with truffles and white mushrooms, was still grateful.

He would have another done in the same way during the week.

For a moment he stood in front of the mirror over the mantelshelf, arranging his evening tie. He smiled at his own prosperous and comfortable image.

"By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches," he quoted to himself with a smile.

It was a text of which he was particularly fond. It seemed so *à propos* to his present state.

Then, beaming and purring, he went to meet Mr. Verschmidt—and Death, who had also come in the carriage from Park Lane.

"*But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*"

## THE LAST CHAPTER.

A CHRISTMAS EVE PARTY. A LETTER FROM CORFU  
AND THE ANSWER TO IT. THE CHILDREN LIE  
SLEEPING.

THE actors in a drama after the curtain falls, particularly if the night has been an arduous or a special one, go home with a sense of great relief. This is, of course, a commonplace. All men are relieved when hard work is over, and the time of relaxation has come. But the actor especially, as all who have made any experience of theatres know, finds a relief, not only of brain and body, but of nerves, which, perhaps, few people in other occupations know so poignantly.

It was Christmas Eve in Bedford Park. Roland and Gertrude had asked some friends to supper.

There was to be a little feast, and perhaps a quiet retrospect of the stirring and terrible events so lately over and still so much in their minds.

It was as though the tolling of a great bell had ceased, but the vibration still swung through the air.

About eight o'clock in the evening Canon Escott sat with Roland in the study. He was talking quietly and earnestly.

"Yes," he said, "it is in Cornwall. The living is in the appointment of the Crown. They made no difficulty in giving it me. Of course, it is worth nothing at all from a financial point of view, but it is what I want. My preaching days are over—over, that is, as a regular and continuous practice. I have 'taken a fear' of the pulpit, just as the fishermen of the wild country to which I am going sometimes 'take a fear' of the sea. But I shall be able to help you on the Confraternity far more when I am leading a life of a recluse than I should have been if I had continued in London."

He stopped and his next words were spoken with some difficulty.

"You know, my dear Speke," he said wistfully, "how dangerous a thing it is to use the emotions of one's own heart and soul as a continuous lever to influence the emotions of others. The whole unity of a man becomes weak and flabby. The soul seems to slough away—but I won't insist on that. We are to be merry to-night, aren't we?—and it is so good of you to have me here for a day or two before I go to Cornwall. It is a new environment for me. I want to break away quite suddenly from the West End of London and all the rather penal influences under which I have been for so many years."

The voice of the great preacher was as melodious as ever. The cameo face, the Roman Emperor countenance, the indestructible manner of the courtier existed as before.

But the whole man was chastened.

He had learnt humility.

He had failed in his own eyes and was departing humbly to hear the going of God in the wind over the remote moors of the West.

He who had stood outside the gates and urged others to come in with the mighty power that God and Nature had given him, was now about to separate himself from friends of the past, and all the human influences of a vivid and successful life, to force himself into the Awful Presence. He had learnt how his life, outwardly so serene and grand, had frivolised the soul. He had learnt that the power of the drug that he had taken to help him in the service of God, had forbade that he should drink in inspirations from Heaven without degrading them, even though he was surrounded by all that would naturally suggest that he was near to the Music which he echoed so well.

"Who are coming?" Canon Escott said to Roland.

"Father Grogan is coming," Roland answered. "He will be here about nine. after solemn evensong at St. Paul's. Then Dr. Low and Tulloch will be here too. At the present moment, I suppose, they're at the Children's Hospital in Great Ormonde Street. Angus is painted and disguised as an enormous clown. Ella is doing conjuring tricks with liquid air. Can't you imagine the children sitting up in their cots watching these wondrous doings—they are a splendid pair, those two! I expect the three of them about nine."

Canon Escott sighed. It was a sigh more of reminiscence than anything else.

He felt he had been too long out of these definite

and human activities. He had been always upon his pedestal, and the rich things that mattered, that caught hold of people and swayed them in their daily life had escaped him.

"Splendid, indeed," he said, "they are doing the real work."

Gertrude came into the study for a moment.

The children, she said, were all in bed, their little stockings were tied to the bedposts—they had sunk into a sleep which was merely a happy stupor of expectation.

She saw to the comforts of the two men, built up the fire, and left them with a gracious smile.

"How wonderful your wife is, Speke," Canon Escott said. "She is always so serene, so adequate. And if you will let me say so, so beautiful."

Roland stretched out his legs luxuriously to the blaze.

All men love to hear praises of their wives from disinterested friends.

"Oh, of course, she is perfect," he answered dreamily. "She always has been. There is no one like her in the world."

He said it with the pride of possession, with the lazy comfort of a man whose ways have been cast in pleasant places and to whom his wife has been a star to lead him happily through life.

The great preacher did not answer. Was it his part to smile the smile of cynicism and chill the ardours of this happy husband? No, not now. Cynicism is the hall mark of failure, and though he had failed in much that he would have achieved, he had still hopes of a useful future and a placid

life in correspondence with God and in contrast to what had gone before.

For a moment he felt his own loneliness, his own apartness from these sacred and beautiful domestic joys. But he smiled brightly and gave his friend the silent acquiescence, the tribute which he desired.

He was going into the remote Western world to be the mouthpiece of the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost. No longer would he speak his eloquence and thrill vast audiences. Now his part was to be that of the literary exponent of the society.

He was to write for them. To pin his silver words upon the printed page. To give his fire to the world through a new medium.

He bent forward and looked earnestly in the face of the younger man.

"Speke," he said, "I feel that now indeed my real and true opportunity has come. Far away from men and affairs, I shall send you my thoughts—put upon paper with the conviction that I feel, and in the hope, that they will reach the hearts of women, and of men too. I shall teach them the truths of motherhood, the real facts about the marriage Sacrament. I hope to tell them that those men and women, in married life, who dare to juggle and interfere with the purposes of God and outrage His purpose are laying up for themselves a nemesis which will dog them for ever throughout this life.

"I understand that your next definite move is fully determined on by the Council of the Confraternity?"

"We have thought it out with the utmost care," Roland answered, "and after the next general



election, I believe that we shall be able to carry the measure. We can't explain to low intelligence and to un-Christian intelligences the hideousness of the preventive check. They know nothing of God or Nature. How can we point out to them that they are offending God and Nature alike? It is only in the case of the educated and upper classes that we can conduct the campaign on higher lines. Therefore, what we propose to do is to legislate sternly on the matter, and to coerce the masses in the first instance, in order that the mere fact of a rigid law shall lead them to enquire *why* that law was enacted. The members and the candidates for Parliament who are pledged to support us, will work the campaign on purely social and economic lines. The time is not yet ripe for the religious aspect to be insisted on in public debate. But the end and aim of all of it is simply this—we intend to make the sale or the procuring of preventive checks to conception as much a penal offence as the child murder practised by some unfaithful doctors of the day. You can't make people good by Act of Parliament, that is quite true. You can't make people good at all unless it is by religious means. But you can *prepare them for the process of being made good* by removing from their reach the mechanical agencies by which they are able to outrage the laws of nature and of God, and to avoid the consequences not only of natural function, but of undisciplined lust."

Canon Escott was bending forward, listening to the secretary with extreme attention, when the door of the study suddenly burst open.

A clown—surely, there never was such a vast clown—ran into the room with little mincing steps. His face was white as linen, his mouth was one huge vermilion streak of laughter. His black hair came down in a peak upon his massive brow. In one hand he carried a string of pink sausages and in the other a turkey, which was momentarily growing leaner as its saw-dust stuffing fell upon the floor.

Followed him, Dr. Ella Low, with a brass kettle in one hand and a small black bag, which she announced in strident tones was liquid air, in the other.

And, lastly, in his long black cassock, rather tired in aspect, but wearing the happiest of smiles, came Father Grogan himself.

Angus Evan Tulloch seemed to have a new lease of life. He absolutely refused to climb over the wall which divided his house from Roland's and to remove the paint.

Willy nilly, the party perforce sat down with this gigantic Grimaldi, and the first pop of the champagne let free far more volatile spirits than any bottle ever held.

For all their troubles were over. Everyone there on that night had just gone through terrible and unforgettable experiences. These had become things of the past, the immediate past, but still the past. The net had been gathered in. The cords were brought together and tied in a final knot. An epoch was ended in the lives of all of them. The tragedy of which they had been spectators and even actors was played out. The curtain had fallen, and now tragedian and comedian—the whole troupe of mimes

—had left the theatre for home and rest with comfortable fire upon the hearth.

At Roland's supper party there was a great sense of the actual occasion. Christmas was a real thing.

This was probably because all of them there, or nearly all of them, had been brought into very recent contact with children. Tulloch and the Doctor had been at the children's hospital. The others had been occupied with Roland's and Gertrude's little ones. They had gathered some of the joy and gaiety of children at Christmas-time. children who tear the very heart out of the happy occasion.

So they were all very merry, and it was generally agreed among them that no reference was to be made as to what had gone before and that the shadow of other lives should not intrude upon their own.

All the forces of the hour seemed playing chorus to their story. And Angus Tulloch, as he recounted his heroic buffoonery at the hospital, summed up the whole situation by raising a brimming glass towards the chandelier and thanking Heaven for a bad memory and a good digestion.

They drank toasts in the good old-fashioned habit of the forties—"to all our friends round St. Paul's." Angus Evan Tulloch, who was adroit in the manipulation of coins, oranges, and the fantastic mystery of the disappearing egg, recited his famous story (so popular at the Savage Club) of the conjurer who, having made a large fortune, retired into private life, with an establishment of two servants—one Masculine and the other Cook. The ad-

ventures of the retired magician, unable to curb his appetite for mystery, were inimitably shown in illustrative pantomime, together with the astonishment and consternation of his household.

The fun was fast and furious. A spirit of purely childish frolic was animating them all, when the door of the dining-room was suddenly thrown open by a somewhat puzzled maid-servant, and, with a bland smile, Mr. Humphrey England was shown in.

With the most simple aplomb, that distinguished young gentleman announced that, though uninvited, he had felt it his duty to call upon Roland and to explain a new and glorious idea which had suddenly possessed him as he was dressing for dinner.

Humphrey England looked older and more worn than before, though his face wore its usual expression of supreme and enthusiastic happiness.

The young man had gone through deep waters of late—his name had been very prominently before the public in connection with the recent scandals. It was known that he had been a prime mover in the whole affair, and, though acquitted of any blame in the general opinion, he was yet pointed at as a type of inordinate and useless foolishness—as one of the most degenerate products of degenerate age.

The Radical papers had published leaders about him, he had been called a toy Petronius, and ink-stained wretches had let their imaginations free upon the scandal of such a being as this being able to control a vast amount of capital.

All England's set, his particular set, had been broken up and dispersed. Many of them had gone

abroad, waiting until the whole business had died down and was forgotten. They had, so to speak, all been brushed up and thrown away.

Humphrey England had been puzzled and unhappy. Nobody seemed to regard him much. He had been torn from his little niche, and rude hands had walled up the place where he used to stand.

On that evening he had dressed for a solitary dinner, not knowing where to go, or what he would do afterwards—when his great idea had come to him.

The party in the dining-room welcomed him with genuine warmth and friendship. Everyone knew all about him. Everyone was sorry for him, because they discerned the simple-mindedness which had always underlain his wildest vagaries and the real talent for kindness and decency which had only been veneered by the accident of his fantastic life. He seemed very touched.

Gertrude made a place for him by her side. Roland had often talked over the young man with her, and she had that motherly feeling good women experience for those who are unstable and forlorn.

"Everybody has been making a speech, England," Roland said, "suppose you make a little speech and tell us of your new and glorious idea."

There was a little ripple of laughter and expectation. Humphrey England's face brightened. The situation was precisely to his mind, and he rose with a bow and addressed them in the fantastic periods beloved of his heart.

"Trailing clouds of scandal do I come," he began with a happy misquotation, "and it is so good of

you all to take me in. At lunch-time this morning I was in despair. My mind no longer dwelt in my body, it haunted it like an evil spirit. All my friends have disappeared, as a criminal suddenly disappears through the drop. I didn't know what to do, and I remembered it was Christmas Eve. I thought of going to the junior Turf Club—the cab-shelter in the middle of Piccadilly, don't you know—and entertaining the cabmen with ham and eggs and conversation. Then I found I was not quite in the mood even for that. Strange regrets crept through the shadowy thoroughfares of thought. I felt lonely, and all the enthusiasm of the past seemed futile. Like milking he-goats, there was neither honour nor profit in them. Indeed, my dear friends, I don't remember having been so melancholy since I heard of poor dear Emily Verschmidt's death, which seems so long ago now, though, of course, as mere time goes, it is very recent. I sat at the window of my bedroom, looking out into Berkeley Square. The sunset was like a passion flower. The sky was hung with banners, but not for me. For the first time that I can remember, I found myself without a dominating enthusiasm. I remembered that wonderful text in the Bible, one that has always strangely struck me—"Wizards that peep and mutter"—from Ecclesiastes. I felt chilled. Then night opened her great black fan, and I went to dress for dinner, not knowing with whom I should dine, what restaurant I should choose—and, if you will believe me, I hadn't even an idea as to the soup, a thing which I generally have completely settled

by four o'clock in the afternoon. I realised then the great stream of human tears that is for ever falling through the shadows of the world, as Walter Pater so beautifully puts it. I know something of the plain of Lear, the yearning of Dante for the mystical rose—the satiety of King Henry the Eighth as he lay upon his purple bed, bordered with golden stars, and sighed for rest."

The faces of most of the company wore a slightly puzzled look. This was all a little outside their experience, though to Mr. Humphrey England it seemed perfectly proper, right and befitting to the occasion. Someone poured out a glass of champagne for him. He lifted it with a radiant smile, bowed to his host and hostess, and continued—

"But perhaps psychological analysis is rather out of place at a Christmas party, and I fear it might be resented by the gentleman from Drury Lane"—he waved a slim hand at Angus Evan Tulloch, whom he did not recognise beneath the paint. Humphrey England did not in the least question the presence of a clown at an ordinary evening party. It seemed quite right and proper to his fantastic view of life.

"I will merely say," he went on, "that I have decided to devote the rest of my life and all my fortune to the cause presided over by Mr. Roland Speke. Accept me as a humble recruit. Use my poor talents in any way that you may consider necessary. Teach me the methods of your propaganda and command my cheque book. I don't think," he continued, rather more earnestly than before, "that I have ever in all my life been so

fascinated by a plan of action or felt such enthusiasm for a cause as I do for this."

With that the volatile young gentleman subsided gracefully into a seat and began to tell Gertrude how he had half formed a plan of becoming a member of the Roman Catholic Church, capitalising all his income and building an enormous cathedral in the centre of Bethnal Green—when this other and far more glorious idea had come to him.

Everybody in the room agreed, puzzled as they were, to take the odd creature's remarks in good part, nobody expected that this was more than a passing fancy. Father Grogan, however, who had had more experience of the type than any of the others there, took occasion to drive home with the young man. He sowed new seed in that fertile and distorted brain, seeds of seriousness and of penitence. The records of the Confraternity to-day bear witness to the able and whole-hearted work done by the young man of the muted harps.

The evening passed quietly and happily enough till an hour before midnight, when with many greetings and farewells, the guests departed into the keen and frosty night.

Roland went upstairs to his study for half an hour. He had a letter to read and to answer. Gertrude was to join him on the stroke of midnight.

He opened his desk, took out a letter with foreign stamps and postmarks upon the envelope, and began to read.

The letter was from Sir Arthur Childe, who was away upon a holiday.



*"Hotel Spagus, Corfu.*

" . . . . I wish that you could see this place, Roland. Already I'm beginning to feel myself again—to 'be my own man,' as R.L.S. put it. It's all blue, yellow, and jade green. I have got rid of all my depression and nerve weariness. One *lives* here, and I shall come back to the figures a new man. This is the first real holiday I have had for ten years. I feel as Charles Kingsley felt when he wrote 'At Last!' and saw the fairy-land of the world for the first time—after loving it with his warm and vivid imagination so long and so well.

"I was introduced to the King of Greece yesterday. He is a quiet, able, and gentlemanly man who suggests the English country gentleman and wise, kindly landlord. He gave his people instructions that I was to have a key which will admit me to the private park of his house here—a beautiful domain, which he seems anxious that people should enjoy and share as far as may be. He often comes over to the island in his steam yacht—comes over from Athens. And when he is here, he lives the simple life of a squire.

"Corfu is English still. Jack Tars from Plymouth and Devonport parade the waterside precincts of the town, plump, clean-shaved, happy, with faces burnt to mahogany colour, out of which steadfast and blue Saxon eyes are looking. Cheery and satisfying fellows! They make one glad to be an Englishman, too, and flatter the insular arrogance from which (I suppose) we all suffer!

"I can hardly realise as yet that I am living in

the old Homeric Corcyra. One thing am I certain of, which is that Mr. Gladstone made a great blunder in giving this beautiful place to a degenerate country of cigarette makers like the Greeks.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I had written so far when the mail from Malta arrived, and I broke off my letter to glance at the English newspapers. I resume it with feelings of the liveliest dismay.

"What does this mean, Roland? What is the real truth of this hideous tragedy—this fearful scandal in English society? I have never read anything so horrible. That poor dear young thing, Mrs. Verschmidt! and her husband—the great financial king—one of our latest recruits to the Confraternity. Was Ninian Newton at the bottom of it all?—it seems so. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*—I know the ancient maxim, and honour it. But there are cases and cases. The doctor was a black scoundrel. Did we not have to threaten him with Scotland Yard? He is well out of the world, and I pray that he may be now being taught the truth and may be experiencing the Divine and stern process of purification in another life.

"Three people I had so often met in society!—I am bewildered. And I see hints, in this long article which is before me, of some extraordinary and malign influence that has been at work. What is this story, told in such carefully guarded and reticent language, of incredible and occult things? Who is the mysterious personage from India to whom such curious reference is made? I read of 'the beautiful wife of one of our well-known judges.'

This must surely mean your aunt? And I see that you also are hinted at, and that Angus Evan Tulloch's name is actually printed!

"I am really overwhelmed by all these horrors. The colour seems to have gone from the sea, and the blazing day to be cold and chilling.

"Write at once, my dear boy, and tell me what you know.

"Give my love to Gertrude, and kiss my little god-child, Arthur, for me—and do not delay with a letter.

"My best wishes for Christmas to all your happy household. I pray for you all daily.

"Ever, my dear Roland,

"Your affectionate,

"ARTHUR ALDENHAM CHILDE."

Roland read through the concerned and agitated letter with a sigh.

Then he took up his pen in answer.

"Christmas Eve,

"Addison Road,

"Bedford Park, W.

"MY DEAR CHIEF,—Your letter has just come to me, and I can well understand your anxiety and interest. I hasten to reply at once.

"Eight days ago it was suddenly given out in society that Mrs. Verschmidt was dangerously ill. The cause, or the nature, of the illness wasn't mentioned. Two nights before, Mrs. Emily Verschmidt had been at Humphrey England's house. She seemed, so he told me, quite well, though tired and

*distract.* The next afternoon Mr. Verschmidt drove up to Ella Low's house in his motor car.

"Dr. Low was looking out of the window of her consulting room—which is in the front of her house at Earl's Court. She says that the car came down the road at such a pace that it was leaping up from the wood pavement. She was taken back at the same rate of speed to Park Lane—there are ten summonses, unheard, of course, now, against Mr. Verschmidt. She arrived, and was hurried up to the bed-room. Mrs. V. was dying. Nothing could be done for her. Before she passed away she called to her husband. He bent down to her and she put her arms round his neck—he had to lift them for her—and she told him that she loved him dearly, that he had always been sweet to her and shown her a high chivalry that now, at the last moment, filled her with unutterable remorse.

"And then, Ella Low told me, she made the most terrible confession that she, the doctor, had ever heard. Newton's name was implicated in it. The poor thing sobbed a little and died, holding her husband's hand.

"Then Verschmidt asked Dr. Low a question. He was quite calm and rigid.

"Dr. Low said that she would answer it in an hour.

"Verschmidt went away.

"In an hour, upon the actual minute, he returned to the death-chamber. The poor, foolish, lovely girl lay waxen and still in the bed. Ella held out her hand to the husband over the corpse. She said that she was weeping bitterly. She told him the

Truth. And she told him also that it was her duty to state it upon the death certificate. 'I *must* do it,' she said. 'My whole life is pledged to a duty like that.'

"He didn't seem to mind. He gave an odd little laugh, and told her that he was not afraid of any scandal now. Then the doctor went away.

"What must have happened almost at once was this. Verschmidt drove to Harley Street in his motor. He was shown into Dr. Ninian Newton's consulting room. When the doctor came in, Verschmidt jumped on him and strangled him with his hands. About an hour afterwards the butler found them. Verschmidt was in a faint upon the floor—rigid and hard as a board. But his fingers were locked into Newton's neck. The points of them had penetrated the flesh, and a masseur had to be brought from the Jermyn Street Turkish Baths before they could be loosed.

"Verschmidt is in Holloway prison. The doctors say that he is perfectly sane, and he has been committed for trial. But I know privately, and, of course I tell it you in *the strictest confidence*, that nothing will be done to him. Sir Michael Manichoe, the Archbishop, and Dean Gortre have been to the King. The judge will direct the jury that they shall bring in a verdict of justifiable homicide. This crime is going to be stamped out utterly. The pressure has been applied by the Confraternity. The King is determined that it shall not go on. But far worse, so far as we are concerned, remains behind.

"My poor aunt is quite insane, and has been

taken to a doctor's house in Bournemouth. My wretched young cousin, Patrick Speke, married a barmaid of low antecedents a short time ago. He has since been brought up at Bow Street Police Station, charged with an aggravated assault on his wife. It was stated in all the papers who his parents were.

"Lady Honoria, it seems, has been under the influence of an adroit swindler for weeks. The man was an officer in the Indian army many years ago. He had a brother, a Colonel Mordaunt—the Devon Mordaunts, you know—whom I and Gertrude met, quite by chance, when we were on our honeymoon. Colonel Mordaunt and the brother were twins. The brother had been imprisoned in India for fifteen years for a murder with, I understand, extreme provocation. He came to England a year after his release as the missionary of a fantastic Indian sect. He wished to convert English folk to his creed. I gather that he was perfectly sincere, but that the misery of his career had turned his brain.

"He sought out Colonel Mordaunt, who was living the life of a recluse in the family house at Ilfracombe. The colonel's wife had left him, many years before, in India. He believed her treacherous and unfaithful, and the shock had taken all interest out of his life. But it appears that the woman was not really what her husband thought her. There was a poignant reason for her flight, a reason of which Colonel Mordaunt could have no knowledge. The convict brother knew the truth of the whole matter. He had discovered it by means of an old man—a native servant—when he was released from prison.

"He made a bargain with Colonel Mordaunt, who was dying at the moment, and had only a few days to live. The brother was to give the colonel proof of his wife's fidelity. In return, he was to die in a certain place and without any explanation to the people who were to be gathered together to see him die.

"The whole thing was quite simple, and devilishly ingenious.

"The brother, who called himself by an Indian name, 'Debendro Nath Tagore,' had got hold of the silly novelty-mongering members of my poor aunt's set. He promised them that he would die and rise again. They were all taken by Ninian Newton, who was a bought accessory to the whole thing, to see Colonel Mordaunt die. The likeness was exact, and they all imagined that they were witnessing the death of the brother.

"Then, a week afterwards, there was a sort of *séance* in Humphrey England's house, and the impostor appeared as one risen from the dead.

"They all believed in him—you know how these neurotics will believe in anything—and in the hope of some transcendental revelation which would destroy the uneasiness of their consciences, they were prepared to make him into a demi-god who could give them the keys of life and death.

"It fell to my part to expose the whole thing, with the help of dear old Angus Evan Tulloch, whose journalistic instinct was aroused.

"Sir Basil came to me in great distress, and told me all that had happened. Lady Honoria, he said, was quite estranged from him and in a state of

nervous hysteria that made life almost impossible. Ella went to see her. Ella came back and told me, privately, that she was on the brink of mania. The poor thing, Ella explained, should have had a family. She was suffering from a well-defined feminine disorder, disturbed function resulting in weakening mental power.

"Angus and I went to the house and saw this impostor. I recognised him as the man I met one night when I was walking home to Bedford Park with Tulloch and Father Grogan—the man who ran away—you'll remember I told you of the occurrence.

"Tulloch and I went down to the lonely old Tudor mansion at Iifracombe. We found an Indian servant there, crooning over the hearthstone for his dead master like a Greek slave.

"We learned the history of the imposture from him.

"We came back and told my uncle the whole history. He told Lady Honoria—and that was the end of everything.

"She had some hope that this magician would save Pat in some way and restore him to decency.

"Debendro has disappeared. No one knows where he is or what has happened to him.

"Lady Honoria, as I have said, is in a private madhouse. She sits in her room, so I hear, and talks baby-talk to an imaginary nursery of children.

"She seems happy.

"I have little more news that will interest you, my dear chief.

"You will no doubt have heard that Canon



Escott has accepted a small living in Cornwall, and intends to devote his leisure to the literary side of our work. His writings will be an enormous help. We wanted just such a man to write on the *spiritual* aspects of birth and motherhood.

"He is staying with me here for a few days, and to spend a quiet Christmas. He says that he will preach no more, that nerves are going under the strain of such lofty eloquence. He seems much brighter and happier than I have ever known him.

"To-night we have a little party. Escott, Grogan, Tulloch, and Dr. Ella—and, last of all, Humphrey England!

"He arrived unexpectedly with a fantastic proposal to give all his time and money to the Confraternity. I wish I could think that his enthusiasm was real and would last.

"I fear that it is only the reaction from the severe troubles of the last few weeks. We shall see.

"We have all been very merry during the whole evening, though now that I am alone and writing to you, I cannot avoid certain shadows upon my thought.

"For I know that Sir Basil is sitting alone in his vast funereal house, weeping for the present, thinking of the past with terrible remorse.

"He has no child to comfort him.

"And I know that Mr. Verschmidt is sitting alone in his cell at Holloway with a broken heart.

"But it wasn't his fault. He is tried by God for some reason we don't know. He is a Jew and a clean man.

*"Which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with His presence, and first miracle that He wrought in Cana of Galilee."*

"Good-night, my dear friend and master. My heart is very full. It is full of sorrow for my friends who have not learned the truth, it is full of joy and gratitude for my own bright and fortunate lot.

"And it is full of the joy of Christmas and the sense of our Lord's birthday. Good-night.

"Always your affectionate

"ROLAND SPEKE."

When he had written this letter, Roland left his study and went to find his wife.

He found her in the children's day nursery. The little ones were in bed long since. The window was open and she was leaning out of it. 'Twas a clear frosty night and the great stars globed themselves in heaven.

"Which is the star that came near to the world and hung over the Village, sweetheart?" she asked with tender and whimsical fancy.

"That one," he said, pointing: "perhaps it was."

"I don't know," she answered dreamily. "To-night Jesus was a little baby. Let us go and look at our dear little babies."

They passed into the room where the children were sleeping. Roland's arm was round her, her head drooped upon his shoulder.

Both their faces were bright and shining.

THE END.

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