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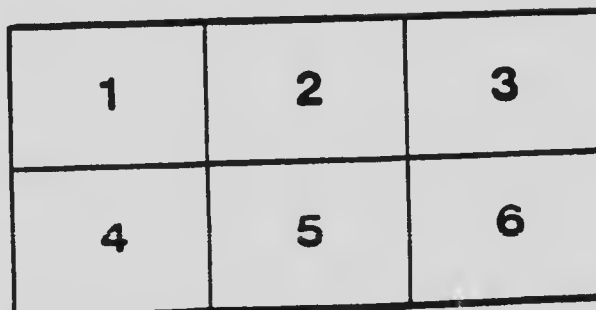
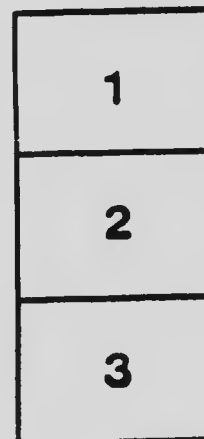
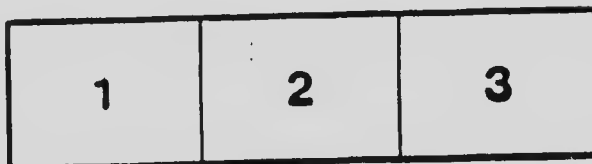
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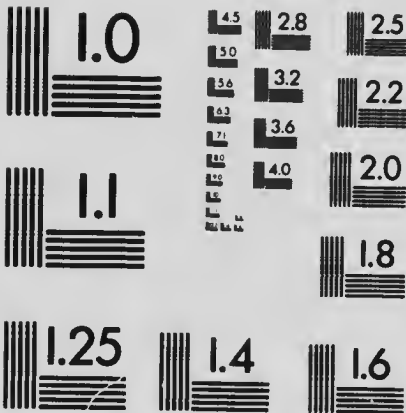
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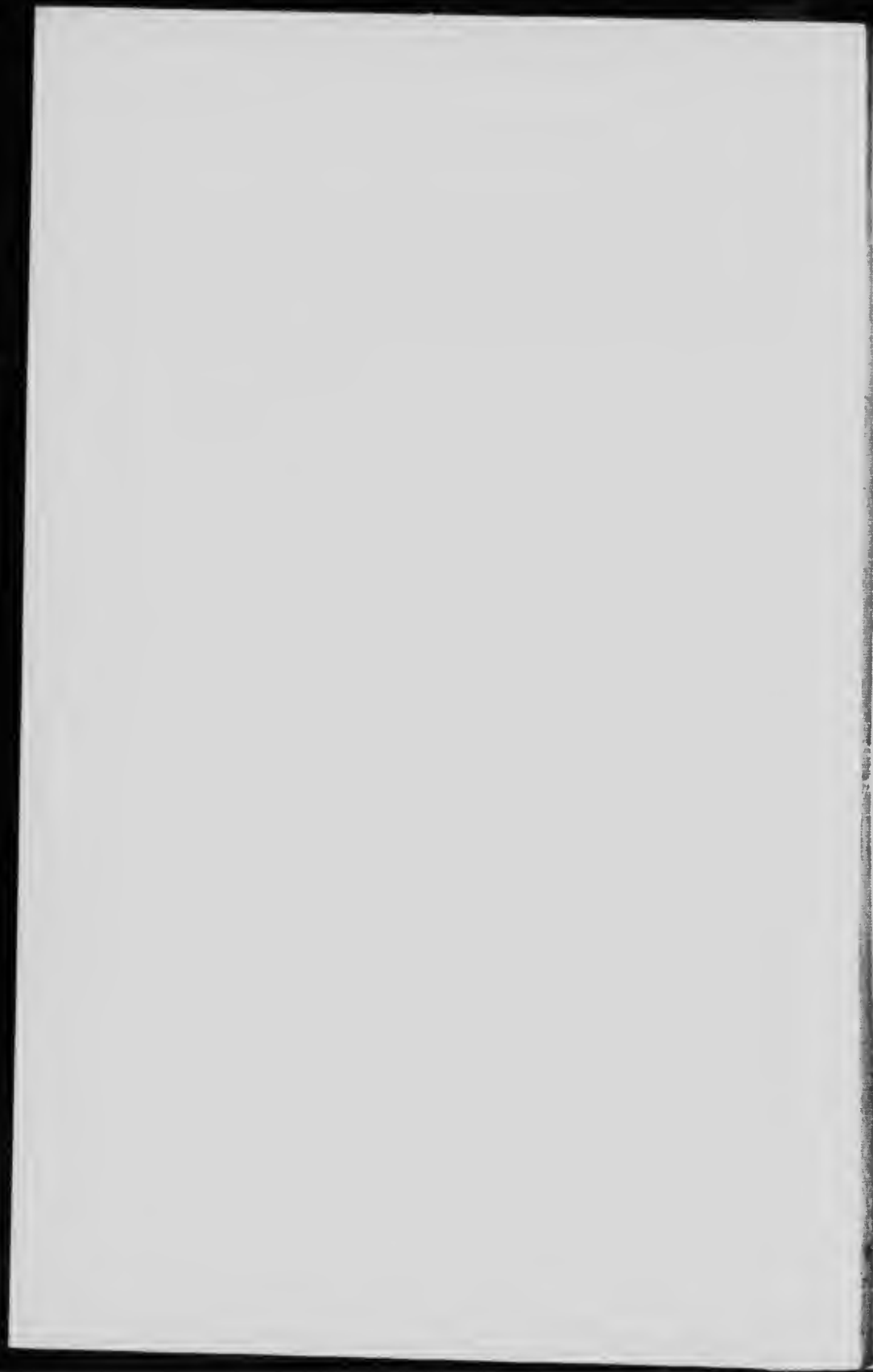
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Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

ANNE
KEMPBURN
TRUTHSEEKER



MARGUERITE BRYANT

11/2/11



Anne Kernpburn, Truthsecker



Anne Kempburn, Truthseeker

By

Marguerite Bryant

Author of "Christopher Hibbault, Roadmaker"

Toronto
McLeod & Allen
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TO VERA

*To you, my only sister, and as dear
As, in the story faintly shadowed here
Is Anne to Naomi,
I inscribe this book.*

*To you beside the sea it first was told
Your faith restored a confidence grown cold
Most fitly then to you would I indite
My second book.*

LAVERSTOKE, 1910.



PART I
PAUL ARRINGTON

Anne Kempburn, Truthseeker

CHAPTER I

ON the wide open uplands and down the broad and well-watered valleys Spring tripped along to the accompaniment of an insistent, if cheery, east wind. But in the narrow sheltered glade that ran up between the wooded chalky tracts of what had once been open downland, the wind might sway the topmost spires of the firs, or play with the high budding beeches, but in the glade itself all was still—Spring might be imagined to be standing still with hushed awe to take cognisance of her own advance.

The bank that sloped to the south was planted with larch, spruce, and a few Scotch firs, and the ground was brown with pine needles through which the tiny flower-children of these chalky lands pushed with fond persistence. The head of the glade was wrapt in a tangle of undergrowth, blackberries, and a few gorse bushes, with apparently no exit except for the scurrying rabbits; though fascinating paths lead through the tangle out on to the ploughed and furrowed lands, or back by divers twists through the woods into the working world, which indeed was far nearer than the glade with its dear seclusion might lead one to suppose, since propinquity is not synonymous with comradeship.

The little glade was seldom visited except by unappreciative keepers and the solitary occupant who, at the moment, was sharing its beauties with the silent Spring.

The girl lay on the brown carpet beneath the firs who in their turn stood beneath nothing lower than the vast blue space above. Delicate mosses had crept insidiously through the pine needles, and the girl had idly cleared a space over a patch of ferny moss and set a pathway of little pine cones around it. It was a child-like trick for her hands to be employed in such a way, while her mind scarcely recognised their movements as related to herself. But she had desisted long ago and now lay motionless on the ground, her head pillowed on her arm, gazing from the low altitude of the brown earth itself into things visible and invisible. The invisible world was always nearest to Anne and had a disconcerting habit of getting between her and any very clear perception of the material world around, so that she moved mentally as one wrapt in faint mists which only scattered when she blundered metaphorically, and sometimes actually, into some very tangible object in her path, as on the memorable occasion when she was herself so engrossed in the really beautiful lesson she was giving a Sunday School Class, that not till the very end did she discover her three most promising pupils were surreptitiously enjoying concealed books of no "Sunday" tendency whatever.

But to-day in this little, sunny, sheltered glade a great thing had happened to her. That mistiness of vision had fallen from her eyes and for the first time in her life she was looking out on a beautiful world that was not the opponent of her inner nature, but the living palpitating manifestation of that spiritual homeland of hers.

Through every blade of grass and curling frond of moss, through every swaying bough and every emerald leaf bursting from its ruddy cradle, in the brown beeches, tingling through every quivering pine needle, and filling the whole blue space above her, she felt, saw, and recognised that pulsing spirit of Life which is

the very essence of the spiritual world. She had thought of them as separate realities, this material tangible world and that Kingdom of Heaven in which she was so far more at home, and lo, on this one great birthday of her soul she had opened her eyes and found them to be one.

The pulsing heart of Spring, beating tempestuously through the earth was the same power beating through her own being now. She herself was built up from the earth's great Laboratory as was the red pine trunk her hands touched in love, or the long brown furrows in the ploughed field. She belonged to it all, the Life-Spirit that sustained the one, animated the other. There was no difference in substance; quantity and quality alone could build no barrier between her and every living thing that was. And all was living! even the earth itself. She had sufficient knowledge for that.

The exquisite sense of union that was hers for the moment was an ecstasy hardly to be borne. Her consciousness seemed to spread out and enter into the dawning experiences of every expectant bud and plant. She realised what it was like in the quiet glade when she herself was not there, how Life went on steadily without the consciousness she was lending it for the moment. All the curtains of uncertainty that had shut out the real vision of Life slipped away. The chances and changes of the material world became mere matter for kindly laughter beside the wonderful, simple, verifying truth of Living Unity. She was like some solitary wanderer who awoke suddenly to find herself one of a large loving family. In a very ecstasy of kinship she pressed her lips to the soft green moss and damp earth beneath.

Then her eyes travelled from earth to the clear blue that showed through the pine trees.

Still sweeter and more uplifting was her soul's rapture, recognising that through all that immense space

"It" was,—This Life-Spirit, the very breath of God. There, on earth, in every living thing, in herself Anne Kempburn!

She lay still awhile, her eyes still on the sky, her hands caressing the moss and pine-needles. She was not really tired, she was conscious only of a great content, rest, and stillness. It was indeed very good to be here. But the sense of exultation slipped from her quite slowly, so that she presently sat up, brushed back her hair and put on her hat. She was not sorry it was over—her wonderful hour. She was almost glad it was time to transmute this spiritual revelation into the details of common life, and to experience how *that* would feel *now*.

Yet she still lingered a little, her hands clasped on her knees, her big grey eyes looking out across the glade which once more had faded from her subconscious vision.

This hour would mean something to her all her life and in that life she felt a revolution was coming. The uneasy uncertainty that had lately trod hard on the skirts of every future thought had gone. She was certain of her path now, there was something for her to do, and at that thought her innate energy set itself in motion like some complex machine and caught her into its own circuit.

Anne jumped up, shook the pine needles from her clothes and set her face homewards. She had an impulse to gather a frond of moss as a memento of so great an occasion, but on the moment of picking refrained her hand. Why hoard a memento of what was hers for ever, for one cannot unsee a vision that has produced a revolution. Instead, she glanced round once more to fix the well-known spot permanently in her mind, and a spontaneous expression of thankfulness rose to her lips:

"Thank you, God, thank you for this hour for ever."

Nothing else happened, she turned and walked down the glade into the highroad and so homewards.

Ten minutes later, as she entered the Rectory gate her mind was concerned as to whether Jane had burnt the tea-cakes or not. She felt compelled to hurry in order to avert the catastrophe, and then drew herself up laughing. She had warned Jane that morning of her predilection for over-cooking tea-cakes. Jane was not really without intelligence, and yesterday's disaster was not a general rule. There was no real occasion for her to burn her face over the kitchen fire, in order that Naomi should have her tea "just so." It was far more important that she should get half an hour's talk with Naomi before their father came in. She would not have felt this yesterday; the less agreeable duty of toasting tea-cakes would have seemed the first importance just because it was disagreeable, but to-day life was different, its proportions seemed changed. So she went straight down the garden beside the little clear stream to a sunny arbour shut in by trees and shrubs on all sides but the south, where it opened out—a veritable trap for sunbeams.

Naomi was there as she expected, with a pile of books scattered around her, ranging from philosophy and poetry to the latest novel. Naomi, who was having a holiday and must not be spoiled, Naomi who came so joyfully out of the big world to this quiet spot, Naomi with her beautiful clothes, her heaven sent voice, her calm beautiful face and more beautiful heart.

And Naomi was Naomi Kempburn here, whatever name she had once carried so proudly in the big world, ten years older than Anne, but for all that Anne's very dear and only sister.

She saw Anne coming, and pushed aside a pile of books on the seat to make room for her.

"You have come at the right minute to share my discovery, Anne!" she cried. "Here is the last modern

Society novel"—she pushed it away with an affected little gesture of distaste—"that thinks itself so modern and up-to-date, so very much a *novel*, and behold, after being nearly tricked into a similar belief, *Helienum* of about 4000, B. C., and I find the whole thing there, much better done and far more convincing!" She pushed the poor modern thing further away with pretended scorn.

"Well, you see, I've not read *Helienum*," protested Anne meekly; "so it sounded novel to me, besides I told you you would not like it, it's a disagreeable story."

"I know," sighed her sister penitently, "only every one talks of it, so I thought I'd try."

"You are not 'everyone.' But oh, Naomi, stop talking nonsense. I've made a discovery too! I want to tell you about it." She leant her arms on the little table and the visionary look welled up in her eyes.

Naomi's quick glance was eloquent of loving suspicion.

"What is it?" she asked, a little breathlessly. "What have you discovered, Anne?"

But her sister did not answer at once, not even to Naomi could she have explained fully the event of that day, but its results, the rapid transmission of her new knowledge into active, practical issues towards which her heart had been set so long, that was what she must confide and explain without delay. When her words came they came with a quick rush, with all the force of foregone conclusion behind them.

"Naomi, I have been here at Applebury long enough. I could do more than I have to do here. I've got to do more. It's not just a question of waiting or wishing. There is such a lot of work waiting to be done in the world, waiting for workers who are not only willing but who have also just a little glimpse of what is 'back behind things,' and what's it for. I've got the strength and the will, you know *that*, and now——" She

turned her head to her sister with a half triumphant, half-deprecating look in her eyes. "*Now*, Naomi, just in a little way I do know something. The world isn't a flat surface any more. I am twenty-two. I have no special talents or gifts, nothing but my energy and love of 'doing' and this glimpse of the real relation of things to each other, the beauty of it all, the order and joy that life is meant to be and will be. There seems some sense in working when one knows that."

While she was speaking Naomi sat still with her hands idle between the leaves of her book and her eyes fixed on Anne's dark head. There was silence for a few minutes, sufficient space to give Naomi's slower mind time to catch up and lay hold of the trend of the other mind. In just that interval of time she got level with her sister, and saw the situation with equal clearness from her own standpoint. Anne knew this, but what she did not know was that that standpoint embraced a wider view than her—Anne's—by no means despicable one.

"How would you begin?" she asked, wasting no time in preliminary arguments or objections.

"There's the Radley Sisters' Home, Jessica Monica's place. She'd find me something to do. Oh, no, I don't mean to join the Sisterhood, but they'd let me help while I looked round and saw what I could do."

Just the shadow of a smile, wistful and deprecating as Anne's eyes had been, crossed the elder woman's face, and brought out a momentary resemblance between them who were so generally unlike. The smile betrayed a tender, wistful respect for another's right to make her own mistakes, and her own discoveries in life in her own way, even at the cost of heartache to the onlooker.

Anne flung out her hand expressively:

"Think a moment, Naomi, how it is! Jane lets me do nothing in the house except make cakes which no

one eats but myself, and anyhow she can do it all better than I can. Mrs. Alister is condescendingly kind if I offer to make up the Coal and Blanket Club accounts, and I know she does them all over again! Mrs. Longley betrays Christian resignation if I put my nose inside the Sunday School. Then there's the Mothers' Meeting! Well, naturally they prefer Mrs. Jones who is the mother of twelve herself."

Naomi smiled:

"It does sound more fitting!" she murmured.

Anne went on:

"Parsons pretends to let me manage the garden, and says 'Yessim' to all I say and pursues his sweet will when I turn my back. You see I've grown up here, they can't any of them believe I am grown up. *Why should* they think I can do things? Besides, they really can do all these jobs a great deal better than I can. They don't want to do them in their own way, they haven't got an 'own way,' they are content to do them as their mothers did before them, quite the best way I expect."

Naomi looked out over the garden again. She inwardly endorsed all her sister said, and she did not consider the ground they had gone over presented any scope for her sister's energies, but they had not covered *all* the available ground.

"And Father?" she suggested tentatively, at last.

Anne drew her breath sharply; Naomi of the few words waited patiently.

"That, of course, is the real point," said Anne slowly. "There wouldn't be any question at all but for that."

"You love the country and the place, Anne?"

"Yes."

It was a heartfelt affirmative.

"Father will not prevent your going, you know that!"

"Yes, I know. If he'd fight over it, it would be easier. He will say I am quite right and help me to arrange it; he'll make no objection at all!"

There was a little catch in her voice, she stared steadily before her, but what she saw was misty and ill-defined.

"Always somebody has to be hurt when we move!" she murmured disconsolately.

"What about the something behind?" said Naomi, putting her hand gently over her sister's. Anne did not respond.

"If," Naomi went on steadily, "if you feel, Anne, you *have* to do something—and I know you would not speak as you have unless you were sure—then you must make up your mind to hurt other people a little. We can seldom start on a new path without treading on some one or something; it's inevitable. Father will miss you, it's no use pretending he won't. It may not be a material miss, Jane will be here as she always has been, but of course you stand for something else to him, you will have to bear that. There is always something to pay if we make our own road even when it's the right one. You want me to tell him, I suppose?"

"What an understanding, dear, it is!" said Anne caressingly. "Please tell him, it won't make me sound so selfish, if you explain it to him."

"He won't ever think you that."

"No; unselfish people are uncomfortable to deal with, Naomi. Now we must go in to tea, Jane will think we are late on purpose to spoil the tea-cakes again. Give me those books and cushions."

She gathered all her sister's belongings up in her strong arms, and Naomi let her do it without protest, as if she were well used to be waited on. She was taller and bigger than Anne, perfectly balanced in movement, with a convicting sense of harmony about her, that found final expression in her wonderful voice.

In return for this voice used in its service, the world had once given her full homage and then unconcernedly broken her heart. The "break" had been so carefully concealed and secretly patched up that only Anne knew the extent of the original damage, and wished fiercely at times she could know and meet the author of the mischief whose name even was unknown to her. Since that day, however, Naomi had cut herself off from the world of London, that had showered a golden appreciation on her lovely voice, and rendered rapturous homage to the charming personality, whose star rose and set for them with such unprecedented swiftness. Abroad, and in the provinces, she sang as supremely as ever to enthralled audiences, who cared little for her personality and much for her voice. Nevertheless, her hard-headed, devoted Scotch agent shook his head as his predilections came true. For since Madame Matoni refused to stand in the place she had won by mere merit, the world would easily let her slip into a back place and forget her. She worked hard but without enthusiasm, she read no notices, she made no friends, but she spent her rare holidays in the remote country rectory, and present or absent, held a permanent position there, as of some great influence which set their placid tide of existence rising and falling to a different measure than that of the rural world around. Events were dated from visit to visit, and Naomi's comings were at least frequent enough for her to lose none of the varying phases of development in Anne, this dear younger sister.

Anne had been a mere baby of five when Naomi's destiny had been planned out by an ambitious mother, Mrs. Kempburn had only lived long enough to see that destiny at the dawn of fulfilment, and before she had seriously taken into consideration the future career of her other child. She had been a magnificent materialist, a utilitarian of the highest principles, who, with a

very strong hand, sought to sway the rod of destiny with more success than is usually the result of such efforts. But the most memorable of her achievements was the way she had controlled the very nature of her husband, holding him in custody to the essentially practical, sensible side of life, so that it was not till her able personality faded from his sight that he awoke to find he had given into her keeping something he should have withheld, something with which she had been entirely unfitted to deal, or even comprehend to wit, his own soul. It had been Marion Kempburn and not her husband, though at the time he had not recognised it, who had decreed once for all, that having accepted authority and tradition as embodied in the Church he served, and having taken to himself a wife, and given hostages to the world in the shape of two children, and having obvious gifts for the difficult position of a country parson, it behoved him steadily to close his eyes and deaden his ears to any voice whatsoever that should whisper of possible mistake, a wider horizon, a more robust spiritual growth, that might disturb the established order of things.

Such voices and visions had come to George Kempburn, the doors and winows of whose soul had ever been open to the divine light; but his wife knew nothing of the divine, and closed doors and windows with a kind strong hand, honestly believing she was saving him from great risks and unnecessary mental trouble. But once Marion kept watch no more, his soul awoke to find the divine messenger had come and gone. He lived through some bitter years, but in the end he accepted the life his wife had chosen for him with never a hard thought towards her, but a deep belief in a penalty incurred by himself ever present in his heart. The only outward sign, however, of his lost possibility was his wide gentle tolerance and a sensitive disinclination to influence or advise others. Such neighbours as did

not like him, and they were few, said he shirked responsibility. Those who loved him—and they were many—said he was tactful and never “interfered.”

He never interfered even with his daughters. When he saw Naomi after the final catastrophe that had broken her life in two, he looked at her wistfully, gave her the silent sympathy and love she sought, and asked no questions. If a faint hope rose in his heart that she might abandon her public life and return to him, he put it resolutely from him when she had said:

“Thank God, I have still my voice to use!”

Anne disappeared after tea for the express purpose of giving Naomi a fair opportunity to fulfil her promise. It was characteristic of this family that they felt no need of further discussions over the *pros* and *cons* of the matter. Naomi might require a few more hours than Anne to get full grasp of the subject, and George Kempburn rather longer still, and a little more explanation than his elder daughter but, as she had foretold, he offered no objection. In the little pause before he answered Naomi, he silently accused himself of despicable selfishness because of the sudden pang in his heart at the thought of losing his little Anne.

“It is quite true,” he said at length; “she has ability and it’s wasted here. But this sisterhood idea! What do you think of that?”

By which Naomi gathered her father personally thought very badly of it indeed.

“That will not last many weeks, my dear!” she assured him, smiling. “It is only a spring-board for Anne. Can you imagine her and Jessica getting on together at all?”

Then she put down her delicate embroidery and took up the more delicate task still of reconciling her father to the inevitable. For it was that Naomi recognised. The step was inevitable now or later, and in general

fairness to Anne, it should be now before habits and character made change more difficult.

"If Anne were a different sort of girl, father, I should have done my best to persuade her to wait and consider carefully what she felt most fitted to do, and to prepare for it. But Anne is a creature of either action and experiment, or completely visionary. She can only learn to join her two-sidedness by actually going into the world; she is one of those who learn best by personal action. Don't you remember as a child she really learnt to read by making little sentences for herself with pebbles in the garden, she could do nothing with the box of letters you gave her. That was Anne all over. She must *make, act* and *do* herself, and she arrives that way at a comprehension of things that go down far deeper than most people's. Anne's got the making of a splendid woman in her, but she has not found herself yet; she hasn't discovered it is quite as important to 'be' as to 'act.' She'll have to learn that through her own mistakes for she'll make those!——"

Naomi paused a moment and leaning forward stroked her father's hand gently.

"We mustn't mind that," she went on in her ever-cheerful voice; "for they will always be generous good mistakes, only she must make them herself. Do you remember the first sentence she wrote with her pebbles was 'God is Love,' and she put a small 'g' for God? You told her it should be a capital, and she insisted she *had* made it bigger, and that it therefore was a capital. Still she thought about it all night. In the text in her room, it was all capitals, that was not what she wanted. She had not the least idea where it came in the Bible, but she remembered it occurred in a story book, and she hunted this all through until she found it: she couldn't read but she knew the book by heart! Next day she altered the letter."

"I remember it was altered, I thought because I had told her of it."

"It is never because she is told," said Naomi, shaking her head, "it is always because she has found out. All the same, she would not have found out, if you had not called her attention to it."

Naomi was always comforting, and Mr. Kempburn needed comfort just now.

They discussed the prosaic subject of ways and means lightly. There was indeed nothing much to discuss about it, Naomi had long claimed the privilege of providing Anne with an allowance, and Mr. Kempburn was not without means.

"You will have your book," Naomi further reminded him. (He was writing a history of his county's flora). "You are not an idle unresourceful man, you know, and we shall both be to and fro a great deal."

"Oh, I am quite sure it is the right thing," he assented earnestly, "that I shall miss her is of course quite beside the mark. I have no right to tie up her young life like that. But you really feel sure she won't be tempted to join the sisterhood or pledge herself in any way?"

Naomi well understood the pathetic anxiety in his voice, his nervous dread of any being becoming bound as he was and learning too late the bonds were indissoluble. She reassured him, however, with perfect confidence, knowing Anne far too well to dream of her being enmeshed in the quite sincere, but sentimental, rule of Jessica Monica's sisterhood.

Anne returned a few minutes later, making no pretence as to the reason of her absence or to her anxiety to learn the result.

She stood between the two of them, looking from one to the other, her eyes only full of smiles. There was something so expressive of youthful buoyance and

expectant faith about her, at the same time something so remote from all that was before her, something so akin to all that was theirs no longer, that father and daughter's involuntary glance of compunction met across her, to be instantly veiled. Anne seated herself on the arm of her father's chair.

"So my big baby wants to leave its nest?" he said, patting her hand.

"My wings are growing, you see," she answered ruefully. "What I really want to do is to carry you and the nest about with me. If I were a great giant I would, but I'm just a poor, weak little baby. So I must have the horrid experience of leaving you. That's the unfairness of life!"

She pursed up her face quaintly and rubbed her head against her father's white hair. Then she suddenly sprang up and stood on the hearth-rug facing them both, with serious steady eyes.

"If I could help you with your book, father, I would stay, because that's work; but I'm no particular good at botany and you don't *want* help, you work best alone. But as it 's, here I am strong,"—she raised her arms and dropped them expressively—"willing, and I can do things. I feel it, not great big things like Naomi, but little useful jobs: there's lots wanting to be done, things most people don't care about doing and I love. It seems wrong to sit down here and *waste*."

"God forbid!" said her father hurriedly. "My little girl, I quite understand. I should never have had courage to *urge* you to leave, but I've often wished you had more to do. We will write to Jessica to-night, if you would like to go there first."

CHAPTER II

SISTER ANGELA was not particularly fond of hall duty. She was not, for one thing, such an adept at meditation that she could drop and take up the thread of her ordered thoughts as easily as knitting, between the many varied interruptions. It was quiet and pleasant enough in the cool hall with the sunlight streaming through the lancet-shaped windows, but the perpetual jangle of the bell got on her nerves at last; the little slate was already full of memoranda and the long afternoon not over yet. It appeared to Sister Angela that "hall duty" was a waste of time, and she had a struggle to repress an unallowable thought that the dear Mother Superior made a little mistake in allotting it so often to her, and "Chapel duty" to Sister Martha. "Chapel duty" Sister Angela could perform to perfection, it was a joy to her really devout soul. Here the apparently loud careless voices of the callers echoing in the empty bareness of the hall and corridors was almost like physical pain to her, and the uncertain—sometimes hurried, coming and going of visitors on retreat or otherwise, distressed her sense of fitness. There was one visitor in particular—— But here Sister Angela's thoughts had to be very resolutely kept face to face with the life of St. Veronica, which without doubt afforded far more profitable food for meditation than the personality of Anne Kempburn.

But Miss Kempburn's concerns were evidently not to be banished so summarily from Sister Angela's mind, for she had hardly composed herself to the right attitude of mind and body, when the bell rang again, not jerkily or undecidedly, but with quiet decision.

Sister Angela opened the door to a tall beautifully dressed lady, who asked if Miss Kempburn was in, in a voice that neither echoed in the hall nor troubled the "hall porter's" nerves.

"Miss Kempburn is not in"; then seeing a shade on the attractive face she added almost involuntarily, and quicker than her wont: "She will be in by four o'clock if you will wait."

"Thank you," said Naomi stepping inside. "How cool and quiet you are here. Outside the pavements are intolerably hot."

Sister Angela led the way into the waiting-room. The walls were painted grey, the woodwork was pitch pine. The round polished table in the middle bore several leaflets with distressing pictures of suffering, or appeals for help, and a thin, modest little magazine recording the doings of this and similar sisterhoods. There was a small bowl of roses on the mantelpiece in front of a sacred picture. The straight-backed chairs were so hard and slippery, and placed with such precise regularity round the room that one hesitated to sit on them, lest one might disturb their depressing uniformity.

Naomi, looking round, wondered why it should be thought more acceptable to God to have hard chairs and bare ugly walls than ordinary comfort or beauty. She considered it quite a long while in her deliberate way, and finally decided it was not a question of acceptability to God, but what offered least labour and greatest convenience from the domestic point of view. This was an arguable position, but Naomi made a private reservation that it would take no longer to dust a comfortable chair or so, than to so highly over-polish the plain rigid furniture now in possession. She had to control a strong desire to place the roses on the table, instead of leaving them on the mantelpiece where there was no proper room for them.

"It is all meant to be restful and calming," said Naomi to herself, "and I ought to be able to feel the spirit of it better."

She seated herself resolutely on a chair with her back to the window. The window looked out on to an ivy-covered wall and two plane trees, and the chequered shadows of the trees lay on the polished floor at her feet. In a few moments she found herself counting and watching anxiously for the movement of sparrows' wings amongst them. Feeling neither rested nor at peace in the stillness, she began to speculate as to the reason:

"I can sit for hours in my own room and rest," she murmured. "I really think it's the colour of these walls. How could one be satisfied face to face with such a failure?"

And suddenly the stillness was broken up, the front door opened and a quick step crossed the hall, breaking the silence more than its real measure warranted; then a clear natural voice, not tuned to subdued monotony:

"A visitor for me! That's just what I wanted. Thanks, Sister Angela. I'll go at once."

Anne flung open the door and tumbled tumultuously into Naomi's arms, so that their large hats collided and entangled, and had to be freed with laughter and nonsense from Anne. Naomi was almost appalled by the contrast in her sister's personality and its immediate setting. She felt a sudden qualm of pity for Sister Angela, and at the same time a deep thankfulness that found expression in a little smile remembering her own assurances to their father as to Anne's probable position towards the Sisterhood. Meanwhile, Anne went on talking trivialities as one longing for that special form of relief.

"Oh, I am so tired, and I did so long to see you. It's perfectly awful by the Docks, and I wanted some-

thing to take the taste out." She made a little grimace. "What are you doing in town? Are you going to stay?"

"One night. I go to Newcastle to-morrow. But Anne, surely you did not walk back!" remonstrated Naomi, in horror, glancing at her sister's dusty shoes. Anne got a little red.

"One can never keep any money down there," she answered apologetically; "it's worse than Monte Carlo, and one can't take return bus tickets. Look at those roses!" She caught the bowl indignantly from the mantelpiece and placed it on the centre of the table. "I put those there this morning, so that any unfortunate visitors might have something restful to look at! Did you ever see such a room? I would like to talk to the painter, only he must be in an asylum now. The roses are all right on the table, besides Mary can see them there," with a side glance at the picture, "she isn't looking on the mantelpiece."

"Anne!" remonstrated Naomi again, laughing.

"Well, she isn't. Come upstairs to my room; we can talk there, and I can get some dust off me."

Naomi followed her across the hall, past Sister Angela's rigidly impassive form, up a staircase to a long corridor of little rooms, and everywhere pitch pine and the ugly grey paint. Anne's room was at the end. It was tiny enough but its bare simplicity was just broken by faint reflections of the owner, sufficient to lift its rigidity into the personal plane without disorder. Naomi wondered what Jessica Monica, their father's cousin, thought. She felt quite sure what Sister Angela would have thought had she crossed the visitor's threshold. The sisters talked some time in generalities, but presently Anne said in answer to a direct question:

"No, I can't stay much longer. I feel I am horrid, Naomi; they are all so good and content, and try so

hard to help the misery, not to cure it. It's just physical misery to them, some of them even seem to think it ennobling. I don't want to make it bearable, I want it to be unbearable, so that they'll all get up and do something themselves. God never meant people to live as they do, but they aren't plants to be repotted whether they will or not, they've got to do their part as well just because they are human beings. It's easy enough to make them just want things different, but it's quite another thing to make them do anything towards it themselves. I feel all the kind people like these sisters are just helping them put up with things they ought not to put up with!"

She stopped abruptly and stood looking at Naomi with eyes that saw nothing material at all; Naomi scrutinised her closely, knowing she was entirely unaware of it. Anne had grown thinner, the expectancy of her face was accentuated, there was a certain quivering restlessness of spirit apparent through the material veil of form. She had said nothing to-day, nor in past days, to her sister of the actual sights and sounds she had been through, or of the more cruel, wider knowledge she had gained, but Naomi knew without telling. She knew, too, it was inevitable that the shadow of the world's pain must fall on Anne, the great question that tugged at her heart was, would those far-seeing eyes of Anne's pierce the shadow and carry her into the light beyond, or would she get lost in the darkness that lay so heavily on all pitiful tender natures?

The distant look faded from Anne's eyes. She moved impulsively to Naomi's side and seated herself on a little hassock at her feet:

"I've been offered work at a Branch of the Charity Organisation Society," she said thoughtfully. "I daresay I shall take that, but Naomi, I want you to tell me something."

"Well?" for Anne stopped.

"You've never told me," continued Anne abruptly, "whether you approve or not of my doing this. Coming away, I mean, and trying to work? You've helped and stood by me, but you've never told me what you really think."

"Would it make any difference to you to know?"

"To my feelings?—A vast difference."

"But not to what you'd do?" insisted Naomi gently.

Anne frowned at herself.

"I don't know, I suppose not; you'd rather I had stayed at home then?"

"Supposing that I did think that," said Naomi teasingly. "What would be the use of saying it? It would only give you disagreeable feelings for no results."

"But I like to know where I stand, whether it's agreeable or disagreeable," persisted Anne. Naomi leant down and put her arms round her, there was a glow of passionate love and admiration in her face.

"Because you can say that, and because it so exactly expresses you, I *do* approve, darling. I think it is the right thing for you, but also because I'm a horrid, jealous, selfish creature, I'd have liked to keep you just as a little ungrown up sister all my life!"

She gave her an extra squeeze and then laughed.

"You are a silly old dear Naomi! You are so much bigger than I, I'm bound to be your little sister always. But Naomi," Anne's voice changed quickly, "everyone likes to know where they stand, there's nothing peculiar in that."

The light died out of her sister's eyes, she got up and walked to the window. She had come to tell Anne something and this was an opening, and she wanted to avoid it.

"All people are not like that at all, unfortunately

for them. There are heaps who go through life afraid of knowing where they really stand. I'm one of those people."

"Nonsense!" protested Anne fiercely, but she knew she was protesting against a fact. Her sister went on without turning round.

"My life is the result of that—you know. I'm always afraid to know just how I stand in existence, no experience has taught me wisdom. But you aren't like that, so you won't make the mistakes I've made. Life mayn't be all easy for you, Anne, but at least you'll always meet it face to face, as I never do."

"What's happened, Naomi?"

"I've refused Larri's offer to go on that Italian tour," went on Naomi steadily, "because I do not want to know anything of Luigi Matoni."

It was so Madame Matoni spoke of her husband, with no more emotion than she might of a passing tramp.

"If I went, I should be almost certain to see or hear."

"But, Naomi, I thought he was in America?"

"If I found he were not, I might have to enquire. Oh, Anne, Anne, I don't want to find anything—that's me all over. If he's there, there's nothing to be gained but bitterness, if we met; if he's not, I should feel all unsettled. . . . But if I were you I'd set off to-morrow and never rest till I know for certain."

Her eyes dwelt wistfully on Anne.

Anne nodded emphatically:

"Yes, I must know how I stand. I can bear anything but uncertainty. We are all afraid of something. See Kipling's 'Soldiers of the Queen.' That's my fear, having to sit still and not be certain."

She sat still a while fondling her sister's white hands and then said in a low voice:

"But my dear beautiful Naomi, it can't be too late: why do you talk as if you were a hundred and one? Supposing Luigi Matoni were dead, surely it would alter things?"

"But he's not dead, I have a signed receipt from him twice a year, and it would make no difference, if he were. I could not send for *him*, the other, and he could not come to me even if he wished it."

Anne gave a little shrug of distaste:

"No, no, but—but—others, darling—— Aren't there any men but those two in the world for you?"

Love prompted the question so it was powerless to hurt the elder woman. Anne was still such a child in these things, and so far as Naomi had seen, sentiment was entirely left out of her composition. Romance she might and certainly would understand, but its half sister would ever be a stranger to her.

Anne understood this much of her sister's story. That at the outset of her career, while still studying, Naomi had fallen the dupe of a clever, plausible scoundrel, who enticed her into a hasty marriage and after treating her to three months of heaven and three months of hell, merely walked out of her life, leaving her crippled in soul for a time, but with youth and interests and her voice to serve as physicians. Then later another love, no Luigi Matoni this time, and no mere girl's romance—and the shadow of Matoni fell between them. That was all Anne knew, except that she had a new Naomi for sister, dear as ever but different. A Naomi who turned her back on the world that had fêted her.

"I wonder, Anne, if you will ask me that a few years hence. Don't be angry, my darling. You *would* understand if I could tell you everything. You can't think how I'd like to, but I can't; not that I don't trust you, but I can't look at it squarely even now, I'm

afraid of it. Always remember that, Anne, it's my stupid cowardice. Why I won't tell you is not because of your youth or anything else, and——" She went on hurriedly, "I am going to Canada with Malcolm Strangeway for a two years' tour."

Anne sat bolt upright on the floor.

"Two years! Naomi!"

"It's not so good an offer as Larri's and it's longer."

"It's miserably long," moaned Anne with forlorn eyes.

They were silent a while, and it was Anne who broke in briskly with her usual optimistic grip of advantages:

"Still, Mr. Strangeway has always looked after you best, and he's much nicer than Larri."

Naomi laughed:

"That's not business, but it's worth more to me. Come back and spend the evening with me, Anne?"

Anne shook her head.

"I've got to go to Victoria Gardens to 'The Children's Hour.'"

"Some one else can do it for once," urged the other.

Anne opened her eyes and spread out her hands in mock tragedy:

"Oh, Naomi, do you take me for a useless amateur?"

"No, just an obliging sister," coaxed Naomi.

"Couldn't do it. You may take me out to tea and a drive, or better still, come and help me with the children."

Naomi made a little *moue* of distaste.

"Couldn't do it," she said in teasing imitation. "I'll give you tea, and I'll drive you there, that's all. We leave at eight to-morrow morning."

They carried out this programme, and then they spoke much of the coming trip to Canada and possi-

ble advantages to Naomi from a professional point of view, they spoke no more of Italy or Luigi Matoni.

But at night when Anne should, by the custom of the house beneath whose roof she lay, have been occupied with her devotions, she, instead, sat for a long hour, looking out of her window into the dull gravel court below, and her thoughts were wholly of Naomi. When she finally went to bed it is to be feared her last thoughts were such as would have found small favour with the good Mother Superior and her little flock.

"I hate him," murmured Anne to herself sleepily, "more than anything in the world. I'd love to tell him so!"

But she was not thinking of Naomi Matoni's husband.

CHAPTER III

SOCIETY gave up Paul Arrington as altogether beyond hope. That a man with far more than a comfortable affluence, no ostensible business, with so very much "Family," and such an appearance to carry, should state in answer to Society's repeated and gracious invitations that he had no leisure to accept them, was more than preposterous, it bordered on the ridiculous. For it was not to be expected that "Society" should or could accept the plain fact that it had no pleasures to offer Paul Arrington in exchange for his time. Such a state of mind might be assumed by those who had no birthright to its privileges, but Paul Arrington was of the very substance of which it was composed; the real genuine stone hewn out of socially prehistoric quarries. "Society" abandoned its claims over him very reluctantly, giving him chance after chance, and finally after his continued refusal to take them, shook its head and pronounced him a "crank."

But there were societies more elastic in form and less particular about the capital *S*, which also regarded him as the goal of their hopes, and made as frantic efforts to entrap him as any Mayfair hostess, with like negative results, as far as the majority of them was concerned. The successful mincristy, perhaps because it was so relatively small, maintained a complete silence over its victory, boasting not at all, lest that should lead to irreparable loss.

All of which merely means that Paul Arrington, having no taste for Society and being free to choose his own employment regardless of money return, chose such work as was congenial to him and did it in

the way most pleasing to himself. It was no one else's business after all. In hours of depression he sometimes felt that a little bitterly, and his thoughts would travel with reluctant steps toward a small distant cousin who trudged up and down Harrow Hill in sublime unconsciousness of his possible heritage in the Bannerton Estates.

Paul Arrington indulged his enormous capacity for work to the uttermost, and, if his motive was to give himself no time to think personally, he certainly succeeded. He had a perfect genius for working out figures and by a curious set of circumstances, rather than by a deliberate intent, had become a specialist in labour statistics and the head of a statistic society that was as reputable as it was dull in the eyes of the general public.

Max Aston, his private secretary and constant companion, adored him for all his amazing ability, his unmatched energy, his furious temper and despotic will, and the strange childlike variableness in him and almost incredible power of abandonment.

Max was twenty-four, absurdly young for the really responsible position he filled; but Arrington had taken him on the strength of his being the grandson of a certain Charles Aston who had much influenced his—Arrington's—early days. Max had wanted experience and work and not money. He got both and if the former was not of the kind to prepare him for the management of the estate that would be his, it provided him with very ample experience in difficult and divers ways of life. The relationship between Max and his chief soon ceased to be a purely formal one, passed even through the stage of respectful homage on the one hand and kindly interest on the other, into a loyal honest devotion linked with an oddly protective instinct in Max; and on Arrington's part, an unrecognised dependence on the boyish affection and

element of humour Max contrived to bring into work generally devoid of that inestimable quality.

They were working one morning in the big library at Playdon House, Paul at the enormous table on the remote side of the room—Max, conveniently situated to intercept incomers from either door. The morning's work was nearly over and Max's eyes wandered occasionally to the open window opposite him.

Playdon Square was just beginning to bethink herself that Spring was in the air, and the brown pink treetops swung gaily to the measure sung by the happy wind racing across the sky, clearing away the clouds that had ruled there all the morning. There was a small discreet knock at the door which disturbed Arrington not in the least, since he did not hear it. It was answered by an equally discreet "Come in" from the secretary. A dignified man in plain livery appeared with a note on a tray, and disappeared when Max had taken it, with an almost miraculous absence of sound.

Max went across to his chief with the open note in his hand. It was quite a journey across the spacious room, giving him time to search in his memory for the right introduction to the note which was an introduction itself.

"Dr. Risler had sent to borrow the Dursley Mine statistics, sir. He has sent a Miss Kempburn, of whom he says he has spoken to you. Do you wish to see her?"

Paul Arrington looked up sharply, but the usual quick response of "yes" or "no" did not come. He put down his pen deliberately and leant back in his chair.

Max had all particulars of Dr. Risler's public life ready to spare his chief all possible strain on his memory, but it was unnecessary. Arrington spoke slowly looking out of the window meanwhile.

"Risler found Miss Kempburn trying to foist practicalities on to a well-meaning but sentimental sisterhood. He disentangled her from that to the mutual benefit of both, and put her into Charity Organisation work. She 'raced' her department and fretted herself nearly ill waiting for the others to catch her up. She is doing L. C. C. work now, but Risler thinks she might be useful to us."

"To the Socialistic Party?" suggested Max.

It was hardly a correction offered to his chief's "us." It was merely a mild protest, a faint little insistence of non-identity between Arrington and himself and this particular creed. It called up, however, a little twinkle in Paul's eyes.

"I'm told, Max, she'd make a first-rate secretary, and would be most sympathetic with us." He emphasised the "us" this time and Max drew himself up indignantly, keeping a wary eye on the speaker, however.

It was a moment of relaxation for his chief, and he never let such an occasion slip through his fingers without exploiting it to the utmost, especially when the morning's work had been particularly heavy.

"She may understand the Cause," he protested gravely; "she certainly *sounds* like that! But she would not understand Master Paul in the least, and he will take no exercise with a mere servant, so he'd get ill and die. You had better retain me, sir."

At the sound of his name a Skye terrier of indisputable ancestry, who was curled up in a basket on the far side of the big table, cocked up his shaggy little ears and blinked his bright little eyes and quivered all over with expectation. Paul's grave eyes travelled slowly to the basket modestly concealed by the tail of the curtain. Max's nonsense seldom failed in its purpose.

"I think we'll see her," he remarked quietly, and

suddenly his voice changed so abruptly that Max jumped. "In five minutes, that is. I must finish this letter. Ask her to wait; you can look out the papers while I'm talking to her."

The secretary went away thoughtfully. It was very unlike Arrington to give any reason for delay, and he was sure the letter was not important. In which idea he was right, for Arrington did not even remember it when the big door closed behind Max. He sat back in his chair and stared at Master Paul.

The immaculate and youthful-looking secretary, who appeared as if nothing could ruffle his calm demeanour much less hurry him through his daily routine, came into the ante-room where Anne Kempburn was waiting with antagonism rampant behind his even, polite bearing. But his politeness was no barrier to the subtle essence of thought, given a sympathetic receiver, and even before Anne had taken secret exception to his very immaculateness, she was conscious of his antagonism to her. They fitted as ill together as sandpaper and steel. The passing months of experience had left their trace on the girl's face. There was anxiety mingled with the expectancy. She was still waiting for Life to push something to her through its mysterious curtains, but seeing the strangely varied gifts it brought others she had begun to entertain a faint doubt as to the satisfaction derived from the something to come."

"Mr. Arrington is sorry to keep you waiting, Miss Kempburn," said Max, in his most gracious tone. "He will not be more than five minutes. He is very particularly engaged."

"It is very good of him to see me at all. I've only come for some papers for Dr. Risler."

"You are helping Dr. Risler, I believe?"

"Yes."

"He is a busy man."

Anne did not think this required further response. She sat silently wondering whether authors studied secretaries or secretaries authors, to produce so conventional a type as the young man before her.

Max noted she had not opened either of the Socialist journals that lay on the table, but instead, had opened the week's *Punch*, and had been looking at the cartoon, representing Capital and Labour walking arm in arm in a garden, with an excited crowd without pulling down the garden wall.

"It's clever, is it not?" she remarked, noting his glance.

"Tenniel is an institution," he assented. "The Principal of the College of Humour, I have heard him called." A little smile flicked round her lips.

"There's plenty of room for humour in the world, but I'm doubtful of it being a College subject. What do you think?" She spoke with a sudden frankness that was as much assumed as Max's elaborate politeness. Both were natural qualities that at the moment would have retreated into the fastnesses of their respective inner beings if they had not forcibly taken them, as it were, by the "scruff of their necks" and dragged them forward.

Said Max inwardly: "This appalling modern girl shan't make me less than polite, she's not worth it."

Said Anne to herself: "Here's a desperate Society loafer playing at work, and taking the bread out of honest people's mouths. He shan't freeze me!"

"Can one teach humour at all?" she queried aloud.

"I believe it can be cultivated," returned Max with conspicuous lack of it. "What is Dr. Risler's opinion?"

"I never asked him; but he would take a long time to graduate, I fear." Her eyes added, "So would you," so plainly that Max understood them.

He came round the other side of the table, and pretended to examine a card lying on the mantelpiece, and then in an absently polite tone remarked:

"I have not the slightest doubt *we* should both make qualified professors at once."

Anne laughed right out.

It was such a spontaneous, natural girlish laugh, that the young man turned sharply to her in surprise, as if he expected to see the years with which he had unfairly credited her slip away and leave the girl to whom that laugh should properly belong.

She had pushed back her chair a little and the light fell more clearly on her face. It looked less emphatic and set. She might almost be called good-looking, he allowed grudgingly.

"If she'll laugh like that to the chief," he thought, "I'll forgive her spoiling his possible walk."

A bell sounded.

"Mr. Arrington is free now," said the secretary sedately.

She rose at once.

"I had really not expected to see him," she remarked, and betrayed her pleasure in her voice.

Clearly either Dr. Risler had not divulged the contents of the note, or she was "putting it on." Max shot a swift look at her, and decided on Dr. Risler's discretion. Arrington was standing before the fire and came forward to meet her, barely waiting for Max's formal introduction.

"What had Risler been doing or saying that Mr. Arrington should take so much interest in the girl?" was the thought that occupied his secretary as he retired to hunt up the papers that served for an excuse for her visit.

Arrington seated his visitor in a chair but remained standing himself. Anne had heard that he had a way of looking people over before he began speaking to

them, and she found the habit even more distressfully penetrating than she expected. He seemed in no hurry to talk, and she wondered if he had asked her in out of mere politeness or respect for Dr. Risler, not realising he saw no casual visitors at all. Then an inspiration came to her to look at him, as he at her, and really face the forcible personality of whom the doctor had hinted strange things, suggestive of Power—authority.

She lifted her head and viewed him frankly. He stood six foot two in his socks, and carried his height with such proportion of bone and muscle that an ordinary-sized man merely felt he was in company with the real type. Anne saw vaguely he was grey, his face clean-shaven and curiously constrained, the lines of his mouth, until he smiled, hard and unfeeling (Max took enormous pleasure in bringing up that smile which so transfigured him!), but she was almost instantly held prisoner by his eyes, which intercepted her survey, holding her as it were in custody and demanding in silence her authority for this liberty. She let them hold her, answering in silence too, and suddenly all fear and awe of him vanished.

The transfiguring smile swept away the austere hard lines, and obliterated the space between him and mankind. She knew him at once to be an infinitely kind man.

"Miss Kempburn, are you satisfied with the work you are doing now?"

She hesitated a perceptible moment.

"It is more satisfactory than other things. It's an honest attempt to help matters scientifically."

"You believe in dealing with humanity scientifically?"

She had an idea he was laughing at her and looked up with a flush. He made no attempt to disguise the fact that he was.

"Why do you do it, Miss Kempburn? You have a home of your own—people belonging to you."

It was not an inquiry, it was a mere statement of facts. She was perplexed.

"How do you know that, Mr. Arrington?"

His eyes wandered over her dress and general appearance. It was that, of course; at least she understood he offered it as his mute explanation.

"One can generally tell. You are not the worker type."

"That is most unkind of you."

"I did not imply you were not a worker, but not the type. I don't think much of the type. Why do you do it?" He reverted abruptly to his question, and Anne forgetting his entire lack of right to any knowledge of her personal existence answered simply:

"I've lots of energy. There's heaps to be done, and there does not seem too many people to do it. There was nothing I had to do at home, I'm not neglecting another duty. My father missed me at first, but he is deep in a book on wild flowers now."

Arrington had the air of waiting for more, and finding it did not come, he said shortly:

"You've tried Charity Organisation and L. C. C., and you are not satisfied?"

"I did not say so."

He gave a little impatient gesture as if that were a triviality.

"What do you find wrong with it all?"

"I don't think anything is wrong with *it*," she returned, trying to directly formulate thoughts that had worried her of late. "I think it's I who am wrong. The work is all right so far as it goes, it helps towards a better physical condition, but at Dr. Risler's I hear other things talked about. There are people who really care for the unhappy underworld, who will have no part in the upper world that creates it. People

who are not only in earnest, many are that, but who live for one purpose only, give everything to that. It seems to me, that is the only way anything will ever get done."

His eyes filled with sudden pity for her. He had himself no illusions over the party he chose to support, no particular faith in them at all except as instruments on which his powerful hands could play at will; but genuine faith and honest idealism called forth from him a pitiful tenderness for the troublous future that lay before it. If he did not help her, she would still fall into the clutches of his party; if he did help, he might save her from too rapid disillusion. He meant to help her, had done so from the moment Dr. Risler had explained his new "find" to him.

"I know something of the new Socialistic Labour Party," he said, choosing thus to speak of his connection with them. "I might help you there if you would like it."

She flushed eagerly. She tried to thank him and to control the indiscreet "Why?" that dominated her.

Arrington's glance wandered to the window where his table stood, and he gave a faint low whistle. The Skye terrier pricked up its ears, and in a moment was fondling his master's feet.

Anne did not stoop to pat the dog but she regarded it with a friendly eye. It sat up and looked at its master, quivering with joy.

"What a darling," Anne said softly.

The dog glanced at her arrogantly and then again at Arrington who nodded and the arrogance disappeared. The little animal came and inspected Anne in a friendly manner.

"He won't bite," said Paul gravely.

The terrier, having inspected Anne's gloves, decided they were sufficiently good to warrant his offer-

ing her the favour of a silky back to pat, at which critical moment a very soft suggestion of a whistle, a mere sketch of possible sound, came from some remote corner of the room. The silky body vanished from beneath Anne's hand, and bounded with twisty gambols towards the said remote corner.

Paul frowned.

"Macdonald, come back. I am surprised at you, sir!" he called sternly, and Macdonald crept back apologetically to his feet and lay on his back with his paws in the air, but his master refused to look at him and addressed himself apparently to space:

"You should allow nothing to distract you when a lady honours you with her attention, Macdonald, *nothing*." He emphasised the "nothing" and Anne, following his eyes, saw the secretary approaching with some voluminous papers in his hand.

"I apologise," said Max humbly. "The fault was entirely mine. I did not see Master Paul's happy state."

Paul eyed him sternly:

"Macdonald," he said, with more emphasis, "should learn to resist temptation."

Max put down his papers on the table and turned to the visitor.

"I appeal to you, Miss Kempburn," he persisted: "a small dog like Master Paul," he looked defiantly at his chief, "cannot be expected to entertain all the heroic virtues beneath his coat, ample as it is. Can he?"

The small dog had returned to the interrupted caress.

"He is as good as gold with the nine virtues added, I am sure. What is his name, did you say?"

Her assumed innocence caught them both.

"Macdonald," said Arrington.

"Master Paul," said the secretary simultaneously.

"Master Paul Macdonald?" queried Anne, marveling at their absurd childishness.

Max regarded her with a shade more favour. She had then a glimmer of other things in the world besides Labour Parties and Socialists.

"Macdonald is his name," said Paul decidedly; "the rest is only Aston's nonsense, he is quite absurd over the dog."

Anne just allowed herself to glance at the secretary without moving her head and caught an answering look.

"And now, Miss Kempburn," went on Paul, "to return to what I was saying when this rude dog interrupted us." ("As if he had not called him on purpose!" noted Max mentally.) "If you have time to spare, and wish to employ it, I propose you should give me three hours a day to assist Aston with his labours. In this way you would come in contact with the sort of work for which you appear to be looking, and perhaps—but this I cannot promise you——" he added a little grimly, "with the sort of people of whom you speak; at all events you would be genuinely useful, for Aston is worked to death." Here he met his secretary's dismayed glance with stern defiance. "I know nothing about the proper remuneration but Aston will see to that."

Anne, who was sitting bolt upright with clasped hands, and colour coming and going, found a small voice at last.

"But, Mr. Arrington, I don't want payment, I'm only——"

"Only a useless amateur?" interrupted Arrington sharply. "I've no use for *that*. I understood from Risler you had a good head, made excellent précis and were worth employment. I propose to make use of you for my own advantage. I don't accept presents. It's nothing to me if you want money or not."

It was Max who was injured and hurt by the touch of brutal hardness in his chief's voice, not on Miss Kempburn's account, but because it showed Arrington in a possibly objectionable light. Anne, however, had no resentment in her. She was too overwhelmed with the greatness of the opportunity, moreover, she approved the principle for which he chose to banish politeness.

"At least be consistent," he went on, still watching her closely. "It is the gist of the socialistic creed that you take no favours, only your rights!"

He smiled himself, a little bitterly, but Anne did not smile.

"You are quite right, of course," she said gravely. "Still I can never thank you enough for giving me such an opportunity. I hope I shall be able to be of real use."

"Aston will tell you if you are not. He is terribly sincere. Don't let his sincerity frighten you, however, he does not mean to be impolite."

The much belied Max drew himself up choking with indignation, but again he caught a side glance from Anne's grey eyes, and kept back the protest on his lips behind a martyred expression.

Anne rose and said good-bye, and Max escorted her to the door with some diminution of his hostility personally, but with anger against Arrington rampant. Arrington evidently foresaw as much. He was seated at his table absorbed in a letter when his secretary re-entered. But Max, glancing at the clock to be sure working hours were well over, advanced to the attack at once.

"I do not know, sir, what fault I have committed to earn such an indignity," protested Max with mournful sadness.

"An indignity?"

"A woman helper," said Max; "when have I complained of overwork, sir?"

Paul leant back in his chair, and considered a moment, and when he did speak he dropped the half-laughing, half-bantering tone with which he had first replied.

"Now," he said, "be a good fellow and understand. I want to have Miss Kempburn here awhile under my eye,—call it a fad if you like, but humour me. I don't think Dr. Risler's entourage likely to be of any real use for her; you could really make her of use,—I ask it as a favour."

"I will certainly make her useful!" returned Max, concealing his devouring curiosity most creditably.

"Does she know anything?"

"Risler says she is a fair *précis* writer, been taking lessons in that; she can also typewrite and is very methodical." Which meagre list of accomplishments was as far from explaining Paul Arrington's interest in her as ever, Max thought ruefully.

That hot-headed faddist Dr. Risler could hardly believe his ears when Anne told him of her good fortune. It was contrary to all he had ever seen of Arrington, or heard either. He could offer no objection, however, and congratulated her, merely expressing a hope she would still find leisure and interest to appear at the various evening meetings where Anne had already imbibed her first draught of that Socialistic ferment that worked—so Risler told her—for the Reformation of the world. When, however she asked him what was Mr. Arrington's real employment, he regarded her dubiously.

"He's keen on Labour questions and Trades Unions," he said rather reluctantly. "He compiles statistics on those subjects, and he's on several commissions in a non-committal sort of way. But he's on none of the Councils, nor does he openly side with any party. Personally, I don't understand the man. But he stands for Statistics,—that's certainly his point."

Anne had a sense of "misfit." Statistics and Paul Arrington as she beheld him fitted ill together. Relieved from the magic of his presence, she began to wonder why she had allowed her life, such as it was, to be suddenly transplanted in this manner, not only allowed but rejoiced in it! Would she indeed find Mr. Arrington the man who *knew*, in whom a vision of the Unity and Ultimate Purpose leavened his work beyond the puny strivings of lesser, blinded men? For, as Naomi had foreseen, the world's Pain had sunk deep into Anne's soul. To her youth with its superabundant vigour, hope and health, it was an unbearable load that must be lifted somehow before the old gladness of mere existence could return. She believed, with almost pitiful faith, that somewhere in the world, men were working for its redemption, by the light of her own vision, marching forward over certain ground that did not serve as a battlefield for parties or opinions, or if it did, still steadily leading to the end for which they toiled. It was to such a man or men, she would give her little atom of help, unrecognised perhaps, but all she had to give. It was for such a Cause she held free from definite allegiance, hearing, watching, keeping loyal to her own faith, ready to recognise the object of her search under any guise, however removed from her own instincts. Ready for everything except the belief and knowledge, this vision of hers did not and could not crystallise into concrete organisation, but worked in the darkness at all levels, a silent, patient hope in the heart of men that they were made to rise.

Yet of all the Seeking that mankind undertakes, surely this, futile as it is, is the worthiest; the Search for the Manifest Form of the Faith that is within him! And only by such honest patient search can the Seeker learn to bear that he himself is the only Manifest Form to which he can join the whole alle-

giance that is in him, while recognising an equal manifestation in each struggling worker, true to such Vision as Heaven granted him. For some a long and weary search along the bitter path of disillusion.

Meanwhile away in Canada, Naomi sighed and smiled and sang with her heart ever near her sister.

"Oh, make haste, little Anne," she cried softly to herself, "make haste to understand life, and to find yourself. It will be such a splendid find."

Then one day came a letter from Anne, declaring she had got into the centre of things at last, and that they were focussed round a Mr. Arrington for whom she—even she—was doing work.

"Real work, Naomi; Mr. Aston, the secretary, assured me of *that*, I had to be sure because Mr. Arrington *will* pay me. I bear with it because these are hard times, the unemployed are everywhere, and their families everywhere else!"

After that letter Naomi sang and sighed but smiled little. Malcolm Strangeway had difficulties; one week her feet were all for the eastward journey, and the next on a rush for the setting sun. Though he kept her to her public engagements she would ruthlessly cancel her private ones and spent hours writing long letters which she never posted save in flames.

But Madame Matoni's voice was as heaven-born as ever and the pure notes like golden tears brought balm to many anxious weary hearts if not to Naomi Kempburn's own; even Malcolm Strangeway's jealous ear found no fault there, so he took her unaccountable and unresultant changeableness in good part, never gain-said her, and never departed from his plans.

CHAPTER IV

"THAT is the last bundle, Miss Kempburn. Your time is up, however, you must leave it for to-morrow."

Max Aston deposited a big bundle of letters and a roll of green tape on the table beside Anne, but he kept his hand on the letters in an apparently careless fashion.

Anne looked up quickly.

"On what compulsion are you going to turn me out on the stroke of twelve, whether I will or not?"

"Three hours was the stipulated time."

"I will not charge you for overtime," she retorted coolly, "but I am going to finish these letters. Don't let me keep you."

"Miss Kempburn, let us be consistent!" insisted the secretary plaintively. "What would become of order and punctuality, and what would be the use of Unions if every man waited and wanted to finish his job?"

"I'm not a man and I don't belong to a Trades Union."

Max groaned.

"I know—that you're coming! You labour to drive the unfortunate worker into the protecting fold, but you take good care not only to remain out yourself but to maintain your own freedom for work."

"Mr. Aston, you are talking arrant nonsense."

"That is unjust to yourself, Miss Kempburn, but of course, if you insist——" He drew himself up with assumed dignity and bowed to her.

She had to let go her annoyance since she was not quite sure if he were laughing at her or not.

"If you insist on staying I must leave you in solitary state to entertain the Prime Minister if he should call before Mr. Arrington returns."

She looked genuinely alarmed at that.

"But you can't go if he's expected, Mr. Aston!"

"I can, if duty calls," he returned with heroic fortitude.

"I don't believe it does. It's an excuse for laziness. You wanted me to go so your truancy should not be known." She gave up attempting to work and regarded him with a disapproving eye.

Her eager expectant face was less sharply angular than a few months ago, she looked altogether younger and less strained than when she had first called at Playdon House. She was quite sure by this time what she thought of Mr. Arrington, but by no means so sure of her opinion of his secretary. For the first month she had not troubled to think of him, the second month she had regarded him with impatient tolerance, this third month she was growing a little confused over his qualities. He was undeniably a good secretary, though Anne considered him lacking in respect to his chief. Perhaps, after all, he could not help being flippant and superficial. It was the way of his aristocratic class. Still, she had this much in common with him, they both hero-worshipped one man. Anne had yet to learn the extent of his worship, however.

He met her accusation now with a look of injury.

"I will vindicate myself," he said, and turning towards the distant window where was the Chief's empty chair, he gave his soft *sotto voce* whistle and the Skye terrier bounded across the room.

"Oh, Macdonald!" exclaimed Anne, a little contemptuously, stooping, however, to pat the wriggling silky back.

"Contempt is a poor weapon, Miss Kempburn."

She laughed at him.

"So is subterfuge! If you want a little exercise in the Park, you could take it without making poor Macdonald the scapegoat. I call it mean, Mr. Ashton."

"Do you hear, Master Paul, what Miss Kempburn calls us? You 'poor' and a 'goat,' and me mean! What shall we say to her?"

Master Paul plainly expressed his desire to leave the female to herself and hasten out. After a moment's hesitation, as if he were vainly seeking a better answer, Mr. Aston took the dog's advice, bid Anne adieu and went away with a sad air of misunderstood virtue.

Anne did not immediately resume her work, but her meditations were given neither to the redoubtable Macdonald nor to the secretary, but rather to the master of both, whom she had hardly seen that morning, but who appeared to her more than usually stern and oblivious of humanity in the particular. The three months she had spent working in his house had left Anne with a very complete admiration for Paul Arrington as a man of affairs. His mental grip of a subject seemed to her in proportion to his physical size, and he certainly had an amazing power of foreseeing objections, and strangling them at birth. But more certainly had he impressed her as one carrying with him that mysterious element of Force and Will, which finds in all things within its reach, only material for the accomplishment of its ultimate purpose. He struck her as he struck the rest of his world as a man with a purpose. Just what that purpose was some few might have hesitated to declare, but Anne, with the generosity of youth towards its idols, would have said boldly: "The ultimate good of mankind." She had said as much to Max once, and he had not contradicted her, nor had she troubled to interpret the

look in his eyes. To Anne, Paul Arrington was at least a big man doing big things, no tinker at effects, but a dealer of stout blows at Causes, so she judged. Occasionally, she had wondered why he was not in Parliament, and then blushinglly discerned her own unwisdom, recognising him the more useful as a free agent and intermediary, as indeed he was. Her only trouble lay in a vague feeling of sapped independence, she could at times feel it in her to wish it were a personal influence that had gathered her within the meshes of its will, but apparently Arrington never consciously used that enthralling personality of his which the girl had faintly discerned behind the rough unswaying strength of the man. She felt he carried everything—and in everything was included her own poor little iota of will and reason—just by force of strength, commanding where he might safely ask. He never persuaded, but to gainsay his will was like walking in the face of a gale, productive of desire to get within shelter and shut the door firmly, if you could, though the gale went on its way just the same, whirling things about. On occasions Anne felt she would very much like to go indoors and take breath, but there seemed no interval long enough to find a haven, so she was carried along by the force she could not resist to an end she imperfectly understood, but dimly felt must be wise and beneficial, since it was Paul Arrington's end.

She was engaged at present in arranging the papers relating to the founding, existence, and extinction of a small Trades Union of wire makers, who for ten years had fought a fierce fight, and died at last from sheer lack of funds and adequate support. Many letters of which she had to make *précis* gave vivid pictures of badly paid, ill-organised work, and a strangely inhuman callousness on the part of the masters, which filled her with a white heat of indignation. It never

seemed to her to wonder what the masters might say in their own defence.

By the time she had finished the last bundle Max Aston and the terrier had returned. The latter wore a guilty furtive air, but the former seemed to have some difficulty in controlling his good spirits.

"Prime Minister called?" he inquired airily.

She shook her head, determined not to be drawn into frivolous discussion again.

"The Chief come back?" This time there was real anxiety in his voice, and she looked up in surprise.

"No. I thought he was not returning till one o'clock."

"Or you would not have stayed on working to encounter the charge of inconsistency again?"

As he spoke the neatly groomed young secretary went on his knees beside the small dog and wiped his feet with a fine cambric handkerchief, after which he carefully reinstated the animal in his distant basket.

Anne watched him with impatient contempt. She loved dogs but this ridiculous fuss by a man of Mr. Aston's responsibilities and duties aroused her indignation, and for once she let her anger master her generally almost contemptuous discretion.

"Really, Mr. Aston, you are absurd over Macdonald. Why don't you get Mr. Arrington to have a dog-boy as they do in India?"

Max, who was replacing the now soiled handkerchief in the depths of a pocket, first laughed and then looked grave. He told himself—as he had done before many times—that it did not matter in the least what Miss Kempburn chose to think of him, but he knew it did matter and the contempt in her voice stung him sharply, though neither she nor another could have guessed it. He glanced at the clock. Twenty minutes to one! There was time to rehabilitate himself in her eyes if she would listen.

"You will be pleased to hear, Miss Kempburn," he said slowly, precisely as if he were fanning her wrath, "that Master Paul is much better, off the sick list now indeed."

"I did not know he was on it," she returned coolly, carefully wiping her pen.

"Neither did Mr. Arrington, so you will kindly not pass on the good news."

"Really, Mr. Aston, I think Mr. Arrington and even my humble self have other things to think about than the ailments of a little dog."

"No doubt, besides he is not your dog."

"No."

"For the case is this," pursued Max steadily, ignoring her marked preparations for departure. "I've taken Master Paul daily to call on the best vet. in London, and thanks to his care we have made a complete recovery."

"I am glad to hear it," said Anne politely. "Let me congratulate you both. I think I will go now."

"What is the matter with you, Miss Kempburn?" went on Max in precisely the same voice, "is that you have not an ounce of imagination!"

Anne sprang up indignantly:

"Mr. Aston!"

He smiled.

"That invariably annoys a woman! But it's true this time, you haven't! You don't even see the need for exercising it in this case. Has it never struck you the Chief is one of those men who hardly ever take a holiday? I don't mean an actual holiday—but a momentary holiday with their brains, which is the salvation of men who work as he does. There is only one person in the world that I've found can make him *let go*, and be really human and foolish, and that's his dog. It's my own discovery and I watched pretty closely before I made it."

He paused a moment and his glance wandered from

his listener to the little pricked up ears just showing over the edge of the distant basket.

"You've never really seen him with Master Paul, so you've got to take my word for it, Miss Kempburn, that that animated mop plays a bigger part in keeping Mr. Arrington's overworked brain properly adjusted than all the doctors. I have to run him for all he's worth—Master Paul I mean—on occasions. If he were to get ill just now and the Chief knew it—well, you and I would probably have to clear out in a day or two. That's all. I apologise for offering even so bad a defence for my folly." He gave her an ironical little bow, but she, flushing hotly, held out her hand.

"Mr. Aston, it's I who apologise; do forgive me. I ought to have had more imagination."

"Please, don't; it was an obvious conclusion," he said so simply and naturally that she realised another failure of her imagination.

"Mind it's strictly confidential," he added, laughing. "I don't mind the rest of the world thinking I am a fool."

She began to set her table in order for the morrow, her mind full of the revelation of affection underlying Max Aston's words, the little pretext of selfishness with which he concluded was so characteristic of him that she hardly remembered it.

He helped her fasten the last packet of letters, speaking of them in his usual slighting way.

"Mr. Aston," she said, when she was quite ready to go, "I want you to explain something else to me."

"If it's not too difficult."

"Why, when you are so completely out of sympathy with Mr. Arrington's work and ideas, do you go on staying with him—and helping?"

"It's odd, isn't it?" he answered, examining the toes of his patent leather boots thoughtfully. "I often think so myself."

It struck her she had perhaps been impertinent and she felt uncomfortable. Max had an extraordinary way, quite unintentional, of making people feel uncomfortable without apparently saying anything. Suddenly he looked up and laughed.

"Again it's for your private ear, Miss Kempburn. When I found out what Mr. Arrington's rotten hobby was, I felt a bit worried, but we settled it like this. When I particularly dislike anything he is doing, and have to help him, I make a formal protest which he accepts and records. Then, having done my best to prevent him committing what I think follies, I can help with a clear conscience."

Anne laughed until she was on the point of tears.

Max looked amazed and perplexed.

"Don't you think it quite a sound plan?" he asked anxiously. "The Chief thinks it all right."

"It's delicious!"

"You see it keeps him at least reminded all the world isn't as mad as he and his 'hobbies' are."

"Why do you call them that?"

"Because he rides them," returned Max with an unmistakable grin. "But you do think it all right, Miss Kempburn, don't you?"

"What all right?"

"My working for him under those conditions. You see he might get a secretary who really approved of him, and urged him on, and then, oh lord!—yourself for example."

"I think it quite the most perfect arrangement that could be in every one's interests." She answered with great gravity, but the laughter that bubbled up in her heart as she sped homeward was a little akin to tears.

The secretary watched her go down the street.

"I suppose," he said ruefully to himself, "I suppose I must be in love with her or I shouldn't care what she thinks of me, and I do. She is lovely. I would

like to see her with an attack of vanity on her one day. How complicated it all is! She's a real Socialist, too, it's worse than the Chief!"

When the Chief entered the room a few minutes later, its atmosphere of peaceful good comradeship was rudely shaken. He took no notice of his secretary, but strode over to his table like an advancing thunder-cloud.

"Does any one know where Joseph Watt is?" he demanded curtly.

Max said he would ascertain.

"You needn't bother if you don't know," retorted Arrington. "He'll be here soon enough and all the rest of them too."

"Anything wrong?"

Arrington turned on him.

"The ironmasters are engineering a Federation of their own so as to get even with the Unions. Christopher Masters' idea."

Max Aston appeared profoundly interested in his boots again, and apparently found an inspiration there.

"Dear, dear I should never have thought he'd do anything so—wrong." The mild protest with its too obviously unmeaning tag precipitated the avalanche, as Max must have known it would.

"Wrong? What the devil has right or wrong to do with it? Here's Watt and his party planning a stroke that they think will paralyse the world and squash capital, and Masters, Capital personified, smiling away at them and building up barricades against which they'll dash to destruction. There's no right or wrong, but it's war."

He pushed his chair aside and sprang up and began striding rapidly up and down the room. His face had changed singularly, a volcano of passion seemed to have got loose within, the passion of a child baulked in some set desire, that in the child would quench itself

ultimately in tears, but in this big man must, as Max Aston knew well, wear itself out on the nearest object in a storm of fury and wild language. He watched his Chief furtively, there was no good in delaying it.

"Surely the Unions are too strong to suffer?" he said with engaging innocence.

Paul turned on him in fury:

"What's the strength of the Unions to you, you damned fool? Do you want to report on them to your precious cousin? Tell him from me then if he chooses to trust to this precious Federation of his, he can. I've held Watt quiet these two years but once he's wind of this, the devil will ride him—I'm out of it. Tell him the fools are planning a strike to ruin Capital——" He broke into a harsh laugh. "Tell him I'm sick of the whole damnable business, and wash my hands of it."

He was standing over Max now in full grip of his mad temper, and his secretary faced him leaning against the edge of his writing-table, with an immovable white face on which was no shadow of fear or resentment, only pure impassiveness.

"What have you told him, you thundering idiot?" stormed Arrington, and forced him with fierce words to an answer.

"I never speak to Christopher on business, sir."

That failed to appease. He was met with flat incredulity, and Christopher Masters, his millions, his ways, his Federations, were dragged through a seething furnace of words which broke for a moment the impassiveness confronting Arrington. Max interposed a word, and brought back the hurricane on to his own head. He was abused as an idler, a degenerate, the epitome of an effete class, willing to serve a Cause he loathed, for what?

The thunder would have answer; twisted and en-

larged its question, flung brutal command at him, tossed him this way and that till it got it.

"Because it's yours, I suppose," Max gave answer at last. A Reason poor enough on the face of matters, but he lacked cunning to hunt for better shelter than the plain truth just then.

"Sentimental clap trap!" he was told with unappeased roughness, "Worse, barefaced hypocrisy!" Did he think that he—Arrington—was going to be caught by that root?

So a new buffeting began. The hypocrisy of the world in general was swept up with sulphurous dust and piled on the shoulders of the unoffending Max.

"Go and serve Masters openly. Tell him what I say, that I've held them in, that I meant to, but by God, I'll let them be now, give them their head. Fools, fools!—and you most unutterable fool of all, why didn't you tell Masters to trust me!"

The thunder of the tempest stopped as abruptly as if it had slid over a precipice, and was plunging down in vast depths. Arrington flung himself across the room to the table and into his chair, caught at a pen, and began to write furiously and hurriedly.

Max, after two efforts to speak, said very steadily and in a very matter of fact voice:

"If that is all, sir, can I go?"

He was told he could, curtly; the vibrations of the storm were still dominant factors in the atmosphere.

Max drew a long breath of relief as he closed the door behind him.

"Phew! That's all right," he murmured. "In ten minutes he'll be fit to see anyone!"

His face was still very white and he took out a handkerchief, not the one that had done duty as a door-mat, and crumpled it nervously in his hands.

He stood still, leaning against a window for some

moments and there was neither calmness nor dignity in his demeanour now: he was just a young man of ordinary temper and feelings recovering himself after a brutal and apparently unmeaning attack. Minute by minute slipped by and he still fought for his self-possession.

He was not in the least upset by the flagrant injustice of the thing, he had deliberately brought it on himself, knowing the storm was brewed and must burst on some one. There were times when he most ardently desired such storms should break on the heads of the men over whose interests Arrington watched. But he knew this could not happen without Arrington losing some of the magical authority he wielded, and Max's sole consolation for their presence was the secret knowledge of how his chief held them all in the hollow of his hand while they fondly imagined themselves free agents merely consulting with a fellow-worker.

Little by little the secretary recovered his self-possession and smiled ruefully over his own folly.

"Been working up for days. Now we'll have a clear sky. Lucky Miss Kempburn had gone, I doubt if even she would have escaped."

Meanwhile, the author of the storm had penned an angry letter and torn it up, and sat a moment gazing so fiercely at a bust of Carlyle that it seemed as if he were on the point of falling on it in renewed fury. Whatever his thought or purpose, however, it was interrupted by a very soft little push. Two silky paws—innocent of dirt—were placed on his knee. He looked absently down at the dog for a minute, and then mechanically bent and patted it. The simple humanity of the action had its effect.

"You have no business out of your basket, Macdonald," he said sternly, but his voice failed to alarm even the nervous Macdonald who, however, returned

his forepaws to the ground and leant hard against his master.

"All right, I suppose you mean lunch time, you need not push me over though."

Then the big man abruptly leant down, picked up the small dog and set him on his knee. Tremulous ripples of pleasure convulsed Macdonald, who with head aside watched his beloved master with affectionate idolatry.

Arrington played with the silky ears and pretended to count the white teeth, talking ridiculous nonsense the while, such as would have rendered Anne dumb with amazement, had she heard it. But Macdonald never told tales. He made the most of his short hour, and finally put his paws on Arrington's shoulder and rested his little head on them.

"Macdonald," said Arrington thoughtfully, "can you manage to convey to Miss Anne your real private opinion of me?"

Macdonald thought he could and was restored to the floor, then his master got up and looked absently round the room as if searching for some one.

"I shall lunch at the Club," he remarked to his only listener, who looked dejected. There was a room at the Club for members' dogs, but Macdonald would have preferred a common "A. B. C." (had he known of such institutions) and his master's near company, to the lonely luxury of the Club and mixed surroundings. He trotted out obediently after his master, however, and in the ante-room they found Max, just starting himself.

For the life of him Max could not restrain a nervous glance at his chief, he did not feel ready to encounter another storm just then. Arrington saw the glance and frowned:

"Going to lunch?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come and lunch with me."

For the fraction of a second, Max hesitated and Paul Arrington's eyes grew urgent.

"Come along," he said imperiously. "I want you." The last sign of the storm was swept away in Arrington's wonderful smile.

"Max," he said reproachfully, as the young man made search for his gloves, which were all the time lying on the table, "you really are a fool, there are your gloves."

"I know I am," returned Max, with heart-whole conviction. "Why don't you dismiss me on the spot?"

"Don't be a blithering idiot too!" laughed Arrington. "Come along, I've been working too hard, let's have a treat and go to Madame Tussaud's, or the Zoo, you choose."

The extraordinary couple went off together, followed by Master Paul Macdonald. And if any casual passer-by had remarked to another casual passer-by that the younger man, personification of correct form, in all appearance the outcome of generations of refinement and leisure, had after all something of the heroism in him of which martyrs are made, and that the big strong man by his side, who looked as if he could rule a kingdom, had beneath his apparent strength and ability, the irresponsible uncontrolled passion of a child, the passer-by would have laughed at his informer.

But Master Paul Macdonald knew all about it, though like a wise dog, he held his tongue.

When the delayed lunch was finished, Arrington again demanded recreation for the evening, and Max must choose. Max, understanding him perfectly, had no hesitation.

"Let us give ourselves the inestimable pleasure of taking Miss Kempburn to the Opera."

He was so used to naming his own sweetening to

the hot draught of his Chief's passion, that he was a little surprised at Arrington's hesitation.

"Why Opera?" he demanded shortly.

But Aston was not going to explain his desire to see Anne under the influence of "Vanity," nor was he going to give way an inch on the question of his "rights" to name the "sweet." If Arrington liked to be ridiculous, he must play the game.

"Opera and dinner at the Carlton," he insisted.

"Very well, if you can buy, borrow, or steal a box. Dinner at eight. You'll have to tell her and fix it."

"I hope she won't be engaged."

"She can break it, if she is," returned Paul indifferently.

"A chaperone?" questioned Max doubtfully.

"Poof!" retorted Paul. "With you? Why, you're a chaperone and host in one. I won't be bored. Besides, she won't think of it, she's too sensible."

Later on, looking out of the window, Arrington said suddenly:

"There's Masters; you'd better catch him."

But Max neither moved nor looked, only his face stiffened a little.

"Don't you want to see him?" demanded Paul wickedly.

"There are times when I don't want Christopher," returned his secretary deliberately.

"I thought you were such friends."

"Exactly. We are."

Arrington only laughed, but as he eyed his secretary through the smoke of his cigar, there was both compunction and contrition in his eyes. He had a vague impression of having said something rather unfair about Max and his cousin Christopher Masters.

CHAPTER V

It was an exceedingly small room and exceedingly dirty. Through the door there entered a permanent odour of refuse and humanity too closely packed; the breath of comparatively fresh air, which might have entered through the window, was carefully excluded by a dirty remnant of curtain stuffed into the broken pane. Round the table stood and sat a group of people, grown-ups and children, busy with a heap of coloured paper and cardboard.

For the moment they were not busy but were gazing at the apparition in the doorway, an apparition of a tall thin girl in grey, smiling at them with her mouth, while her eyes were perilously near tears.

"I fear I did not knock loudly enough," said Anne apologetically. "Please do not let me interrupt, I only want to speak to Mary Brown and I can do that while you work."

They resumed work eyeing her suspiciously nevertheless. Mary Brown remained standing with some paper in her hand. She was a thin, drab-coloured girl, narrow chested and untidy, with a strangely expressionless face.

"Has your father got a job yet, Mary?" asked Anne eagerly.

The girl shook her head.

"Job? No, not 'ee. 'E don't want no job. It's lookin' for jobs 'e likes!"

Her voice was bitter and resentful. An older woman next to her nudged her with her elbow and looked deprecatingly at Anne.

"Mary's put about a bit this mornin'; 'ad a sort of

argument last night with 'im. Don't take no notice of 'er, Miss."

Anne's eyes travelled from one to the other. Her quick sympathy understanding instantly the second woman's instinctive loyalty to her class which Mary had betrayed.

"Well, I have a job for him anyhow, and in the country,—to help make a garden."

"I don't care much for country!" returned the doleful Mary; "but thank you kindly for thinking of us, Miss."

"A job's a job," muttered a man at the table with a furtive glance at Anne.

"'E'd never stick to it," said the faithless daughter, and again received an elbow in her side.

"You see——," explained Anne, eagerly anxious to combat the dispiriting reception of the news she had worked so hard to make practicable, "it's likely to be a long job, and working with the gentleman himself, so your father would have time to get into the feeling of regular work again, and the fresh air—and he would be well lodged."

Mary sniffed:

"I don't say as 'ow it ain't kind of you and I 'opes as 'ow 'e'll be grateful, which is more than I've a known 'im, but, bless you, 'e won't work."

"But you'll tell him?" persisted Anne, fighting her rising sense of impotence.

"Oh, I'll tell 'im right enough. Don't you be afraid. But it's fair weather for rheumatics in the country."

"Here's the address. Don't lose it," Anne continued without heeding her. "He will be wanted next Monday. Good-bye; thank you all for letting me come in, I know visitors hinder."

They wished her good-day civilly, following her with inquisitive eyes, but their dexterous fingers never ceased working. At the threshold Anne paused:

"It's a beautiful fresh day outside," she said rather wistfully. "Would you not like the window open?"

Two children looked eagerly towards the dingy, opaque window, but the elder woman looked scared and amazed.

"The draught would blow one's 'ed off 'im, and Jack 'ee's got a cold already, that's why 'ee ain't at school."

She gave her offspring a shove, and he grunted and sniffed audibly to substantiate her words.

"I'm not on the S. A. C. now," Anne assured her smiling, "still I wondered. I don't think he'd make it worse at school, Mrs. Sharpe."

They listened till her footstep was lost on the crowded, creaking stairs and then discussed her frankly, her hat, her dress, her gloves, her appearance.

"Looks a bit peaky," commented Mrs. Sharpe, "not like when she first came here. She'd a colour then, minded me of Jane what I knew before I came to Lunnon. Think your father'll take it, Mary?"

"'E'll take it; 'e won't stick it. Muddy work it sounds."

"Chucking a job away, I calls it," grumbled the man Reub querulously.

Around the door of the house Anne found a group of idle loungers, men, boys and girls, gazing and remarking audibly on something that at once attracted and infuriated them. They were only kept in some semblance of order by the presence and forcible sentiments of a large woman, leaning against the area railings, her dirty hands concealed under her equally dirty apron; and who surveyed the object of their attention with proprietary pride, and occasionally addressed to it an encouraging and affirmative remark to the effect: "She'd come out right enough; there weren't any other way and she'd not come out yet, on

that Mrs. Davit would stake her life or any part of her person!"

Anne pushed through the group, and stood on top of the steps looking over the unkempt heads, so that the attraction became clearly visible, and a smile twitched around her mouth, despite the displeased horror she tried to express.

A very perfectly dressed young gentleman was walking slowly up and down as far as he was permitted by the interested observers, studiously maintaining an air of detraction and unconcern at the attention bestowed on him, which, since he was a singularly modest young man, must have been particularly trying.

"Mr. Aston!" exclaimed Anne in a shocked voice, coming hastily through the crowd with every maternal instinct awake to shelter him from so public—and possibly dangerous—a surrounding. He turned to her and raised his hat as oblivious as ever of the incongruity of the silky glossiness.

"I hoped I should find you," he said with relief. "This kind lady here," he turned to the stout, smiling party who still mounted guard, "assured me you had not left."

"We must make haste back," said Anne hurriedly. She knew far better than Max that it was none too safe a neighbourhood for him to linger in. "Thank you, Mrs. Davit."

Max bowed to her gravely and ignoring with bland superiority the many remarks of the crowd, which made Anne's cheeks burn, he followed her hurried footsteps down the ugly street, and out into a wider, more respectable thoroughfare. Only then did Anne pause a moment to say reproachfully:

"Mr. Aston, how could you be so mad?"

"You were there yourself," he returned.

"That's different—In those clothes!" She looked at him a moment, her face hot again.

"What's the matter with them? It's a respectable working suit."

"But it's not safe!"

Max opened his eyes: "Oh, I shouldn't mind spoiling them. I've others. Besides, I'm on duty."

Anne sighed. It was hopeless to attempt making him understand.

She signalled to a passing omnibus, and he followed her inside meekly but wondering. She would have submitted to a cab to remove him more speedily from his unsuitable surroundings had such a vehicle been procurable in that district.

"But why did you come?"

She jerked out the inquiry in the jolting of the omnibus.

"I had a message for you. It will keep a little though."

He kept his attention on the slowly improving street for the first available cab or taxi. When the conductor came in for fares, he offered him two shillings having no smaller change. The man grumbled after his kind, and proceeded to shovel pennies into Max's grey-kid hand, to his obvious horror. Anne touched the conductor's elbow and tendered twopence with an expressive glance, which the man understood, restored the two shillings and re-gathered in his pennies.

Max gave Anne a little grateful bow, and sighed. Then his face brightened:

"Stop, please!" he commanded, and to Anne merely, "Come."

In both matters the obedience was prompt; in the latter it was also a matter of self-surprise. She followed him from the omnibus into a waiting hansom as meekly as he had followed her a few minutes before. Once in the hansom he explained his presence.

"I had a message for you from Mr. Arrington, and as you were not in Mordaunt Square, I asked where

I might find you. Miss Collean told me you had gone to see a man down in Houndsditch and gave me the address. You had only started a few minutes before I came, so I thought I might hope to catch you."

"The message?" smiled Anne, refusing steadily to enter into argument over his foolishness.

"Will you dine with Mr. Arrington at the Carlton to-night at eight, and go to hear *Siegfried* afterwards?"

"You came all the way down to Houndsditch to ask me *that*?"

"I thought you might return too late to arrange it."

"It's very kind of Mr. Arrington," Anne said a little wistfully.

"It will be very kind of you to come," he returned promptly.

Anne shut her eyes a moment, and her inner sight reviewed the scene she had just left in the stuffy, ugly room upstairs.

"Oh, how *can* I do it? How can any one?" she broke out, all the surging suppressed thoughts of months breaking through her usual brave control. "The Carlton—the Opera—all it means—and then think of that we've left behind! You only saw the outside, and it's not the outside—not the poverty, the lack of things that matters, but what they lack in themselves; they can't even see the ugliness of it all! There must be a way out! It can't be meant to go on so. I know it's not—but that's not enough—I want to find the way *now*,—to stop doing anything else till I do. How can one go on living in the ordinary way—enjoying things—beautiful things . . . with fellow-creatures down there——?"

She stopped abruptly, not because she realised the futility of her words, but the pressure of her thought was too great. It nearly choked her.

Max looked straight ahead, just nodding sympathetically.

Presently she went on in a low swift voice:

"What is the use of doing little things here and there? Helping one individual? It's the order of things that's all wrong. If one takes one person out of that,"—with a backward jerk of her head,—“a dozen will fill his place. It's worse than killing wasps!" She laughed a little unsteadily.

Max gave her a quick anxious glance. His instinct was to let her "have her say," and toss off the result of what he shrewdly guessed was partly the result of over-fatigue.

"Oh, why, why hasn't she any one to look after her?" he groaned to himself.

Anne continued:

"When I began, I thought because I had once seen *behind things*, had had a glimpse of the Unity of the world and God, that I could do something; but it is too much for me, I am losing even that at times. I want others who know with me. It's *certain* relief, permanent change for which one wants to work, planned by some one who knows."

"But why do you come, if you feel it's no good, and it makes you unhappy?"

"For the same reason one gives a tramp a penny, when he has every need under the sun in his soul!"

"I shall go on giving tramps pennies," he said persistently.

"You can't! You haven't any!" she answered laughing, and his face lightened.

"They are so dirty and clumsy," he murmured apologetically.

"What, the tramps?"

"Oh, no, the pennies. Well, Miss Kempburn, I don't agree with you at all. I think people like you just helping a bit do lots of good, as long as it does not

hurt you; but not if it makes you worry about questions you can't solve. I mean,"—he stammered confusedly,—“that—that individuals have just got to do what seems right and let the rest alone.”

“But what is right?” she sighed pathetically. “How can it be right for me to go about to dinners and operas, while Mary Brown is starving?”

“Anyway it's not right for you to overdo yourself and get fogged up like this,” he insisted firmly. “Don't think any more of it till to-morrow. I'm only proposing one dinner and one opera. You'll see the proportion of things much better after it.”

“That's what we don't see; our side of the line——”

He stopped her:

“Please, Miss Kempburn, don't talk over my head, it's not polite, and it's humiliating. Let's talk about *Siegfried* or Wagner, or something easy and simple like that.”

“Oh, I can't go.”

“They have got quite a decent dragon at last. I am sure it will please you. Only I could have given them points, I used to specialise in dragons in nursery days.”

She gave in, or rather accepted the inevitable; and presently, noting the route they were going, expostulated:

“This isn't my way home.”

“No, but it's the way to tea.”

“Mr. Aston!”

“I want you to come to tea with some friends of mine; I've promised to bring you for some time. Then you can go back and get to the Carlton comfortably.”

“But I've lots of things to do!”

He looked at her anxiously:

“About your dress?”

“No, no,” she laughed. “I'm not so improvident as that! Real things—work.”

"Oh, is that all?" he looked relieved. "Real things don't matter, they always wait for us. It's the pretty bubbles it's so hard to catch in time. You'll like the Heriods, Miss Kempburn."

"But I don't know them," she persisted, half laughing, half frowning.

"Exactly," said Max gravely, and added as an afterthought, "They are quite respectable."

She pretended to be reassured and contented no more.

Back beyond the shadow of Westminster. Along the some quaint, silent backwaters, quiet village lanes and little streets, whose traffic is confined to an occasional hurried hansom, or a milk cart. In one or two streets where houses were mostly hung with creepers which even festooned the area railings, lived the Heriods.

As Max: Aston assisted Anne out, a caller came out of the house,—a woman.

She was young, she was dressed elaborately and badly, and she was clearly "impossible." Anne saw that at a glance but she saw also a strained white face, with paint rubbed off in patches on to the tightly gripped handkerchief. The face was alive with emotion, amazement, dazed with wonder, as one who looked on a new world. It flashed into Anne's mind that so might one look awakening from death unto life. She was pretty, Anne thought, sadly looking after her.

Max shot a look half defiant, half anxious at Anne. He raised his hat as he passed the girl and her colour deepened naturally, but he offered no explanation for her presence on the doorstep of the friends he had assured Anne were "respectable." They were shown into a small square hall darkly panelled, with a chequered stone floor. Anne had barely time to take in its cool sweet silence before they were ushered into the drawing-room. She never forgot her first impres-

sion of that room, well as she knew it afterwards. Her consciousness seemed to absorb the simple details unhampered by time. She knew there were only three pictures in the room, an autotype of Watt's *Love and Life*; a wonderful landscape of a wide country-side with a sense of free air sweeping over it; and a picture of a man, the last faced her as she entered, and although she found she was being introduced by Max Aston to her hostess and was answering intelligently the latter's kind welcome, the back of her mind was still occupied and drinking in the magic of the painting . . . There were a few flowers in a china bowl below the picture, fresh and fragrant, and at the other end of the room were books, beautiful within and without. The lady in the grey dress was beautiful too. She noticed Max Aston kissed her hand foreign fashion before speaking, and knew Mrs. Heriod had barely waited for his introduction of her.

"I am so glad to see you, Miss Kempburn. Max has long promised to bring you. If you like the scent of cowslips, will you sit there?"

Anne took the chair indicated and the scent of the pale green and golden flowers suddenly veiled her acute consciousness of the room and its occupants, and overlaid her mind with a thin vision of the old rectory, her father, Naomi. It melted in turn and so she slipped into the atmosphere of rest that was part of the room. Mrs. Heriod was speaking to Max. She was a slight thin woman, dark-haired. At first Anne had thought her quite young, a girl indeed, but with the light full on her face she saw with some surprise that she must be at least forty. She could not tell how she knew, for the face was not lined or the hair grey. It must be by the experienced strength that underlay the serene happiness of her face. And then Mrs. Heriod leant forward and spoke to her.

"You are very like your sister in some ways, my dear!"

Anne gasped:

"Like Naomi? Do you know her?"

"We were happy enough to know her quite well some time ago, but she has so many friends and claims it is not surprising she has not mentioned us."

But Anne was surprised. To know these wonderful people and never have told her, nor to have thought of introducing her! How unlike Naomi! Yet Anne herself had known them precisely five minutes. It is difficult to say which was the most surprising feature about it.

"Naomi is in Canada now," she explained. "She went for two years; the time is nearly up, but though I keep writing to her and saying we want her she makes frivolous excuses about extending her tour to silly little places no one has ever heard of. It's preposterous."

Mrs. Heriod smiled.

"When you write again, tell her we remember her with love, and hope she will come to us again with you."

Max presently related how he chased Miss Kempburn through the wilds of Houndsditch, and Anne retaliated by describing that unnecessary and unsuitable performance from her point of view. Then Max interposed quickly:

"Mrs. Heriod, it is true about that big block of slums, Reddle Street and behind. It's all to come down and be rebuilt."

"And the people?"

"The people are offered temporary lodging for six months in the mysterious garden city—work also to a great many."

"By their landlord?"

"By the man who has bought the slums."

"Bought the slums?"

Both Anne and Mrs. Heriod turned on him with amazement.

"Mrs. Davit is my informant. Had she not told you?"

Max turned to Anne who shook her head.

"I only saw her that moment."

"I met her at the end of the street, inquired my way, was escorted to No. 10, and learnt this from her. The landlord came last week about it."

Anne thought of the upstairs room. The news and all it implied conveyed little enough to some of them. Her forehead contracted in a frown. Mrs. Heriod, watching her, seemed to divine her mind.

"It is a very great scheme, and will do much towards real reform, don't you think?" she inquired. "You know the people better than I do. I suppose one cannot hope for their comprehending assistance, they won't *see* what's being done, will they?"

"That's the awful part of it. If one could only make them help themselves, one could hope."

"Yes, I *see*; but can't one think of them as children whom we only ask to do as they are told?"

"But by what right can we impose our wills on them; they *are* grown up people, not children?"

"Surely, only grown up in the material sense. Don't you think that the inheritance of mind, education, and leisure, and money, which belongs to some, is just *theirs* that they may bring up their 'children'?"

This was a new idea to Anne, she leant forward with glowing eyes and quivering interest. Max watched her with a little covert smile of satisfaction. It was for this he had brought her and, having accomplished his end, he felt at liberty to contemplate and wonder over her from a more personal standpoint.

In the middle of their discussion, Anne looked up

and saw the picture again and stopped speaking. There was a little silence.

"Who is it? What is it?" she asked at length, but her voice was low and constrained.

"You like it?"

"That is no word," said Anne with a deep breath, "but it puzzles me with some resemblance. I don't understand."

"I think you do. It is just one man's conception of the Christ. If it resembles any one it is just that you have recognised the Christ qualities in different men, and they are brought together there."

"It puzzles me in the same way," said Max's voice behind her. "Sometimes I think it is like my grandfather, sometimes I almost see a likeness to Mr. Arrington. Mrs. Heriod may be right but it remains a puzzle. Of course, it resembles your husband, Mrs. Heriod."

She nodded her head, and at that moment the door opened and her husband came in.

He was much older than Mrs. Heriod, a big man with a fine massive head, crowned with a thick thatch of white hair, inclined to curl in an exuberant joyful way. His keen blue eyes had an unmistakable twinkle in them, and there was humour lurking in the fine lines of his mouth, which served as a cover to its tenderness. He charmed Anne at once, but it was only very gradually she appreciated the force of Max Aston's remark on him. Mrs. Heriod explained Anne's occupation to him in a few words that appeared to the explained one to cover the intention and purpose of her whole life, and in a few minutes she was talking to him as to an old friend.

He elicited the story of Mary Brown's father and the job in the country.

"But I doubt if he'll go after it even," sighed Anne. Mr. Heriod stopped her with sharp kindness:

"That won't do. You stultify your own acts when you doubt their outcome."

"It's Mary's fault," Anne protested.

"Had you much trouble to get the job?"

"Well," she said hesitatingly, "there are not many things to be had—the sort I wanted. You see the idea was to get Brown with some one who would really see he did work. But I'm not sure—even then——" She stopped; her brows knitted with anxiety.

"You must not doubt, you must be sure. When I am doubtful about patients I refuse them."

Anne looked up with surprise.

"Are you a doctor?"

He regarded her quizzically:

"A doctor? Well yes, some people call me so," and added gravely with the betraying twinkle in his eye, "My wife is a Healer, you know. Did Max tell you so? That's a dreadfully unscientific thing, and ill-advised for a doctor's wife; naturally, I can't declare myself."

Anne was convinced he was not a doctor but he declined to be drawn into any serious discussion, and realising presently that they had long out-stayed calling hours, she rose to go.

"I was thinking you had forgotten your engagements," said Max rising also.

Anne apologised rather confusedly.

"I hear you are dining with Mr. Arrington. I hope you will enjoy your evening, my dear. Do you like him?"

Anne was conscious of a strange interest in Mrs. Heriod's serene eyes, that somehow counterbalanced the oddness of the question.

"*Like* is hardly an admissible word with regard to Mr. Arrington. Mr. Aston tells me people hate him or adore him, so I adore him I suppose," she answered frankly.

Mrs. Heriod laughed with something of relief. As they bade good-bye she turned to Max and Anne heard her say:

"Pauline Fensward came to-day; you must have met her as you entered. It was good of you to send her. It will work out all right for her, you know."

Anne did not catch Max's answer, but she saw Mrs. Heriod pat his arm affectionately.

When they were once more in the street she asked him what Mr. Heriod was. He hesitated a little.

"Oh, a doctor I think."

Anne nearly contradicted him flatly, and then conveyed her disbelief in deliberate silence.

"He is a sort of mental doctor," Max volunteered at last. "One does not often see him. He's the best man I know—nearly!"

"Who's the nearly?" asked Anne.

"My grandfather. He is dead though."

He insisted on driving home with her, and on their journey towards the north-west, they passed the railed-in gardens of a great house hardly visible from the road save for one row of blinded windows; the closed entrance gates and unmarked gravel, however, witnessed to the emptiness within.

Max looked out curiously as they passed:

"I've often wondered about that house," said Anne.

"It looks so big and secluded and lonely; I am sure no one lives there."

"No," said Max dreamily. "No one lives there now. You see, my Aunt Constantia wouldn't have it, it's too big. My father hates London—and it was embarrassing as bachelor quarters."

Anne gasped. Then she thought he was "being funny."

"It would take a lot of bachelors to fill it," she retorted gravely.

Max gave her a look and saw she really did not connect him with the house. He had forgotten she was no Londoner, and wished he had not spoken. He could not well explain that Aston House was the last thing over which he would be flippant. Then they passed what was apparently the back gates and the taxi slowed down to let a motor omnibus pass. An old man came out of the gates, caught sight of the occupants of the motor and touched his cap eagerly; he took a step toward them.

"To-morrow, Thomas," Max called out as the motor slid by and took up speed again.

Anne returned to her first state of surprise, with a little confusion added:

"You were not laughing then!"

"About the house? No. It's called Aston House, you know. I forgot you did not live just in this neighborhood."

For a while she was silent, trying to fit in Max Aston's secretarial duties with possession or part possession of what she knew was one of the noted "big" houses in London. But the key to that enigma lay in the belief of a dead man and the example of a living one, and all her puzzling failed to solve it. She had just decided she must be a younger son when he remarked casually:

"If there'd been a dozen of us we could have made a decent barracks of it, but there being only Charlotte and myself we've got to leave the poor thing lonely. Charlotte is really a farmer, and she looks after Marden for the family."

He had never spoken of his people before, indeed, it was a most unusual proceeding on his part to mention anything in connection with himself to the outside world. Perhaps there was a vague wish at the back of his mind to regard Miss Kempburn as not of the outside world.

She was not much enlightened, however, and the enigma remained an enigma.

Just as they drew up in Mordaunt Square, Anne asked her companion if any one else would be there that evening.

"There will be quite an efficient chaperone," said Max mendaciously.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that," Anne answered, but failed to explain that she was wondering if Paul Arrington also had unexpected relations such as his secretary had discovered; relations calculated to destroy her sense of personal connection in the community of "workers" in Playdon House.

"Of course, it accounts for him," she thought as she dressed for the evening's event, "and his not approving of Mr. Arrington's work, or really caring about the people. He can't help being born an aristocrat, but he can help being a secretary!"

CHAPTER VI

"My dear Naomi,

"I hate Canada. Mr. Aston says I am unpatriotic, but I cannot believe in its superior claim to your presence. Everyone is asking for you now, but if you do not take care they will forget all about you, myself included.

"Just at present please oblige me by wiping off from your memory everything I've ever said about Mr. Aston. He is the biggest fraud alive; he can't help being a big aristocrat since he is born so. He is really an Aston of Aston House, nevertheless he is just full of human kindness and unselfishness. He is absurd but his absurdity is adorable; it's not even a pose. The way he does not feel called upon to solve things is so comfortable. I wish I did not, Naomi. One thinks one has arrived at a point from where one can view the surrounding country entirely, and instead, the surrounding country has broadened and widened with every upward step and just as much undiscovered country lies around one. I want to do my little part so badly and I can find no certainty that I'm doing it.

"I still work for Dr. Risler if you call such a drop in the ocean of misery work, and I still go to Mr. Arrington in whom I wish you were more interested. Naomi, he is so wonderful I don't even want to understand him. Me! He is like a great strong river; once you are in its power it carries you on with it. There is no going back or escaping. At first I resented the feeling that one had no voice in one's own destiny, but now I find it's just restful. He is very kind in little ways

too. He took me to the Opera the other night after dining at the Carlton—Yes, it meant my very best frock and your topaz necklace. It was quite nice. I had been down to Houndsditch that afternoon. I ought to have hated the comfort and luxury of the evening, but I didn't. At least only for a minute or two when Mr. Arrington would not talk. When he did talk one could not think of anything else. He seems to understand things so easily, but though he is not cynical in the cheap sense of the word, there is always a little bitter flavour in his talk. He helps so many, he gives his whole life to helping the world forward, and yet I feel with all his strength and power he needs some help himself. Mr. Aston adores him and would do any mortal thing for him, so would I."

It was at this point Naomi laid her sister's letter down and looked out of the window with troubled eyes.

"It won't do, it won't do!" she cried to herself. "She must come away, come out here to me. She'll end by loving him."

The thought disturbed her so much that for some moments she could not continue the letter, for fear of further revelation. But Anne had not learnt to translate her emotions into love yet. She still simply hero-worshipped with Max.

"There is a wonderful thing being done in London now, some unknown millionaire is buying up 'slums'; how it's done no one knows, but it is done. He is building also south of London a big garden city, and he houses the people he turns out of his slums here for absurd rents, and employs them if they wish to work. The slums are just pulled down and I hear sanitary workrooms and factories are to be built on the sites. It's a gigantic scheme and probably several rich men are behind it. Sometimes I wonder if Mr. Arrington knows anything about it. It's just the sort of real

fundamental reform he'd approve. And he is so funny over it—a little bitter and scoffing yet allowing it is good. Naomi, I think I would die for a man who could and would do such a great thing as that. But most likely it's several men and one couldn't die for a 'company.' But honestly, isn't it fine? Because you see, if one could make *one* generation live in a decent healthy way, it would do more to reduce vice and misery than four generations of tinkering. They can't live in the present way and be decent and self-respecting and if they are that—they die or starve. But I forgot, it's not your problem, is it? Do you remember the day in the garden at home, when I first told you I wanted to go and do something useful? I believe I do make a good secretary, Naomi, but it isn't enough when one's seen things. One wants to go and shout to the capitalists that they've *got* to help, that the money isn't theirs really. But all the same, I enjoyed the Opera and the Carlton!"

Here Naomi put the letter down again and laughed:

"She's a child still, thank God," she murmured, and forgot a child's capacity for suffering and a child's capacity for energetic thoroughness.

"I've a grievance against you, my sister," went on Anne's letter. "Mr. Aston has introduced me to the Heriods, who say they knew you well once, and were full of inquiries for you and kind messages. They seem to me unique people and it's the loveliest, rest-fullest house I've ever been in. That's why Mr. Aston took me there, I think. He followed me to Houndsditch to give me a message and I was rather depressed and stupid. The Heriods were offered me as a tonic. They are delightful and I dine there to-night. Why, why did you never give me an introduction to them, you selfish Naomi? Have you ever seen *the* picture there?"

"Good-night, my beloved. Do hurry back, and

stop being mercenary; what do a few hundred pounds more or less matter?

"Your loving
"ANNE."

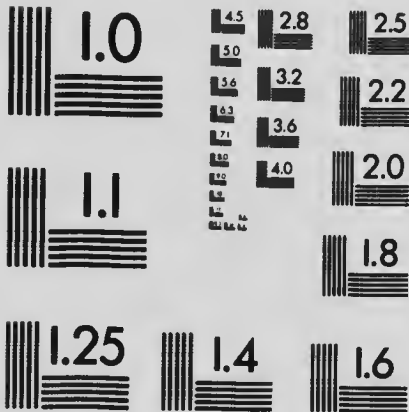
Naomi lay back in her chair with the letter on her lap for a long while gazing out at the gathering twilight. The wide tract of country bathed in purple shadows withdrew itself into darkness which seemed to slide down from far-distant mountains to embrace the fruitful plain. The little hotel stood on a jutting out eminence beyond the town itself, and Madame Matoni's rooms were in the extreme eastward point of the building, with no sign of town or habitation, unless one scoured the plain with powerful glasses.

It pleased Madame Matoni, when singing in the ornate wooden hall in the unseen town, to shut out the painted walls and, in thought, to send her voice out over the vast country even as autumn calls to earth. She had sung here three times and to-night was the fourth and last. She had been sorry to leave, regretful of losing the repose and the kindly audience who offered neither comparisons nor criticisms, but accepted her voice as a heaven-sent joy for their special benefit. But now as she lay there Anne's letter on her lap, she had to fight with the growing restlessness the years were bringing her, against which she struggled as for life itself. So now, with every impulse in her urging her to rise and pace the room, she sat still with locked hands, forcing her mind to frame its thoughts slowly, coherently, honestly.

"First Paul Arrington, then the Heriods! I can do nothing. How can I with my finite sight and judgment, hope to direct or rightly turn events from Anne's path? If I could save her a pain here and it was needed for her perfection it would only be to defer it. It is not to save myself this time; it is that I recognise I do not know enough to interfere, even in the life



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dearest to me. But, oh, Anne, my dearest, if only I knew you were out of his reach!"

The terrible impulse towards restless, useless movement was too great for her,—terrible in this quiet still reposeful woman. She sprang up and walked to and fro, to and fro, pain burning in her eyes as from some fire suddenly fanned to life. Thus, restless, eager, seeking, a deep likeness to Anne sprang to existence. All that was extraneous to her real nature was born of circumstances which were urging her to action, threatening to bring her into conflict with existing facts, pressing her to drag circumstances to suit the setting of her own life. To her, at least, was spared the torturing difficulty of right or wrong decision. She had vowed in past years to lay no violent hands on Fate by reason of what she had seen and suffered from those who did. Her agitation now was a temptation prompted solely by fear. Naomi was instinctively a coward and she knew it. If she faced a danger it was because it appeared to her more terrible to run away.

To and fro, to and fro, she went—to the window opening on the little wooden balcony, to the far end of the long room. The scattered leaves of Anne's letter lay in her path and she trod on them unheeding. It was not Anne, nor Anne's possible troublous future that concerned her now. It was the sudden arousing of an old ill, of a pain and hunger that—even after many years—had power to transform her thus. It was as if the passion and fierce energy of another being had mingled with hers to assert itself at some particular touch.

Little by little her own temperament regained its hold, surmounting this intruding force, so that her steps went slower and slower, and at last she stood still in the middle of the room, and gave a great sigh. A wave of colour tinged her face born of a sense of

shame at her paroxysm of emotion. She picked up the letter and put it carefully away, straightened a chair she had pushed aside, and went slowly to her piano.

Very softly the first chords stole across the darkness. Still more softly the first notes of her pure voice just filled the long room as if moonlight had stolen through the empty windows. It was a *Lullaby* of Henschell's she sang, and of its melody wedded to the music of her voice was born peace.

In the corridor outside her room a man who had been sitting, hearing those soft rapid steps go up and down, heaved a great sigh of relief.

"That's all right," he muttered, rising and pitching the remains of a cigar out of the window. "I'll give her a quarter of an hour more. It won't matter if she's five minutes late for once. But what in the world is up? I wonder if she's heard of Matoni? I'm never convinced the scoundrel won't turn up again or his equally scoundrelly brother."

The wooden hall in the little town was packed that evening with the people who had not heard Madame Matoni before, and those who had but felt they might not hear her again. So full was it, indeed, that they opened the windows, and men paid to stand on the window ledges without.

And she sang—oh, how she sang that night! As if her voice, that dearest, most intimate personal part of her, were an expression of all that men had dreamed of as desirable, sweet, and holy in this tumultuous life.

Malcolm Strangeway listened and nodded:

"No malice then from me to who ever it was," he ruminated. "Her voice was getting just a little sleepy, now it's awake again."

CHAPTER VII

THE Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union lived—when he might be said to live anywhere—in a semi-detached house in the neighbourhood of Primrose Hill. It had a small space given over to untended shrubs and dismal ferns in front, a path of coloured tiles (these were the tenants' one and only addition to the artistic attractions of the residence) led up seven steps to the drab stucco porch, and a front door with coloured glass windows. The dining-room, which had originally been intended for the kitchen, protruded itself by an ugly bay window into the "garden," on a level more or less with the ground. The drawing-room—it had undoubtedly been intended for that—was the owner's particular sanctum. Its shabby contents were in poor accord with the starched, crazy-patterned lace curtains that shielded the room from public gaze. These curtains were a concession to Miss Watt, who being constrained to put up with a small dingy room at the back of the house for a drawing-room, in revenge forced her brother to put up with drawing-room curtains.

"I won't have passers-by thinking we've no drawing-room," persisted Miss Flossie, and Joseph Watt, perhaps feeling he had won over the big question, gave in meekly.

There was hardly a foot of room in the house that did not convey the impression of being used for something for which it was never intended by any rational mind, though there was certainly nothing in either Joseph or his sister, to warrant the deduction that they were not rational, even to the verge of commonplace;

it was just force of circumstances and inability to realise the general fitness of things. Thus, although there was a convenient recess in the rear of the staircase, a row of pegs occupied the narrowest part of the small hall, and the recess behind the stairs was occupied by a bookcase which did not fit into it, and could have found standing-room in the drawing-room, only Miss Watt had no use for it there; it would have jarred with her sense of fitness. As it was a good, old-fashioned bookcase, perhaps Miss Watt was not so far out after all!

On the first landing a fitment cupboard was obviously placed against the wrong wall so as to interfere with the opening of a door. Further—but no! let us respect the privacy of the bedrooms. The dining-room in the depths beneath is more public property and even more glaringly expressive of the general rule. It was so obviously a kitchen. One suspected the linoleum surrounds of concealing a stone floor. The fireplace and overmantel were of very black oak, and the latter had been cut down to fit in an ill-considered way. The blackness of this emphasised the brown dinginess of the walls, which were only enlightened by a set of white-mounted water-colours of distinct merit,—a present to Joseph, who did not appreciate them in the least, but who nevertheless would not have them hung in his sister's drawing-room, where the pale blue walls would have been a fairer background. They were his *possessions* even if he failed to admire them. A sofa which was a disguised bed occupied a prominent place in the room, while the sofa that really belonged to the suite passed its time in idleness in the unoccupied spare room, the largest and best bedroom in the house. Such was Dollis Lodge, or 22 Dossington Road, according to whether you addressed your letter to Miss Watt, or Mr. Watt. It, however, did possess one advantage over similar

establishments in the road, inasmuch as its domestic economy was not in the hands of a small inexperienced, slatternly general, supposed in the fond hopeful language of advertisements to be possessed of all the qualities necessary to lead a successful army to the field against the combined forces of dirt, and disorder and dust. Martha Tidman was not beautiful, she was a long way the other side of forty, she refused to wear black dresses except on Sundays—to her mistress's extreme chagrin—she was taciturn and "peculiar," but she ruled the household well according to her lights, which were such that its reputed mistress could spend the greater part of her time in the more congenial atmosphere of the Hydro and Boarding-house, only returning to Dollis Lodge to gather together fresh forces in millinery and money for the fray.

She was returning home from one such visit towards the end of March, and having paid her cabman with a generous twopence extra—Miss Flossie was not stingy—she tripped up the coloured tile path with her absurd little high-heeled shoes tip-tapping a herald to her immediate arrival. The cabman in return for her gratuity, or because he knew her, followed her with trunk on shoulder, deposited it noisily in the porch and, having rung the bell, departed.

"Martha!" cried Miss Flossie cheerfully, tapping the coloured glass with her umbrella, "come along and let me in, there's a good woman!"

There was a slow, deliberate step within and the sound of a chain being undone.

"Joseph's away then!" sighed Miss Flossie. Her regret though keen arose less from sisterly affection than from financial needs, however.

"If you'd 'a come round to th' back door, instead o' waiting here like a visiter, you'd have got in quicker," was the greeting vouchsafed to her on en-

try; not that Miss Flossie ever had or ever would enter by that humble portal, it was only "Martha's way." She proceeded to drag the box in clumsily and with difficulty, but when her mistress offered to assist, she said sharply:

"Let be now, a-spoiling your gloves! New ones I warrant!—let alone a-cracking your blouse. Tea's ready in the sitting-room, I'm a-turning out the dining-room."

Having got the box to the foot of the stairs, she proceeded to repair the marks of her progress by replacing stray mats and chairs. Miss Flossie still lingered.

"When will Mr. Joseph be back, Martha?"

"Said he'd be back to supper to-night, likely as not he won't."

She persisted in calling the last meal "supper." Miss Flossie referred to it as "dinner"; Joseph vaguely as a "meal."

The sitting-room—otherwise drawing-room—was in perfect order, and a fire burned brightly there. With the exception of its minute size and outlook, or want of it, Miss Flossie found no fault with her "drawing-room," therefore let it rest at that. Martha brought in the tea-pot and was quite ready to linger and gossip, though in accordance with her custom she stood with her hand on the door, as if waiting against her will and intention. Miss Flossie inquired for her brother's well-being.

"He's much as usual," snorted Martha, "a-starving himself to death for them as don't want nothing!"

"It amuses him and keeps him busy," smiled Miss Watt, "think of Mr. Joseph with nothing to do!"

Martha snorted again.

"Queer way to amuse himself, looks more like worritting himself generally."

"Oh, lots of people take their amusements as if

they were a great bore!" explained the more widely experienced woman. "Very often they don't even know they are amused—just like Joseph. How's the cat?"

The talk drifted into domestic topics.

Joseph did return to dinner. His sister found him seated at the table when she came down attired in a high blouse just released from public (Hydropathic) service. Joseph, who was fifty-four, stout and an essentially commonplace-looking little man with the exception of his keen alert green eyes, had not changed his somewhat dingy black coat—he never did.

He accepted his sister's affectionate peck without enthusiasm, asked how she was absently, and devoted himself to eating.

"And what have you been doing, Joe?" she demanded, after rattling through a series of small adventures to which he paid only the most perfunctory attention.

"Working," he returned shortly, "same as usual."

Miss Flossie laughed.

"Well, you enjoy it, you know."

He gazed at her with mouth half open, and some potato poised upon his fork.

"Enjoy it! he grunted. "Do you think I do it for amusement?"

"Well, my dear," she insisted in her irritatingly cheerful manner, "you'd not enjoy *not* doing it, you'd hate *that*, so you must enjoy doing it! Besides, why do it else? You'd make more money at your old work."

He opened his mouth again to protest, but apparently thought better of it and continued his dinner with a grumbled protest.

"How are your ironmakers? As tiresome and quarrelsome as ever?"

"If you mean by ironmakers, the Ironworkers'

Union of which I am Secretary, they are much the same as usual, overworked, underpaid, and sat upon by capitalists." He snapped it out irritably.

"It sounds very heavy!" said Miss Flossie with engaging innocence.

Joseph considered that such indecent flippancy warranted no answer, and continued his dinner in silence. Presently he asked how long she would be at home, and while mentally debating if it were a propitious moment to apply for more personal funds, Miss Flossie replied she did not know. Conversation again lapsed into a thought-ridden silence.

"You want some new shirts, Joseph."

She made the announcement briskly, with the air of one who has got to plain facts at last.

"I don't."

"Martha says you do."

That seemed final. Joseph pushed back his chair, and brushed the crumbs from the folds of his ill-setting waistcoat.

"Get 'em then."

"I ought to get myself some more clothes too," she remarked tentatively. Joseph eyed her with suspicion, and looked her up and down with disapproving eyes.

"What's the matter with your clothes? You are always buying 'em."

"I've had nothing new since Christmas, and my dear Joseph, Martha and I must know best about these things! It's our business. You would not like me to tell you you didn't want new cigars, or new books, or to say when those stupid boiler men wanted new coats, or more beer, or whatever it is they are always fussing about!"

He gave a queer little smile. There was just a substratum of truth in her exasperating nonsense, which he was fair enough to recognise. He was dimly aware she had at bottom some of his own

shrewd common sense well as she disguised it from him, and it reminded him of the proposition he had decided to make her, a proposition so at variance with his rooted contempt for women, that it was significant of the degree he was at present over-working, little as his sister suspected it.

"If you'd take the trouble to learn typewriting, Florence, you'd be more worth your keep, and of some use in the world."

Flossie sat up breathless with amazement.

"Typewrite? I?" she gasped, much as if he had asked her to black his boots.

"Typewrite, and arrange letters, and stick on stamps; lots of women do those sort of things. There's work enough here out of office hours to keep you going, and I won't have one of those official brutes poking round. You are on the spot, much better job than trying to get married. Think of it!"

With which parting shot, he rose and went out abruptly, leaving his sister for once shocked and amazed into silence.

She spread out her hands, kept white by constant use of creams and gloves, and looked at them pitiably.

"Typewrite," she echoed faintly. "Oh, what a brute Joseph can be!"

When she had sufficiently recovered to move to higher regions, she met Martha who informed her "*they* had come already, with their nasty greasy foot-marks all over the hall!"

Miss Flossie shivered and sighed, and retreated to bury her discomfiture in the pages of Marie Corelli's "latest." About ten o'clock Martha put her head in for final orders, and remarked grimly:

"I thought they had all gone, but there's one of them pertinent out-o'-works just come. We'll all be murdered in our beds some night."

Again Miss Flossie shivered and thought with amazed, wondering sorrow at her brother's heartless attempt to bring her into contact with such unrefined associations, which she, had she chosen to remember it, had escaped simply by reason of Joseph's own hard work. For Joseph Watt was of the people he now served. He had been born in an ugly black lane, in ugly circumstances, and reared till he was ten in an atmosphere of grime, smoke, violence, and brute force. Then his father, one of those incompetent consequential workmen of no value to any employer, had been summarily dismissed at a critical moment for his ailing wife, by a master whose system permitted no mistakes and no second chances. They had been improvident, thriftless people; dismissal, therefore, spelt starvation. Flossie had been born in surroundings that offered no incentive to her mother to live. That the baby was reared at all was due to the charity of a baker's wife, with a large heart and nothing to fill it. Joseph continued to work out his own existence, drinking in as his creed the iniquitous power of capital and the close relationship of Peter Masters with the devil. He passed from boyhood into manhood still under the shadow of the iron rule, and knitted himself to the first opposing force to it that came his way—that was the Union of his trade. To that he held with a resolution and grit that placed him out of the rank of lesser men, by it he climbed to the highest point of advantage it offered him. When necessity forced him to take over the care of the fifteen year old Flossie, he had been aware of no discrepancy between the social standing of the ever busy, black-coated brother and the lately dead baker's wife, to whom such distinction had been a fundamental part of life. Joseph still worked at his trade, but it was of secondary importance to his work as Secretary of the local "Union." He was neither thriftless nor improvident, and was

enabled to carry on his sister's schooling on the lines commenced and approved by her benefactress. He himself lacked sufficient education to discern the aimless incompleteness of the lines, and in any case he had too profound a contempt for women to think it was a matter of any consequence where or how Flossie got her schooling, so long as she got some. She got sufficient to keep step with him in his ascent towards position, accommodating herself to each "rise" with an ease which might be prophetic of better things, only it was coupled with a faculty of forgetfulness of the past that was almost miraculous.

Their backward social horizon showed no perspective beyond that of Dossington Road. If she should soar higher on the wings of her brother's little understood ambitions, Dossington Road in its turn would be obliterated from the tablets of her memory, or so coloured by the reflected glories of the new as to preserve a perfect equilibrium with it. Meanwhile, she had an assured content in things as they were, and in her own ladylike position, a content very rudely shaken by her brother's sudden impossible proposition.

Martha had been quite wrong as to the status of her master's latest visitor. The Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union did not receive "out o'works" either here or at the official office. Had he done so, he would have done little else. Nevertheless that evening's last visitor, a seedy morose-looking man, might have passed anywhere as a mechanic out of employment.

"You're late," said Joseph shortly, indicating a big, shabby easy chair which his visitor accepted nervously, and seated himself on the extreme edge of it, rendering it the most uneasy of seats.

"Had to go home and see the wife."

Joseph grunted; not being a married man he did not see the obligation.

The man took a big, clumsy notebook out of his pocket, and turned over the leaves awkwardly. Joseph, watching him, wondered how it was that this man—born and reared and educated with him, working with him in the same grimy shops, dragged by him and with him up the steep ladder of social advancement, seizing the same chances of extra education, and having quite excellent brains of his own—yet remained in the end, to all appearances, just the same slow type of workman commanding neither respect nor confidence. It annoyed Joseph vaguely that Alfred Ellers was what he was, since he was his friend. If he had carried out his vague sense of dissatisfaction to its logical conclusion, Joseph might have found a solution to some of the vast problems he had set himself to solve!

Ellers, however, had his uses. He was a much travelled man, and Watt never found his information inaccurate, or overburdened with the trivial complaints that rendered so much of the Secretary's work exasperating.

Having found the page he wanted, Ellers proceeded to give its contents, adding no word of explanation but pausing between each item.

"Whenshall's men sympathising and are ready. They are working half time; twenty hands dismissed. Quilbury half time but unsympathetic; they say foreign orders are coming in. Batherly three-quarters time; fifty men turned off, so sympathetic."

Watt gave a start.

"Batherly paid a ten per cent. dividend last autumn!" Ellers nodded as if he knew as much, which he did not.

"Ribber's men have accepted a reduction of wages, one penny an hour less, without reference to the Union, they are no use to you."

"Their wages were only put up two years ago."

"Yes, during the boom."

Watt frowned:

"Go on," he said curtly.

"The Crabley men say they'll wait. Melton's the same; they aren't ready, and work is slack. It would mean a long business. The northerners are nothing to them; they are quiet enough at the meetings, outside they talk differently."

"Just so," interposed Watt hastily; he was not desirous to hear how Ellers knew what they said outside the Union.

"They all want time, you can't force things on," concluded Ellers, carefully replacing the elastic band.

Watt watched him expectantly:

"And what of the Masters group?" he demanded harshly.

"Masters's men, as usual, are on full time and full wages, but no new hands go on."

"How many Union men has he now?"

"More than half. He always takes the best in the market. He's given them a meeting-room in Stormly's. Can't think how those works pay. They are making iron frames for the village at the works. Put up job, I expect, to keep work on. They say every penny that's made at Stormly is spent on the place and people. Pity there are not a few more such Masters!"

He smiled crookedly at his own small joke, with one eye kept warily on Watt who did not smile at all, but whose green eyes blinked angrily.

"If there were many like him," he remarked sullenly, "there'd be no work for you, or me, nor any Unionism. Men like him are a real danger. What they *do* is all right, but it's all just a mere chance. It's a damnably dangerous thing. What guarantee does it give for the future? What's to prevent Masters's sons reverting to Peter Masters's system? I tell

you these philanthropists are the devil for us. But you can't make the fools of men see it. They get what they want to-day, and that's good enough for them! What do they care about the next generation? But there's no chance of there being too many of Masters's make," he added, calming himself a little. "It means more than capital, and Stormly's only a drop in that man's bucket. If he makes three per cent. from those iron works it's all he does, yet he's a three-fold millionaire—What the devil does he do with his money? Who runs Stormly for him, Ellers?"

"Fulner. David Fulner," returned the other with lowering brow.

Watt frowned too.

"I remember. He might have gone far if he'd stuck to us."

"He gets eight hundred pounds a year and his house."

Ellers seemed to have a predilection for giving his Chief information he did not want; the frown anyhow deepened. Ellers's face lightened in a sombre, disagreeable way. He had another item of news which he had kept till last.

"They say," he remarked, addressing the far corner of the room, "that Masters is forming a sort of Federation amongst employers. It's hardly likely to be true, but if it were——" He paused.

Joseph Watt sat quite still, the veins in his forehead standing up strained and purple, inarticulate rage and dismay drawing every facial muscle close.

"How dare they? By what right?" he spluttered incoherently. "It should be forbidden by law—it's an outrage—it's—it's——"

His voice trailed off into guttural mutterings. He eyed his companion suspiciously. He had learnt to be suspicious even of his friends now. If the news were true it was too important for an "underman" to

be allowed knowledge of its importance. He pulled himself together with the habitude of one used to emergencies:

"It's probably not true," he said shortly, taking up a pen, "and anyhow it won't matter; our little affair will come off first. Good-night, Ellers."

The other, with no sign of resentment against the abrupt dismissal, bade him "Good-night," and went obediently; but the disagreeable smile on his face increased under the darkness. Watt locked the door after him, and returned to his own room with shaking hands.

"I must see Mr. Arrington," he muttered again and again. "He'll know. It can't be true, they daren't. Good Lord, what's the world about to allow it! It's murder, sheer murder!"

CHAPTER VIII

THERE is no doubt that at this period of Anne's pilgrimage towards completion Max Aston proved a very good friend to her, by keeping alive in her the saving grace of humour, which nearly died a natural death in her very unhumorous surroundings.

As to the part she was beginning to play in Max Aston's life she was even more unconscious of it than he of his share in hers. Her whole attention and interest were centred on the Chief, and she imagined his secretary was likewise engaged, as indeed he was, though with a very different purpose to Anne.

Max watched with growing amazement and anxiety Arrington's increasing ascendancy over Miss Kempburn; the surprise did not lay there, but in the deliberate intention he detected in Arrington's method. His patience when she made mistakes as sometimes happened; his care to make her understand the purpose and meaning of any job on which she was engaged; and above all, his readiness to hear and answer her own eager propositions, which she was apt to let fall with apparent irrelevancy in the middle of discussions on quite other matters. The irrelevancy was, however, only apparent, though it took Max longer to discover this than it did Paul Arrington. Anne had a wonderful faculty for getting at the heart and ultimate aim of any matter without much consideration of the outside aspect; a faculty that was occasionally disconcerting—as when Arrington was explaining the difficulties of introducing a universal Eight Hour Labour Bill, and Anne responded it would be far more simple to alter the curriculum at Public Schools.

Arrington pointed out to her that the poor man must depend on himself and not on the better instruction and widened responsibilities of the rich.

"Still they've got to depend on the rich for wages," Anne urged. Whereat Arrington laughed and told her that she had not learnt that creed in Risler's school. In short, Anne continued to have a quicker insight into the spirit of things than judgment of their material aspect, and was alternately the despair and pride of Arrington who took every opportunity of drawing her out and directing her vision along lines of his own drawing, to his secretary's very great uneasiness.

Perhaps it was just as well for Anne that she was at this time living with extremely practical and commonplace minds. She made one of a household of four women workers in the neighbourhood of North Kensington, her own room being at the top of the house, while below her resided a highly educated mistress from a High School near; and below her, on the drawing-room floor, was a lady of means who devoted herself to church work, spent half her income on indiscriminate charities, and lived luxuriously by comparison with her fellow-lodgers, on the other half. The dining-room floor was the common property of all, and the particular retreat of Miss Collean, the able housekeeper, who ran the house and the Correspondence Columns of at least three Ladies' Newspapers. She was a stout middle-aged lady given to theories and opinions; indeed, she had an opinion for every subject under the sun, and could and would deliver it coupled with much good advice, with or without provocation. Both advice and opinions savoured usually of great common-sense, and the only annoying thing about it was that she never waited for any one else to express them, and thereby secured from the indiscrim-

inating a reputation for originality instead of mere previousness.

One day after an extended morning's work, Anne appeared at luncheon just when every one was finishing or had finished, and Miss Collean offered her tactful reproaches and excuses in the same breath, as she helped her to beefsteak pudding.

"You must not hurry," she insisted in her kind, domineering way; "nothing is so bad for digestion as meat eaten in a hurry. If one is forced to eat alone, a book is often a safeguard against indigestion, by preventing undue haste." She beamed round on her household benignly.

The High School mistress, who often sighed for a book in lieu of company, rose to go, with a curt little excuse; the elderly church-lady remained with Miss Collean, presumably to preserve Anne from the pangs of indigestion by conversation, which unfortunately had usually the opposite effect to a book on the perverse Anne.

"Mrs. Grately has been giving us the most interesting account of the new Garden City," Miss Collean remarked at length, arresting her top-floor lodger's attention at once; "it is really a remarkable attempt to solve the housing problem, without undue pampering of the working class, or denial of the necessities of life, such as plentiful water supply, well ventilated rooms, and general sanitary arrangements."

Anne was emboldened to question Mrs. Grately directly.

"There are trams right into London, just ordinary company's trams like you see anywhere, and some of the houses have gardens and some have not. That seems such a pity, but I am told every one has not leisure to attend to a garden. It's a matter of regret, because I have always understood gardening was a softening occupation."

"Not for the hands," said Anne gravely; "and a neglected garden is worse than none, don't you think?"

"They have allotments," put in Miss Collean quickly, "very serviceable for growing potatoes and vegetables, which, after all, are such wholesome diet and cheap too!"

"There are great recreation grounds," continued Mrs. Grately, "and all the people who use them contribute one penny a week to them—one penny for whatever recreation they take up. There are big public baths, not only swimming baths but hot and cold baths, not public, but in a public building, I mean. The money for that is included in the rent."

"Nothing is more desirable than to cultivate a habit of cleanliness amongst the poor," observed Miss Collean. "And I wonder why they did not put bath-rooms in the houses."

"They would probably not be used for baths," said Anne.

"Then," pursued Mrs. Grately, "there is a hospital but it is almost hidden from sight, right out of the way; one would imagine they were ashamed of it. It is quite a nice building too, but very plain."

"Everything connected with ill-health is better removed from the observation of the healthy individual," explained Miss Collean.

"Surely, that is to cultivate an unsympathetic spirit amongst men?" queried the eldest lady reproachfully.

"What about rent?" asked Anne hastily to avert a discussion on this point.

"I have no head for figures, but I understand there are three classes of houses available, which again seems undesirable, and likely to produce envy and discord, and a sense of superiority in the most fortunate."

"But there are several classes of houses in other cities," murmured Anne.

Mrs. Grately looked at her suspiciously. She did not altogether approve of Anne, since she had discovered she had already sojourned in an excellent sisterhood and left it for more worldly work.

"The Garden City is meant for a limited class of people," she explained, "and really the best houses are quite nice. I should not mind living in one myself—a little taste would make quite ideal homes of them. The second class are certainly serviceable and commodious. The third class are really tenements, two storied flats. I believe they are quite cheap, a shilling a week for a room or something like that. If there are too many children for the accommodation afforded they can sleep at the public *crèche* up to the age of twelve or fourteen, for quite a nominal sum."

"So long as the *crèches* are properly managed and inspected, that sounds a sensible plan," remarked Miss Collean. "Will you have rice and stewed prunes, or tartlets, Miss Kempburn?"

"Tartlets, if you please. It all sounds sensible and nice, I think; and I am quite envious of your opportunity, Mrs. Grately."

But Mrs. Grately was unenthusiastic. She had gone down to the "Southern City" in company with the Senior Curate of St. Agatha's, to verify a distressing report that had reached them, and which was likely to prove detrimental to his accepting a post offered him by the Bishop in the unknown philanthropist's paradise.

"It is all very excellent so far as it goes," she admitted with mournfulness. "That is, from a worldly point of view."

"Aren't there any churches?" questioned Anne.

"There is the most beautiful church there I have ever been in," she paused dramatically; "if that were all—There are, however, other—what can one call them?—places of worship?"

"But not enough for the size of the place?" Anne made the inquiry in all innocence.

Mrs. Grately threw up hands and eyes:

"There are Congregationalists and Methodists—even Salvation Army people! and I believe Romanists too."

"Who's left out then?"

"*Left out?* Oh, my dear Miss Kempburn, and you a clergyman's daughter! Think of the lost opportunity of drawing all those dear misguided souls into *the Church*! An opportunity flung away. It is too distressing! Poor Mr. Feighton nearly wept. He feels quite unable to accept the charge in a place where so little preferential respect is shown to his calling. It is actually proposed to have a common Club Room, where the priest of our church would be expected to meet those other people on an equal footing!"

Anne tried not to laugh. She had seen Mr. Feighton, and recognised an element of humour in the idea, and a spirit of mischief prompted her to add to poor Mrs. Grately's pained astonishment at her unorthodox attitude.

"It would be so enlightening for him and all of them," she said, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. "That is, if they could refrain from quarrelling. They might give each other hints on church management and other matters."

"My dear Miss Kempburn, you have no idea of the crass ignorance and arrogance of these would-be teachers! Mr. Feighton has had considerable experience. He tells me it is impossible to get them even to listen to the most plain statements on the matter of the government of the Early Church, for example."

"But they might discourse on the present Church methods. If they'd only compile a really good service between them, without repetitions or selfish petitions, what an incalculable blessing it would be!"

Mrs. Grately rose and shook the crumbs from the folds of her black cashmere, with the air of one who would free herself from any taint of heresy.

"It is impossible for me to stay and hear such amazing sentiments expressed," she said with such real indignation, that Anne was rendered dumb with astonishment. "To speak of tampering with the Liturgy of our Church seems to me, Miss Kempburn, very little short of—blasphemous!" She sunk her voice almost to a whisper; her eyes sought reinforcement from Miss Collean for the further confusion of this misguided girl.

But Anne was a favourite with Miss Collean, and though the latter was unwilling to offend her richest boarder, she had too much common-sense to back up her naïve intolerance; so she poured oil on the troubled waters as well as she could.

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Grately, I am convinced Miss Kempburn meant nothing disrespectful to the Church, how should she?—a clergyman's daughter. But I assure you a great many people think there are a few little points—rubrics and such like—which could be improved in the Church Service, and young people are always reformers, you know." She smiled benignly at Anne who, half amused and half repentant at the storm she had so unwittingly aroused, looked from one to the other with uncertain purpose.

"I am sorry to have hurt your feelings, Mrs. Grately," she murmured, trying to keep prisoner the amusement which had ousted repentance. "It really never occurred to me that the Prayer Book was constructed after the laws of the Medes and Persians, and I've no doubt you are quite right. It would be quite impossible to ask Mr. Feighton to share even a common room—a perfectly absurd suggestion. It shows how little the ordinary church-goer understands these things."

Mrs. Grately was mollified—she really was—Miss Collean frowned slightly and studied her plate.

The champion of orthodoxy, having smiled a pardon on Anne, proceeded to her room, pausing by Anne's chair to put her wide white hand caressingly on the girl's shoulder.

"Ah, you young people so often speak without thought!" she said, with mild Christian tolerance; "but I am sure in reality you are a very real and wise member of this dear church of ours."

Anne held her breath till the door closed behind the elder lady; then she looked appealingly at Miss Collean, who still studied her plate.

"Do please laugh," pleaded Anne despairingly. "If you don't, I know I shall get cross, and it is such a waste when it really is comic."

This pathetic appeal to entertain comedy could not be resisted; Miss Collean allowed herself to smile, but she shook her head over Anne all the same.

"She is really a very good woman, you know," she said reprovingly.

"I do know! Didn't she help me over that gardener job—and——"

But there Anne stopped and the cloud that had overshadowed her for some days descended with sudden intensity.

Miss Collean, who was really very fond of Anne and had been secretly concerned over her late depression, hazarded a remark on the apparently clouded subject.

"How does the man Brown get on? You told me he took the job."

"To oblige me——"

Anne pushed back her chair. A sudden and unusual desire to see how her troublesome problem would strike the practical Miss Collean seized her.

"Miss Collean," she said abruptly; "it's very hard

to be wise in this world. I thought it was quite a simple wise thing to get Brown a job that would put him under the eye of a good man, and get him into regular work again—and yet the results——!” She gave a little tragic gesture with her hands.

“Isn’t he doing well?”

“Yes, it’s not him, it’s his daughter. They were always quarrelling, but still Mary kept a sort of home together, and she wouldn’t go into the country. She went and lodged with some friends—and she is going to marry Reub Fisher—says she must have some one to look after and she is in consumption and Reub has fits, epileptic—I tried to make her see she shouldn’t do it, and all she said was, her aunt had had fits, and it seemed providential as she’d know what to do—and——”

Anne stopped and leant her arms on the table and her head on her hands, and was silent.

“Well, it sounds very unwise of them, but it’s hardly a question for you to trouble about, my dear,—heredity and that sort of thing.” Miss Collean looked a little red and uncomfortable.

Anne turned a grave face to her.

“Don’t you see, if I had left matters alone, she would not have married Reub, probably not married at all. What chance is there for their children,—aren’t I responsible?”

“Responsible? My dear Miss Kempburn, what an idea! but they may not——” She stopped.

“Oh, yes, they will, heaps—their sort always do,” said Anne with great candour, and such real anguish in her eyes that Miss Collean quite started, and for once found nothing to say, practical or unpractical. As she said afterwards to a friend, “These were subjects, at which one is *bound* to draw the line!” Somehow Anne realised there was no help there, and she rose with a sigh.

"Well, it's not your doing anyhow, Miss Collean, why should I trouble you——? There's the post."

She collected her letters on her way upstairs and mounted with a heavy heart. For in truth the trouble she had just fruitlessly laid out for inspection was a very heavy one to her, and had disturbed her rest for many days, a dreadful nightmare that seemed the immediate result of her own interference in other people's affairs.

It is really youth, not age, that suffers from the sense of responsibility. The regeneration of the world rests on young shoulders, and even when suppressed into the limits of immediate enjoyment, this sense of responsibilities remains a load only the confidence of youth can lift. Every example of vital youth is at heart a hot-headed reformer bent on improving the state of things into which it has dropped, but age, having learnt its lesson, is well content to be a wise workman in the world's workshop, satisfied that as much material as is necessary for its job will be dealt out by the Providence, Fate, or the Great Master of all, without need of struggle or strife, yet now and again casting kindly, tolerant eyes on the wider arena, where youth is training with so much clamour and martial music for the ultimate quiet corner in the workshop.

Thus it remains a fact that every Great Reformer and every Great Politician must remain a youth at heart, if accomplishment is to walk on endeavour's heels. The ardent confidence and lusty fury of youth which have withheld him from the quieter workshops will subordinate the years to its own ends and bring about the gradual enlargements of the confines against which the soul of youth revolted. Philosophers and philosophies accomplish little because they see so much. They preach from within the confines and no walls fall down before their gentle blast, nor had it entered

their minds even to desire so confusing a result. They shed their load of responsibilities when they set about discovering a theory of life.

The adjustment is all very fine and exact; Youth by force of clamour and onslaught always making fresh room for itself in the workshop, and Age carrying on serenely the work it so noisily prepared. So the equilibrium is preserved, and in time the whole work, which no man has yet fully apprised, will fit together and the sons of the morning shall shout for joy.

But Anne was still carrying the heavy panoply of youth, the kindly years had not yet taken any of the burden on their shoulders. Responsibility was additionally heavy to her because though she had seen a goal towards which to struggle, she had as yet found no certain path towards it. Every path seemed beset with dangers and pitfalls. Even Mr. Arrington's paths as explained by himself only carried conviction because they were his, and it was already easier to take his wisdom for a certainty than to make new roads for herself.

What would he think of her present problem?

She smiled a little to herself, it required no great stretch of imagination to make that out.

Mr. Aston was the person she ought to ask, the one who would really be able to find out a sane point of view. It was somehow very comfortable to know that.

She pulled up an easy chair to the open window, and lay back so that she saw nothing but sky,—no roofs, no chimney-pots, nothing but sky and that blue. And gradually her mind reverted to the Garden City, and the unknown mind that was carrying it out, that had planned it from the first. Her eyes grew soft as she thought of it all.

"It is splendid. I wish I knew who it was. I wonder if Dr. Risler knows? It's wonderful to think

what it means—they are really poor, these people—and then—The children, the little children from the pavements, gutters, awful playthings those streets, the noise and crowd, the *dirt*—to roads, lanes, gardens, flowers, clean sky, air, quiet and *mud*—I don't mind mud, it's not like dirt. Oh, if only I could help!"

Her hands moved restlessly and a touch reminded her of an unopened letter she still held.

It was a large card of invitation and bore this inscription:

"Mr. Aston

"At Home,

"To-morrow, Wednesday, April 15,

"at 4 o'clock.

"Aston House.

"To meet Mrs. Heriod.

"Omnibuses from Mordaunt Square pass the door.

"Taxis stop there!"

Here was a delightful change from the distressing problem of Mary Brown and the future inhabitants of Houndsditch. Anne was quite as pleased with the invitation as delighted with the manner of it. She answered it at once in the affirmative, and went out to post it. That done, she extended her walk to pass by the boundaries of Aston House, and from one point of view found she could discern the shrouded windows. It certainly looked rather forlorn and, try as she would, she could not connect the spacious, sheltered house with Max Aston. There was a remoteness about it that she could not recognise in him, although his people and his life outside of Playdon House were every bit as strange to her as Aston House itself. She noted with care the passing omnibuses, and smiled a little over Mr. Aston's obvious preference for the stopping taxi, which certainly did stop in rows outside the surrounding railings.

CHAPTER IX

PAUL ARRINGTON, walking through the Park with his long easy stride and oblivious air, nearly walked into Anne Kempburn. Macdonald greeted her with a friendly salute of a fluffy tail, and his master looked her up and down in his unabashed way with the obvious assumption he had every right to approve and criticise her.

"It is all much too good for Houndsditch," he said, smiling approval.

"I don't think I agree with you," Anne replied with a little laugh, "but it's not going to Houndsditch. It's going into Society; into quite high regions too."

Arrington turned and walked beside her towards the sun, Macdonald panted his thanks to her in an unheeded monotone. His master's pace was a little trying to short legs, and it led to nothing, so far as Macdonald could distinguish but a curtailment of time for exercise. Miss Kempburn's pace was more like that of the dear Max; moreover, her direction led away from home and the rather boring basket.

"Too high an altitude for me?" demanded Arrington.

She looked at him with the same quiet criticism he had bestowed on her.

"I shouldn't think so," she replied gravely. "It should be a good fit from the outside appearance."

"Then can't you take me too?"

"But I suspect you do not want taking," she answered, forgetting she had met him coming from the direction of Aston House.

"Not at all. I was returning to a forlorn tea with Macdonald. At all events allow me to postpone that

movable meal till you safely arrive at your royal residence."

"It might be royal for the amount of ground it occupies," Anne said dreamily; "but also it may be very ugly inside, I don't know yet." She refrained from giving him either permission or refusal to escort her; every imaginable reason for refusal shrank to nothing before a sense of elation, which gilded the beauty of a beautiful afternoon. Her femininity was pleased to recollect her dress became her well, and her childish vanity pleased that Mr. Arrington had approved it in his sweeping glance. She was keenly alive to the pleasure of his companionship and entirely unaware, as Paul was not, of the comments it excited in a little group of people standing by a carriage and pair, which they passed as they turned off along a side walk that appeared to lead into a vista of blue.

"That's Arrington, by all the Powers!" exclaimed a man.

"Who's the girl?"

"I don't know. I saw them at the Opera with Max Aston and——"

"Oh, if Aston approves, he is safe enough," laughed the first man, and then turned quickly to the occupant of the carriage. "Pardon, Mrs. Wyatt, I forgot he is your nephew."

"Pardon for a compliment?" she answered gaily. "I'm not offended with Max's reputation! But I believe I can tell you who the girl is, as I am going to have tea with her. She is a Miss Kempburn, and is a sort of under-secretary at Playdon House."

"Mrs. Wyatt, did you look at her?" queried the young man gravely.

Mrs. Wyatt laughingly admitted she had looked at Mr. Arrington instead.

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed at tea then; whatever and whoever Arrington's fair companion

may be, she isn't a secretary or typist or anything like that!"

"The point isn't the girl," said a fair, rather peevish-looking woman seated beside Mrs. Wyatt. "It's the fact that Mr. Arrington was seen with any woman at all. I thought there was a story about him and that singer Madame Matoni, who is supposed to have broken his heart or something."

Mrs. Wyatt gave an involuntary movement as if some thought had struck her sharply. She said quickly:

"Oh, that was a long time ago, even if it were anything but a story. Well, I must go and verify my opinion, Mr. Archdale. I promised Max to be early. Shall I drop you on the way?" She turned to her companion questioningly.

Meanwhile Arrington and Anne continued on their way till they entered Kensington Gardens, ignorant and indifferent to the chatter their appearance had caused.

Anne talked of the Spring, and the treasures to be found in country lanes now, of the sprawling babies on the sooty grass to the right, debated how they got there, and what Peter Pan would do with them if they were left there after lock-out time.

Paul knew nothing of Peter Pan, and had to be enlightened.

"There will be no room for Peter Pans," he said mournfully, "when Dr. Risler's useful and sensible commonwealth occupies the ground. Fairies and Fancies will be warned off State children's curriculum."

Anne laughed gaily:

"You can't rule fairies and fancies out of existence unless you rule children too!"

"Nothing is further from my wishes. I was talking of Dr. Risler's republic."

"The only really fatal thing," said Anne thoughtfully, "would be if the State suddenly conceived the idea that the cult of Fairies and Fancies was stimulating to the imaginary and inventive faculties, and *did* put it on the curriculum; that would mean a very long funeral for Peter Pan and the rest."

"Let us hope the Educational Board will break before then. You have not told me where you are going, Miss Kempburn."

"To Aston House, to tea with Mr. Aston."

"With Max?" he asked, genuinely astonished, and then recovering himself. "What a very improper proceeding on his part."

"Not at all," protested Anne hotly. "I have it on the best authority that he is a most efficient chaperone."

"I shall forget Max forgot my invitation," Arrington answered hastily. "It's no use his being a chaperone if there are not two people to be chaperoned."

"There is Mrs. Heriod."

"Who?" Arrington almost stopped. The change in his voice amazed Anne, but she repeated the name obediently, and added in explanation the Heriods were friends of Max, and he had introduced her to them and that they were delightful.

"They knew my sister, too," she added.

"When is Madame Matoni coming back to England?" asked Paul, staring straight before him.

Anne sighed:

"I don't know at all, she won't say. She seems to like Canada, I hate it, though Mr. Aston says that's unpatriotic. It isn't anything to do with patriotism, I tell him it's jealousy."

"You are fond of your sister, Miss Kempburn?"

There was a hardness in his voice that jarred on her; she did not answer him at once, did not intend to, it was so trivial a question; yet in the end, per-

haps because his intention to have an answer was stronger than her whim to refuse it, she said:

"Naomi has been mother and sister in one to me. I am naturally fond of her."

They spoke of other matters, but a little later Anne found the subject had again drifted round to Naomi, and she spoke of her Canadian experience, and the kindness of her present agent Malcolm Strangeway.

Mr. Arrington was no longer abrupt. He seemed, indeed, quite interested. She had seldom spoken so much about her sister to any one.

At length he stopped.

"You are nearly there now," he said. "I must go back. Tell Max I am deeply hurt that he did not invite me, I hope you'll like Aston House."

"Is it nice?"

He considered a moment:

"Yes, I suppose it is. Its chief treasure, however, is the memory of two of the finest men who ever lived. A great many people are glad it's not let to the New Society. It's a pity Max doesn't take it. Good-bye."

His farewell was alarmingly abrupt, but before she had time to frame a mental remonstrance she saw Mrs. Heriod approaching.

It was a very quiet road, with innumerable houses to let on either side, opposite them was a narrow walk running between black palings capped with bushes. It might almost have been a country lane. Anne suddenly realised whatever Mr. Arrington may have thought of her knowledge of geography, his desertion would have left her in a predicament, but for Mrs. Heriod's timely appearance.

She explained matters ruefully:

"It's all very well to say I'm nearly there, but I haven't the least idea where is *there!*" she concluded laughing.

"It was very inconsiderate of him," agreed Mrs.

Heriod. "I daresay, however, he never imagined that everyone does not know every way to Aston House!"

"Mr. Aston was far more considerate, he told me 'buses passed and taxis stopped.' I hope they'll stop till I return."

Mrs. Heriod appeared to know her way quite well. She led Anne down the narrow lane, out into a private-looking road, in at a small iron gate which led directly into the grounds of Aston House.

The shuttered windows were all open in the front which partially dispersed its grey austerity.

Wheelmarks had ruffled the smooth gravel, and the front door stood wide open. Max came out as they approached attended by a magnificent deerhound.

"Aunt Constantia has come," he exclaimed gleefully. "I told her half past three, so as to be sure she'd arrive by four. One has to be so careful when one knows two really punctual women. I've ordered tea in Christopher's den because it's the only room we use at present."

There were treasurers of art in the lofty hall and long corridors, but Max led them straight on into a small sunny room, facing south with wide open windows leading into a garden, that seemed many miles removed from London.

On the threshold of the window there stood a woman. She flashed on Anne as the most beautiful thing she had ever seen, and yet in writing to Naomi after, she found no word that would imprison her beauty on paper. She might have been Max's sister, in the lack of any appearance of age on her radiant face; indeed, the latter treated her with a very un-nephewly way.

They quarrelled over the tea-table. Mrs. Wyatt asked her why the best Dresden china tea-service was not brought out in honour of their guests, and Max said he'd ordered the Spode because he preferred it.

"Am I to have no authority in my own home?" inquired Mrs. Wyatt tragically.

"Am I not to regulate the establishment of my father in his absence?" persisted Max.

"Establishment!" scornfully repeated his aunt,

"An establishment of one old woman, one old man, one boot boy, and a dog. I can't imagine what Nevil is thinking about."

"I can," said Max, handing tea. "He's thinking of 'The Real History of Don John of Austria.' The proofs are just out."

"Well, Renata, or Charlotte, or the rest of you," replied Mrs. Wyatt, not to be drawn from her grievance.

"My mother is thinking of how she can trick my father into taking meals at reasonable hours, and Charlotte is thinking of cows, or drains, or fences; it's always one of those things. My sister Charlotte, you know," he added turning to Anne, "has ousted me from my proper post as land agent for my father, and insists on managing the property in her own way. She's older than I and much, much bigger, so I had to give in, and turn out."

"And a nice muddle you'd have made of things if you hadn't," retorted his aunt. "And I would much rather have had to bring out a girl having only boys of my own. Charlotte is a most excellent land agent, but as a woman she is a fraud."

Anne was amused but a little amazed at them. Mrs. Heriod evidently was used to their ways, also there was what Anne called "an understanding" look in her eyes. Indeed, Mrs. Heriod knew very well their nonsense was a little forced, assumed in part to disguise from themselves and the world the silent influence that deserted house had, on every member of the Aston family.

Anne delivered Paul Arrington's message and ex-

pected to see Max covered in confusion real or assumed. Instead he looked thoughtfully across to Mrs. Heriod, and it was Mrs. Wyatt who added to his condemnation without impressing him in the least.

"You know it is one of the few real pleasures of life left me to meet Mr. Arrington," she lamented. "And then you go and neglect a chance like this. It's wronging Mrs. Heriod too. I'd have loved to introduce them to each other."

"Since that is a privilege denied you, you might suggest entertaining Mrs. Heriod some other way."

"I wouldn't presume in your father's house," was the quick rejoinder.

"Dear Aunt Constantia, will you do me the honour to assist me in showing our guests such poor treasures as may be worthy their notice?"

"Very well, since you speak so prettily," she rose and led the way back to the hall.

Whatever might be the daily condition of the house, there were no traces of shrouding wrappings or closed blinds about it now. The light streamed in through large, opened windows, and touched with revealing fingers, treasures which made Anne's beauty-loving heart quicken with pleasure. Mrs. Heriod had apparently seen it all before, and Constantia Wyatt made that a pretext for entrapping her into a pleasant alcove for that talk she had promised herself, when she accepted her nephew's pressing invitation to play hostess to his host.

"She is quite charming and original too, but what does it mean Mrs. Heriod?" began Constantia quickly, as the other two passed out of earshot. "Of course, I'm furious with Paul Arrington anyway, he promised to look after Max."

"I think he does—or Max after him," said Mrs. Heriod with her quiet smile. "But what do you want

to know? If Max is in love with Miss Kempburn, or she with him or what?"

"Everything," sighed Max's aunt. "You see I feel so responsible. My brother and sister are not the slightest good in these practical matters. Max must marry some day; he is the dearest of boys, but one never knows when a woman comes along; it would be too disastrous if he married the wrong person."

"Who would the wrong person be?"

"Any one who could not run this, and—all it means," she concluded hurriedly, with a little wave of her hand towards the far end of the corridor.

Mrs. Heriod's face was illumined with sympathy. She knew so well how much it *did* mean—Aston House and its memories! The real anxiety was clear to her. It was not a fear of a *mésalliance* from the social point of view that troubled Max's aunt, it was a more noble fear for traditions and ideals that were the richest possession of a notable family.

"Dear Mrs. Wyatt, I can't tell you much. You want to know if Max is in love with Anne Kempburn. I think he is, but he himself hardly knows where he stands. I am sure she is not in love with him yet. She is quite incomplete on that side. I am not even sure she can fall in love like ordinary girls, but I can tell you that if Max married her, you might give Aston House and all it means in her keeping without fear."

Constantia gave a very genuine sigh of relief. She had complete confidence in her informant, save that she did not believe it lay long in any woman to resist Max's wooing, a belief she kept strictly to herself.

Meanwhile, the objects of her anxiety wandered through the spacious rooms, and Max showed the girl treasures she had never dreamed could be seen outside a museum.

"Did you live here when you were a boy?" she

asked, noting he occasionally hesitated for the whereabouts of some item of interest.

"No, we were brought up at Marden, hardly ever here. My grandfather, father and uncle lived here."

There was a note of constraint in his voice. He put down the ivory statuette he held very carefully.

"I should like to tell you about them, Miss Kempburn," he said quietly, and she knew he was going to speak of something which was very intimate and real. She was too genuinely interested to wonder at his intention, or see what was involved in accepting a confidence that obviously was not often given.

"Cæsar—that's my father's elder brother—died three years ago and my grandfather six months after. Cæsar was paralysed, through a shooting accident—he was always on his back. The two lived here mostly. They have created a sort of atmosphere—tradition—I can't quite explain, but there's nothing splendid and noble and good in the world that doesn't seem centred with them. Cæsar adopted Christopher Masters. If it had been any one but Christopher how jealous we should have been! But that was just it, one couldn't be jealous, nor mean, nor petty, near them." He paused.

"Come and see Cæsar's room, will you? It's just as it was when he left it. He died at Marden, not here, my grandfather too. But this was so much their home, none of us can bear to live here yet. Perhaps Christopher will take it next year."

He led the way down a corridor as he spoke and opened a door at the end. It led into a still spacious room, with tall windows opening on to a terrace; a few wonderful pictures, that made Anne gasp with surprise, and through all a sense of air and light and life. It was in no way the room of a dead man but rather a room only momentarily quitted, awaiting its occupant.

There was a long sofa by the far window, a low bookcase of books near. On a table stood a sketch of a man's head, with red hair and a wonderful vital beauty that spoke of strength of purpose, strength of intellect, strength of body.

"That's Aymer—Cæsar we called him," said Max, "it was done about five years before he died."

"I thought you said he was paralysed?" she asked quickly.

"He was."

She drew it nearer her and continued to look. It attracted her strangely. The impossibility of connecting the face with anything but abundant life dispersed the little conventional touch of constraint she had felt at being shown a dead man's surroundings. She really understood Max so little, that she thought it was just like him to show her so frankly and openly what was evidently so sacred a memory to him, as earnest of their mutual friendship. She too would introduce him to Naomi when she returned.

"That is my grandfather," said Max indicating a portrait over the fireplace, and Anne gave an involuntary exclamation:

"But it is—no, it's like the picture in—Mrs. Heriod's!"

"I knew you'd say that. Only you'll find that picture like so many people. Still the artist knew my grandfather."

The longer Anne looked, the more real and living became her vision of the two men who had lived here and left so treasured a memory behind them. It was only afterwards she recollected Max had really made no attempt to explain either of them. His words had been of the briefest, most guide-book-like description. The pictures, the room, and his unspoken knowledge had done the rest, for from now onward, Charlie Aston and Aymer Aston were personalities in

Anne's life. The love and endurance which they typified became a measure for lesser things, for the undying worth of a noble life is the standard it sets for man's achievement, the highest standard of all seeming at times a height beyond our unambitious reach. Anne knew the standard set here was very high, knew also she herself owed it something already in her friendship with one man who measured his world by it. Aston House became a place of mark to her also, but also she failed completely to connect Max Aston with it. The only thing in the place that seemed to be a personal belonging of his was the big deerhound, who followed him about like a dignified shadow, and who must, Anne felt sure, nurse an undying jealousy of Master Paul.

"They have tea together sometimes," Max explained. "I don't think Forrester is really jealous, he hasn't many petty vices. He goes to Playdon House on Master Paul's birthday and such occasions, but the Chief's a little afraid of him I think."

The idea of Mr. Arrington being afraid of anything living, amused Anne greatly, besides Forrester was so courteous in manner that really a babe might have considered him on an equality.

They had strolled out of the open windows into the garden and the two elder women were advancing to meet them.

"It's forty years since this house had a mistress," said Max suddenly.

"It will have one in time," Anne replied gently, her kindly eyes meeting his calmly but smilingly.

His too were full of kindness but something lay behind that which escaped her.

"I hope so," he said simply.

At that moment Constantia Wyatt joined them.

Fresh from the room with its memories and portraits, Anne awoke anew to the fine beauty of the

woman before her. Some of the vitality of the red-haired man in the smaller picture lived here also, something of the wide tenderness and humour of the portrait of the elder man too; but beyond that there was an elusive perfection of some feminine quality that seemed to Anne the epitome of all she had heard of beautiful women. She recognised the phrase "beautiful women" was something more than a phrase, that it had a significance spiritually as well as physically.

Constantia Wyatt's beauty was not in the least the spiritual type, but it was a perfection of the feminine, such as is rarely seen. Anne felt instinctively here was a mistress of Aston House. Could Max find another such type? She thought of these things as she whizzed homeward in Max's "stopping" taxi; wondered also a little why all these people were so kind to her,—Mrs. Wyatt, the Heriods, Max himself. She felt vaguely they were helping her, though she hardly knew to what, except the knowledge of how many good and beautiful people there were in the world.

"But I should not have known any of these but for Mr. Arrington," she thought finally; "he has been kinder than any one. There wasn't the least reason for him to have bothered about me at all. It is always the people who are doing the great big things who find the time to do the kind little things. After all I think I must be on the right line at last. Mr. Aston's grandfather and uncle seem to have understood, and Mr. Arrington was their friend! It would be splendid to be quite sure, and not have to decide things for one's self any more!"

CHAPTER X

AFTER that visit to Aston House, Anne went less frequently to Houndsditch and more often to the 'Heriods', and sometimes to Constantia Wyatt, who was invariably kind to her, but maintained an entirely neutral position with regard to her nephew's suspected wishes.

Anne did not entirely desert her dreary slums but she could not quite shake off the harassing impression made by the Mary Brown episode. She realised, moreover, she was walking amongst pitfalls and snares, and this increased her deep-seated longing to find a perfectly safe guide outside her own personality. It was small wonder she fell more than ever under the spell of Paul Arrington's influence, more inclined to find his dictum a final court of appeal that absolved her from the responsibility of decision. Max Aston got more and more uneasy and had to derive what satisfaction he could out of the significant fact that, after any very deep discussion, she invariably turned anxious eyes to him to see how he was affected. It was small comfort, but it was something, for she remained vaguely dissatisfied if she saw he did not agree.

Max by this time was very seriously in love with Anne, though by reason of her position in Playdon House, he felt bound to preserve a dead secrecy on the matter. He even at times tried to argue with himself, and to drag into view the points on which their minds were most widely asunder but it was useless. Love proved no affair of the mind, declined to be reasoned with, or argued away. Instead, it presented him with a perfect vision of Anne as mistress

of Aston House, which over-rode all nearer contingencies and endued him with a sort of desperate patience as he stood by, and watched Arrington's clever manipulation of her mind to his own ends. What those ends were puzzled Max day and night. It was not the mere overthrowing of Dr. Risler's influence, nor the forming of a disciple to his own undefined creed. That would have been tolerable as a temporary affair, but it appeared as if Arrington was actually trying to attach her to his side by the personal magnetism he so generally discarded.

There were days—bad days—when Max thought the Chief was in love with Anne, other days when he was equally sure he was not. Strangely enough he never allowed himself to speculate over Anne's feelings. Eventually she would be his if he could possess his soul in patience, and on that dim surety he had to rest content.

Arrington was not in love with Anne, but he worked as hard to obtain a position of command within her soul as if his whole future existence depended on it. And in his eyes it did.

That vague design which had risen in his heart on his first interview with her had taken definite shape long ago. Anne was for him the stepping-stone by which he would ultimately step back to the kingdom from which he had banished himself. He meant no harm to Anne, however; she was merely Naomi Matoni's sister and that alone was a passport to his protection, even if he were not helping himself in serving her. In days not far distant, Naomi Matoni would be in London again, and Paul Arrington was training a potent embassy to carry messages of peace from him to her. That was, if Mrs. Heriod would give him time. It was the appearance of Mrs. Heriod that had scared this big man as he went from Anne's side on the day of the tea-party at Aston House. It was

Anne's increasing friendship with her that woke misgivings in him as to the well-being of his future plans. If Mrs. Heriod told Anne Naomi's story before Naomi returned, then Paul Arrington was well aware the younger sister would be a barrier and no stepping-stone towards appeasing the passionate desire of his heart.

He thought of these things seldom, yet persistently adhered to his plans, flinging himself meanwhile into the intricate paths of politics in a masterly non-committal manner. Then suddenly one day Anne herself all unconsciously showed him to what a perilous pass he was bringing his honour.

A certain statement concerning the affairs of a great labour employer had been made in the Labour Parliament that was absolutely false. It had passed unchallenged. But the reports of the speech came to Arrington and it fell to Anne to make certain extracts from it. She noted Arrington's heavy exclamation mark beside this particular statement, and asked him why so wrong a state of things was allowed to continue.

"It doesn't exist," said Arrington scornfully, "it's a thundering lie!"

"But didn't any one say so?"

"Apparently not."

"Didn't they know?"

He looked up at her sharply; she was standing by his table, the slip of paper in her hand and a certain grave horror in her eyes that half disarmed his anger at her insistence.

"Some of them did, of course. They didn't choose to say, that's all."

"But it ought to be contradicted. Lots of those who heard it might believe it."

"That's Z——'s look out."

"He may not see Labour papers, besides he's abroad."

"Well, Miss Kempburn, it's not my concern, is it?"

Anne did not reply at once. Max, who was standing behind her, watched her anxiously. Would she hold to her own idea or let Arrington's indifference over-ride her judgment?

And Arrington was suddenly aware of a conflict in which he was concerned. He pushed back his chair impatiently.

"Well?" His voice was harsh and peremptory.

"I daresay there are lots of people who could contradict it, but they haven't, and you could; you could make him say it wasn't true at the next meeting."

Arrington laughed.

"I should be a busy man if I went round making people eat their own lies."

"Still this man knows you—it's—it's *your* party—the Labour party mustn't do it. They accuse others of it."

"Theoretically you are right, but the mistake lies in thinking any one takes speeches like that seriously, as anything but clap-trap and jargon. There may be half a dozen other lies I don't recognise in it."

"It was tremendously applauded," said poor Anne. She was weakening, and Arrington knew it and frowned. Max stared steadily out of the window. Arrington made his last shot in a tone of tolerant amusement.

"You evidently think my silence is equivalent to dishonour?"

Anne flushed hotly.

"Mr. Arrington!" she cried, and the hand that held the fatal cutting shook.

"Well, don't you?" he insisted lightly.

"You—you couldn't do anything not honourable. It is just that I don't really understand the right point of view I suppose."

Max turned sharply away, more disturbed in mien than by any outburst of temper from his Chief.

For the first time in his life his feelings towards Arrington were entirely hostile.

Arrington himself merely said curtly:

"You can't expect to see every point of view," and went on writing, while Anne returned to her table still too engrossed in trying to get the right perspective of the thing to be conscious of her own appearance in the matter. The more she puzzled the less she was able to see any standpoint but her original one; and since she had no opportunity of speaking to Mr. Arrington again, she wrote him a quaint little note, which he received just before dinner, stating she was sorry to appear so pigheaded, but she really couldn't help wishing still that he would find it possible to expose this one particular lie."

Arrington, who had been in a most unapproachable mood all day, read the note with an unwarrantable sense of relief, stuffed it into his pocket and went in to dinner with a comparatively clear countenance rather to Max's surprise. Max was dining "in" that night and had foreseen an uncongenial repast. It proved quite the reverse until just at the end when Arrington said abruptly:

"Are you going to marry Miss Kempburn, Max?"

Max was so taken aback, that for a minute or two he really could not speak.

"I shall be annihilated by your people if you do," went on Arrington drily, "and I can't prophesy what will happen to you."

"I should be too fortunate for prophecies to touch me," said Max, at last, very quietly. "But at present it's life and not mankind that interests Miss Kempburn."

"She sent me word she had not altered her mind about that absurd affair this morning."

The touch of contempt he tried to introduce into his voice did not deceive Max, whose face lightened perceptibly.

"You agree with her?"

"I am glad she agrees with herself," said Max steadily, and then having no desire to discuss Anne with his Chief or any one, he remarked the store of cigars was running low.

"Order some more, then," returned Arrington rising. He took a step away and then swung round on his heel again.

"Some one will have to influence her some time. Why don't you do it yourself, if you don't like my doing it?"

But Max stared steadily at his empty glass and made no response.

Arrington went out into his own private den and caught up the evening paper put ready to hand, but it failed to interest him. He pitched it away with impatience and began striding up and down restlessly. Presently, he opened the door leading into the larger room where they all worked, and switching on one light stood looking across the dim space towards the table where Anne usually sat.

"She'll have to go. It's all very well now, but a month later she wouldn't have sent the note. I don't want her conscience, besides there's Max. The Astons will never forgive me. It's a confounded nuisance—but she will have no power with——" His mind halted and stumbled over Naomi's name from force of habit that had erected a barrier between it and him. "It's a question of my own interests after all."

He laughed a little bitterly, and walked across the shadowy room, pushing intervening chairs impatiently away till he stood by Anne's place.

"I shall use her just the same," he muttered re-

sentfully, "only I'll tell her myself first. Meanwhile *she* wouldn't like the socialistic nonsense, besides Anne's too good for it—— If I leave her to the Heriods now I'll lose her altogether; they'll soon see where she stands."

His mind was working in jerks. He was at war with himself for the half considered purpose to which he had bent Anne's mind. At war with her for her unconscious revelation of his success and for her equally unconscious call to his honour.

"She shall go to Watt. That will cure her, he won't convince her that black's white!" He gave a bitter little laugh again. "The Heriods will convince her white is black. She shall stand on her own feet. Watt is rough but absolutely safe, and she'll see the real thing."

Again he stopped.

The slow ticking of a big clock seemed to enhance the silence of the house. He went out into the hall. There was not other sound anywhere, nor sign of life. The dim emptiness of it all found fellowship in Arington's heart. The strong purpose of his face gave way to a look of passionate hunger. It had always been his iron pride to regret and repent of nothing in his stormy life. Yet all his adamant will could not control that desperate hunger for all he had—of his own doing—missed. Hunger which went out into the solitude of the great house and returned to him unsatisfied.

"She must go," he repeated. "She's too fine workmanship for me to manage; but, oh God, what I would give to keep her here, a safe hostage!"

CHAPTER XI

MATTERS had not been doing well at 22 Dossington Road, at least with the master of the establishment. True, he had come home earlier than usual from the headquarters office of the Union in the City, and had been on fewer journeys; but he had worked in his own dingy room till early morning hours and was—as Martha put it—"as irritable as a game bantam," a bird to which it must be confessed he bore not the slightest resemblance.

Miss Flossie, though less perturbed and harassed than her brother, was also not without her little flicker of annoyance. She had purchased the necessary shirts, and incidentally the clothes required for a prolonged stay at Buxton, but the propitious moment for signifying her intentions to Joseph did not appear. Joseph's hold on the purse-strings was tight, and since Miss Flossie was quite dependent on his bounty, her movements were equally at the mercy of his caprice. His ultimate generosity to her was a more sure quality than what she called his reasonableness, meaning his will to listen, and reckon up in his shrewd head the advisability of her various plans of campaign. He was quite anxious to see her married, occasionally a vague wonder flitted across his mind that she was not. He supposed she was "smart" and no more objectionable than the rest of the female world, and she certainly applied herself to the task, and application, in Joseph Watt's creed, is half of the word success. So he wondered vaguely in a perfunctory manner when her rustling entrances and exits called her to his mind for a moment. Just at present, his

"caprice," as Flossie said, his "affairs," as he would say, allowed him no leisure to consider her at all. Miss Flossie treated his wild proposition to make use of her with the contempt she considered it deserved, and he refrained from further allusion to it, perhaps realising its inutility. There was no doubt, however, that at this time he was seriously overworked, and unable to hold the balance between his official duties and the ambitious schemes he furthered in his private hours.

There was a wave of depression passing over the iron trade, over trade generally, in fact. Great concerns were shutting down, running half time, turning off hands in every direction. The local secretaries of the big Unions were inundated with bitter complaints of grievances beyond their scope to soothe and rectify. The temper of the workmen generally was in a state of nervous irritation, little to be wondered at perhaps, in those who lived in daily dread of losing daily bread. In such times it was to their Unions they looked for assistance, accrediting with almost childish simplicity the evil times to the master's cupidity or bad management. It is then that the Manager and foremen stand in perilous passage, knowing the necessity of care and economy on one side, and understanding the uncertain human tempers on the other. But harder still was the position of the local secretaries of the Unions. Accused of being traitors to the men if they ignored their ill-considered wrongs; of being "paid agitators" by the masters if they attempted to set them right; at all times bound to hit the happy medium between discretion and neglectfulness in their reports to headquarters. Truly a position that was no sinecure to those who honestly believed in the importance of their work and the world's need of it.

The Society of Ironworkers, as Joseph Watt's special Union called itself, was, so far as its members were

concerned, spoiling for a quarrel; and, so far as its leaders were concerned, struggling to preserve that quarrel for a more propitious occasion. To such leaders and men who thought only of the immediate concerns of their Union the issue was simple enough. They existed to preserve fair play and a decent life standard for those who had not leisure or brains to preserve it for themselves. But with men of Joseph Watt's calibre it was a very different matter. He was not only deeply bitten by the socialistic creed, but he had been driven along that path by personal hatred and personal suffering. The object of the boy's hatred might be dead, but all that he stood for was greatly alive: Money and Power of it ruled the world, Money and the pride of it trod the worker under foot! It was no longer the man but all he stood for, against which Watt would direct the resentment of years. He named no names when he spoke for his Union in the Workmen's Parliament, or moved among his fellow workers. He was considered a temperate and safe man, so he rose high, and his Socialism had at least the merit that he did not desire other men's goods for his own benefit. Luxury, or even what a considerable portion of mankind calls comfort, did not appeal to him. It was not men's possessions, but the power they gathered by such possessions against which he cherished his bitter wrath; the power that had enabled a hard man to turn adrift without warning an incompetent workman for a trivial fault, and the price of starvation and death to his family.

But in the responsible position to which he had climbed, with the well-being of thousands on his shoulders, such a man was dangerous, the more so that he could keep quiet and hold back from open profession when the ranks of Trades Unionism were torn with the conflict between the old traditions and new socialism; the new using politics as weapons, the

old concerned only with such parliamentary proceedings as immediately affected the working man.

He was doubly dangerous in that he nursed ambitious plans too big for the grip of his square hands, though within compass of his wider vision. Time after time Watt had felt himself on the brink of a movement which would shake the Power of Capital far and wide. Time after time he had held his hands and tongue. He would have said the opportunity was not quite ripe, never did he confess, nor did he even know, that what really held him back was a Will and Purpose stronger than his own; the will and purpose of a man who was the very epitome of that Power he strove to break.

Paul Arrington had crossed Watt's path—or Watt his—at a critical moment in both their lives.

Arrington read the man through and through, gauged his actual ability, his weakness, and above all his danger. Arrington was thirsting for some outlet for the pent-up passion he had martyred to his blind pride, and he found it here. He flung in his lot with the advanced Labour Party, because by its very contact with this, his pride would suffer as the rest of him suffered, and he would gratify it with nothing that should abound to its credit. He never appeared openly, never appeared to dictate the Party's measures, yet he swayed them this way and that, now urging forward, now restraining, unguessed and unseen, a Power behind a Power, swayed himself by no motive he recognised except the pleasure of controlling the many-headed hydra; seeking no recognition, save that of his own sardonic mind, of the sceptre he held. Truly if Joseph were a dangerous man, Paul Arrington was a peril.

A few evenings after Alfred Ellers's visit to Dossington Road, Watt was sitting at work trying vainly to reduce the voluminous pile of correspondence to

combatable proportions. But he gave only half his mind to the task, the other half was occupied with the negative results of his inquiries concerning the Ironmasters' Federation, of which Ellers had given him so vague a hint. He had sought vainly for confirmation of so desperately important a crisis; none had been forthcoming. For some hazy reason lodged far back in his active brain he had refrained so far from seeking Arrington, as had been his first intention. Paul Arrington did not like unfounded rumours any more than he did himself. It would have been preferable to face him with documentary evidence, for Arrington had once said, and Watt had believed him, that such a Federation was out of the question.

Meanwhile the northerns were pressing for a strike, the midlands hanging back, and Watt hampered with incomplete knowledge of the forces against him was in way to be crushed between the two, before he could bring off the stupendous *coup* for which he had laboured so long and which at last had seemed on the eve of fulfilment.

"I must see him now, and hear what he has to say," murmured one half of Watt's brain; while the other, intent on the pile of letters with which his hands were busy, muttered: "All these are really official, how the beasts get my address I don't know." He bestowed various bundles in various pockets, pushed the rest into a drawer and locked it. Then he stood up hesitatingly.

A mouse squealed behind the wainscot and Watt jumped like a nervous girl.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he commented savagely. "This cursed Federation idea has got on my mind, and it's all nonsense, it doesn't exist except in Ellers's imagination. I'll not mention it to Mr. Arrington. If it's real he'll do that quick enough.

But I'll go there, perhaps he'll give me a hint how to keep these fools of northerners quiet for a while, he knows a thing or two about men as I've proved."

He still stood awhile ruminating and tugging his short beard. He was at a loss to account for his reluctance to visit Arrington, uneasy at the vague suspicions filtering through his mind, suspicions for which his daily experience offered ample excuse.

Finally, however, he conquered his indecision, worst symptom of all of his present state of mind; and looking into the drawing-room to warn his sister if any one called they'd better come to-morrow, he went out in the street and walked with quick jerky steps towards the tram terminus. Eventually the tram gave way to an omnibus, and the omnibus again was relinquished for feet, and Playdon House reached as a clock near struck nine.

Mr. Arrington was at home, and Mr. Arrington would see Mr. Watt, and presently Mr. Watt's short square figure was established in a suitable chair with refreshment to hand and a cigar that had not come from the neighbourhood of Dossington Road between his lips, and the big man opposite watched him through a haze of smoke.

Joseph Watt was sufficiently a natural animal to appreciate the comfort of his surroundings, he was also sufficiently independent of them to make no empty comparisons between this and his home; nor did it strike him that his creed was to render them impossible comforts for every one, probably he would not have minded if it did. And Arrington ruminated as he watched and listened to the stout little man's outpourings of trouble.

"The Northern Unions are almost beyond control and their grievances are genuine enough. It would make a good business locally, that's all. Where are we then? Funds gone, nothing *real* done!" He leant

forward spreading out his square fat hands on his knees.

"Look here, Mr. Arrington; the numbers in the Union have gone up by leaps in the past two years. If they'd wait we can do the Universal thing, and we are bound to win. North, South, and Midlands together, why we'd corner them! Make them see we were something to reckon with, get a really decent wage standard!" He sunk back again, the momentary excitement dying down, and concluded irrelevantly: "But they won't wait, won't act together, won't join up."

"Who holds out?"

Watt mentioned some big centres and employers, and added, casually gulping some whisky:

"And Masters's men at Stormly and the Steel Axle Company, and the rest of it."

Then Paul Arrington, who knew his story, understood just how matters stood, and foresaw how the personal factor was likely to ruin even Watt's well laid plans. He sat silently awhile, viewing his visitor through a haze of smoke, smiling a little sarcastically, turning over the probabilities in his own mind.

Such a *coup*, as Watt had faintly foreshadowed in his inarticulate way, would, indeed, shake the labour world to its foundation. Arrington had foreseen it for years. He had ambitions regarding it also. Since it was inevitable sooner or later, he meant it to be sooner, while he could set bounds to its dangerous tide, turn it this way or that, allowing it the satisfaction of its legitimate desires and saving the employers from disaster. For he had at his command strokes of diplomacy unattainable to men like Watt, and he had no personal interests in the game beyond the gratification of his sense of power. He employed none and was employed of none, hence he held himself as the one impartial judge, able to regulate the scales of jus-

tice. And now another man by a simple, natural action had interposed a new barrier between capital and its threatened destruction, which would nullify all his carefully laid plans, and threatened his supreme position as arbiter of the fight.

Probably if Christopher Masters had chosen to take him into his confidence the Federation of Ironmasters would have been a surer, firmer thing. But Christopher Masters chose and had always chosen to regard him as the possession of the other side, an honourable enemy but an enemy. In his eyes the Union stood between the employers and their men. He disliked that in principle, but acknowledged mournfully there *were* cases when it had been useful. That anything—one man in particular—should stand between the Employers and Unions was to him to build confusion on confusion. He had no room for Paul Arrington in his direct dealings with the world, and he had emphasised the point in his omission to consult him on the subject of his growing Federation, that was on the eve of becoming a legalised instrument. He had formed it because he believed concrete action is as good for preservation as destruction, and trade must be somehow preserved from a tyranny that was too often blind to its own interests, and totally blind to the moral and wider interests of the country.

Arrington had been in the mood to dismount his "hobby" for good and all, but to-night sitting, watching and weighing the problem offered by the stout, ugly little man opposite, he again got astride and was in mood to ride it far with tightened rein. It would be a duel between him and Christopher Masters in the end, and his conscience reproached him a little as he thought of Max.

The personal factor had crept in here too! "This Federation of Masters's," he said slowly, "will upset your ideas a bit."

Watt started.

"It's true then?" he said hoarsely.

"It's true, or will be. They aren't making any noise about it, or any secrecy either. That's Masters's way. If it becomes as big a concern as he intends it will be a stiff fence, Watt, won't it? He's not the only millionaire in the iron trade, and suppose they really hold together?"

"They won't," returned Watt uneasily. "Our funds too are good,—if I keep them quiet now."

Arrington laughed softly.

"Good against Masters's millions which he does not spend on himself? I congratulate you, Watt."

Watt again moved uneasily.

"They'll have to give in if it's universal," he muttered.

"Or sacrifice their works. What will you ask?"

He asked carelessly as if little interested. Watt looked around cautiously; he had never voiced these big dreams of his to a living soul. It was significant of his confidence in Arrington that he did so now.

"Raise the minimum wage, eight hours, and the right to become shareholders in concerns over a certain size,——"

"Good God! Are you mad, Watt? The right?"

"Why not? if it pays to give it as a sop to stop the starving mouths, then it's something to which we've a right in every one's interests. It's a step towards state control which will come.—There are other things, small things—a discharge sheet for every man, for his Union to see, wider recognition of Labour Bureaux, and regulations of short time. Decent dining-rooms—perhaps housing regulations."

His eyes were dreamy now, his voice trailed off, his inner vision busy constructing a labour world that bore no likeness to that in which he had been reared, such a world as perhaps already lay in the matrix of

Time, and which he would bring to an untimely birth, an abortive weakling unable to stand the crude handling of unenlightened humanity.

The two men talked on long, Watt with the outpouring of an overstrained mind, shadowing visionary things, defending vague possibilities, ever skirting and then avoiding close issue with the matter of the Ironmasters' Federation; Arrington listening closely to catch the practical thing beneath the vision, leading him on to discover his real resources, skimming over dangerous ground, suggesting here, turning a phrase there to safer purpose, all with the air of one receiving a confidence of no personal meaning. It was Watt's affair. It helped Watt to talk it out, he was Watt's friend, hence the discussion. Such at least was the impression on Joseph Watt's mind.

"It comes to this then," said Arrington at last; "you must keep the North quiet til' the autumn."

"How?" demanded Watt, dropping from exhilarating heights to present dull difficulties.

"There'll be a General Election in the spring, if not in this autumn. The nearer you drive it to that, the quicker the settlement. The country won't stand both together."

"They think we're hoaxing them. They believe in nothing but their own needs."

"Oh, tell them to play the game decently," returned Arrington carelessly. "They'll understand that."

"Play the game!" cried Joseph, bounding up. "You've hit it! That's the line to take, that will fetch 'em. Yes, yes, they'll see that."

He went off into an explosion of little grunts and nods and helped himself to more whisky.

"Couldn't think of any line to take, got stale I suppose," he said presently. "The work's heavy. Look here!" He pulled a bundle of letters from his bulging pockets. "See that? Those are all from private

individuals, marked private! Look at them!" He thrust the bundle into Arrington's hand.

Arrington read them, laughed in his short way and dropped them into the fire.

"Good God, what are you at!" cried Watt, with a desperate grab towards the flame. "Don't you know individual letters are the very devil if not answered."

"Flies of Beelzebub rather!" scoffed Arrington. "No wonder you are stale, Watt, if you sit up all night answering that rubbish."

"But I *know*," repeated Watt dismally. "I've done it myself, written—and heard nothing."

"Your sins have found you out, then. What you want is a private secretary of your own."

Watt shook his head.

"There's more than enough of them now."

"I didn't say official. I mean a nice tame private secretary to sort out your letters, to answer some of the rubbish and burn the rest, to generally keep your papers and engagements and that sort of thing."

"I had thought of a typewriter," began Watt haltingly.

"That's no good. The secretary I am going to saddle you with can do more than that, and won't take sides, and won't give you away, and won't be got at, because she's a lady. Half your visitors will be afraid of her because she's polite, and the other half will despise her because she is a woman."

But Joseph Watt exhibited no enthusiasm but rather inexpressible dismay at the rosy prospect held out to him.

"Women aren't much good," he muttered lamely. "I don't hold with them mixing themselves up with politics."

His vague proposition to his sister seemed quite impossible now, he could hardly believe he had made it seriously.

"Politics?" queried Arrington, raising his eyebrow. "No, I agree with you there! This is a lady who has a harmless wish to be useful to humanity. She can certainly be useful to you. Now listen, Watt, I don't generally give you bad advice; trust me now, and a month hence you'll thank me. Think of it!—with a lady seated in the corner of your room, Can-sham and his crew won't dare to blackguard you, or take up your time with their damned personal nonsense. You will have an excuse for dismissing any subject you don't want to discuss, or she'll provide one if you arrange a code. At the same time all your private work will be kept as well or better than the official work, you'll have time to breathe and think, and you'll need it you know," he added significantly.

"Well," grunted Watt gloomily, "good or bad, I can't afford it."

"I can. By the way, I've got Orton a job; he won't badger you any more."

"He won't take it!" His voice was almost pathetically wistful. Orton had long been a thorn in his side, a man with too good a memory and no elasticity of mind.

"Forty-five shillings a week to look after a small toy foundry run for experiments in Ireland."

Watt's face brightened. He weighed the matter gravely. Not the question of Orton's employment, however. He thought he had been offered a bribe which he had not, though Arrington was quite aware he thought so, and left him with that impression. Eventually Watt discovered his objection to female secretaries was not of such pronounced growth that it might not be uprooted, at least temporarily, while his opinions on the subject of Orton were far more assured.

Gradually he found himself discussing quite other matters than his own, harmless queer subjects like

Wireless Telegraphy, Mr. Durant, and the last Polar Expedition. This was the inevitable end of business discussions with Mr. Arrington, and it never ceased to be a matter of mystery and surprise to Watt, first to find himself speaking on such useless topics at all; secondly to find he had anything to say on the matters. Perhaps he had nothing worth chronicling but he did not chronicle that, and his visits to Playdon House were more influenced by this astounding mystery than he himself believed.

He was brought back to the humdrum subjects of his life presently by his host's casual inquiry as to what he thought of the new Garden City Scheme.

"A sop to justify some millionaire's squeamish conscience," retorted Watt contemptuously.

Arrington eyed him critically.

"You don't think it helps materially then, destroying slums and providing decent dwellings, and a fair start in life?"

"Oh, yes, if there was enough of it," Watt assented grudgingly, "the *thing's* right enough."

"Done by the wrong people, eh?"

"No one knows who does it! Clemens and Carten are carrying the matter through. It's a big job and not much in their line I hear. They don't deal with millionaires generally."

"Perhaps it's not a millionaire."

"Need be! What I can't make out is how he induces Bedminshire to part with the ground quietly like that. A lease falls in and it's gone before one can look round."

"You've studied the subject?"

"Yes, and given it up," grunted the other. "It's some fool philanthropist or a company. What's a Garden City for those slum dregs? It will be a rubbish heap in a year!"

"Next generation?" suggested Arrington. "De-

cent rooms and tolerable air, necessities of life, water and all that?"

But Watt wasn't to be drawn. He did not approve of Garden Cities nor philanthropy detached from Socialism and would not argue on it.

Still when he wended his way homeward by walk, bus, and tram, an idea connected with the objectionable scheme for the mitigation of human misery crossed his mind and occasioned him some anxious thought.

"He hasn't money for it, and it isn't his line, but yet—— I'd stake my life he knows something about it! If it's a company, what do they mean to get out of it? There's no money in it yet!"

And perhaps he was tired, or the aroma of Arrington's cigars, or the sedative effect of the latter's desultory talk acted on his jaded brain, or all reasons together, his mind hovered round this point of Arrington's possible connection with the Garden City till beneficent sleep overtook him.

CHAPTER XII

It never seemed to occur to Paul Arrington to question his right to dispose of Anne's future according to his own imperial will and wisdom. He was so accustomed to assuming the command of all that came within the circle of his influence that it had become almost an unconscious habit. At all events, though he so plainly faced his lack of right to interfere with Anne's conscience, he saw no reason why he should not direct her life as long as it was to her benefit. That his own ultimate benefit was also served had really less to do with the matter than he insisted to himself.

The day after Watt's visit, when Max was absent on some business, Arrington came across to Anne and watched her fill up forms and schedules with apparently meaningless figures.

"Miss Kempburn," he said in his authoritative tone, "stop doing that nonsense. I've something to say to you."

She obediently laid down her pen and listened.

"You've no sense of proportion," he grumbled. "You work at those figures as if they were of supreme importance."

"Mr. Aston said they were."

"What right has he to dictate to you what to do with your time?"

"Your vice-regent?" she inquired, with a faint little lifting of her brow, wondering where this tended, and a little frightened for no very adequate reason.

"For that matter why do you let me dictate to you either?"

But he smiled as he spoke because it was a very idle question not to be taken seriously. She leant her chin on her hand and looked at him. The idle question, just because he had spoken it, had meaning for her. Her mind rapidly recognised the dictation that lay in it, the implied command to stand on her own ground, to offer him some reason for her very presence there, besides his will.

"You offered me the work, Mr. Arrington," she said, a little pleadingly. "I was glad to do it. It's something that has to be done by somebody, and it's on behalf of those who want helpers. It mayn't seem interesting to you, but—well, it has to be done. It isn't made-up work."

He nodded, but would have been better pleased had she cared less to make him understand. It seemed to him she wanted his assurance of the righteousness of her outlook and he would not give it.

"I can't see it matters in the least," he returned ruthlessly. "You ought to know you could do better work than that."

The desire to convince him of her sincerity and purpose grew apace, became a necessity for which she must dare greatly, for her own conviction in the matter was linked perilously near to his.

"You don't believe me," she said quickly, and her voice was very earnest and eager, so that he was compelled to listen with more than patience.

"In the old days," said Anne, "when men really could build houses for God, every man who laboured over a stone desired that *his* stone might be rightly chiselled and well laid, and be fit for the place; and so when all was finished, the whole was worth something because of the individual thought that had been built up in it."

She stopped, looked at him a little appealingly, and then away.

"Well, go on," he insisted ruthlessly; "finish your allegory."

"I'd rather make a stone smooth for this cause,"—touching the paper of Labour statistics as she spoke,— "than build myself a summer-house, even if it is foolish and unenterprising."

"And you think the Temple of the Social Democrats—that it will come to—may really be worth something built so? Well, Miss Kempburn, I am not going to undeceive you; you must find out for yourself. To carry out your own allegory you've smoothed enough stones, you'd better go into an architect's office and see what you think of the plans."

She saw what was coming now and felt strangely numb and passive before what was really a heavy blow to her.

"If Aston and I can find you no more stones, would you go back to Dr. Risler's?" he asked, with some curiosity.

She shook her head.

"No—not Dr. Risler. The Heriods perhaps——"

He interposed sharply.

"No, not the Heriods, they build only cloud houses—nebulous visionary palaces, no good to you."

He paused, hoping she would appeal to him to help her, but she remained silent and somehow he knew she would not ask then, or ever. He resumed therefore, in a casual manner:

"I want you to go as secretary for a time to a man who is overworked and wants some one trustworthy to manage the private side of things for him. He puts a lot of the stones of your temple together," he added, in the slightly mocking voice which she had long ago learnt to discount as indications of his real thought. "The pay's the same as now, little enough, but it means all your time, the advantage for you is you'll see the inner working of things and be able to

judge for yourself if they are all to your fancy or not. He's not a very polished man but he is absolutely honest and trustworthy. You've seen him, I expect, even if you haven't spoken to him. I don't know that you'll like him, but that's no matter. He's Secretary to the Union of Ironworkers and he rose from the ranks, so you'll be as near your beloved working-man as you like—Watt is his name, Joseph Watt."

A vision flashed across her of a short, stout commonplace person whom she had seen several times entering and emerging from Mr. Arrington's private sanctum. It was so preposterous a vision she almost smiled. There was nothing real about it at all.

"He won't want you for a fortnight," concluded Arrington. "You'd better take a holiday and run down to Applebury to see your father to-morrow. I shall be at Bannerton for Sunday and I'll come over and see him if I may. You'd better come here to-morrow morning and see Watt yourself."

He left her abruptly and returned to his own table.

Anne sat still for awhile looking across the length of the room at him. Apparently he was busy writing—yet she almost fancied the left hand was otherwise engaged. Master Paul Macdonald, crouching close to his master's chair in defiance of rules, knew it was.

She finished her work mechanically and when Max Aston returned he gave her more to do, and spoke of certain papers to be got ready by next week. She did not undeceive him even when the arbitrary master of her days had gone. The knowledge of what it meant to leave the great quiet room and all in it was mounting to her consciousness like a cold flood; she scolded herself for her folly, tried to insist she had known she was only "a temporary," but reason or philosophy would have nothing to do with her case. The fact remained she was happy here. She liked her work; she liked her surroundings; she liked Master Paul

Macdonald; she liked Mr. Aston; she liked—yes, even in her rising resentment with him, she *liked* Mr. Arrington, who so callously swept all these pleasant “likes” out of her life without why or wherefore, who arranged her future and disposed of even her leisure! She was profoundly and even unreasonably indignant with him. She told herself she would decide nothing about going to Mr. Watt until she had seen him. If she liked him, well and good; if not,—she would do something else. The Heriods were far more practical than Mr. Arrington thought!

In short, before she left, she succeeded in working herself into a very healthy revolt against the arbitrator of her fate.

Max followed her into the ante-room when she left. He saw clearly enough something was wrong, and entertained a faint hope she might confide in him.

She said nothing, however, so he asked her if she thought of going to the Heriods to tea that afternoon. She had not so intended but it sounded a good plan, so she said “Yes.”

“I thought of calling myself,” he remarked casually; “if you have no objection?”

“How should I object? Or why?” Her voice was as nearly cross as he had ever known it, and she redeemed it almost instantly.

“Considering I owe them to you, I can hardly set up a monopoly, can I? It was one of the kindest things you ever did, Mr. Aston.”

He laughed.

“A reputation for kindness is easily won! I introduce quite a number of people to them.”

Anne recollected a visitor they had met leaving the house on her first visit; that too was some one of his sending. But Max was too concerned at her unusual manner to remember anything else, and when she had gone he went back to his work greatly perturbed,

The Chief was in one of his most irritable moods that day, with a mind to wreck some of his own most cherished schemes. He told Max he was going out of town for the week-end, and swore furiously when Max tentatively suggested previous engagements.

"Cancel them," was the peremptory order. "Am I to slave for these blackguards, year in and out, with no life of my own, damn them!"

It was no use to argue with him in this mood. Max cancelled the engagements with infinite tact and spent the rest of the day exercising the same tact with less success on his Chief.

About three o'clock Arrington went out, and his secretary, by that time completely exhausted, flung down his pen on the desk and his person into a big chair and whistled softly.

Master Paul bounded across the room and on to his knees, that particular whistle and that particular chair meant thrilling romps, and mad gambols, that preserved the incarnate spirit of puppyhood in the quadruped and eliminated the sense of crushing age in the biped.

"Master Paul, you are a duck of the first water," said Max at last; "as a reward here's your ball." He took out a coloured india-rubber ball from the basket of a bronze nymph on the mantelpiece, and rolled it across the room, to the exuberant joy of Master Paul. Finally, it rolled under a bookcase and the joyous barks turned to yelps of impotent rage. Max was forced to get a stick and "poke" for it, and at last, to lie full length and "spy" for it, and at this juncture Mr. Arrington returned.

He was about to address his secretary's table when he saw it was deserted; at the same moment the ball being dislodged Master Paul testified to the success vociferously, and his master perceived his secretary before he was in turn perceived.

Max was ruefully brushing his knees, when Arrington's voice brought him to 'tention like a soldier.

"Good Heaven! What a pandemonium! Go to your basket, Macdonald. Is this how you amuse yourself generally when I go out?"

He looked as if he'd like to order Max to his chair in the same tone he had ordered Macdonald, but he didn't; perhaps he knew he would not be so promptly obeyed.

"Not *generally*," said Max pleasantly; "only I rather wanted some exercise."

"Oh, you wanted exercise!" repeated the other sarcastically. "Well, you had better go and brush your coat, it's got dusty with exercise."

Max went meekly, but the corners of his mouth twitched a little and broke into a rueful smile once he was safely out of sight.

"Just a toss up how he takes it!" he murmured. "I'd no idea he'd come back so soon but I feel a jolly sight better, it's worth it."

A minute or two later a perfectly grave and immaculate secretary was seated at his table busy at work. From time to time Paul Arrington looked across at him but kept silence, but at last he caught Max Aston's eye straying to the clock. He was supposed to be free at four for a couple of hours.

"Max!"

"Now for it," thought Max, obeying promptly.

Macdonald hearing his step peeped round the corner consciously and cocked his ears as one who would say: "It's all right, old chap, I'll stand by you. Who cares for a wiggling? Rats!"

But Arrington's first words so dumfounded Max that, for once, he never saw Master Paul.

"If you want some one to do Miss Kempburn's work, you'd better find them but not a girl. Miss Kempburn is going as private secretary to Watt!"

"What?" gasped Max, surprised out of his official manner for once.

"Exactly," repeated Arrington, with a dry smile. "Do you object? He's an honest man."

He spoke as one who had been dealing of late with the opposite genus.

Max remained quite silent digesting the news.

"Well?" queried the Chief impatiently, looking up from the letter he had resumed.

Max drew himself up with a sigh.

"Mr. Arrington, I beg to offer and record a formal protest against this action."

This time it was Arrington who was surprised or pretended to be.

"And what the—— Oh, I see it's official!" He drew a little black book from a pigeon-hole in his table, opened it and made an entry with the same little crooked smile, then he shut it with a snap.

"All right; received, recorded, referred. You can go. I shan't want you till after dinner."

The curt words did not trouble Max in the least, but he still lingered as if he'd something else to say, and he said it:

"She's a first-rate secretary, sir."

Paul Arrington, who had watched him all the time, smiled properly.

"Max, I didn't tell you why she came, and I shall not tell you why she's going—except that I'm considering her advantage."

Max bowed and went away more satisfied, only when he got to the door did he remember Arrington had said nothing about his and Master Paul's escapade.

The object of their discussion and of Mr. Arrington's case was at this time confiding her troubles to Mrs. Heriod.

The latter sat thoughtfully gazing at the Picture

for some little time before she replied. Then she said tentatively:

"It is a great thing to be offered a chance of new experiences and to see the actual working of things."

"I was quite content," said poor Anne disconsolately. "Do you think I was really no use or that it bothered him, my being there? It was his own plan and he never seemed bothered."

"No, I don't think it was that, and I know you were useful. But anyhow, Mr. Arrington's motives do not matter, do they? You are going to be used somehow else, so it's all right unless——" she looked questioningly at Anne—"unless you stay at home for a bit with your father?"

Anne moved restlessly:

"I couldn't do that, it would be impossible now. Besides, it wouldn't be right, would it?—to go back, having begun?"

"You feel *that*, that it would really be deserting your post?"

"Yes," Anne said in a low voice, "it would mean failure. I set out to find something, I *have* to find it, to go back is just that—desertion, failure!"

"Then don't be afraid of Mr. Watt," advised Mrs. Heriod cheerfully. "I think he should be interesting. Do you know the people who make one wonder what God meant them to be and to stand for? I think those sort of people are always most interesting."

"Every one interests you. But do you know any one who is anything like what he or she was meant to be?"

"I know one or two on the way there," replied her hostess, dreamily looking out of the window at Max Aston who was coming up the steps. "Anne, dear, did you tell Max you were coming to-day?"

Max seemed unusually tired and thoughtful and

did not revive until after tea, when Anne asked him why he had not brought Master Paul.

"Master Paul and I are in disgrace," said Max untruthfully. "You see he wanted exercise, so I gave him his ball, and it rolled under a bookcase, so he could not get it, so I was foolish and good-natured, and tried to get it, and had to crawl on the floor, so Master Paul barked, so the Chief came in!"

Anne laughed gleefully; she could picture it and all Max had left out. Mrs. Heriod pleased to find them both more cheerful, went to see her husband who was too busy for tea, and left them; and Anne told Max about her future as arranged by the Chief.

"Of course, I am not certain I shall accept the work," she added, with a tiny tilt of her chin upward, "but it would be experience."

"Yes, it would be experience," returned Max gravely, gazing into his tea-cup.

"What are you smiling at?" demanded Anne, sitting bolt upright.

"Was I? I was admiring the courage of your uncertainty."

"I don't understand you."

Max looked at her.

"If Mr. Arrington told me to go to Watt as secretary, I shouldn't waste time making up my mind about it."

"You would consider it so advantageous?" she demanded wilfully.

"No, but so inevitable."

"Ah, yes, *you* might."

"So will you, don't boast, Miss Kempburn. You'll go to Watt at the very day and hour Mr. Arrington chooses."

"You are going the right way to make me refuse."

Max was inscrutable. He declined to be drawn on the subject, except he complained bitterly of the extra

work her departure would entail on him, at which Anne laughed.

When Mrs. Heriod returned, she played to them. They both sat silent and looked at the Picture and Anne felt peace creep into her heart, and the idea of serving Joseph Watt grew less repugnant; but Max was as usual analysing the Face, tracing likeness, and his own became expressive of a sentiment that was as remote from him as it might well be in any son of Adam—to wit, sadness. It set so ill on him that Anne seeing it woke from her reverie and felt an instinctive call to banish it.

Needless to say she succeeded.

CHAPTER XIII

It happened that Miss Flossie Watt had a particular and intimate friend to whom she confided all her cares from the trimming of a new hat to the management of a refractory brother. The advice she received in exchange was generally sensible and suitable to the case as represented by Miss Flossie. If it failed to fit in with all circumstances, that was more the fault of the recipient's primal statement than the donor's diagnosis of it.

Joseph Watt received a letter one morning, the main contents of which he communicated to his sister over the breakfast table, with the disastrous effect of making her upset her coffee over a still very passable dress and spoiling her breakfast.

"I'm going to have a young woman as secretary," Joseph said so abruptly it was small wonder the coffee went over. He waited till that disaster was partially remedied and then went on in a hurried aggressive way.

"She'll be coming here every day, and you'll have to stay at home instead of gadding about, and in June I'm going into the Midlands and you must come along and take care of her. You'd better tell Martha to clean up my den, and get some decent curtains and a new rug."

He buried himself in his paper again, while his sister sat dumbly trying to take in so vast a revolution in the daily order of life.

In consequence of it, she sallied forth at mid-day to consult her friend Miss Collean, and only then recollected Joseph had not even mentioned the name of

the "woman" as Miss Flossie perforce designated her.

They had lunched and Mrs. Grately had retired before Anne returned, late again for a meal that should surely be a movable feast. The cause of her lateness had been the brother of the fluffy-haired lady seated opposite Miss Collean, though Anne had no means of connecting the two together. Nothing was farther from her thoughts than to imagine Joseph Watt with a sister, and such a sister; just as nothing could be further from Miss Flossie's thoughts than to connect the very aristocratic girl wearing quite desirable clothes with the disturbing "woman," of whom she was at the moment of Anne's entrance complaining bitterly. Miss Collean introduced them, and in the same breath repeated her usual formula as to the undesirability of hurried meals, and begged Anne to eat leisurely; for her greater freedom she and Miss Watt would retire to the fire, etc.

At the repetition of the name, however, Anne started slightly:

"I met a Mr. Watt this morning," she said slowly. "I wonder——"

"Oh, it couldn't have been Joseph," interposed Joseph's sister hastily; "he is always at work and——"

"His name was Joseph," interrupted Anne in her turn.

"Well, my brother is secretary to the Ironworkers' Union, Miss Kempburn, he belongs to the people who make iron and things like that, and strike."

"Do they often strike?" asked Anne, partly in curiosity as to Miss Watt's answer and partly to gain time to consider the wisdom of announcing her new relationship with Mr. Watt, who had betrayed no existence of a sister, nor anything personal except his own desperate nervousness.

"Oh, I don't know what they do really," exclaimed Miss Flossie archly. "It seems very silly to me, but I suppose Joseph likes it. Everyone enjoys life in their own way, don't they, Miss Kempburn?"

Anne tried to connect the idea of Mr. Watt with enjoyment of any sort, but it was too ponderously incongruous a thought for her. She gave it up, deciding also Mr. Watt might prefer to tell his sister of his arrangements himself.

Miss Collean, however, interposed, ordered Anne to lunch with much peremptoriness and withdrew to the fire with her friend.

Snatches of their conversation broke in on Anne's unwilling ears from time to time, as she tried in a desultory way to connect Miss Watt with her new employer and to wonder whether Mr. Arrington knew her and what he thought of her.

Equally idle and purposeless were Miss Flossie's stray thoughts as she gossiped on more essential things. How did Joseph come to meet Miss Kempburn, who, even if she were not "smart," was still quite "the right thing"? Miss Flossie's birdlike eyes had taken in every inch of Anne's appearance already, from a misplaced hairpin to a button off her sleeve.

But then conversation drifted back to Joseph and his misdeeds and general pigheadedness.

"I had set my heart on Buxton for June," she lamented, "and now he says he'll shut up the house and I must come to those awful Midland places with him! What's the use of new clothes there? And I've bought a love of a French grey dress at a sale, a real bargain. But there's one button missing on the revers, and I can't match it."

"Turn the revers down with coarse embroidered lace and add a chemisette of same," advised Miss Collean in her best dress-column style.

Miss Flossie was delighted. The talk drifted on

spasmodically, and at last reached a pitch that forced Anne to revelation.

"I wouldn't mind so much," Miss Flossie said, raising her voice under stress of emotion, "if it wasn't the *reason* of it! But why must I be sacrificed just because he wants a typewriter or secretary, or something. Why must *I* look after her? Gracious me, that sort of person can generally look after itself; she's sure to wear glasses and be a sight, and talk of nothing but strikes and wages and dirty workmen, and wear ugly bulgy blouses, and odd shirts, and——"

Anne, who had finished her lunch and risen, reached them at this moment. She subdued with an effort the twitching corners of her mouth, and made her announcement with becoming gravity.

"I am very sorry, Miss Watt, I ought to have spoken before, but I have only this morning agreed to become your brother's secretary for a time. I am sorry it should upset your arrangements."

The two women gazed at her in speechless amazement.

"Oh, my goodness gracious!" gasped Miss Watt at length. "Think of what I've been saying, but then I couldn't know," she added, with a ready tact for which neither of her hearers would have given her credit, "that I hadn't reason to grumble, could I? Joseph isn't generally a lucky sort of person."

Anne laughed outright.

"That's very nice of you, Miss Watt. I hope it won't be a very unpleasant time for you. I promise not to wear blouses always, not Sundays for instance."

Miss Collean struck in to cover Flossie's embarrassment.

"It is certainly a most remarkable coincidence," she said affably, "that Flossie should be lunching here today. So fortunate too, that you can get to know each other. Will you take all your clothes, Miss Kemp-

burn? I hear coloured things get dreadfully spoilt in that part. I advise plenty of plain white washing waists in spite of Flossie." She smiled indulgently. "They look cheerful and if you can afford the washing, are really the cleanest."

"But we do not go to Mirchester yet," said Anne; "at least, so I understood."

"Oh, I shan't mind now when it is," was Miss Flossie's hearty comment. "You must make Joseph give you proper time to yourself, Miss Kempburn, and we'll see whatever there is to see in Mirchester."

Anne was saved a reply by the arrival of the post with a letter from Naomi, which she ran upstairs to enjoy, leaving the two friends to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the situation at their leisure.

"My dearest little Anne," began Naomi's letter.

"We are moving on daily and I have little time to write but in the train, and you know how I dislike jolting. There is only one thing I dislike more, and that is staying long anywhere out here! I've been thinking much of you and your work in the big quiet library you describe so well. I see it so clearly and Mr. Aston and your Chief. You are happy, I can tell, but I do wonder if it is experience enough for you, if you are finding and doing what you set out to do and find? Do not get tied up with any one else's ideas and aims, keep free. You know I am rather jealous for my own sex and could wish you were working more directly in their cause. No, not the cause of Women's Suffrage, Nan! Heaven forbid! Still if such work has not come your way I am confident you will always follow the clearest path before you. I am glad you know the Heriods. You are in safe hands there. Forgive me for not having introduced you myself, dearest—I could not, for the old

reason I confided to you at Cousin Jessica's, because I am a coward, and the Heriods and their house are interwoven with all I try still to believe never did nor could have happened. I think I came out to this beautiful empty country to convince myself of it, and to remember how big the world is, and how little our own lives.

"Malcolm Strangeway is so quietly good to me, it is terrible to be able to do so little in return. Professionally the tour is a success; at least he is satisfied. Tell me more of your beautiful Garden City idea. It interests me, though I should not think Mr. Arrington (from what you say of him)"—*This was written in over line*—"is rich enough for so vast a scheme, but he may, as you hint, be one of many. Still I don't think seriously I'd sacrifice my life even to a great philanthropist—let alone a company, if I were you. I only advise, of course, but personally, I could find something quite as useful for you to do out here. Would you like to come?"

Anne laid the letter down with a grave face. Should she take her sister at her word, leave Mr. Watt to find other assistance, and prove to Max Aston his Chief's will was less inevitable than he believed? She moved restlessly at the thought. But she could not escape it.

She put her hands over her face and let herself sink slowly into a state of stillness and negation. Of old in such abstraction and rest had she found the answer to every question that threatened her peace, found and accepted it and gone on her way confident and unafraid of ill or good result. But of late—she knew it with uneasy misgiving—another arbiter than the Directing Spirit had had place with her, the old confidence would not return. The stillness she sought to impose on her mind remained void and unbroken.

But there welled up in her heart a sudden thirst for the green lanes, the tranquillity of the old garden, and her father's peaceful presence, and there was no obstacle between herself and it. She remembered quite suddenly, and with surprise, that this morning on waking she had decided she would go to Applebury, had even begun packing a bag. She glanced at the clock. There was still time to catch the afternoon train without any terrible exertion. She finished packing quietly and methodically, made her few arrangements and arrived at Waterloo in good time for the four o'clock train.

As she was seeking a comfortable corner she encountered Max Aston armed with a big bunch of violets and a sheaf of magazines.

"What an odd chance!" she exclaimed smiling. "Are you seeing a friend off, or going away yourself?"

"Seeing a friend off," he answered dreamily. "It's not to my liking at all. Come along, Miss Kempburn, I've got a comfortable seat up forward for you."

"For me? With your friend?"

He laughed.

"I told you yesterday certain things were inevitable, didn't I? Or are we not friends?"

"But I said nothing about coming away to-day. Don't tease me, there is no time to retaliate at stations, it's not fair."

"Then I'll explain. I've just seen the Chief and Master Paul off to Bannerton for the week-end, and his last words were—'I expect Miss Kempburn will be going down to Applebury by the four train!'"

Anne walked silently down the platform beside him. Presently she said:

"It was just a guess on his part."

"Of course. I don't suppose he ever mentioned Applebury to you."

They were well up to the front of the train now, and Max stopped and looked back down the platform. No prospective passengers, nor officials were anywhere near them. The train would not start for another twenty minutes, then it would carry her away probably out of his life altogether, unless he took time in violent custody, and crammed great possibilities into those few minutes. He put her into a very foremost carriage, handed her the flowers and papers, and then got in himself!

"Are you coming too?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered deliberately. "Miss Kempburn, is it really true you are not coming back to Playdon House to work any more?"

She looked away, and shook her head.

"Then I may not see you for a long time?" pursued Max steadily. "Well, I can't let you go without telling you something."

She looked back then, questioningly, yet unsuspecting in spite of a vague uneasiness.

"Won't you get taken on without meaning to go?"

"They will not be here for tickets for another ten minutes. I've time, Miss Kempburn. I want you to give up the idea of going to Mr. Watt—and things like that. I want you to come to me instead."

"As secretary?" She refused herself permission to read anything but nonsense in his words.

But Max was not going to be put off or enticed from his path. He knew his own mind so well now, he would have denied that any period of doubt had existed.

"No, as my wife. I want to marry you. I want it more than I can hope to make clear to you. I haven't any other need at all indeed!"

He sat opposite her, leaning forward, one hand grasping the window strap, his eyes fixed on her face and filled with such sincerity and honest desire that

she must needs have believed them, even if his voice, so quiet and terse, had failed to carry conviction to her.

Outside, a porter laden with some lady's paraphernalia hung a little moment on his step, seeking a carriage in which to deposit it and her. Anne was consciously aware of him. For a fractional second of time the probability of his invading their carriage seemed of world-wide importance. But he turned and went back.

Oblivious of their escape or rescue, whichever it might be, Max went on less steadily, but with short-cut intensity:

"I'm horribly afraid it's springing a surprise on you, but I—I haven't been able to—to show you—working together you see. But now that's over: I just had to say it at once, so you should know—Oh, I'm not expecting you can answer me here straight off—If you could possibly *care* enough? . . ." He looked away suddenly, not wanting at that moment to read her dismayed face.

"I don't understand all the things you care about," he said hastily, "but I'd help you where I could—and I'd never hinder you,—I'd try and understand."

She put her hand very gently on his sleeve.

"You would help any one," she answered, in rather a choking voice. "You always have helped me. It's too much what you offer though; I couldn't take it and give nothing in return. For your friendship I am, oh, so grateful, but the rest—no."

She stopped, a curious incoherency of thought and words coming over her. Thoughts she could not marshal into line with her convictions, words that would not express her meaning.

"It's not that I don't like you,—but I've never thought of—*loving*, being in love—since I was in three-quarter frocks—there's been so much else. I

never contemplated taking it into my life—I can't now—it's outside me. Please, Mr. Aston, can't you be satisfied—go on being friends?"

"Of course, never less than friends, I hope," he answered quickly. "More in time, I shall believe that and go on, believing it till—till it's true. All I ask now is that you will take it into consideration—Love. It's part of life. The best part—and just remember mine's there for you always if you can do with it—"

"Tickets, please!"

Was ever so preposterous a wooing so preposterously interrupted! Anne searched hastily for her ticket which she had, of course, put carefully away like the rest of her sex. Max stood up and got out and waited till the inspector had passed the next carriage. Then he stood on the step and looked in at the window.

"You won't let it worry you," he said anxiously. "Because there's nothing to worry about, and I had to tell you—you'll understand some day,—and I can wait——"

"But it's no use," cried Anne distressfully. "I'm sure it isn't. You mustn't waste time over me."

"It's not wasting time," he interrupted. "I see clearly you, indeed, have never contemplated it; it's very good to wait for something in the world even if it's beyond reach."

The train was moving off, Anne wanted to find some convincing last words, but failed. No traveller ever stranded on alien shores was more at a loss than she to meet the situation in the really artistic manner as demonstrated in book land. The actually material situation, too, had not helped her. Time and place were against her. She knew dimly it was hardly meet to stand watching Max Aston's figure grow smaller and smaller, hardly meet to have left him with no

other word, not even good-bye. It was cruelly perplexing to be conscious of relief at being carried from him, and at the same time half-heartedly desirous to hear him speak again.

She sat down and tried to rearrange her thoughts. Max Aston had proposed to her!

A proposal, especially a first one, usually counts as a crisis in a girl's life. Anne did not in the least feel as if a crisis had been reached.

She should have been regretful at causing him pain by a refusal. She wasn't regretful of anything.

Besides she had not refused *him*. She had refused to entertain this idea of love he had sprung on her with such unwarrantable suddenness. It was too personal a theme then to find place with her at this moment. In her eager, faithful, but impossible hunt to find a centre of things, a poise for herself in the external world, she had never realised the necessities of her own personality, nor that the centre of things for the individual must ever be the *Ego* itself, that *Ego* by which alone we have access to the Divine Unity.

As the train glided slowly through the dingy squalor that skirts the line between Waterloo and Clapham, the very reality of the should-be "crisis" seemed to slip away from her mind. She could attach no serious importance to Max Aston's proposition. It passed into the world of shadowy imaginings and empty echoes, something which gave her a vague uneasiness if she thought of it, and therefore was not to be thought of. She felt no necessity to face her standing in the realm of Love, because she herself had never set foot within the country.

She had far more ado to keep eyes and heart from the nearer manifestation of the sordid surroundings of the great Majority, and the eternal problem of how the Beauty and Meaning of Life were to reach even to the uttermost bounds through such desperate barriers.

But as the kingdom of Bricks and Mortar slowly gave place to the Kingdom of the Green Things of Earth, a great rest and freedom came to her. The Earth alone forced no problems upon her, no perplexities, nor grief. But the clean cool beauty and joy of Spring were there filling her with an ecstasy of hope and faith. Solemn mountains of cloud processioned across the blue fields of Heaven. The woods gleamed with primroses, primroses that decked even the route of the steam dragon that tore through what had once been their own fastnesses. Then came the open wide heaths and a glimpse of silvery water; all this open beauty and space and free life were going on while that other sort of life she had left behind panted, fought, and struggled for existence in its crowded arena.

Max Aston and his call to the Unknown Country sounded very faintly now. She spoke of many things to her father that night as they sat hand in hand, looking out into a moonlit garden but nothing of the last fifteen minutes at Waterloo. He looked a little anxious and grave when she related her future plans as arranged by Mr. Arrington, though she did not allude to them as that, nor did she speak of Naomi's vague proposals.

"We don't know anything about this Mr. Watt, my dear," he said, a little doubtfully.

"Mr. Arrington does. He is down at Bannerton this week-end and said he might come over to see you to-morrow. It's only thirty miles, nothing in a motor!"

At that he looked relieved. He knew better than Anne that Arrington of Bannerton Castle was a personage who might be more or less treated as a responsible neighbour and as such be depended on to give him assurance of his little Anne's safety in these strange new paths, where she elected to walk.

When sleep emphatically called for her due and Anne succumbed to its charms, it was not Max Aston who wandered through the tangled dream path, but the bigger, stronger figure of his Chief, leading Anne and winding her about with a silken cord as fine as gossamer, which her half-hearted dream efforts failed to break.

CHAPTER XIV

ANNE awoke to the calm repose of a dawning Sunday morning. A sense of discarded nightmares lay in the recollection of long yesterdays, of dawns ushering in days of purpose and struggle with unget-at-able foes.

Here in the fresh, dear little room of her youth there came to her on that first awakening a sense of vastness of the evils against which she arrayed her puny strength, coupled with a new sense of the vastness of the beauty and goodness of the earth from this momentary standpoint. She had flung open every window, and lay in bed gazing out at the world that went on so serenely about the business of beauty and utility, till she felt herself carried forward by its quiet process, unresisting and untroubled, towards the end to which all moved. Thinking so, she fell again into sleep refreshing and peaceful until Jane came in to bid her rise.

There was early service, lowspoken and simple, in the little grey church, sparsely attended, choired only by twittering birds, a service with long pauses and inward spaces of silence that filled imperceptibly with unexpected harmonies of peace.

Then breakfast with the old struggle to see her father ate his in right order and did not "muse his coffee cold" as Anne had been wont to say. After that the gossip with Jane as she cleared away, and the little duties that had always been Anne's and to which she turned instinctively. Later on an exploration of the garden with her father for company, a voyage of new discoveries and old delights, from which she had to recall him to the service hour, and even then remind him of his sermon.

The inevitable meetings and greetings after church offered a cobweb of boredom, that perhaps only enhanced the secluded joy of the garden when again recovered. Once there, Anne shut herself in with the pleasant present, in tacit agreement with her father, letting the decision for the morrows await her better pleasure. Yet when she sat alone for a few minutes in the little sunny arbour where two Springs ago she had spoken to Naomi, she knew, dear and loved as it was, the Rectory at Applebury did not and could not hold her life now. It was a harbourage and haven, to which her heart would turn at times with deep need, would turn, and rest, and renew itself. But her life lay in the outer wider world, she had chosen that; to deny the wisdom of that choice was to deny the main-spring of her life itself.

She wished to convince herself a choice lay before her, wished to be able to confront Mr. Arrington, if he should come at all, with an uncertainty of her future decision; and yet now the sudden home-sickness, which had really caught at Naomi's vague suggestion, had slacked itself in these dear passing hours and it was only a pretty play of her imagination that dangled the lure of Naomi's company before her eyes. For she would hate her sister's life with its perpetual wanderings, its perpetual public, its perpetual subjugation to the needs of the golden voice that she loved best alone, in surroundings better mated to it. Naomi had never willingly brought her sister into contact with her professional life. She did not herself despise it, nor even chafe at it. It was just her environment from which she subtracted the better and discarded the worst elements, but she knew well enough it would not be with Anne to do this. Anne had none of the artist's temperament; she was too conscious of realities to bear patiently with that inevitable element of artificialness which disturbed Naomi not one whit, too

wide-seeing to bear with the equally inevitable narrowness of professional life. Perhaps if Naomi had not been aware of all this, her remark concerning Anne joining her would have been less vague and more pressing. As it was, Anne let her thoughts play round the idea, chiefly as has been stated, because it pleased her to fancy a choice existed for her, and that Mr. Arrington was less the controller of her destiny than Max Aston thought.

It was not till tea had been brought in and the shadows lengthening on the lawn, and the evening air crisping with a threat of mild frost, that the dominant energetic voice of a motor vibrated through the quiet garden.

Anne half stood up, then sat down again and rearranged the tea-tray.

"Dear me, a motor here on Sunday!" exclaimed Mr. Kempburn who had quite forgotten their possible visitor. Anne hurriedly re-explained before the guest was announced.

He seemed taller, bigger, more dominant than ever in the little low-ceilinged room, and Macdonald, who followed close at his heels, looked relatively smaller. Anne felt curiously shy, and her shyness lent her a quaint little air of dignity, that Arrington found charming. To him it was as if some one had taken his earnest vital protégée, and put her into a miniature. It was still Anne for all the unfamiliar setting but a limited Anne.

He apologised for Macdonald's presence, saying there was no one to leave him with at Bannerton, and that he obviously pined for Aston, which Anne refused to believe.

"It's a regrettable truth, though. It's reciprocal too. Why, Aston would dismiss me to-morrow if it were not for Macdonald."

And Macdonald, lying between his master's feet,

looked at Anne and gave an undeniable wink, a confidence which Anne did not betray.

She served tea, and listened with something akin to amazement to Arrington as he talked to her father. She had not dreamt him capable of the gentle courtesy, and deference. He spoke of the Rector's botanical studies, though Anne hardly remembered having mentioned them to him. He told him of treasures peculiar to the Bannerton neighbourhood, and presently he spoke of books and writers, strange to Anne but with whom her father seemed conversant.

Yet as they talked and as she listened, Anne became conscious of an idea that was so irreconcilable with Paul Arrington's personality that she transferred the disagreeable sensation to her own shoulders with a sense of misfit. Some one was nervous, not shy but nervous, there was tension in the air. It could not be her father, whose self-consciousness was a negative quality, and if it could not be their visitor, it must be herself. At all events the vague feeling had the effect of making her strangely anxious that Paul Arrington should acquit himself well, and win the heart-whole approval of her gentle-judging father.

The consciousness of tension lay on her when they went round the garden after tea, where the evening light lay like a golden mist over smooth lawn and flowery border. It was not till Mr. Kempburn murmured vaguely something about putting up his sermon and went off to the house, that Anne found herself alone with her late "Chief."

For a few moments he took no notice of her at all, but stood still, sending swift searching glances over lawn and walk; it seemed to the girl he might almost be searching for some invisible form. Then he turned to her in his familiarly abrupt way.

"What do you come to London for, Miss Kempburn, when you could live here in peace?"

"Because there's nothing to do."

"There's living, it's an endurable pastime here."

"Only too endurable and only too truly a pastime."

"Pastimes have their value and place in life."

"Yes, so I am here now." She was amazed at her own boldness in opposing him, mystified at the sudden cessation of the sweeping force of his will. Here in her own home, even in his presence, her life was her own again, she could, she thought, even have refused Joseph Watt's service and all it implied, had she so willed but all she willed was just to walk down the long grassy paths with him and speak of the flowers and memories which, like their very scent, perfumed the place with each changing season. This was Arrington's will, though she was unconscious of it, a strange pleasure he had desired and feared when he came, and the fear died down now and left only desire which she fulfilled with him in simple talk.

Here had been her and Naomi's gardens, only Naomi had always done both gardens; here is the ivy bush where she had seen her first bird's nest. It was Naomi who had lifted her and let her slip and scrape her knee on the wall. There was the pool into which she flung her doll in an access of temper, and Naomi had waded in and rescued and confiscated the once favourite. No memory that had not its double essence of sweetness, the memory of two. They ended in the little shut-in arbour and there Anne turned to him smiling, the glow of the western sinking sun on her face.

"Here," she said softly, "just over two years ago I told Naomi I must go to London and cease to be idle, she understood so beautifully."

He was standing bareheaded with his back to the evening light, so she could not see his face.

"Yes, she would understand." Then he paused

and wheeled round and looked up the garden. "She seems to have been a good sister to you, child."

He had not spoken to her so before and Anne was a little surprised. For a slight unmeasured space she was conscious the scented sunlit garden held something besides her memories of it. But before she could determine its quality her father came out with his cassock on and sermon in hand, and the church bell was hurrying its swing as if in haste to finish the day's duty. Anne wondered what Mr. Arrington would do. Was he leaving, or did he expect her to stay and keep him company, or—it seemed very improbable—would he go to church?

The improbable happened, however, he did not even debate the point. They met Mr. Kempburn and walked by his side to the little gate that led to the tiny Norman church that served the village with its spiritual food. If the presence of the big stranger there interfered with the devotions of some of the congregation, Anne, at least, was conscious of a vague satisfaction and content. She was fairly certain it was no habit of his, and thought none the worse of him for that, but yet there was a subtle pleasure in his being there, in his sharing in the dear intimate custom.

"He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek," chanted the choir, perhaps with more zest than art.

"The mighty from their seat!"

Over Paul Arrington's soul, drinking in a breath of long-denied freedom, there came a recognition of certain truths, fundamental, simple, unchangeable, of no consequence in the stress of his strenuous life, but of vast meaning and consequence here in this little grey building with its forty or fifty worshippers. Some at least of these humble and meek souls had relationship with a Power before which his own personal power sunk into the dust. He was not, in any sense

of the word, a religious man, but he recognised religion was a power in the world, and could feel a contempt for the shallow prophets and philosophers who prated of the future without taking cognisance of what is an undoubted factor of evolution. But such calm, vague views dissolved in this atmosphere, and in the companionship of the slight wistful-faced girl beside him. Her thoughts and belief and knowledge might differ in quality from the rest of the little congregation, yet with them she could join without hypocrisy or self-deception in the simple worship, one with them at least in recognition of the Great Power to Whom the mighty upon Earth are but as unlettered wilful children.

She passed him a hymn book presently, and he opened it carelessly. On the first page "Naomi Kempburn" was written in a flowing easy writing he knew so well, that for a moment writing and print swam dimly before his eyes; first he would have put it away from him, and then would have given its weight in gold to keep it. Anne all unconscious sang on:

"For we have no help but Thee."

The last glow of sunset streamed in from one window painted only with that glory, and to Arrington it seemed as if the echo of a voice that had often sounded in the little building floated back on the dying light, infinitely pure, so that he recognised the tightened string that had stretched across the afternoon's experience was a retributive pain it ill became him to loosen and forego.

For the first time a vague misty misgiving floated across Paul Arrington's mind, obscuring the plan to which his heart had bent will and reason now; what if, after all, it were not to circumstances nor even to woman's sacred honour that Naomi Kempburn's heart—and his own of course—had been sacrificed, but

possibly to his, Paul Arrington's, own pride? That was a thought too intolerable to harbour, it would indeed mean a putting down of the mighty out of their seat.

It was not so, of course. And one day not long delayed Naomi Kempburn would return, would find him no stranger in her home, would surely turn to him, and touch hands across the past. He strained his thoughts there. The situation had not altered in the eight years that had elapsed back into the unrecoverable past, but there were other modes of egress now, there *must* be, should be.

And Naomi Kempburn would ask what he had done with her little Anne? He would answer her fairly and squarely there. The best that could be. There was her desire for "work" as she understood it, her great need of enlightenment, however much it tried her eyes. Watt was a safe man and good, better than Risler and his school—and he would be able to keep in touch with her. That was the real gist of the matter, even though he refused to see it, save as a small factor.

It was with perfect good faith he explained his ideas to Mr. Kempburn, before leaving that night.

"She has chosen her way of life," he said; "it's a very noble way, but it may land her amongst strange people. The Watts are common to commonplace, but they are honest. It will not hurt her to know that class any more than it hurts her to know her slum people. She carries benefit with her in either case, more than she knows."

So he explained, putting out arguments that exactly met the mind of Anne's diffident anxious father. Strange if he had not done so, since Paul Arrington dealt largely with men's minds. Before he left he made them promise to come over and lunch with him at Bannerton Castle the following Saturday.

Anne, who had cognisance of many of his public

engagements through Max, ventured to remark that was the day of the Ironmasters' big luncheon at the Criterion.

"Is it?" he demanded, looking at her; "then there will be two interesting luncheons on the same day."

Anne laughed. She knew he was not offended.

"Were you lunching at the Criterion?" he demanded politely.

"I think not."

"That is fortunate. Neither am I. I shall send the motor over for you at twelve o'clock, Mr. Kempburn, and I will have all the books I named looked out for you." With which promise he left them.

"My dear Anne, you are very fortunate to have found so able a friend," said Mr. Kempburn, looking after the disappearing car." He seems to know about everything. He tells me that phrysanifera are quite common round Bannerton. It will be a pleasant outing. I have never seen the place, indeed, I believe it is never shown to the public at all."

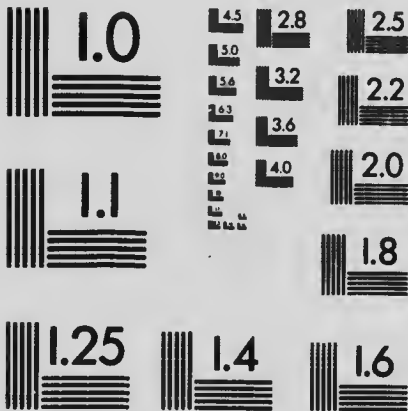
So she was to see Paul Arrington's home as she had seen Max Aston's. She thought of it like that, as something intimate, a peculiar privilege for her better knowledge of the showman. True, Aston House had not been Max Aston's home but it had spelt out a phase in his character for her; they could by no chance become strangers to each other now. Would Bannerton Castle perform the same office for its owner? The man she knew belonged to and was typified in Playdon House; could there possibly be another man belonging to this Bannerton Castle—which was not shown to the public at all?

It was only when sleep had laid her first touches on Anne's eyes that a thought sprang to life alert and sharp, scattering those gentler touches remorselessly. She had said nothing whatever to lead Paul Arrington to suppose she might not, after all, follow the course he had mapped out for her.



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CHAPTER XV

BANNERTON CASTLE stood high on an eminence overlooking a wide wild park, with great oaks reigning solitary and lesser oaks in plentiful company, giant bracken, growing rank and tangled on virgin soil, and on the far margin a heather-covered track elbowing in to meet forest and clearing. Such was the view from the south front of Bannerton. Northward, the forest land had been pushed further back, only a long straight avenue of the oaks was left, leading up from the old grim, turreted lodge below, to the wide flagged and gravel court before the house. No garden or shaven lawns broke the austerity of this north front, and the home itself had nothing but its fourteenth century dignity by which to claim homage or admiration. The long spaces of blank stone were broken by small windows. The jutting-out entrance was a compromise between a tower and a three-storeyed porch. The great gateway and tower that flanked the courtyard on the left and led to the stables was twelfth century, and in silent unspoken strength it lent its own character to the whole. One judged the place by that, and one's judgment was not too pronounced on what the long years had crowned with a solid dignity beauty itself could not touch.

Eastward were the shut-in garden and farm-buildings; westward, forest; and nowhere sign or token of other house, other humanity, other building than Bannerton itself. The little village crowding as if for protection at its feet was invisible to the lofty head in its proud isolation.

Anne looked round the great courtyard. The flagstones in the centre were innocent of weed, the

gravel rolled to unmarkable firmness. On the south front she had already had a glimpse of the comparatively narrow space of terrace that separated the house from the forest, asire with flowers. Human hands must in all cases be the agent. Human forms were even observable in the distance, yet the strangely uninhabited effect of the place bore heavily on Anne. There was no sense of expectancy as there had been at Aston House. The very servants seemed to lack a vital reality. Anne was almost alarmed when a man in a plain livery came out and asked Arrington where he would have tea.

Arrington looked at Anne.

"Where?" he asked.

"Somewhere on the terrace?" she suggested.

"Outside the library window," he ordered.

Mr. Kempburn was gazing dreamily at the tower leading to the stables.

"There was a still older castle here once," he hazarded.

Arrington nodded.

"Yes, tenth century; bits of it still remain but that's thirteenth, it was rebuilt then, and rebuilt again just a century later."

"And since?"

"Since then, Miss Kempburn, I fear it has only been tinkered with. The inside? Yes, that was largely altered at the end of the seventeenth century."

"What have you done yourself?" Anne asked, longing to differentiate him from the sombre age of it.

"I added bathrooms," he answered, laughing. "You don't like this side, Miss Kempburn, why do we stay here? Let us come through to the library; I promised your father some books." He led them once more through the great hall that had thrilled Anne at first entrance. It had a high vaulted roof

with heavy rafters, one side of it was given up to a display of armour and arms, and over these some tattered banners hung. The walls were light-coloured with vast black timbers crossing them in fantastic chequers. A wide staircase in hard black chestnut went up against the longest wall, and led to an open gallery running from end to end of the main building. The gallery was poorly lighted save for the open part looking down on the staircase. Three windows level with it on the opposite wall were blazoned with gorgeous coats of arms and the colours repainted themselves on the light walls with weird effect.

Arrington so far had proved himself an excellent host but a very bad showman. Certainly after lunch he had taken them out on the terrace and round to the gardens, he had even allowed the proud bailiff to show and dilate over the merits of a herd of prize Jerseys and a model dairy, precisely as the head gardener had been permitted to exhibit floral treasures, while Arrington himself listened—a little bored, a little impatient, but withal kindly forbearing of their “ways.”

But here in the castle, in the hall itself that was voiced with interests of no common order, the owner found nothing to say of arms, or harness, or blazoned shields, or even the hunting trophies more obscurely placed. All might have been non-existent for all the attention he appeared to pay to them; and there was no one to tell Anne that Paul Arrington would as soon have thought of laying open his soul to their inspection as exploiting the deeds or belongings of his ancestors.

He led the way now across the hall, down an almost dark-flagged passage into the library. This was a fifteenth century addition, since altered and modified more than any other part of the Castle. It was lined with books half up the walls which were hung with

tapestry above. The windows were set in deep embrasures, and approached by steps, with the exception of one which opened out on to the terrace, and here under an awning tea was presently served, and their host—apparently oblivious of the fact that there was a woman present to do what is usually considered so essentially woman's work,—poured out tea himself and waited on them. He talked well, but as at lunch on purely impersonal subjects. Anne slipped out of the conversation when possible, the better to reconsider her host in these new surroundings which were either no part of him at all, or so much a part that Anne felt that the premonition of fear, that had been hers on their first interview, was not only justified but must hereafter be an integral part of her regard for him. For the Paul Arrington of Playdon House was a man of many faults and many virtues touched even more closely than most men with the inevitable small life worries, the dearer because of his openness to these, since it flung more heroic qualities into stronger relief. The worshipper could find failures, condone and pity them without fear for the safety of its idol. But here at Bannerton Anne found the power of kindly criticism gone. The man himself was forbidden ground, as forbidden as the demesne of the Castle. She knew him less well now than when she had got out of the motor. Yet he played the host to fine perfection, even to the point of leaving her to detached meditation when such was her whim.

After tea he took Mr. Kempburn into the library, and showed him where rare priceless treatises on plants and herbs had already been set out for him, with material for making extracts if such was his will. It being so, and the pleasure absorbing him from the outer world, Arrington came back to Anne, and stood leaning against the window frame looking down at her thoughtfully.

"Isn't it amazing we foolish mortals refuse the gifts of the gods and fling ourselves into the hideous prison-house of town when we could stay here?"

"Here?" she questioned, smiling.

"It is all 'here' in the country! Still even more exactly—Suppose we take up *Psychical Research* or something harmless and futile like that, and stay here. You and Max would have masses of correspondence to get through, of course, but you could do it."

"And Mr. Watt?"

"Chuck him!" returned Arrington with the heartiness of a schoolboy.

And Anne laughed and said reproachfully:

"After digesting your admirable lecture on his virtues, on the responsibilities of the post, and his deplorable need of assistance, I cannot find it in my heart to abandon him!" Thus spoke Miss Anne who had contemplated the said abandonment very calmly not long since.

"Why did I romance?" he groaned. "I might have known you'd take me seriously."

"You would be a great deal more upset if I took you seriously now, and so would the world in general."

He let his long length into one of the lounge chairs and gently lifted Macdonald, who stuck to him more faithfully than his shadow, on to his knees.

"After all, why shouldn't we?" he insisted. "The world would get on quite nicely without our valuable assistance, Miss Kempburn."

"Not a bit of it," she maintained stoutly; "and if it did you'd be furious, and ready to trample it under foot."

This was greatly daring on her part and her heart beat quickly.

"Macdonald, have you been giving me away?" demanded Paul, gravely pretending to tie the dog's silky

ears into bows on his head. "Why should you imagine I could be furious at anything. You should believe me incapable of it."

"Macdonald has not betrayed you."

Her eyes wandered in daring criticism over his outline. That strength and will were of necessity generators of fury she was sure.

"Then it was Max," he insisted.

"Max?—Mr. Aston?" she corrected herself quickly, "is incapable of betraying *any one*!"

"Hasn't the brains to seize his own advantage."

He had played for a rise and got it!

"Mr. Arrington!" expostulated Anne, sitting bolt upright with a flushed face.

"Has he?" he demanded teasingly.

"Do you like being served by stupid people?"

"Now you are demanding a compliment!"

"Not at all," she fenced. "I have taken servitude to Mr. Watt. I've nothing to do with you, I hadn't brains enough."

"On the contrary you had too many," he said mournfully, rising. "You would have found me out. Max found me out and stuck by me, but I can't expect two such inestimable characters to fall to my lot. Come and see the pictures, Miss Kempburn; your father is making extracts and says he does not much care for pictures, but I think you will, they are rather remarkable paintings."

It was the first time he had alluded to any of his possessions as worthy of attention and Anne jumped up with alacrity. He took her the length of the terrace, up a winding stone stair in a tiny corner turret, through a heavy oak door into a long wide gallery. There were pictures on all the walls, portraits of men and women, strange cracked old canvases, glowing colours and fading beauty. There were top lights to the gallery and strange arrangements of sliding

screens and blinds, by which each group of pictures might at all hours be viewed to the greatest advantage. In accord with the same idea, a life of each painter and a history of his works was to be found on the long cases that ran down the centre of the room. There were other more valuable documents than these within the cases, pertaining to the subjects of the paintings, some in strange beautiful writings on white vellum, or in clasped volumes and tooled binding. The former were frequently shown to visitors, the contents of the cases—never!

It was the very epitome of the Arrington pride that that very pride itself should be beyond reach of public gaze, while the exact expression of Arrington honour lay in that, in thus screening their pride, they should not defraud the man who had served them of one iota of the homage or admiration due to him, for which presumably he had worked.

So Anne was shown the pictures of the race, and gravely told the history of the paintings and painter, which interested her not in the slightest, while her whole mind became absorbed in the line of human documents hanging there in so great a silence for the verdict of posterity to fall on them, holding fiercely to their kinship, betraying it in unexpected trickery of pose or in expression, claiming it flagrantly here, just holding it there,—a long, long procession of the generations, divisible perhaps into half a dozen types who might, to a superficial observer, have served as models all through. But Anne, oblivious of her host's courteous explanation of the artists, began to trace a deeper mystery. The paintings were but composite pictures, one overlapping the other, rearranging itself, inviting the predomance to this trait or that, and always augmenting in a dominant pride veiled behind the increasing strength of purpose.

When they came to the Gainsborough period, Anne

was too absorbed in tracing the rise and fall of one mysterious line of likeness, to listen to her guide, and after repeating some anecdote connected with the painter, Arrington stopped abruptly.

"You are not attending, Miss Kempburn," he said severely.

"No," said Anne with daring frankness, "I am not. I don't care one little bit what Gainsborough said about it. It would be far more interesting to know what the sitter said about Gainsborough." She indicated the picture of an unusually gentle-faced Arrington, who stood out against a sombre background and had held her spellbound by that fugitive resemblance to some vague recollection.

"It would have been something quite polite," said Paul with such emphasis and mock severity that healed the words of possible rebuke, but Anne coloured nevertheless.

"I'm sorry if I'm impertinent," she maintained stoutly, "but I can't help it. I don't care one bit for painters nor painting and I do for these people more than anything else I know at this present moment. They are tremendously exciting. Take me away if you don't like me to look at them."

"No, look if you like. I don't mind."

He spoke quite seriously and gravely, giving her permission to thus view his ancestors as a favour he might, with propriety, refuse if such were his will. Anne gave a little gulp with a sudden realisation she was face to face with a pride as colossal as the power and will of the man, a pride so secret and racebound that it kept grip even on the dead past, not as a mere memory but as a living document as intimate and personal as the soul of the living representative himself.

Nevertheless she took advantage of the permission to look closely. Only now in picture after picture she found none of the fugitive riddle she had been hunting,

but only the lettering of this excessive pride augmenting and augmenting stronger than will or ambition, quenching entirely, as the generations passed, that for which she had looked previously.

Paul Arrington seated himself in a chair at the end of the gallery to which she was making slow way, and watched her. Nearer and nearer she came out of the past into the present. Gracious, fair women interspersed here between the sterner, harder portraits of men—women who had lent this posterity, or given permanently, new blendings or new characteristics to the race; lastly three portraits, one an unusually contained, cold Arrington, and a woman of the south, dark, loving, passionate. These were Paul's father and mother, and then hung one alone—a portrait of Paul himself. The masterpiece of a master.

"Oh!" she cried, caught by the wonder of painting at last, apart from the subject.

Paul joined her.

"He says it's the best thing he ever did," he remarked carelessly. "But I suppose that doesn't interest you either?"

"It does, more than the portrait. He has left something out of that."

"It's not generally an accusation brought against him," said Paul drily. He was not in the least embarrassed at being discussed on canvas himself, it was preferable to discussing his ancestors anyway.

Anne looked back down the room with wrinkled brows.

"I don't know what it is, but he *has* missed something—it's the thing I've been trying to find far back."

She stopped abruptly, realising again the indiscretion of her interest; but this time Paul made no protest, he had himself recognised the arrogant discourtesy of his behaviour to the very gentle, kindly girl.

"We'll find it together," he said. "I'm afraid

I'm very rude, Miss Kempburn, but somehow we never think of explaining the family, it seems so intrusive."

"Now I feel like a veritable intruder," laughed Anne, but she had noted the "we," and a sudden wonder seized her. Was there any "we"?

"Is it dreadfully intrusive to ask why no one else of your generation has been painted?"

He seemed to consider the point and answered her very gravely at last.

"There is no one else except a small boy of fifteen, a third cousin once or twice removed, Durton is his name."

Then he was alone, utterly and entirely alone with this heavy chain stretching into the past, holding and still controlling him with dead hands and undying wills.

The sense of this strange power of the past came over Anne. She realised almost with fear that it was no dead past at all, but a living chain of minds and wills that had in their time grappled with circumstances and won, minds urgent and insistent, pressing forward their visible representative to some end they themselves could but faintly foreshadow, but something that should be a culmination of the strength, the purpose and latent nobility that lay there behind the varying faces and types.

And Paul Arrington was not married! It came to her as a shock. He had never been connected in her mind with anything feminine, nor anything of the nature of Love. Anne was indeed one of those rare women whose sex instincts lay dormant, awakened by the awakening of the soul and not at the command of the flesh. That much was her heritage from the past, a heritage of which neither she nor the greater number of equally endowed women rightly understand the worth.

Her eyes sought eagerly amongst the pictures again, but now it was not the men but the women she examined. What type of woman did these Arringtons affect to be mistresses of their house, keepers of their honour, and mothers of their children? And here a very singular point became clear to her,—the type of the men varied, the surface characteristics differed, but the type of the women separated by generation after generation, lacking blood kinship, betrayed kinship of soul! In all cases, whether small or stately, dark or fair, young or old, plain or beautiful, they were women whose highest qualities as women were dominant and distinguished. Whatever the collateral branches of the family may have done, the Head of the House had invariably married women of dignity and purity and strength; never weak, never insignificant, never wholly of the earth. Pride of race rather than love may sometimes have governed the choice, but through such a line—with perhaps a great love passion woven into it here and there—the race had propagated itself. Anne did not see all this as she walked down the gallery with the outcome of it by her side, but her subconscious self took hold of the fact and kept it safe for future revelation.

Meanwhile Paul told Anne histories and stories of the painted dead, in a matter-of-fact prosaic way yet betraying an intimate knowledge and appreciation of each. So they retraced their steps and half way down, before the face of a young man in Spanish armour, a Velasquez, Anne found the key for which she had originally sought.

"He went to Spain, lived in the Court and married a Spanish lady, yes, that one. He was a favourite with Philip IV. for a time, some suppose that's why Velasquez painted him. He fell out of favour on a point of honour and brought his wife home."

That was all he related. There was no explana-

tion as to the "point of honour" in question, or whose honour suffered! Anne caught her breath in wondering admiration at this typical omission.

It was a singularly beautiful face. The fiercely expressive will power had here become a steadfast strength of purpose, the face of a man who would not count costs where honour was concerned.

"He was not much over thirty when he died,—at Naseby," said Paul. "It's rather a fine suit of armour in the portrait. We have it in the hall."

Again the "we." A habit acquired in childhood, or by tradition, Anne thought; in either case an unconscious uttering of the whole spirit of the place.

She went on satisfied, however. The young man in Spanish armour had established a likeness to the Portrait in Mrs. Heriod's room and she understood.

When they were once more at the turret door, she found she had left her scarf at the far end of the gallery. Paul rebuked her carelessness and went to fetch it leaving her there on the threshold.

The now low sun flung a warm yellow glow over the wide park land without, and filtering in at the tall, narrow windows, filled the gallery with dancing rivers of light, through which she watched Paul Arrington pass and repass. Then for one second she missed the sound of his step and it was as if the Past had caught him back into its misty dimness. A sudden misgiving clutched at her heart, as unreasonable as the vague impulse towards protection. She wished she had gone through the golden mists with him—she felt a little giddy and confused, and leant against the wall with shut eyes.

"The pictures have not been seen by a visitor for eight years," said Paul's voice as he rejoined her.

"You do not allow people to go over the place then?"

Her voice was, to her own surprise, steady and com-

posed, though the preposterous suggestion of her fancy still painted her cheek warmly.

"At sixpence a head," he retorted drily, "as they do at Lord X——'s place?"

Anne laughed; she was not quite sure at what. It was a relief to be out in the cool air again, a relief to join her father in the library, where they tore him reluctantly from his research. Almost a relief to find it was time to be ready for their homeward drive.

For Anne understood now a very great deal more of Paul Arrington than when she came, and the knowledge was strangely disquieting in view of that question which had floated into her consciousness from the misty mote-laden light in the picture gallery. "What is this man to you or you to him that his passing troubles you?" It was a question she neither could nor would answer. Yet it troubled her foolishly and insistently.

They were standing on the rounded steps in the entrance court watching the motor make a sweeping circle round the wide space. Macdonald, usually too cautious to imperil even his dignity by indifference to these uncanny monsters, chose that moment to be seized with panic like a nervous old lady, and rushed across the approaching terror's path to Paul for safety. Everyone could see the dog, but the chauffeur, who was bending over a brake,—and then——!

The whole thing was instantaneous—Anne's little gasp, the jar of the brakes, and Paul's action.

He caught up his dog from before the car, and the front mud guard ripped a piece out of his right sleeve with a queer cracking sound,—but Macdonald was safe in the left arm.

Paul made some remark to the frightened chauffeur in an undertone, and turned to Anne.

"I am sorry you were frightened, I won't put him down till you are safely off; Macdonald's not often such an idiot."

Anne touched Macdonald's head, but said nothing. The butler opened the door of the motor and they got in. Arrington continued to talk, as usual, but his face was strained and growing grey, and he did not shake hands with them, though he continued to hold his dog in the left arm. She found nothing to say, no word for her thanks for their day, nor fear of his hurt; but he understood and smiled at her very kindly, as one who held a confidence with him.

"I hope he was not hurt," said Mr. Kempburn concernedly, as the car moved off. "It was well done, and I am glad the little dog is safe, but he might have been seriously injured."

Even then Anne was true to the confidence, though she had seen the faint fruitless effort to lift the injured arm, and knew—seriously or slightly—there was "hurt." The vexing question had to be very firmly suppressed and put away, since she neither could nor would answer it.

CHAPTER XVI

It is to be feared the new curtains and rug in the front room at 22 Dossington Road rather emphasised than concealed the general shabbiness of their surroundings. The badly arranged room struck Anne as oddly pathetic as she looked round while Joseph Watt rummaged for letters in an over-full and not too orderly desk.

She had felt a little nervous on entering into her new employment, but her nervousness was a mere shade beside Joseph Watt's own embarrassment. He was at a loss even how to address her at first, an unaccompanied "Miss" being all that occurred to him. Anne's nervousness, therefore, vanished at this distressful condition and she suggested he should show her where things were kept. He confessed he was not very clear himself and said he wanted a letter copied, and proceeded to hunt for it. This was partly subterfuge, as Anne saw, for the disorder of the desk was, after all, only chaotic order. There was a corner for everything, and letters were folded into elastic bands, and labelled, but there was no proper arrangement of them then. The desk was one of those big American affairs with rows of pigeon-holes and every sort of convenience, once the compartments were properly labelled and one knew one's way about it. This apparently was what its master did not do, and his new secretary made a bold suggestion she should arrange it. Joseph jumped at the idea more as a means of employing her, than from any sense of need.

He explained such order as did exist, and got up with alacrity.

"Are you going at once?" she asked, a little dismayed.

"I shall be late now," he answered, hastily.

"But after I've done the desk?"

He frowned perplexedly, and his glance fell on a pile of unopened letters on the small flat table, where he preferred to write. These would constitute his evening's work. He remembered vaguely Mr. Arrington's enumeration of a secretary's duties.

"There are the letters," he said doubtfully. "Some one's got to open 'em."

He made for the door.

"May I put my table where I like?" demanded Anne.

"Yes, yes, put it all where you like, as you like,—so as I can find things. Good-day."

He escaped with a breathless pant, and a minute later she saw him hurrying down the coloured path, and smiled a little at his odd ungainly figure.

When she again gave her attention to the room, she decided to take full advantage of his permission, "nothing being anywhere where any one would like it," as she expressed it to herself.

She set to work in earnest.

Two or three times Miss Flossie peeped in to see if she wanted anything; to see also what prospect of company lay in this new inmate of the residence. The net result of her seeking had not been encouraging and by lunch-time poor Miss Flossie felt chilled and disappointed. But Anne was to have lunch with her, and at that meal made ample amends for her apparent discourtesy. She proved a splendid listener, profoundly interested in her hostess's description of life from the standpoint of a big northern Hydropathic, of Mrs. Clemen's ailments and cures there, of broken engagements and fragile hearts, of the doctor's attention to her—Miss Flossie—and the history of the old gentle-

man who had nearly proposed to her, and been carried off by an indignant niece-in-law, "a regular tartar, you know."

"Still I don't think I'd like to really marry an old man," concluded Miss Flossie, meditatively, as if she would not have minded pretending to do so. "Would you, Miss Kempburn?"

Anne replied gravely she thought not, and listened with commendable patience to the menus at the said Hydro, against which some over-fastidious inmates had had the audacity to protest.

"Of course, Mrs. Malsby being a friend of mine—she is *quite* a lady, *has* to be in *such* a situation!—I heard a great deal from her about it. People have an idea of the difficulties of catering for so large a place with a limit set by directors—and men at that!"

Anne agreed it must be difficult work, and said she must return to her duties; and after a little fruitless opposition Miss Flossie reluctantly allowed her to go. Anne's general hours were to be from eleven in the morning to six P. M., which would enable her to sit some time with Watt himself on his return from the office when she could receive instructions for the morrow.

On this first day, however, she had come early to see him before he left and he had not hurried his return, half hoping to find her gone. But she had not, and he was shown a subtly transformed room. Even the angle of the big desk was altered, and on the little square writing-table three piles of letters lay open and ready to hand.

"That pile is all advertisements and circulars," explained Anne. "I should have put them in the paper basket as a rule, but you had not said if you needed any. Those are purely private letters and those business ones. I have put them in the order of their apparent importance; the real importance you must teach

me." He essayed the task grimly, tossed the first pile into the paper basket, pushed the second aside and took up the third.

Several of these he put hastily into his pocket with a sharp glance at Anne's placid face. He had no great faith in the discretion of secretaries, and had yet to prove the superiority of Mr. Arrington's protégée. The remaining letters he roughly divided reserving one lot for himself, and telling her she could try to answer the others next day.

"They've all got to be told the matter—whatever it is—will be seen into, but we're desperately busy; put 'em off and don't offend 'em if you can help it."

He gave her a few more instructions in a very gruff manner.

Anne took the letters and looked through them. She shifted one to the top of the pile and hesitated a moment as she laid it down.

"Is this letter from Middlesborough to have the same answer?"

She knew it was a venturesome question and might be resented, but also the letter might be there by mistake. It had been foremost on Watt's original pile.

"Give it me," he said brusquely.

"Dear Sir," ran the ill-written letter. "There was a meeting of my union here last week and I spokes up about my case agen what is a bad one and Mr. Jacon he says it must stand over same as he says last time. Sir, I write to you to say I am tired of this standing over, for while it goes on standing over I can't get no work and my wife no food. I been paid into the Union these fifteen year and never had nothing from it nor wanted and I wants something now and that you tell Mr. Jacon to let be standing over and go and see Clewsons for me. What's my case is this two month ago Clewsons, which is my master turned off a lot of

us, work being short. Some got characters some didn't. I did which Latten the foreman what is no friend but enemy of mine, asked me same evening to give him to show a friend as might have work for me. From that day till now I take my bible oath I never saw my character, though I asks for it often. A while since Clewsons took some of us back work coming in. Them as 'ad characters which mine was, but when I came up Latten asks me for it and I told him he had it. He says I lost it and he can't take me on without character. Sir Ive not lost it but he has it damn him and I cant get work without it and its no use my seeing Clewsons because Latten dont like me, but I cant starve and my wife to cause he dont like me. So I asks Union to see into it for me and Jaccon goes on with let it stand over. Sir I write to ask you not to let it stand over any longer but to help me as you should Me being a Union man these years and no trouble given. Sir I am your obedient servant

"JAMES HOLLOWAY."

"It reads to me as genuine," said Anne, watching Watt anxiously.

He tossed it down.

"It's genuine enough. I know the man."

"Is it to go on standing over?"

Watt glanced slantingly at her with his alert green eyes as he leant back, tugging his beard and considering. There were three courses open to him, he recognised that. Either he could put a stop once and for all to his new secretary's claim to differentiate between the many claims that came before him, and to her audacity in questioning his ruling; or he could mislead her with the idea he intended doing something "official"; or he might make clear to her at the outset the conditions of a critical position. Watt wavered between the first and last alternative. The second he

merely recognised as a possibility. Had he been the man to consider it, Mr. Arrington would not have put Miss Kempburn within range of that consideration. So Watt balanced the first and third possibilities only, and decided on the last.

"Miss Kempburn was a sharp girl," he thought. "She had picked out the letter as genuine from a number of trivial ones, she evidently regarded the Union as a practical machine for the redress of grievances. That was intelligent of her, but dangerous. It had other uses as well.

"Yes," he said slowly, "in a general way, it would receive attention, of course. Jacon knows that. But just now matters are not in an ordinary way—not at all. It must stand over, just for a bit. I'd better explain.—What do you think is the real purpose of the Union, Miss Kempburn?"

Anne re-seated herself, though he had not told her to do so. She answered promptly, and all the while there floated before her a faint recollection of Sunday afternoon and Church Catechism that spoilt the solemnity of the occasion.

"The Union exists to preserve the balance fairly and truly between employers and employee, to watch over the interests of those who lack education and time to watch over them themselves, and to maintain a 'Living Standard' as in accordance with the interests of humanity, morality, and progression."

So spoke Anne out of some gathered knowledge and belief backed by inherent idealism.

"Just so," agreed Watt, worker in this righteous cause; "also they exist to protect Principles."

He did not mention whose Principles, nor did he enumerate his own. Anne waited rather anxiously, hoping he would.

"Just at present," he went on, "the Unions, the Ironworkers' Union, in particular, have got to look

after Principles, even at the expense of individuals. You will understand that better than Holloway."

"The Principles?" murmured Anne interrogatively.

"The Principles of the Rightful Division of Capital and Power," expounded Watt with a certain grandiloquence that missed its mark with its present audience. "We are prepared," he went on, "to fight for these Principles and obtain for Holloway and his like, advantages which go further and deeper than any mere righting of his present wrong can do. We shall be dealing with Clewsons shortly and any interference with them now will only serve to hamper our movements then. The strength of the Union must not be frittered away in small things. That is only to tinker at effects when we are on the eve of attacking Causes."

Anne drew a deep breath. Here were her own words and her own sentiments flung back to her by a quite genuine exponent of them. Here was a man sharing her ideas and prepared to act up to them at all costs, emphatically a man of action and not of theories. By every rule of logic she should transfer to him the need of hero-worship she had bestowed on Paul Arrington as exponent of the same theories. She was not so certain of Arrington's principles as she had been; but there could be no doubt about Joseph Watt's genuineness. Yet oddly perhaps, for one who prized logic, she felt no inclination to hero-worship in this case at all.

She told him gravely she quite understood the situation, which was hardly accurate on her part, and since he seemed to have no more to say, she wished him Good-evening and returned home, thinking of many things. Also she recollected with some satisfaction that owing to Applebury's superiority over Hoxton, her last month's salary from Paul was not yet exhausted, and she had Mrs. Holloway's address.

But certainly her first day with Mr. Watt had given

her food for consideration, and she continued to digest it that evening as she sat looking out of her high windows towards the distant park, hazy under the opaline tint of the sky. She could see a chestnut opening green fans in a neighbouring square and a plane tree. Plane trees always reminded her of Cousin Jessica's establishment.

She remembered very clearly to-night her first days there, and her first look out on the blackness and misery of the Under-world.

Cousin Jessica held that this misery was due to sin, and attacked that and incidentally, poverty. She never presumed to debate about the Cause of Sin.

The Charity Organisation, considering Poverty itself the parent of misery, attacked that valiantly if ponderously and left the *problem* of Poverty to others, Dr. Risler, for example.

The London County Council were of opinion that lack of Science and Sanitation were at the root of the trouble, and they certainly fought well on behalf of their agents. Dr. Risler laid the blame on Society and Modern Civilisation, and attacked that in a wholesale way with words.

Joseph Watt apparently believed Capital to be the Culprit, and against Capital devoted his forces. Anne did not attempt to formulate Paul Arrington's belief, but she remembered once when she had been speaking of the apparent unfairness of some great Labour trouble to Mrs. Heriod, that lady had said in her thoughtful far-off way that the hill of Progression was steepest at the bottom and journeys were generally uncomfortable. She thought of that now, there seemed an elementary substratum in it where lurked possibilities. She did not, however, think Mrs. Heriod would attempt either to level the hill or shorten the journey.

And what did Anne herself believe? Long ago under the pine-trees in a little glade she had indeed for a

Divine moment understood such things as Joy, Beauty, Sorrow and Failure. The Cause had been clear, the End certain. She had sought since in the world for some practical reflection of this vision, for being sure of the reality of that, she was equally sure it must cast its reflection on the physical world, and to find that would be to work in open sunlight, in sure knowledge and to sure attainment.

The opaline tints faded into grey but the voice of the vast world without droned on its unending chorus, and at this distance discord and harmony were merged together. Anne listened very quietly and confessed to to herself she had not found the reflection of her vision in the working world yet.

CHAPTER XVII

FOUR men sat round the table in the not very large nor comfortable office of the Ironworkers' Union. Fred Ellers was one, bearing his usual rather hang-dog expression. An alert-looking man of about thirty-five with a black moustache sat opposite Watt, and the fourth man was narrow-faced, thin-lipped, with cold, light eyes, very neatly dressed. With the exception of this man they were all men who had fought their way upwards against circumstances which seemed planned to keep them down. The youngest of them, he with the dark moustache—Mr. Cecil Marks—showed least signs of the fray and had risen highest. He would have been the first to credit his ancestry with a tendency to rise to some original level, perhaps he did not know there was either original level or ancestry to rise to it. Still he made no foolish boast of his success, he never flaunted it in people's faces, he carried reminiscences of it to their drawing-rooms, and he was quite a welcome visitor in several houses not too easily entered.

The four men had been arguing a little fiercely and hotly, and a cooling silence had fallen upon them for the moment. Then the thin-lipped man—Raskin by name—spoke in a soft, rather alluring voice.

"We have Mr. Watt's assurance as to the Election in January."

The words contained no doubt of the information, but the soft voice conveyed it subtly.

Joseph Watt repeated what he had said at an earlier period in the Meeting.

"The General Election will take place in January."

"November is then the very latest time we can take?" continued Raskin.

"It is far too late," put in Mr. Marks sharply. "If it comes to a strike we can't call the men out at the beginning of winter."

"They'll count on that!" put in Ellers sourly. No one took any notice of him.

"Why not?"

Mr. Marks shrugged his shoulders and looked at Watt, who suddenly sat upright and addressed them in a manner that left no doubt as to which was the dominant mind at the little meeting.

"There will be a strike, of course, and the men must be ready to come out in August. My men and yours too. The thing must be over and done before the winter."

"But you can't do it!" gasped Marks, flinging out his hand with a queerly helpless gesture. "It can't be done in the time, man. Look at all Masters's men. Blank refusal! There you are! You can't afford to cut them out. How's it to be done without time?"

His voice was almost hysterically pleading; he was demanding conviction not contradiction.

"There's plenty of time," said Watt woodenly. "You leave Masters's men to me, I'm going there,—to all his places in June. I shall be ready for you in the beginning of August, middle at latest."

The smooth voice intervened in an unnecessarily conciliatory tone.

"There is great pressure from the North, you know, Mr. Marks."

Watt turned to him:

"The pressure is from here," he said, grimly touching his own waistcoat. "I've waited these many years and I know my hour when it comes. It's here. I'm going to seize it. There's the rough draft of the

Claims," he indicated a paper on the table. "I've read them to you, you've agreed. Now it seems you're only ready to agree as long as the whole thing is in the air, *some time*—but I say it's not some time, it's this time, this year, August—are you going to cry off?"

"Not at all, not at all," broke in Mr. Marks eagerly; "it isn't that, but are we really ready? That's what I want to be sure of. Of course, the sooner the better."

"I tell you I'll manage Masters's group."

"But how, man, how?" reiterated Marks impatiently.

Again Raskin's voice slipped between them as if he fancied them on the verge of a quarrel which was not the case.

"Mr. Watt has his own methods, eh? I think we can leave it safely to him, I am ready to. Let us hurry up, for God's sake, if the time is ripe."

"Yes, before the Masters Federation grows too strong."

The three men jumped round towards the little-noticed fourth person who had thrown his bomb in his ordinary dull lifeless voice, but there was veiled life and ugly light in the eyes that glanced slanting ways at Joseph Watt and back again.

"What Federation? What's this?" demanded Marks breathlessly.

Raskin's thin face quivered a little; he seemed to withdraw from the discussion, to be only occupied in watching—watching very closely.

Watt was unmoved, apparently uninterested; but Ellers continued to glance at him aslant.

"He knows," he muttered sullenly. "I told him long ago."

Marks turned on Watt.

"What is it? A Federation? Why are we kept in the dark? We ought to know."

Still Watt was imperturbable. It would appear as impossible that he also, at the same news not so long ago, had betrayed a like agitation.

"Some of the big Employers," he drawled out in explanation, "seem to be making a little Society of their own for their own protection. It's not incorporated yet."

"It will be next month," put in Ellers, "eighteen Members. Masters started it. Carberry, Badderley, and the rest of them are in."

Doubt and suspicion sat heavily on Marks as he looked from Watt to Ellers, and from Ellers to Watt. He did not like Ellers any more than the rest of them did, but it was customary to regard him as Watt's "tame dog"; now it appeared he was less tame or less a dog than perhaps his presumed master thought.

Watt took up a pen. He had seemed to hang a moment on Ellers's words as if waiting for more which did not come. Ellers had cast his bomb and awaited the explosion anxiously, there seemed a danger of it fizzling out.

"Then we are all agreed," Watt said, in his usual gruff tone, "to have everything prepared for August, and to have a full meeting here on July 12. Will that suit you?"

He looked from Marks to Raskin questioningly. Ellers drew a long breath.

"No, no," spluttered Marks. "You haven't explained. The Federation? We've got to understand."

Watt indicated Ellers with his pen.

"He's told you, hasn't he? A lot of them don't feel so secure behind their stolen capital as they'd like, they are trying to patch up a new defence. Perhaps they've an inkling something's in the wind. Things creep out." He paused as if that were to sink into some mind present. "That's all, it's not incorporated

yet. It's too new altogether to trouble us in August. Shall we say July, then, for the Meeting?"

He looked Marks straight in the face.

The atmosphere of the little office was still charged with danger. Ellers's bomb had still an explosive quality, though it looked very much as if it would, after all, fizzle out quietly. Ellers mopped his face. The dust of an explosion would have hidden him from Watt, as it was—he got a little nearer the door.

Marks shifted his gaze to Raskin who still watched appreciatively, with a detached interest that betrayed his true relationship to these momentous things. Marks found no assistance there.

"After all," he considered quickly, "Watt had been their teacher a long while. He remembered his record. He had never failed them. When he had bidden them hold their hands he had invariably proved right by events; when he had pressed them forward they had won. He pressed them forward now,—This Federation Ellers spoke of—Success meant more to Watt than to any of them, and he was not disturbed——"

In the end Marks took out a notebook.

"July the first? Here?" he asked.

Watt turned to Raskin.

"Will that suit you?"

"Quite well. A full meeting you say. By that time the Federation or whatever it is, will be public property, I suppose?"

"It seems public now," said Watt indifferently, and again, though he did not glance at Ellers, his words seemed to scrape him with bitter scorn, and the other man knew it.

"That's a false move of Watt's," thought Raskin, "Ellers is his enemy now and a nasty one!"

They settled a few more points and then separated. Ellers slipped first from the room with a muttered ex-

cuse. Marks gave him a curt nod. Raskin took no notice of him, but said good-bye to the other cordially, and ran downstairs. He overtook Ellers at the door.

"Come and dine at the *Monoco* to-night?" he asked airily.

The other nodded a consent barely lingering.

"Seven sharp," said Raskin, and hailed a hansom.

Marks waited till they had left the room before he spoke.

"Look here, Watt," he said, in his quick, earnest way. "I was taken aback just now, but I'm with you, you understand that? If you think it's nothing—this Federation business, I'll take you at your word. You and I know it's a big thing we are in for, and are going to pull off for our people. There's not room for personal rot. I'm with you. You see?"

"Oh, all right," returned Watt curtly. "I understand."

"Ellers is a bit of a fool, but I think I'd keep my eye on him, Watt."

The other laughed rather unpleasantly.

"Think so? I'll see to it. Thank you."

Marks hurried off, his alert face expressive of a satisfactory decision. He had taken his line and Ellers or Raskin might take what course they liked; he, Marks, would have no dealings with them since he believed Watt was the better man.

When this last footstep had died away on the stair Joseph Watt shut and locked the office door, flung open the window and sitting down in the least uneasy chair, stretched out his legs with a sense of fatigue. Then he took out a handkerchief and wiped his face. His hands were shaking now and his impassiveness was all gone; it had served its turn. The day was his!

At present he would not think of Ellers, who had nearly wrecked it. It was hardly a safe thought, the office was hot and he was stout.

But the day was his!

He ran his mind over the rough programme for the coming weeks.

He would start soon, sooner than he had said, visit all Christopher Masters's centres, speak to the men there. There must be no advertisement of himself. He would go, a plain man to plain men, to put issues before them that they had not gathered out of the ashes of such hot speeches of such men as Raskin. It would remain to be seen if Christopher Masters had not forged a weapon against himself with his Federation. By July he would have the whole thing clear and settled to lay before the Council; by August they would in turn lay their propositions and demands before the Masters.—And they would be refused. There would be no doubt about that. Watt meant them to be refused! Then the men would be called out—all the Ironworkers of England—and the stronghold of Capital to his mercy!

Now that the fulfilment of his great dream was dawning, Watt found a new being within himself who struggled pitifully in his ill-fitting prison home. The fierce enmity of his youth rose like some re-embodied spirit to contend with that altruistic passion that had so gradually usurped its place. Six months ago he would have said confidently he was chiefly actuated by a desire to help those of whom he was. To-day he could not honestly have said which force dominated him. Pity for the down-trodden, or hatred for the Down-treader.

His mind, or the re-embodied spirit that possessed it, re-visioned the cruel black years of his childhood with their conspicuous lack of all things necessary, and super-abundance of all things unnecessary for his better being. Re-visioned also the big form of a keen, hawk-eyed man who passed sometimes through ugly streets with a following of black looks and blacker

faces, for which he cared less than for the black dust soiling his boots. A man who, backed by the Fortune he had won by their sweat and anguish, played a big part in the "back behind" history of a continent, or so it was whispered—a very strong man! Stronger beyond measure than the puny boy who shook his small fist savagely after the retreating form, and—strong or weak—now passed beyond reach of the same fist growing mightier, the same hate still remembered, and now to be dreaded. But only the man, the individual, was gone! The fierce young-old spirit whispered that continuously in a willing ear. The Principle, the dreadful Power for which he stood was still existent. Christopher Masters might act as he would, break up the system of his father, pamper his workmen out of touch with their own Union, their true ark of safety; but Christopher Masters inherited nevertheless his father's Capital and his father's Power, and he—Joseph Watt—who had waited, worked and watched, meant to lay strong hands now on both, and redistribute both Capital and Power according to his own ideals of wisdom, justice, and well-doing.

The Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union gave a sharp gasp as he reached this personation of his thoughts, as if he had been audience to some strangely eloquent speaker who, by force of oratory, faith, and passion, had carried even a level-headed, sober-minded man off his feet.

These things were merely extravagant visions, of course. The real thing was that he was going to make a great move in the eternal conflict between Labour and Capital, to readjust the balance of life; and a clear brain was needed for it.

He wiped his face again.

"I'll go next week," he muttered to himself. "and take the girl. I won't see Ellers at all!" That there was any connection between taking his new secretary

and shutting the door on Ellers's face did not deliberately occur to him. Possibly, he had even forgotten what Paul Arrington had said about her being a protection.

It is certain, however, that that day the knowledge Miss Kempburn would be waiting for him did somewhat accelerate his movements homeward. He was used to her presence now, even able to criticise her doings in his gruff way, and this spoke well for Anne, since he was still in awe of her, though he would not have allowed it for a moment. Still anything so strange to his environment as Anne, was bound to excite emotion of some sort even in his unaccustomed breast, for he was not really an unemotional man, only a very self-repressed one, on whom this new element of womanhood—so opposed to his former conception of the "feminine"—must kindle some unexpected sentiment.

He met his sister at the gate just going in. She was very amiable and beaming to him, as she had every reason to be, since, Buxton or not, new clothes were at her disposal by means of an unasked cheque Watt had tossed her a few mornings ago. He had entertained a vague idea of late that there was something wrong with his sister's appearance, perhaps she was a bit behind the fashion, for he concluded Miss Kempburn must certainly be in fashion. He saw no reason his sister shouldn't be the same in moderation. Flossie beamed still more when he told her to ask Miss Kempburn to have "a cup of tea." She hurried on and was delivering her invitation when he entered the room.

"You'd better stay," he put in gruffly, seeing her hesitate. "There's a lot to do, I may want you later."

She looked at the really formidable pile of letters awaiting him and agreed.

"Five o'clock then," said Miss Flossie. "Oh, don't

begin to open any of those dreadful letters till I'm gone! I always think they are full of gunpowder or poison." With which playful sally she retreated to arrange a tea worthy of the occasion.

If her words, however, could have been taken figuratively, Miss Flossie's fears were not so far from the truth concerning the letters Anne laid silently before Watt. Rough, ill-worded, queerly written epistles full of explosive threats against some one Power or against Watt himself; better written letters with bitter innuendoes against many men, again against Watt in particular.

"There is another letter from Holloway," she said, detaining it a moment. "He seems fairly desperate. Is he a dangerous man?"

These threatening letters had alarmed her at first, till she saw how little heed Watt paid to them.

He held out his hand for Holloway's epistle silently.

The letter was coarsely abusive, and ended with specified threats of vengeance and one sentence of interest.

"Money to my wife," wrote Holloway, "isn't justice to me! if you sends it you mark that, its justice and open dealing I asks for, not money."

Watt glanced sharply at Anne. There was an innocent lack of interest in her face that betrayed her. Watt frowned a little.

"Write to him again, tell him I sent no money; that I'm coming to Milbury and will set his matter right."

"After his threats?"

"There's no room for fine feelings like that in our work, Miss Kempburn. Men in want threaten naturally. It's their way. Are all those letters from Carberry's men?"

"The first six; one is a sort of Round Robin, they

say they sent the same to the Office, but in case it does not reach you, send here also."

"I never saw it," snapped Watt curtly.

He skimmed it through and tossed it down.

"To-day's Tuesday. We'll go Thursday evening. I hope you are a good traveller, Miss Kempburn; we'll have to rush about."

"I shall like it."

He got up and looked out of the window, and went on talking gruffly.

"We must take Flossie along, it will be better for you in the evening and that. You can't have a lot of luggage remember, one box each, something easy to move, and plain things; make my sister understand if you can."

She was amazed at his thought of such matters, having so far had no knowledge of the real campaigning greatness of the man, and his grip of detail.

He was struggling now with doubt as to how much he must tell her. Resentment of his obligation to tell her anything, resentment of the need she had already created for him, contended with the unaccustomed luxury of having a companion willing to take his valuation of things, who had no axe of her own to grind and who really believed in the Cause.

"It's a rough job we are going on, Miss Kempburn," he said, at last turning to her with his hands in his pockets, and his unheroic figure outlined against the window in no graceful fashion. "A rough job, and you'd better be sure what you're in for. It means a big thing too. Look at that!" he pointed to the letters on the table, "that's the voice of thousands calling for redress and help. Do you think I mind their threats. Why, they show they are alive and ready to live. Well, we are going to give them redress and help. Going to do something," he gripped the back

of his chair and leant towards her. "Now listen, here on one side are Capital and Employers, Companies most of 'em that care for nothing but their dividends. They just rake in money—money for which they do nothing, and for which they give back to the people who make it a few paltry shillings of pittance! They don't know and don't care, they are dealing in flesh and blood. Money's all they care about, money to buy things they don't want, and so we—we've got to do without things we do want! Well, we've got to show them we not only want but will have! These masters"—he choked a little at the word—"have got to be brought to their senses, they've got to learn we won't be very poor in order that they may be very rich. But, remember the fault's not all theirs, it's ours that's never let them see we are in earnest, never let them realise *we* are the real Power, and if we hold our hand their money will crumble away. We've got to make a big effort, make 'em realise this; then, when they've learnt to be afraid of us, we'll get fair play and justice,—not till then!"

He stopped abruptly. He had not meant to practise his coming oratory on her, it was the effect of an audience of any sort in conjunction with the subject. Anne had listened in dumb amazement. The words and sentiments, had she calmly considered them, were those of any stump orator in the Park, but there the resemblance ended. In place of ferocious tone and fervent gesture, Watt delivered himself with the quiet assurance of a business man making an unanswerable statement. He diagnosed a disease and prescribed a remedy as a specialist. He saw his point and no one else's, there was no other and he was quite calm about it. Small wonder Anne—for all her glimmering instinct of something "left out,"—felt herself caught into the circling plans of this plain-speaking, confident man. She had succumbed to Paul Arrington's oratory

in a different spirit, he drove her thereto by the brilliant light of logic and reason and his own will. This man was not greatly concerned to drive her anywhere. He was only concerned in carrying out his Plans. If she fell in with them well and good, if not he would not argue with her to convince her. Presumably he took it for granted he had accomplished this for he reseated himself at the table and went on giving directions for their journey and procedure.

"And mind, I'll want you in close attendance, you needn't be afraid of the men, however rough they seem, it's not the rough men who are dangerous, but you are to stay no matter who comes unless I give you a signal to go."

Anne nodded.

"I know. Mr. Arrington did that with Mr. Aston. What signal?"

Watt gazed rather blankly at her.

"You could just look at me and then the door," said Anne. "Mr. Arrington has quite an elaborate code, so his secretary knows just how soon to return."

"I shouldn't remember that," said Watt hastily. "Besides I want you to stay. They may try to get at you, you know."

This time Anne looked blank.

"Want to find out things, where I'm going, where I've been."

"Oh, that's quite easy. I need not know anything. Secretaries never do you know, unless they are told to know it."

"Don't they?" remarked Watt drily. "That's not my experience. However, we shall see—and you must be ready to leave any place at a few minutes' notice."

She nodded, but thoughtfully because she was thinking of Miss Flossie.

He divined as much.

"I think it's tea-time," he said. "I shall tell my sister something about it, so you'll know just how much she knows. Do you see?"

Anne gravely acquiesced, and they went in search of tea.

Joseph Watt was quite pleased to discover the real reason he had been so anxious for Anne to stay to tea.

CHAPTER XVIII

"THE Chief will be in by four, will you wait, Miss Kempburn?" Max's voice was a little anxious.

"Yes," she responded promptly, "if you are not too busy."

"You ought to know it is one of my duties to entertain Mr. Arrington's waiting callers."

"I think I remember something about it," murmured Anne demurely. "Only according to precedent we ought to wait in the ante-room."

"Precedents were made to be broken,—on suitable occasions. I've been longing to break something for days. If you knew how grateful I am for the opportunity you'd be happy."

"Do you also feel like that sometimes?" she asked sympathetically; "that you want to break things? I do too. It is so ridiculous that we can't do it. Why not go out and buy a sixpenny vase and smash it?"

"Oh, that wouldn't adequately express my feelings at all!" exclaimed Max; "a sixpenny vase isn't half valuable enough. My feelings must be very superior to yours; I'd like to smash the Portland vase, or something equivalent."

"Why not blow up St. Paul's?"

"Not at all. It would make such a litter. If you had let me finish I should have added—smash something, sweep the pieces into the grate and say nothing about it."

"That's deceitful," objected Anne reprovingly.

"Not if it's my Portland vase. The crux of the thing is that it should be something of my own," he sighed deeply,

"Why this violence?" demanded the visitor after a moment's pause.

"You spoke of sharing the feeling, and you ask why?" was the reproving answer.

"There's always a 'why' if one takes the trouble to find it out. Sometimes it is so small a why that its discovery reduces one to laughter which does one good."

"And if it's big enough to reduce one to tears?" Anne nodded.

"The risk is too great. I don't want to weep over it. I want to smash something, it's less discomposing in the end."

"Then you really know why? Is there anything seriously wrong?" persisted Anne.

But Max only shifted his chair. It would have been better than the biggest smash to tell her, but he was his Chief's man; and she Joseph Watt's.

"At all events I don't want even to break anything quite gently now," he assured her. "I am quite comfortable, thank you."

"I am happy to hear it. I was getting nervous. Mr. Aston, we are going to Mirchester to-morrow."

"I know." And seeing her surprise, he added: "Watt has been to and fro a good deal lately."

"Then Mr. Arrington knows about it and he is on our side? I've been wanting to ask that so much."

Max hesitated. She could hardly have asked him a more difficult question. For one thing he was certain of nothing and in any case he could not be open with Joseph Watt's secretary, that would be to land her into the maddening position in which he found himself.

"I can tell you this much, Miss Kempburn," he said at last. "Watt doesn't take any steps alone. I think he is still in leading strings."

She caught at the humour of that, but remarked presently she was glad Mr. Arrington knew.

"It is so big, this affair of 'ours,'" she smiled quaintly at Max. "I felt doubtful if he—Mr. Watt—was—enough!"

Max laughed. Anne had a vague suspicion he had not laughed much lately. He looked very thin and, when not talking to her, preternaturally grave.

"Don't let's talk shop," he entreated. "When are you going to introduce me to Miss Watt?"

"I had thought of asking you to join us at a Concert one Sunday, but I've given it up," said Anne mournfully.

"Why, wouldn't she like me?"

"You mightn't be congenial. It is not her fault of course, but yours entirely. You are not sufficiently unlimited in capacity for appreciation."

Max considered this with the gravity it demanded.

"It sounds like looking-glass writing," he said with rather a baffled air. "Still, it's clear I have not got something I ought to have. Can't I acquire it?"

Anne shook her head solemnly:

"No, I'm afraid it's out of the question. I'm not denying you a sense of humour, but I know its limits."

"Hasn't yours any limits too?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, it's limit would be watching yours fail."

"That's one of the nicest things you've ever said to me, Miss Kempburn."

"It was not premeditated," answered Anne quickly.

"Unpremeditated charity is the essence of——"

"Of wastefulness," she interposed. "Please don't talk of charity, it fills me with all uncharitableness. Instead, please tell me how is Mr. Arrington's arm. I haven't dared mention it the few times I have seen him."

"So you know!" said Max with interest. "I was wondering how he did it?"

"Picking up Macdonald from before the motor, which he tried to hold off with the other hand as far as one could see. It was quite mad but Macdonald wouldn't be alive if he'd been sane."

"Insanity is responsible for saving many lives," he agreed wearily. "The arm is all right now, at least he can shake hands; but my word, Miss Kempburn, Macdonald ought to be taught some one has to pay for his pranks." His tone implied Macdonald's master had not been the only payee in this case.

"That's why," he half stopped and glided on skillfully, "I'm so thin. I've had so many letters to write."

"And no helper? I thought Mr. Arrington told you to find a new under-secretary."

"I can't find one."

"Shall I help? I know several eligible ones."

"Please don't trouble," he interposed hastily. "You have no idea of the qualifications necessary."

"My own?"

"You have less idea of those than any one. Miss Kempburn, do you like your new work?"

She was aware he was suddenly serious, and anxious for her answer which she gave frankly enough.

"Yes, I like the work better than the life; and if ever a man needed a secretary Mr. Watt did! Then we really are going to do something big. It's no secret that, to you."

"No, I know about it, but I don't want to know."

"You don't approve?" She frowned a little.

"I refuse to talk about it. How is your sister?"

It was quite a harmless, natural question, but the effect on Anne was as if he had suddenly put out the light.

"I don't know. I wish I did. She writes she is well."

He waited for more. It did not come readily. Anne seldom spoke of Naomi to any one, yet just now when the thought of her was charged with so much doubt, she felt it would be a big relief to talk to Max

Aston. After all, why not? It was Max Aston, and it was so easy to tell him things, so safe and restful.

"I am worried about Naomi," she said, looking at him with her candid grey eyes so expressive of concern. "The tour is over, she has not renewed her contract but she still stays there; she says she isn't coming back yet. Why not? I don't like it."

"Can't you persuade her to come and sing to us in London?"

"She has not sung in London for years," said Anne in a low voice. "She never will,—in the provinces and abroad that's all. I think it stands in the way of her getting appointments now. Malcolm Strangeway says she's lost her real place. How can one tell? I think her voice heavenly."

"She likes Canada?"

Max spoke in as commonplace a tone as he could, he knew well enough he was being honoured by a confidence. A fear that she might presently regret it, or that he might inadvertently scare her from what was evidently a relief, chained him close to matter-of-factness.

"I don't know even that. If it were not for Mr. Watt and this coming thing, I should go out to her, and bring her home. She says she is well, but something must be wrong, she seems to have lost heart."

"Does she ask for you?"

"No, quite otherwise."

"You can't move on anything so vague as that, can you?" he said earnestly. "Your sister would certainly make it plain if she wanted you. Probably she just wants a rest, and likes the country. It isn't very wise to worry is it?"

"Perhaps not, but I'm never very logical where Naomi is concerned. However, I couldn't leave Mr. Watt just now, could I?"

"Out of the question!" agreed Max, "and here's the Chief."

Arrington seemed in no way surprised to see his late secretary. He barely troubled to glance at the letter she bore which was the pretext of her coming. He told Max to order tea in the little drawing-room, a very rarely used room but still not shrouded in holland like its big companion.

"We will talk business after tea," he said to Anne; "it's no use attempting it with Max here, he will only interrupt."

Max protested plaintively and was told peremptorily to lead the way and not fuss.

The small drawing-room was sparsely furnished with old French things, of quaint design and fine chiselled work. There were a few pieces of rather exceptional china, and it was all painfully tidy, and the ornaments looked as if glued to their places. Max opened the window and Macdonald took this as an attention to himself and stepped out on the balcony to watch the street through the heavy balustrade.

Tea came in and Anne officiated by request. Her thoughts were all too busy with the last time she had had tea with Paul Arrington at Bannerton Castle, when she had not been allowed this privilege. It seemed a long while ago. She had seen him twice since, mere short glimpses and she had resolutely refused to allow her thoughts free range concerning him. This she took as a pleasant reward for her mental reticence. It was quite undeniably pleasant.

Max went away as soon as tea was over, and Anne forgot when he said good-bye, though he did not, that their next meeting was a problematic affair.

When he had gone Arrington moved his chair back into the shadow, from where he could see Anne's face clearly.

To him Anne was now the main link between him and the Event he was dragging towards him out of the future. For a time she was going beyond reach of

him into a very ruffled world, and a thousand things might intervene between him and her, and consequently between him and that purpose on which all his will and desire were set. It was necessary in the short hours that remained, to strengthen by every means in his power Anne's confidence in him that she might leave London feeling him most surely a guardian of her life, a friend to whom she might return, an arbitrator in those rending questions he knew the future held for her. Had it been merely a question of being in touch with her he could have relied on Max, who might be trusted in his quiet insistent way to keep Miss Kempburn in view. But it was Anne's mind and will and wishes that Paul Arrington desired as his ally in purpose; and moreover, whether Max was in love with her or not, Arrington's sense of what was due to the Astons would have prevented his counting on Max's inclinations towards what his family would probably regard as an unfortunate marriage. Anne must be his friend entirely, was to be the medium between him and Naomi in the coming days, and he set himself to cement that friendship in these last minutes of her near sojourn to him.

Had he known it, it needed little enough effort on his part. It was Paul Arrington's merit that he made no count of his personal magnetism which stood him in such good stead. He had had relatively little dealings with women and believed, with an almost boyish simplicity, it would need an effort on his part to draw Anne into the desired bonds with him.

But Anne—poor Anne—how could she be expected to know the great man set store by her friendship? The position was full of danger for most girls, even Anne with her detached view of life and her power of restraint was in danger, when Arrington talked to her just *so*, with all the fine play of his mind on great subjects laid out for her benefit.

They were soon speaking of Watt and such of his plans as Anne knew. Arrington saw she was already uneasy and since it did not suit him for her to take fright yet, he allayed her doubts through her own reason, nor did he betray the bigness of the scheme of which she saw but a corner.

"Watt belongs to the people; he knows them and their needs. This 'Living Standard' idea of his is reasonable, you allow."

He kept her eyes on the justice of that, made it the focus of thought to the belittling of the means that should touch it.

"Do not judge hastily of either side," he warned her presently. "Hold your ideas in abeyance. You are helping a man who at heart believes sincerely in the course he takes, and is fighting the battle for the weak. Leave him his own tactics. Everyone finds his own road in the end. Neither you nor I can say at present if this is yours; meanwhile, you are doing incalculable good to Watt—remember that—or rather do not remember it. It is enough you are there."

She sat silent a while thinking of this. It was quite a new light on her position, so curious an illumination indeed, that for a moment the walls of the little drawing-room might have melted away, and the pines and blue sky have taken their place.

Arrington watched her curiously. He did not know just how he had achieved his purpose but he had done so. Anne would certainly return to him now, for he had told her something that had brought a look into her face that was beyond his reading. She did not, however, know that and would want more from him.

Then they talked of other matters. He would not let her go yet, though he had achieved his object. It was restfully refreshing to be with her, to explore that open wide mind of hers, with its undiscovered country beyond. He forgot he was talking to a girl.

She figured for him rather the country of some faint lost belief that had been near him once, some sweet wisdom that would not fit into the elaborate clothes of knowledge the world spun for it, and was therefore discarded.

At last, he essayed her on the subject of Love. Was it his evil or good genius that led him there —into the very ranks of danger, yet a danger dependent on what men call chance.

He had shown her a small picture entitled "Love Crowned," possibly of more value as a painting than a thought, and she said so quite frankly.

"It does not embody your idea of love then?" he asked a little amused.

"Well, is it any one's?"

"Presumably the artist's."

She shook her head.

"No, not even that, I think. He was considering a clever adjustment of light and shade, a delicate symphony of roses and sunshine, and rosy girls who, if they had skins like that and lived in the open air as he insinuates, must have bathed in glycerine and cucumber every night, or they would have been as brown as gypsies!"

Paul laughed.

"And it's altogether too light a treatment to please you?"

"If he'd called it 'Girls at Play,' I should have thought it very pretty."

"Well, isn't it a play, Love? A play for girls and boys?"

"No," said Anne laconically.

"What! you too would make a sort of god of Love with the rest of the world, and set him on a pinnacle of Life for all things to bow down to?"

There was a little bitterness in his mocking words. Anne turned to him quite gravely:

"They can't help themselves; Love doesn't demand

homage, but it's inevitable since Love exists. I mean——" She made the little spreading out gesture with her hands common to her when difficulties of expression oppressed her. "There is Love existing and all else, all lesser feelings, give way to it. It's the natural thng"

"All lesser feeling—there you are!" Paul retorted with scorn. "You count all things 'lesser.'"

She mused a little then looked at him a little perplexed and distressed.

"Something has to be on top, the rest must be lesser if only by a step."

"Honour, name, obligations, self-respect?" he flung the words at her in scorn.

"They might stand between Love and fulfilment, but not in its place, nor could they take it."

"You child!"

He looked down at her from his height with impatient wonder.

"But you know it really," she said with a sort of wistful forbearance. "Love is quite independent of fulfilment. Any of those things you name can stand between it and—coronation, but for all that Love is the real King. They cannot unthrone him, they can only unthrone——"

She stopped short and looked away, aware this was a strange topic between them, and that she had been speaking of hidden faiths gathered up in God knows what hours of dreams, that had no counterpart in her life since Love had never made visible manifestation there.

"Well, go on; what do they dethrone?"

"Passion," she said turning away to the window. "and we were talking of Love, Mr. Arrington, which perhaps after all isn't to be so easily spoken of."

There was a silence through which the ticking of a clock pulsated with terrible deliberation. Across the

silence Arrington's taunt of her as "child" was tossed back to him as empty and meaningless, or transcending his own dull interpretation of it. He heeded this not at all, he stood dumb and white as if she had struck him. This possible new reading of his life, the possible view that his love had not been great enough instead of too great for its own existence, had been something less high than the height to which a woman like Naomi or Anne herself could climb, had once before stirred in his mind in her presence, and he had pushed it back as madness. Now she had voiced the possibility openly, and driven him back through ten years that were empty of meaning if his love for Naomi had been a less noble thing than he fancied.

Anne herself was vaguely alarmed, yet refused to let confusion overtake her. They had had no business to talk of these things; it was no wish of hers, but what she had said had been true, so why should she be abashed at it? Yet she stood looking out of the window with her back to him, nervously fingering a little chain of green stones she was wearing. Paul was oblivious of her presence, oblivious of the distress his silence must cause. She had ceased to be Anne Kempburn to him. She was an accusation which he felt to be false and yet irrefutable. He had beaten down and bartered Love for other things; or if Anne spoke the truth then it was not Love that had succumbed to their onslaught and the empty years that intervened became a mockery and the future empty too—all emptied. Again if Anne spoke truth then that other heart he had stricken down with his own, moved, breathed and loved still—a wounded broken thing. Unbearable thought!

Why some unconsidered words, a mere repetition of sentiment quite commonplace and trite, should suddenly clothe themselves with light that strikes into the darkest corner of the heart, can never be explained.

It remains a fact, however, when the hour of awakening is at hand the summons comes in no strange voice but in familiar form. It was so with Paul Arrington now. Perhaps Anne's personal conviction had lent force to her words, they anyway continued to burn though he had forgotten the substance of them.

At last she could bear it no longer, and turned quickly, meaning to speak and end the foolish tension. As she turned the long scarf she wore caught on a covered Wedgwood box and it came to the ground with a tiny crash.

"Oh, I *am* so sorry!" began Anne in dire distress.

Among the shattered pieces of china lay a little ribbon bow uncunningly worked in a quaint design in silver,—worked by Anne herself long ago and forming part of the garniture of a dress of Naomi's, specially designed to match "the little sister's" first attempt to create beautiful things. Anne could not possibly mistake it. It was Naomi's ribbon, her monogram carefully entwined, and it was here in a china box in Paul Arrington's house—

She picked it up, and stared across at him in dull uncertainty.

The breaking china had brought Paul back to the present. He went forward to reassure and assist her, and saw what she held.

"Naomi's lost ribbon!" he cried. "Where did you——?" Recollection caught him back into silence. He held out his hand.

"Give it me," he said quietly.

But Anne held it firmer, and made no effort to move. The revelation was only too complete, and too blinding in its completeness for her to exercise judgment or discretion. All she knew was here is Naomi's ribbon and there the man who had spoilt Naomi's life somehow, the man who had been hero and master to her—nearly something more—she could

catch comfort even at that bitter moment for the guard she had set before her heart.

"It was you then?" she said slowly; "you, who made her so gloriously happy and then—broke her heart and spoilt her life? I don't know quite what you did, she never told me—not even a name, you see—but how I have hated the man who did it, and it was *you!*—I want to think she found you were not good enough, the very best of you wasn't *that*—that it was not your doing but hers—but I can't!" she added passionately. "It wasn't like her, it was you who did it! There was the visit when she was so happy, and afterwards she wrote to me and said she was to be married, and then almost directly she wrote again that she wasn't! Nothing else. When she came again one saw—and it was you!"

Her incoherent accusation left him at her mercy. No defence would be accepted by the sister of the woman he had in some unknown way so wronged. Besides, he had no desire to defend himself, yet he wanted her to say her say; no words of the child could hurt him now, she had unknowingly dealt him the real blow before.

"You helped me because of her then?" Anne went on, the voice softening at that. She had no self pride where Naomi was concerned. "So you do or did care for her?"

The little crooked smile on his face softened her still more.

"Oh, why, why was it?"

"She was married," he said slowly, his eyes on the ribbon he ached to possess. "You knew that did you not? She did not tell me at first, not for some time."

"But he had deserted her for years, in six months. She was barely more than a child."

"He was or is a scoundrel, but her husband."

"But surely—desertion—a bad man like that!"

She stammered in confusion but stuck to her purpose of understanding the matter.

"She would have divorced him—yes." He helped her out grimly.

"Well?"

"You are a child, you don't understand," he said impatiently. "I love her. and I respected her too. The divorce courts for Naomi—and that scoundrel! I knew something of him."

"It was better to break her heart?" she questioned scornfully.

"You *can't* understand, you are too young—It broke mine too! Do you think I did not want her there at Bannerton, that it was easy to separate? She at least had her glorious voice, I—had nothing!"

But at the word *Bannerton* a new light swept in on Anne, her intuition caught it, held it aloft as a torch, and the whole pitiful tragedy of her sister's life became clear.

"You are quite wrong," she said, her eyes taking a hard gleam. "You had your pride and your race, and Bannerton and its portraits left you, all the things which you preferred above Naomi. Don't hug to yourself the idea of being magnanimous to her, or saving *her* from disgrace. It wasn't to save her, it was to save Bannerton and the gallery. It was a record that wouldn't read well there, none of those women had a terrible story like that. It wasn't Naomi's fault, she was as good as the best of them. You meant to put her there, and then cried off because she told you how she'd suffered; and your wicked false pride has spoilt life for my Naomi, because she can love if you can't, and anyhow you've ruined her career! It's because of *you* she won't sing in London, I see now. Oh, I hope you are and have been and will be alone and always alone, with your pride and your pictures and your name, which you

think worth more than a woman like Naomi. No, I'll not give you the ribbon. Don't come near me. I'm going. Go on building your Garden City, and trying to help things; but it won't set you right, or build up the life you spoil."

A choking sob stopped her. She caught the scarf, the agent of the mischief, about her and stepped over the broken china, shaken and trembling, but Arrington interposed.

"One moment," he said very gently. "I am building no Garden City, I don't know why you think so. For the rest I don't think you are right but——" He turned back to the table—"If you wait a moment, Jephson will call you a taxi."

"I'd rather walk."

"You will not walk, you will drive to Mrs. Heriod's at once," he said peremptorily, and as Jephson entered, he crossed over to Anne and gave the order without turning round.

His near vicinity shook her. She was conscious of a bathos, and a feeling of inadequacy. The pain of her discovery was not all on Naomi's behalf, though she did not yet realise it. She refused to look at him and kept her eyes fixed on the window to see the taxi approach.

He waited too, anxious for her to be gone, holding no traffic in his mind with her fierce accusations, yet conscious he would not have had her less roused or less direct. He could almost love her for her hot championship of her sister, and cared nothing if it were just or unjust. He thought he had known that something like this would be the end from the very day he had so unexpectedly saddled Max with an extra responsibility, so he waited silently thinking of many things he had planned, now only dead thoughts.

A taxi seemed hard to find. Poor Anne felt it was all very badly managed,—the taxi, if she must have

one, should have dashed up with rampant snorts, and borne her away in a cloud of indignation; and here she was calmly looking out of the window and watching for it with the man whom she had so hotly attacked patiently waiting by her side. He was not looking at her, she was glad of that; he was not even angry, of that she was not glad, not knowing Paul Arrington's anger was not a thing to encounter justly or unjustly.

At last! The taxi came slowly round the far end of the square, the driver more intent on watching his tyres suspiciously than on hastening to the call.

Paul moved, and she gave a sigh of relief.

"Good-bye, Miss Kempburn," he said very quietly and held out his hand.

She put hers in it mechanically, before she realised she had not meant to. He knew that and smiled and held it. She would not pull it away from his grasp, she raised indignant eyes to him instead. And on a sudden his face softened and he bent and kissed her hand.

"Because you are her champion," he said, releasing her.

She went out with burning cheeks and gave him no look nor word besides. Jephson saw her into the taxi, and without asking her, gave the man an address. She knew it was the Heriods and made no protest; she could re-direct him when they had started. She could have done so easily, but somehow she did not. She lay back in her corner, dazed and tired, her heart beating uncertainly and an odd sense of ill weighing on her. Mrs. Heriod's room and Mrs. Heriod and the Picture seemed to draw her. She left the matter of direction alone.

PART II
JOSEPH WATT

CHAPTER XIX

SEEN from the top of Clayton Hill, Runnyford was really quite a pretty village. Its new redness was screened by the elm trees in Cloy's meadows, and Stormly lay behind under its pall of smoke, a pall certainly less thick than it had been ten years ago. North of Stormly it hung heavy and black as ever, for there were towns of foundries and ironworks, whose owners cared little what hue the sky took above them, so long as the heavy ore changed to gold in their hands. But Stormly stood on the fringe of these black townships, and Runnyford two miles from Stormly, though electric trams, plying along the road that looped the bottom of Clayton Hill, made the distance inconsiderable.

On the left of Clayton Hill lay Stormly Park, stretching out in green restfulness, full of promise verging on fulfilment these early June days.

Christopher Masters, who had been testing the hill-climbing power of a new motor, left the car drawn up at the side of the road and leant over a gate contemplating Runnyford as it lay out before him in the sunlight. There was a wide space of common land between it and Stormly, Clayton Hill itself being part of it, just wild land with hawthorn and blackberry bushes, and patches of bracken man-high in autumn. "Waste land" many people call it, and Christopher Masters would laugh but refrained from contradiction.

"It was Patricia's," he said; "if she preferred it 'waste' it was her own affair." Runnyford was his. There was no "waste" there. Perhaps Mrs. Masters kept the common as a buffer between his building

craze and Stormly Park; her children undoubtedly preferred its waste wildness to the more precise beauties of the Park. The Runnyford children had also an affection and use for it.

It was certainly quite a pleasing prospect looking down over Runnyford from Clayton Hill, and it was in a large measure a prospect of Christopher Masters's own making. The Runnyford he had swept away had not been a pleasant place at all, but the maker's face was very grave and betrayed at present little pleasure in viewing his handiwork. There had been troublous times and rough going in the ten years that had elapsed since Christopher had reluctantly stepped into the place his unrecognised father left for him. Matters had been disorganised then, were reorganised, and Stormly left to find its feet under the new régime, and it had found them with marvellous alacrity. In that ten years the whole face of the countryside had changed.

The rows of wretched jerry-built houses, the dilapidated older hovels, the whole dirty, sordid little world that had crowded round the great wall encircling Stormly works had been swept away. Runnyford and the tram lines had taken their place, and halfway between stood the great block of "bachelor quarters," and nearer still two groups of iron buildings where Christopher had first "housed" his people while Runnyford sprang into being.

He leant over the gate pondering over the problem of Economy he had to solve for the good or ill of his people down there below him, small wonder he looked grave.

His people!! As he looked, the sense of his Unity with them, and of their vast daily needs which he and his millions alone could satisfy, swept over him with irresistible force. All these people, men, women, and children, some thousands of human beings, were

actually dependent on him, humanly speaking, for daily bread. He was at least the appointed channel by which it should reach them. Perhaps vaguely they imagined their toil went to swell his own gigantic fortune, no doubt indeed they did so think, but actually here in Stormly every penny made went back to the workers. The place was self-supporting that was all. Shocking economy perhaps, but as Masters had once said to a protesting clerk, if he had chosen to spend the money on a deer forest, on the turf, on yachts, or in any of the hundred and one pleasures, which did not greatly appeal to him, no one would have complained or scoffed. It happened to be his hobby to set these people of his in such a position with regard to material things that they should not be unfairly handicapped in life's race. They mistrusted him, misjudged him, maligned him, as a matter of course, grumbled continually, being at best half-developed human beings—that troubled him little. What did trouble him was how to keep them unreasonable grumblers without subsidising Stormly works from his own big income.

For though the bad years that had dragged the country's trade nearly to a standstill seemed likely to mend, work was still slack, and at Stormly they had long ago exhausted every pretext for working full time, and were already on short hours. David Fulner, the manager, said these must be shortened again and wages must be shortened likewise in common fairness to fellow employers.

The men ought to have been prepared for such a day, they earned good money, had been driven by circumstances to spend it fairly wisely, had every facility for saving if so minded, Clubs, Societies, Unions, all around them. They *ought* to be able to tide over a bad place.

But Christopher Masters knew them! Improvident, extravagant children with regard to wordly wisdom.

They would suffer privations, worst of all they would be idle, and the trams went further than Runnyford and Stormly, went as far as Milbury, where its crowded publics at every corner were very different affairs from the various clubs and decent inns of Runnyford; and it takes more than ten years to change ingrained habits of mind and body. Christopher knew all this, and his heart was heavy for his people.

In all the vast concerns to which the name of Masters was a password there had been established as far as was compatible with honest dealing towards the shareholders, a new régime since the days of the great Peter Masters, who had piled up the fortune partly by the maintenance of a system, which regarded the workmen as machines so long as they were within the boundary of their works, and as non-existent beyond that boundary so far as any responsibility towards them went; a system which certainly paid a good price for a good machine, but discarded it on the slightest sign of friction or wear.

Nevertheless Peter Masters was a great millionaire. When death overtook him at a crowded crossing it was found he had left no will, only notes for the tracing of his unrecognised son, and directions for the carrying on of the great estate until that son was ready to shoulder the burden that must be his.

Very unwillingly had Christopher Masters taken up that burden, but having taken it he gave his life to the better adjustment of affairs. He saw no obligation to make a prison house of his money, no inclination to launch into luxuries for which he had no taste, or a style of living which appealed neither to his wife nor himself. They reserved for themselves an income sufficiently great in the eyes of the majority of mankind to spell riches, sufficiently moderate by the standard of Park Lane fortunes for him to be dubbed a freakish deserter from the camp, and in his own estimation an

income small enough to allow the luxury of denial or choice of superfluous pleasures, and sufficiently large to open the doorways of life for his four children.

It was a thoroughly useful and wholesome life, had the planning of it left him time to enjoy it. But Christopher was one of the hardest worked men in England or out of it, for the remainder of the fortune had to be spent somehow, and spent wisely for the benefit of the country at large and for those who had made it.

Now there are endless ways of dissipating a fortune to the economic benefit of nobody at all. The Stock Exchange is as easy as any other—but Christopher had ambition. He did not wish to dissipate it, he would have said it was not “playing the game”; still to expend it wisely and well without upsetting the balance of the economic world, or trespassing on the rights of others was far from a simple matter. He was sometime finding a scheme to suit his purpose, but having found one he devoted all his energies to it, leaving no stone unturned to make it an accomplished fact. But besides his big “Hobby” he had to keep in touch with all the various businesses from which he drew the golden means for his end. All these affairs could not be conducted as well as his own pet private works at Stormly, but as far as was practicable, the Masters group of industries were mentioned, by such as could distinguish them at all from any other similar affairs, as being run on extraordinarily equable lines, as paying a sure and even dividend that never reached inflated figures, and as having less labour trouble than most business.

There were many days when Christopher, looking along the new wonderful roads that threaded the country—north, south, east and west—thought secretly of the days when that only was his work as it had been his invention, days when he was not called *The Road-maker* for nothing. Then the recollection of the two

men, who had made the road of his life possible for him, would cut asunder such weak regret and strengthen his back for the greater burden.

But to-day was Saturday, which day was devoted to Stormly and home affairs, and Christopher had come out to test a new car and meditate over the question of short time, on which David Fulner—his manager at Stormly—had insisted. If work continued slack the construction of new swimming baths and gymnasium at Runnyford must be stopped, for he must not subsidise Stormly. Had the swimming baths and gymnasium meant an advantageous extension of his pet "hobby" for himself, he would have had to relinquish them after such a year as Stormly had experienced. So wait they must. It put people out of employment—that was the worst of it. Bricklayers, masons, carpenters, painters—he could invent no more work for them, and even if he did, Stormly couldn't pay for it. Fulner was right, there was nothing for it but short time and its attendant evils.

Trade *was* improving even if it had not come this way, only the Labour Agitation that was in the air might frighten back the turning tide. There were agitators in Mirchester, the centre of disaffection, in Birmingham too, many irresponsible speakers unconnected with unions or credited parties; also there were more responsible ones or rumours lied. . . .

He must tell Patricia to have that sandpit fenced in or some children would roll down and she'd have to pay damages!

As he considered the matter in his meditative leisurely way when "off duty," another motor car panted laboriously up the hill only to come to a standstill at the top, with ominous creaks and snorts.

The occupants betrayed no particular concern, probably supposing it was part of the ordinary procedure with motors, and anyhow another car was at a stand-

still to bear them company. The chauffeur looked worried, and jerked several levers vigorously with negative results. Christopher watched him as of old a lover of horses might watch an unskilful groom mismanage a tired horse. It was only when he saw an appeal to him was inevitable that he looked at the occupants of the car.

They were a stout black-coated man with a short black beard, a rather gaily dressed fair young woman, and a girl in grey who, Christopher thought, matched neither of her companions.

The chauffeur, who had been rummaging in some subterranean box, crossed the road and asked the loan of the unfindable tool.

The stout gentleman by his side instantaneously bent forward as if to stop him, but collapsed back and contented himself with gazing in the opposite direction, tugging his short beard and grumbling to himself. The women folk, however, regarded Christopher with interest and even—one of them—with visible approval. He was very good to look at and his forty years sat lightly on his square shoulders. The resolution of his face was softened by a human humourousness and general interest in the surrounding world, that was very misleading to casual readers of his appearance.

He just raised his cap to them as he came up with the chauffeur and the two went over the offending mechanism. Christopher, after a moment's examination, pointed out what he thought to be the necessary remedy, and when the man made clumsy attempts to set it right, took the tool from him and did it himself with a dexterous hand. He gave the man a word or two of technical advice, and with another slight bow to the occupants of the doctored car returned to his own.

Joseph Watt still resolutely looked away and merely grunted unintelligibly in response to the chauffeur's

low, rather awe-struck explanation of their timely helper. The explanation did not reach the two in the back of the car, and Anne Kempburn was a little amazed at Joseph Watt's boorishness, while Flossie spoke her opinion thereon in a voice she may have thought was low, but which made Anne shake with apprehension lest it should reach the subject of it before his own car started.

"Why, Joseph, aren't you going to thank him? Such a nice-looking young man too!—he is young don't you think? I wonder if that's his car or not? You might have spoken, Joseph, perhaps he belongs to these parts and we might have struck up an acquaintance, that is, if he didn't turn out to be a chauffeur, but one can't tell these days, some of them are such gentlemen to look at," and Miss Flossie broke into a weak giggle.

Christopher's car was now gliding down the hill they had come up, so Anne's terror of overhearing was transferred from him to their own driver. She made a violent effort to turn the channel of conversation which, however, made spasmodic attempts to return to rhapsodies concerning their knight errant.

They were descending the Runnyford hill and at the bottom would cross the tram road to Stormly. The village lay out peacefully before them in the summer sunshine, and Anne thought it a beautiful sight. There was a pleasing lack of uniformity in its houses, never more than half a dozen of a type being together, and something in the general plan and laying out of the place seemed vaguely reminiscent to her.

In the centre of the village was a green with a fine clump of elms on one side, that had once flanked a meadow. At one end was an inn, a low comfortable house, the oldest in the village, with a wide-open hospitable door, where the inn keeper was sunning himself and talking to a little group of inhabitants. On the green some children played cricket, and in the various

gardens there were women sitting in the porches, sewing or tending babies, or gossiping across the fence with their neighbours. It was as rural and simple a scene as might be found in any place in England, and the change that lay beneath the apparent familiarity of it all, was hidden from the unobservant eye, while it was faintly typified in the electric tram rails that curved round to a big building behind the little inn.

The group of men at the inn door turned to watch the car approach and one of them stepped forward with a sudden exclamation.

"Mr. Watt!"

Joseph, who was getting out of the car, looked over his shoulder and nodded casually. He wasted no energy over social forms with the people from whom he came, and bitterly as they would have resented this from a man like Raskin they looked for nothing more from the man in whom they really trusted and believed.

"Coming round presently," Watt admitted to the man who had recognised him, while the others stood in a far-off group still watching intently.

"Want to walk round the place first; usual thing I suppose—model houses, model gardens, model drainage, and all the rest of it model, landlord included."

Anne's eyes wandered from one man's face to the other. She was accustomed now to Watt's contemptuous attitude towards philanthropy. There were moments even when she understood it. The man he talked to now did not understand it and obviously resented Watt's sneer.

"There isn't much the matter with the landlord," he said a little hotly. "But it's a model that isn't too much copied I'm thinking!"

Watt laughed.

"Does he let you plant your own gardens, or choose your own window curtains?"

"He doesn't interfere at all," returned the man sul-

lenly; "there's a Parish Council, he isn't even on it, we do as we like."

Watt turned to his secretary.

"I shan't want you, you can go where you like; tea here at five. You come with me, Wilson."

He went off without taking any notice of his sister at all, as was his custom. Anne was a little disappointed. Watt was clearly in a bad temper but even so, his company was more congenial to her on the tour of inspection than Flossie's was likely to prove, and Flossie at once proposed retreating to the inn to "tidy up."

Even she could not help being aware of the reluctance of Anne's consent, and the sight of a very modern landlady at the inn door, waiting to greet them with a professional smile, seemed to furnish her with an idea.

"Look here, Miss Kempburn," she said good-naturedly, "why shouldn't you go and explore the place by yourself? I don't want to see it in the least, it's just cottages and churches and chapels, not a swell house in the place. I'll stay here, the landlady will look after me, and I can order tea; you'll see more without me because you can walk as fast as you like."

It was too pleasant a prospect to resist. Anne, after a moment's hesitation, agreed and looking back as she turned round by a rural post-office and general shop, she saw Flossie was already engaged in talk with the rather decorative landlady.

Anne explored thoroughly, and the singular absence of uniformity or apparent plan left her wondering how much was old, how much new. In one corner—tucked away behind a public reading-room and a chapel—she found a little old thatched cottage with the smallest of windows and most crooked of doors and in the garden, huddled up in a chair, an old woman was sunning herself while a grandchild of fifteen knitted at the gate.

Anne stopped. She did not want to appear curious

but the cottage seemed so out of place beside the commodious dwellings around that it aroused her interest.

The girl nodded pleasantly:

"You'll want to look at the cottage, miss? Most folks do."

"Don't you mind?" Anne drew nearer and her eyes wandered to the old woman in the chair.

"Granny's that proud, she'd tell you all about it, they says that's what keeps her alive, people coming and talking to her and listening. But it's one of her bad days, she can't talk, she's over ninety, Granny is!" This was evidently a point of pride, the child also appreciated the distinction of belonging to the oldest inhabitant of the oldest habitation.

"Can't you tell me?" Anne asked with a smile and the girl was nothing loath.

"Granny had been born in that house and her father before her." (That took one back far enough, long before the days when Napoleon was a bugbear to England.) "Then about eight years ago they began building the new Runnyford, and the old houses came down, Granny had notice to quit and she wouldn't go. She just sat in her chair and told them she wasn't going to budge, and they said as how they'd pull it down over her, and on that she had a sort of fit, and Mr. Masters, he was passing and came in, and told 'em to clear out and he was that good to Granny!" The child's eyes brightened as she spoke, "And he told her she should stay till she died and never a stone should be touched 'cept just to make it more comfortable like. And he did it too, put us a new pump and a new floor, and rethatched it; of course it isn't like the nice houses round, but Granny she is used to it, and being old, perhaps 'twere natural."

The child's account evidently culled from repeated listenings filled Anne with a strange uplifting sense of sympathy, whether with the child, the old woman, or

the man who understood she did not stop to define, but the recognition of the rights of the past seemed to her a beautiful thing in its very simplicity. She walked on thoughtfully and at the corner nearly collided with a man walking fast, a man with a big head and sandy hair and a very rough hewn face, not improved by a frown of prodigious blackness. However, he apologised and lifted his hat and would have passed on.

"Can you tell me," said Anne politely, "which is the hall of the Trades Union men?"

The frown on his face deepened:

"It's the other side of the green beyond the schools—do you want any one there?"

His tone was rough and brusque and he eyed her with dislike.

"No," Anne answered. "I only thought I'd like to see it."

"It's nothing to look at and no place for you just now," was the man's amazing remark. "They'll probably mob you or something, better keep out of their way."

Anne laughed.

"Is it a stormy meeting?"

"I don't know, I'd not cross the threshold. How can it be anything but stormy with paid agitators stirring the men up with lies—even here?"

His glance swept over the whole of Runnyford with a curiously proprietary glance, and back to Anne doubtfully.

The man was clearly agitated beyond his normal self. Anne would have judged him a hard-headed, self-possessed man.

"I am Mr. Watt's secretary," she said quietly. "I don't consider him a paid agitator. I'm sorry it all disturbs you. Good-afternoon."

But now she could not pass, for he barred the way unconsciously.

"You?" he muttered in a sort of bewildered anger.
"You one of *them*,—why, you are a *lady*?"

"Thank you," she said, "if you'll kindly let me pass I shall know you are a gentleman."

"I'm not," he interrupted sharply, but he stood aside

Anne passed him with a slight bow; he stood looking after her still dissatisfied and angry.

It was preposterous to want to stop and argue with a slip of a silly girl in a village lane, but David Fulner was uncomfortably aware he did want this preposterous thing.

And as he stood realising his own discomfiture, Anne came back; she was smiling, but her eyes were grave.

"Why don't you go and hear Mr. Watt," she said persuasively, "it's good to hear both sides you know, and you'd find he wasn't a paid agitator."

"Doesn't he get a salary from the Union?"

"I suppose so," said Anne, surprised; "he works hard enough."

"Well, then!" said Fulner triumphantly, with a little outward movement of his hand.

Anne shook her head.

"Isn't he paid to get between the people and their masters, to make them believe the masters are their natural enemies, robbers and thieves waiting to fall on them! Doesn't he rouse them to look after their 'rights' and their 'interests' at the cost of any one and anything? Isn't he rousing them now, even *here*,—here in Mr. Masters's own village to rise against the man who spends his life and money in their service? What's that but a paid agitator, tell me that?"

She caught her breath and stood looking at him with wide interest, forgetful of the absurdity of the situation,—a narrow country lane, allotments and no cottages on either side and behind them the village, and beyond them the open rising common, beyond that, though she

did not know it, Stormly Park. But here was a man with beliefs and arguments as earnest as Joseph Watt, a man of the people too. She must see what it meant. Convention swept by her up the lane out of sight, she faced him inquiringly.

"If he agitates it is because he would have all the Labour world cared for, housed, treated as yours are—you know that's not the case."

"Then let him leave ours alone. We've our own difficulties to see to, without being pawns in his game."

"His 'game' is the raising, the protection of the worker. If you are a worker as you say, you must know what it is. I've seen people and places in Mirchester that cry aloud for agitation, for anything that shouldn't be mixed up in it."

"I'm not disputing that," he put in. "Let him lift them up and make his model employer by Act of Parliament if he can," he laughed scornfully. "But when he's got a model employer ready to hand, let him leave him and his men alone. That's reason."

Anne knitted her brows.

"But the men must stand by each other—Uniformity of action."

He interrupted in his brusque, scornful way——

"That's something you've heard said, you haven't thought it out yourself."

"No," she replied wearily, "I haven't. But surely we may take some one else's word for something we can't understand ourselves."

"If you can't understand it for yourself you shouldn't be mixed up in it."

It then occurred to both of them simultaneously that they were doing a very odd thing, in discussing problems that baffled mankind, in the middle of a lane, each with an unknown, unnamed individual.

Fulner was the first to rectify one point of oddity.

"My name's Fulner," he said suddenly; "and as I

manage Stormly for Mr. Masters, you can't expect me to agree with—with Mr. Watt."

That was obviously not what he intended to say, but he said it.

"And do you manage Runnyford, too?" she asked eagerly, neglecting to make clear her personality for lack of any sense of its importance.

"No, they manage that themselves,"—he gave a queer little smile, and added: "Or they think so."

"Who does really?"

"Some one who knows what he's aiming at, though I can't always see it myself."

"Mr. Masters?"

But Fulner said nothing. He recollected he was talking to Joseph Watt's secretary. "I belonged to your Union once, so I know all about it," he told her. "If you want to find your way to where they are talking now, you must go to the left and then the right, and up past the doctor's. You'll see the plate on the door."

"Thank you."

He lifted his hat again and turned abruptly away, walking quickly with a certain impatience of stride that was not customary to him.

Anne looked after him thoughtfully.

"It's all very well," she said ruefully to herself; "but I didn't put myself here, it's all Mr. Arrington's fault—and yet I do want to understand. Somebody must be right!"

It was the cry for the visible concrete manifestation of Right that goes on echoing down the ages, and will echo till mankind has learnt to piece together the broken light of the prisms, and found the White Truth behind it.

Poor Anne! ever seeking the lost vision, ever striving for comprehending leaders in the Search, ever mistaking Man's certainty for God's Purpose, and ever

craving for the visible manifestation of supreme wisdom in another, in very humility fearing to look for it in the depths of her own being!

Yet happy Anne, whose sorrows and griefs were those of the suffering world, nobler burden than the little personal troubles that fret away so many lives. Happier than these if only in the realisation of humanity's apparent failure to prove its kinship with Divinity, which kinship lies at the heart of all things, and is the lever by which the world can move upward and onward.

She did not go to the left, then the right past the doctor's house. She went back very slowly the way she had come and sat under the trees before the inn, until Miss Watt appeared and suggested tea, since it was no use waiting for Joseph.

CHAPTER XX

CHRISTOPHER, having satisfied himself as to the car's possibilities, at least on Patrimundi Roads, returned it to its stable, and sought his wife.

He asked no one as to her whereabouts, but finding she was neither in the library nor her own sitting-room, went out into the Garden Nursery.

The Garden Nursery was Patricia's idea. She had many, but this was one of her best. A big slice of garden had been fenced off in an unobtrusive manner, and the enclosed space arranged entirely for the convenience and enjoyment of the children. There were gay borders all round concealing the barriers, and no flower nor plant of pronounced poisonous qualities grew in them. There were smooth lawns with grassy slopes that called out to be rolled down, straight paths and winding paths that led through shrubberies where armies of pirates might lie in ambush. There were trees that absolutely lent themselves for climbing, and there was a little shallow laughing rivulet that wound in and out under bridges and down waterfalls, with here and there a sandy coast breaking its even edges where harbours could be built and ships beached—sand that was deep enough to bury a four-year-old to the waist—sand that was dried and renewed and restored with shells and pebbles in a miraculous manner. There were sunny squares of garden which might be replanted and dug over, and weeded or not weeded as sweet fancy dictated. There were swings for expert eight-year-olds and swings for tiny people. There were fascinating summer-houses that served for fortress or hut or palace at will, and at one end nearest the house a great patch of smooth Patrimundi, under a

glass roof, with sliding side screens. This would be an open-air gymnasium some day; at present it was an excellent playground for drizzling damp days, a source of joy for an open-air family.

It all meant a big slice off the not too extensive gardens of Stormly, and it necessitated the continual service of a man who remained unobtrusively on duty and who was a perfect mine of string, sticks, and useful commodities, and an encyclopædia of learning on the subject of the pets which lived in a court behind the shrubberies. But neither Patricia nor Christopher had ever for a moment considered the space wasted nor the man superfluous. The children's wing had direct communication with the garden, and from the nursery window a vigilant nurse could command an extensive view, while the most perversely deaf child could make no excuse as to not hearing the bell of summons.

And withal there was an apparent absence of plan or formality, or suggestion, that stimulated the imagination and gave room for a glorious sense of liberty. The Garden Nursery was just part of the general garden. There were no locks on the gates that led across the wide central lawns, on the other side of which a rose garden of like dimensions preserved its secret joys with its carved seats and central fountain. It was not forbidden ground any more than the library or Mother's dear pretty room, but the Garden Nursery was "theirs," a kingdom they believed they had appropriated.

Patricia was there now. Christopher knew it by the tone of the shrill young voices that no fence could shut out, and he found her on a lawn alternately lying flat on her back, and being violently jerked up again to a sitting position which it was her part to pretend she could not maintain, but must fall prone again like a back-boneless rag doll, the moment artificial support was removed.

Regina, aged ten, rushed up to her father to explain in breathless haste lest for the moment he might believe some terrible misfortune had befallen "Mum-mie."

"But it's *my* doll anyhow," objected Christopher with one eye on the said doll. "You shan't have her. I want to play with her myself."

"No, no, you can't, we want her!" they shouted, clamouring round him in desertion of the still prone doll.

Christopher feigned wrath.

"I tell you it's mine, and I *will* have it!" he cried stamping. And then in a loud aside to Regina, "Is that right? how it's done?"

Regina, who was the eldest, nodded between her shrieks of laughter; but Aymer, the second child, regarded his father seriously for a moment before joining the three other children in their combined efforts to frustrate their father's capture of the "doll." Shouts and laughter followed but Aymer presently pulled Regina's dress.

"Regina, it is his toy, perhaps he'll get angry like Charles if you go on too long."

"Does Charles get angry?" cried Christopher, swooping down on his youngest son and depositing him deftly on top of his mother, now sitting upright with a very firm backbone indeed.

"I expect Charles only pretends as I do, Aymer."

Charles, a sturdy seven-year-old, got a little red, but he rolled off his mother's lap with a laugh, and then they all lay out like blind puppies basking in the sun. The simile was Regina's.

Christopher, keeping a wary eye on them, made a sudden dash at his toy, gathered it bodily up in his arms and made for the gate.

The "puppies," too overcome with laughter to prevent the raid, rolled on the ground in ecstasy.

"Put me down, you bad boy!" gasped Patricia. "I'm much too heavy to be carried."

"I know you are," he groaned. "A fine sort of toy, like Charles's engine."

She struggled out of his arms at the gate and displayed her rumpled dress ruefully.

"That's the normal condition of Regina's dolls," he declared impenitently; "I've strong precedent on my side, besides didn't you say you wanted to call on Madame Larri with me and see her latest production?"

Patricia led him off to the rose garden and introduced him with due formality to the latest rosebud, an exquisite thing of delicate opaline tints that seemed to have been caught from some sunset sky.

Christopher approved it but in rather an absent way, and afterwards they walked down the grassy path to a stone seat set in a bower of sweet briars. The perfume of these mingled with the aromatic smell of herbs in a border behind them, called out by the sun who—high in heaven—drew all the sweetness of the earth to him.

Now and again the children's voices came to them across the garden, filling the place of bird song which would not awaken till an hour later. They sat silently there having little reason to use the clumsy communication of words in their complete understanding of each other.

This was Christopher's holiday, "Repairing day" he called it, when in the serenity of an atmosphere charged with love he replenished the spent forces of his mind, and rubbed down the friction the world's rough dealing had brought in the week's fight.

Patricia saw to it that the purpose and aims of his boyhood did not die out, that the callous discouragement of the world did not embitter a life whose springs of action were not drawn from it. And much of this work of hers was done in quiet silent moments

like this, without word, without effort, by just that perfect communion of soul which was theirs, the increasing riches of their lives which time could not steal from them.

"I shall have to shorten time and put off the Gymnasium work for a while, Patricia."

"It's only temporary," she answered reassuringly. "Perhaps it's good for them, there won't be any real want you know."

"No, but there'll be leisure," said Christopher, a little grimly. "Leisure, not playtime, for people who don't know what to do with it. That's a deadly thing, and this man at Mirchester."

"I forgot," said Patricia, quickly. "Mr. Fulner telephoned to tell you it was Joseph Watt of the Ironworkers' Union who was at Mirchester, and that he meant to speak informally in Runnyford to-day. Mr. Fulner was going to find out if he did, and then come up to see you about stopping it in future."

"Stopping it?" Christopher put his hands in his pockets and sought disconsolately for a pipe which wasn't there.

"That's what he wants to do. Will you, Christopher?"

"By what right? The hall's their own. Two-thirds of them are Union men and Watt believes he's acting in their interest. They've a right to hear him."

"In your village, your buildings?" she questioned, but her eyes were shining strangely, and the smile on her lips was of one assuming a rôle.

But Christopher didn't see it and he frowned a little.

"The very essence of the thing is that it isn't mine. Would you make it all a charity, what they have? It's the return for their labour, theirs, not mine. I work harder than they do and I get more." He looked round. "The rest is theirs as much as this is mine. Oh, you know, Patricia, don't be silly!"

"Yes, I know," she answered, slipping her arm within his, "I wanted to feel you knew too. David Fulner doesn't."

"It's odd that," mused Christopher thoughtfully, "when you think that under Peter Masters's rule (he always spoke of his little known father) he thought them entitled to even more than they get now."

"He's just equalising his mind, getting balance I expect," said Patricia. "But, Christopher, you did stop that man from Brocken?"

Christopher's face changed.

"He was entirely dangerous. It was rank destructive atheism, scurrilous treason. One couldn't suffer that any more than one could a polluted well or bad drains."

"I do love you when you are an arbitrary despot," she cried, rubbing her cheek on his rough coat. "Good gracious, if you didn't think as you do, what a dangerous man you'd be!"

His face remained grave.

"Is it despotic to insist on decency, order, and sanity?"

"On your own definition of them?"

"Patricia, what definition exists except that my poor reason offers?"

"You dear, you dear!" she cried, touching his hand. "Are you afraid of a word? Trust nothing but your poor reason, be despotic if you will in good faith, the world has still room for you and need of you!"

"Rot!" He jumped up with a sort of boyish scorn of praise though she troubled him little with it. "I think I saw Watt to-day in a motor with two women folk." He told her about the encounter as they went back to the house and ended by saying:

"I can't think what the other girl did there, they were an odd trio."

"The other girl must be Max's assistant secretary," said Patricia promptly, "the one Constantia spoke of."

Max said she had gone to be secretary to a Trades Union man, a Mr. Watt."

"I suppose that's so. Watt knows Arrington."

His face was grave again.

He launched another bit of news at her presently.

"The Rennels can take another lodger next week if you know of one. Kloss is going!"

"Kloss going? Have you dismissed him?" Her surprise was complete. Kloss was a man of standing in Runnyford, leader of the choir, and organiser of many entertainments.

Christopher's face stiffened perceptibly.

"Yes, I've dismissed him. He's to go to-night."

She looked questioningly at him.

"He's—he's bad—— Oh, I can't tell you. It's an ugly story. I've told him it shan't be published by me if he clears out to-night; I ought to have known, it's awful, the harm he may have done. I can't forgive myself."

"Christopher!—Of course though, you ought to know intimately the characters of nearly two thousand souls, as they are more or less in your employ."

"I might have known this, if I'd listened to my own instinct; Raleigh (Raleigh was the Vicar) is sure to ask for his reinstatement. If he comes to you about it, Patricia, please say it's impossible—you need not say any more."

"He'll want to know why."

"Tell him I didn't like Kloss," said Christopher, drily.

As they crossed the hall they saw through the wide open door a motor dashing up the drive.

"Christopher!" cried Patricia, "it's Mr. Batherly, that's business. I won't have you do outside business to-day, promise you won't, promise!"

She put her hands against him as if she would push him out of sight with her child strength.

"It must be deadly important to bring Batherly over

on Saturday," he answered. "I can't promise anything. I've had most of the day, dear."

"Three hours at the works. Kloss's business, the new car, the Congregational Chapel people, and Mr. Fulner coming later. You call that a holiday, a rest?"

"A few hours with you, half an hour in your rose garden. It's all rest here. It's atmosphere that counts. Go back to the babes. I'll come to tea."

He met his caller at the door.

Presumably his diagnosis was right. Mr. Batherly looked as if very special business indeed had brought him. He was a stout florid man with a hurried aggressive manner; his assumption of his right to the first place obtained him more deference than the merits of such rights.

He sprang out of the car and barely waited to return his host's greeting.

"How do. Thought I should catch you, Masters, most important, I want to see you privately at once."

His impatient dictatorial manner had always the effect of rendering Christopher correspondingly slow and cool.

He offered his guest whiskey and soda, or tea, now, and when it was impatiently pooh-poohed, handed him cigarettes and suggested the garden.

"No, no, I must see you privately, you'll understand; Federation business—no eavesdroppers, you know."

"There are none here," said Christopher coolly. "Come into my den."

He led the way into his own retreat, pushed a big chair forward, and seated himself on the window seat in a rather careless attitude.

"Ah, nice room," said Batherly, looking round. "I never see it without thinking of your father, wonderful man!"

Peter Masters's son remained impassive. It was the

best means of bringing his guest to the point he knew from experience.

The point indeed was arrived at quickly.

The Federation was not sound. It was composed of a group of twenty-one Employers, and according to Batherly's story, five of these were "ratting."

There were papers and letters all round Batherly in a few minutes, another of his habits which annoyed Christopher horribly.

He continued to sit in the window and smoke and listen, and the calmer and less concerned he appeared the more fussy, dictatorial and instructive did Batherly become.

"What's their reason for withdrawing?" inquired Christopher at last, though withdrawing was not the word that had been used.

"Funk, pure funk—here's this—this beastly Watt coming round stirring the men up and they think he has a grudge against the Federation."

"Naturally he has," said Christopher, opening his eyes. "Wouldn't we, in his place?"

"That's not the point?"

"Well, what is?"

"The Ironworkers' Union are going to iron us out flat if we don't take care. This isn't a promiscuous visit of Watt's. They are working up for a big fight, they've got *terms*, *terms* I say, made out, agreed on already."

Christopher got up and tossed away his cigarette.

"How do you know that?"

It was the same question Watt had once put to a certain Fred Ellers. The answer was even more evasive and uncertain than his.

"Oh—er—er, one gets to know these things, I've Union men in my office, you know."

"Union men who give their own Union away?"

Christopher's voice was very quiet, dangerously so.

"No, no, but it's so—I know it for a fact. They don't all approve, you know, think a little of what they owe us, some of them."

"Treachery?"

"Tut, tut, you are too squeamish, my boy, too squeamish; they don't understand that sort of thing."

"Perhaps they don't."

The implication was decided but Batherly either didn't or wouldn't see it.

"Well, this Watt got all the Northerners and Southerners fixed up, but here we've been too much for him, so he's come to work it personally. Rumney was sent first, did no good at all. Watt comes along, he'll convince them all, he thinks. Now what he must do, my dear fellow, is not to give him a chance. He must not be able to get halls, or audiences, or—"

"He is speaking in their own room in Runnyford to-day."

"Oh, dear, dear, dear, how terrible! I am too late! But it mustn't occur again, you'll see to that."

"It's their own room, they rent it."

"It's your property."

"It's trust property."

"Still you'd have a right—in Runnyford—your own village surely!"

"Watt is the Secretary of their own Union; if I employ Union men I can't prevent them hearing their own officers speak in their own halls."

"But you could turn him out—a disturber of the peace!"

"I haven't heard it is disturbed."

"It will be."

"It seems likely."

"But, man, do you propose standing doing nothing till the peace is broken?" spluttered Batherly angrily.

"Are you going to let a common agitator, a firebrand and spouter like this Watt, come and tell you men to

strike, ruin the place—— Oh, damn him!" He jumped up and walked up and down, agitatedly wiping his hot face with a handkerchief, and muttering incoherently.

"He may tell them," said Christopher quietly; "but I don't think they'll listen. What have they got to strike over?"

"They will make that," retorted Batherly viciously; "and if you didn't think it possible, what the deuce did you mean by your Federation?"

Christopher regarded him intently, considering how much of the very simple truth he'd be able to take in. He did not think his guest's capacity for that wholesome commodity very extensive. If any were to go down at all he would have to administer a big dose since most must be wasted.

"I started the Federation," he said deliberately, "because it was quite easy to see Labour trouble was brewing, and they were a concrete whole and we scattered units. You don't all hold the views I do on the Labour Question, but I think you all see our real interest—the men's and the masters' that is—is identical. What's best for the one—really best—is best for the other. I don't like Trade Unionism any more than you do, but for different reasons I dislike being regarded as an enemy instead of a leader, and you don't like having your own way interfered with. The men have honest enough grievances sometimes, and it's difficult to see what other weapon of redress they could use than the Unions, since weapons are wanted. Well, real grievances have got to be put right and destructive outrageous demands, made chiefly in ignorance, have got to be put down. As long as we are scattered units the Unions can force small men to ruinous concessions, and big ones that can refuse reforms are shut down. That sort of thing's no good. If we've got to fight in two camps instead of one, let us fight squarely for a

cause and not for selfish interest and keep the personal element out all together."

"That's high talking," said Batherly scornfully. "You are young, Masters, and you spoil 'em. I tell you plainly, I joined the Federation because I'm not going to be dictated to by a lot of idle ignorant louts as to what I'm to do with my money, or whom I'm to employ, nor anything else of their damned impertinence."

Christopher nodded.

"Yes, so I supposed. Walters likes the Union, doesn't he?"

"Says so—pooh, he's company, not an individual!"

"Well, the Federation ought to help you both. It's just meant to secure fair dealing all round."

"All round? But, by George, Masters, we aren't all millionaires like you, remember, to make ducks and drakes of our money!"

"It's not a question of money," returned Christopher steadily; "it's a question of principle and proportion. Things aren't right in the world, it's every man's business to help make them so."

"But—but——" Batherly spluttered with anger again, his eyes were bloodshot and staring, he was not at all a beautiful sight, "but your Federation is a confounded sham then! It's not to help us, it's to help these Unions—it's a swindle, it's——"

Christopher checked him.

"I don't deal in swindles, Batherly. The Federation is to protect us, and the men too. They don't know what's possible and they don't *see*. They want to make a Trade Government of their Unions. I'm not even speaking of the Socialistic creed—the L. P. is enough! They can land us all in a bad hole if we aren't careful."

"Can they? Fight against Capital? Why, it's starvation, the fools!"

Christopher looked at him with a curious expression in his steady eyes.

"Self-destruction either side is a crime; so is murder. I've told you I don't like the Unions but since they will regard us as enemies, we can use our strength to prevent either of those evils and make honourable terms."

"You're afraid of the winter, I believe?"

Again the curious look in the younger man's eyes, he did not trouble to deny the charge, besides it was true from another point of view than Batherly's.

"And you won't help us stop the mouth of this spouter?"

"I can't."

Batherly stood pondering. He disliked Masters, he was dissatisfied with his interview but he dare not quarrel with him. Suddenly his face lightened. He came nearer to Christopher and put a fat podgy finger on his sleeve:

"Then will you—*see* him, eh? *See* him?"

He put a might of emphasis in the words.

"What do you mean?"

"Go and ask him what he's after?"

The other flushed.

"I am not so afraid as all that!"

"Eh, you don't take me—these men are all on the lookout for Number One you know—on the make. Find out what he'll make out of it, catch on?"

For one moment Batherly's tenure in Christopher's house was precarious in the extreme. He had used the privilege of his greater years to alternately scoff at and insult the younger man, while he sought to use the position and power of the greater name to shelter his own petty greed and cunning. He drew back now, his florid face partly white, fear plainly in his reddened eyes.

Quite slowly the inward blazing anger that had

leapt to sight in Christopher's face died down. He turned and looked out of the window; it was not good to see a man looking at one like that!

"I told you, Mr. Batherly, that I did not deal in swindles. I don't deal in bribes either, neither does the Federation. If you've mistaken its object, perhaps you'd like to withdraw."

"Oh, no, no, no! You quite misunderstand me," stammered the other. "I only meant we ought to find out as soon as possible what they do want."

Christopher got up, made a little attempt to disguise his contempt and, without saying anything, conveyed the idea the interview was over. Batherly, in fact, was thankful to seize any chance of escape. He might have been at a loss to find words to convey his real sentiments towards Christopher Masters, millionaire, when he alighted from his motor. He was at a loss now for different reasons. He expressed them forcibly and loudly in indirect terms all the way home, using the car, the driver, the weather, the roads in place of Christopher Masters, and feeling the cruel insufficiency of language.

Christopher watched the car disappear, and then going back to his room flung the second window wide open. He stood for a moment gazing distastefully at an imaginary spot on his coat sleeve and then, drawing a long breath, he raised his head and stood looking at the picture of Charles Aston that hung over the fireplace. Finally he gave a little laugh at his own stupidity and went away to search for Patricia and tea.

CHAPTER XXI

JOSEPH WATT and suite were staying at an unostentatious little hotel in Mirchester, whose proprietor was an old friend of the busy Secretary, and like himself had risen from humbler ranks. Watt had a sitting-room on the ground floor near a private exit into a quiet street, and a bedroom opposite, while his sister and secretary Anne were given bedrooms on the second floor. They took meals together in the public Coffee Room, and that was practically the only time the ill-assorted trio did meet together. For Anne was in constant attendance on Watt, and Miss Flossie had renewed an ancient acquaintanceship with the daughter of the proprietor, and was nearly reconciled to the loss of Buxton in consequence.

"She is not quite the thing, of course," Flossie confided to Anne, "but she's wonderfully sharp at picking up things and she knows all that's worth knowing about Mirchester. So I'm letting her show me round and then when Joseph remembers you'd like a little bit of life too, I can do the honours for you."

But Anne was seeing a bit of life all day long. Strange discontented humanity thronged Watt's room during certain hours of the day; there were silent sullen men, and noisy violent men, with parrot-like phrases ever escaping their heedless lips,—quiet respectable hard men with a terribly business-like outlook, but one and all were making dim attempts to escape from an aspect of life they were told rather than felt to be evil and sordid.

Very little poverty or want troubled them. Watt did not deal in sentiment even for trade purposes, he left that to men like Raskin. Physical needs on the

whole reckoned little with him beside the more intangible needs of level rights and mental freedom. Still she saw something of that actual want to which she had grown familiar in London, when Watt dived into the fastnesses of the great town, visiting small ill-managed mills, searching out slack members, arguing with half-hearted antagonists. It was then Anne had glimpses of badly paid labour, overcrowded work-rooms, the familiar degradation of slums and alleys, saw the pressing need of remedy, of organisation, of hard resistance to man's greed, and yet saw too Watt pass them by unnoticed, unhelped. These were too low down in the scale to make use of the expensive machinery of Trades Unionism as a remedy for their ills.

She visited Labour Bureaux with him, and sat through long dull interviews with local secretaries, full of local grievances and the sins of particular employers. She heard various acts of tyranny quoted again and again as samples of normal conditions, she got by heart names that were synonymous with black frowns and muttered execrations. Sometimes she saw the other side of the picture. Other visitors sought Watt at times, under various excuses,—fur-coated and be-ringed men, jovial hearty men, whose bluff manners would die out under Watt's matter-of-fact tone. They came in the afternoon or at dusk generally, and Anne was glad to escape when permitted. Sometimes she drove or walked through other parts of the town past grand municipal buildings and palatial residences, and signs of a crude luxury and ostentation that rasped badly against the adjacent need and squalor. The gulf was too great here in this part of busy England, it was different in the south. She had vague reminiscences of visits paid to southern manufacturing centres, where the difference between the extremes was less glaring or less pronounced.

She learnt also to know the appearance of men of big Dividends to whom increasing profits brought no increasing advantage to the worker, but stood for more extravagant raiment, more costly furs in which to send out daughters and wives north, east, south, and west, and meant an increasing staff of idle domestics, increasing number of luxurious rooms that could not be occupied, increasing number of pictures no one wished to look at, and the increase of all fatuous futile possessions, and piling up of treasure that sooner or later would be scattered. They were charitable! There was no denying it! They gave largely to public institutions, to churches, chapels, hospitals, all the vast army of material weapons waging brave war against human misery. But it was "Charity," a creditable virtue to the credit side of their account with heaven. Anne loathed the word "Charity"; so little of love was left to it. Moreover, she had learnt the reason for doing things is of as great account as the doing them; that if a generous deed be done in the spirit of ostentation, ostentation will be the ultimate outcome of it for ever. The use, the user, and the servers also will imbibe something of the spirit which created it.

And here lay the secret that kept Anne a faithful worker by Joseph Watt's side. She might mistrust his methods and his helpers, but she honestly and thoroughly believed he was animated with a pure spirit of unselfish desire to raise mankind, that he indeed held a spark of divine pity and love for all that were oppressed, bowed down, and needing help.

So she worked quietly and unobtrusively, as no secretary with whom he had ever had dealing with had worked for him. Arrington's words came true, Watt found in her a sense of security, and a power of self-obliteration that was strange to him in any co-worker. Men came and went and hardly noticed the quiet form in the corner, and they talked freely but with just the

touch of control that spelt safety for speaker and hearer. He dismissed her, of course, sometimes. She seemed to know with unfailing instinct when she was wanted and when he would be alone. She had no personal feeling about it at all. She was his secretary and she tried to do justice to Max Aston's very excellent training.

Watt never thought of her as a woman in the same category as his sister; he was often inconsiderate and exacting, but he never failed to appreciate her, and he trusted her implicitly, speaking freely of the men who came and went, with a curious sense of relief at being able to do so. He taught her to respect the alert Mr. Marks and discovered she needed no word from him to distrust the polite easy-tongued Mr. Raskin.

The latter incurred her dislike on his first visit, when he had taken advantage of Watt's momentary absence to speak to her with a confidential air of fellowship as one who would say in bad French: "*Que diable faisons nous dans ce galère?*"

Watt spoke very little of the moneyed people who came and went, but Anne can scarcely be blamed if under his guidance she took the befurred and beringed gentlemen as representative of the eternal bugbear "Capital." Then one day Mr. Batherly called.

He wore no furs, nor could she find fault with his clothes as with his face the instant his red-lidded eyes caught sight of her, and he shifted the position of his chair so as to look at her while he talked to Watt. Then after a few moments of unnecessary phrases, he asked with a nod in Anne's direction:

"Your typewriter?—safe? It's rather private."

"My secretary, quite safe," snapped Watt with a half-warning glance at Anne that she was to stay. She had hoped to escape.

It was of course in the visitor's power to refuse to have a third person present, however safe, but Watt's

calm assumption of agreement generally had effect. Batherly nodded again.

"You mustn't take my appearance here as an open concession to your views, you know, Mr. Watt," said the visitor with breezy heartiness, and was told nothing was further from that gentleman's thoughts.

"I'll be very candid," went on the breezy man cheerfully. "It's curiosity that brings me—but mind you, justifiable curiosity, I think. I wanted to see the man I've got to fight with, eh?"

Watt regarded him blankly.

"Fight? But there's no word of fighting."

"Oh, come, come, General, you are too cautious! Does a busy man, like you, come out for the pleasure of reviewing? Let's be open, it will do no harm."

"You think not? Well, what do you want then, Mr. Batherly, since you are here?"

The wind was taken out of Mr. Batherly's sails with a completeness that made Anne want to laugh. The man sat there, with his mind flapping round, whistling—so to speak—for a capful of self-confidence to restore his position.

"What? eh, want? Oh, well, it's the other way about perhaps, Mr. Watt,"—the capful was his again—"it's you that will be wanting before long, isn't it?"

"Indeed? And if so I may apply to you?"

"No, no, not so fast, General. I'm one of the Federation, you know"; he gave the other a quick look from the corner of his eye. "I own it frankly. When the Federation moves, my hands are tied, but we don't act yet. But Federation, or Union, or alone, I take it, Mr. Watt, as a man of the world, that we are all fighting to defend our own interests, for our own hand. That's it plainly with no high-falutin nonsense about it, and if we can find out our interests are identical, so much the better, Mr. Watt, so much the better."

"And you are here on behalf of the Federation to

make proposals before any proposition is put to them?" demanded Watt, in a curt business-like tone. Again the capful of wind died out. Batherly looked annoyed:

"Well, no, hardly,—as a private individual. *We* haven't moved yet." . . . He looked round at the room, the big table covered with papers and letters, the silent secretary, writing, writing, writing. "What a hard-working man you are, Watt!" he said, with a burst of admiration, "and what a place you've made for yourself already. But I was only thinking the other day that with a little capital to stake, you, with your ability, would have been a second Peter Masters by now, would have been able to meet this youngster, Christopher Masters, on his own ground! A thousand pities! We could do with a few real honest hard-working men amongst us who had had grit to get through!"

It spoke volumes for Watt's training, self-control, and judgment, that even at the bitter equality offered him with the object of his boyhood's hatred, he did not let his real feelings transpire to this futile cunning man. Yet Batherly never did a worse turn to the Federation and the man that headed it, than in that foolish comparison which fanned the smouldering personal sentiment which only Arrington knew slept beneath Watt's self-devoted career.

"Well, you see, the Capital wasn't forthcoming, and therefore, since time is the only capital I have I should be glad to know what it is I can do for you, Mr. Batherly."

And the other made an effort this time to change tactics, and come to the point.

"It's really more what I can do for you, Mr. Watt. I like to play with the cards on the table, square you know, but——" He glanced back significantly to Anne.

"I have only one card," said Watt, with his eyes fixed on him, "it's no secret."

Batherly leant forward perhaps a trifle eagerly. Watt made a gesture of laying down a card.

"Abolition of Capital; nothing else—or less."

There was a small silence, the eyes of the two men held each other, and at last it penetrated even Batherly's thick skin that this paid agitator and spouter was an honest man,—and he might have saved his credit and his time; yet he was incapable even of owning his mistake, he must play out his crooked game to the end.

"Oh, come, keep that card for your public, Mr. Watt; it's a good one for the gallery—but—— Why, you are as much an employer as I am and where would you and your Union be without Capital, and I should have thought acquiring even a better word than abolition—for an individual, eh?"

There was a significant pause. This man seemed to have a faculty for putting himself in dangerous positions, and escaping them by the sense of the contempt he inspired. At all events Watt's voice was calm and pleasant when he spoke.

"I won't contradict as I am not an individual but the Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union. I really know nothing about individuals and care less, except they seem to me dangerous, no matter how creditable their views. If you have any communication to make to my Union, I should be pleased to lay it before them."

He stopped quite abruptly and looked fixedly at the door.

Batherly got up with a baffled mien, and all his hearty breeziness dissipated.

Anne watched him from the window as the car disappeared noisily down the street, and then she turned and looked at Watt. His crooked smile was amazingly pleasant by comparison, and she smiled back.

"Nice specimen!" he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"He's ten or twelve thousand a year. Put up a drinking fountain in the public gardens with a medallion of himself on it."

"As an awful warning?" suggested Anne.

Watt's lips twitched.

"Probably. He rules his men on the system they are all of them thieves and bent on cheating him, bribes the men against each other, and they take the bribes, some of them—and give him the lies he touts for."

Anne's cheeks grew hot.

"Has he many men?"

"Only eight or nine hundred. You can guess what they are like when they leave him. We don't pass Union men to him if we can help it."

"But they are the many, and he—one," sighed Anne. "Can't they stand for their own honour?"

"What do they know of it?" said Watt brusquely, with unusual candour. "As things are, the character of the man on top filters down to the merest errand boy. It's the result of the System, bound to be."

"But if the top man is splendid?"

Watt frowned.

"Guarantee that by Act of Parliament," he scoffed harshly, "and I'll talk to you."

Anne looked away and sighed again. Batherly was too fresh in her mind for her to combat Watt even if she thought of doing so.

CHAPTER XXII

MAX ASTON arranged the sheets he had just read and fastened them together, but his hands shook a little and his face was grave with a gravity not belonging to professional necessity.

Then he sat staring at the paper a while—harmless, neatly typed foolscap headed "Memorandum of Terms offered by the Union of Ironworkers to the Iron Employers' Federation."

"No masters in the world would accept them," Max murmured, "and if the Union holds to its word that means a strike or a lock-out all over the country! Has the Chief gone mad?"

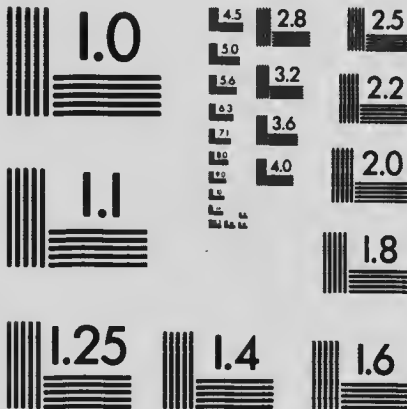
He got up and walked disconsolately across the room. Macdonald's basket was empty and so was the Chief's chair. In fact, when he had viewed those objects and also his late assistant secretary's table which still remained in its old place, he decided the room was not only deserted but dull.

He had never removed that table. On idle days—they had been few of late—it pleased Max to pretend Anne was still sitting there and to hold imaginary conversations with her, with ingenuous arguments breaking down her passive resistance, and with the magnanimity of the victor to soothe her natural distress and enjoy in imagination the pleasure of an empty victory. Arrington had caught him once, shaking his pen dictatorially at the distant table. Max had remarked very unnecessarily that there was something wrong with his nib. Arrington had taken no notice apparently, but in the afternoon Max found a new box of nibs ostentatiously placed on his table, and since then had been more careful.



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That, however, was the sole occasion when Arrington had allowed himself to trifle in his old manner since Anne Kempburn had left. He had grown more irritable, more exacting; there was seldom a smile, seldom a relaxation, mental or physical. Macdonald was bitterly offended and showed his resentment of neglect by a pointed preference to Max's company which pleased his master very ill.

There had also been a great deal of work which Arrington kept to himself, and the culminating point of this was reached on the day the secretary was given a copy of "The Memorandum" to look over, a Memorandum of which neither the details, proofs, nor original draft had ever been under his eyes.

He could not believe Arrington would countenance anything so disastrous to the country as a universal strike in the iron industry, yet that was what the Memorandum must lead to, or so it seemed to him. And Arrington had given it to him without a word of explanation, protest, or approval. He did not know what to think.

Max believed with the sublime faith of a fanatic in his Chief's power to control the forces with which he chose to play. He seldom saw eye to eye with Arrington and his personal bias in most questions ran counter to his Chief's, but for all that Max served Arrington with a loyalty and devotion seldom found in the most ardent disciple. Perhaps he was even a little over-punctilious in his loyal service to make up for the lack of zeal in his private opinions. Max was no leader of men but he was a superb partisan, and however little he approved Arrington's methods, he still believed implicitly that Arrington worked, in his own way, for the maintenance of custom and the established order of things, and that his interest in the heaving tumultuous labour world was dictated by his desire to control and direct that self-destructive flood.

Max did not believe for a moment this Manifesto was compiled and uttered without Arrington's knowledge, therefore if he disapproved of it, his power over Watt must be on the wane, and there was no other sign that this was the case. On the contrary, Max had every reason to believe Watt was more directly under Arrington's influence than ever. Could Arrington have approved the Manifesto?

It was this thought that troubled Max to the extent of making him neglect his work and face with very dire misgivings an unforeseen situation.

If Arrington instead of restraining was really urging these people on to what amounted to internecine war, Max's faith, belief, and confidence in his Chief would receive a blow from which they could hardly recover. He thought of the many times Arrington's strong hands had checked or diverted just such an impossible position as this Manifesto seemed determined to call up, and how he had ridiculed to early death just such arbitrary demands as here had sprung to life with increased vigour.

Max felt he must know for certain that Arrington had not abrogated his intermediary position, and that his Power, Will and Intention, stood as heretofore for Construction and not for Destruction.

And if Arrington had changed, how would that affect Max Aston? It was a question Max Aston found no pleasure in pondering.

When Arrington came in he was still frowning over the paper.

A rather cruel little smile twitched Arrington's lips as he noticed his secretary's face and he stopped by his side.

"Does it meet with your approval?" he asked casually.

Max folded up the paper with care and handed it to him.

"I think it is preposterous!"

"It will be handed to the heads of every ironworking firm in England to-morrow."

"But there have been no strikes, no disputes, to justify it!" cried Max aghast.

Arrington shrugged his shoulders.

"Watt will tell you there have been disputes for the past thousand years. I've only foreseen this for eight years past. Let them fight it out and settle down again. They ask enough. Uniformity of wage, no sliding scale, rise of minimum wage—they won't get all of it, so they ask for plenty!"

"But Clause IV., that dismissal Clause? They know no employer would consent. It's courting refusal!" broke in Max.

Arrington took the paper from him.

"Clause IV., he read:

"Any Employer dismissing an employee shall first signify his intention to the local Secretary of such employee's Union, giving his reasons for the same. In case of dismissal of hands on account of shortage of work, a list of such men as are to be dismissed shall be sent to the local Secretary who will have power to "suggest" substitutes for one-third of total number to be dismissed, in such cases where his intimate knowledge of the families would lead him to suppose dismissal will entail unusual hardships!"

Arrington laughed and tossed the paper on the table.

"It's preposterous!" cried Max again hotly. "No one in their senses would agree, would you?"

Arrington tossed a careless answer back as he went over to his table.

"There'll be no strike. It's better things should come to a head than go on simmering."

"You mean they won't really stand on Clause IV.?"

Arrington flashed a look of impatient anger on his secretary.

"Can you stop them, sir?"

"What the devil does it matter to you what they do? It's not your business nor mine either!" burst out Arrington furiously. But his fury was impotent. Max was very white, very quiet, very persistent.

"Watt is the only strong man they have, he leads them entirely and, though he doesn't know it, *you* lead him—*entirely*! What are you going to do?"

Arrington eyed him closely.

"After all," he said slowly, "why not let them fight and the strongest win? I've no axe to grind. Your beloved Christopher and his Federation have got a bit of power too. Let him stop it!"

"Is that what you intend to do, having let them get this far?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"If it is," said Max, and he was conscious of a curious numb feeling within, "then you must get another secretary in my place."

For a moment the two stared at each other and it would be hard to say which was the most amazed at words so unexpected, so unpremeditated. For Max had only known as he spoke what must be the inevitable end of the situation as he had crudely summed it up, recognising instantly the substance of the shadowy fear that had troubled him. He hated it but he sought no compromise, and waited for the outpouring of Arrington's wrath, with a sense of desolation almost unbearable.

But it did not come.

Arrington continued to stare at him in an unseeing way and presently said curtly:

"Your reasons?"

"No man knows better than you, sir, what a universal lockout or strike in any one trade means, you've told me often no advantage gained this way can pay for the appalling misery, the moral, mental, and physical deterioration that comes from any long drawn out struggle like this. It's been your one stopping place—you've used the possibility of it, you've let them go far, but never so far as this. You know what it would mean to the country, to trade generally—you know it all better than I do, all I know of these matters is of your teaching; on the face of that if you let these men strike when you *could* stop them, then it's——" He stopped himself weakly, nervously. He realised he was daring to accuse Paul Arrington of what in his eyes was little short of crime, and he was very young, excessively modest about his own merits, and he loved Paul.

"Well, finish—it's—it's what?" insisted Arrington, in an unusual deadly calm manner.

"I don't know, I can't judge," said Max despairingly. "Only you'd better get some one else."

Arrington got up and, coming round the table, put his hands on his secretary's shoulders. Max was not really short but the other seemed to tower above him, and he knew he was a mere child in that grip and stood passive.

"Max," said Arrington in a low deep voice as one holding some force at bay; "Max, if you leave me I swear I'll leave them to their own will. I'll let them fight, and stand aside. I'm sick of it, deadly sick of it, but what else is there? Oh, Max, you fool, I'd like to shake understanding into that dense head of yours!" Indeed, involuntarily and unknowingly he nearly did shake his audacious secretary, and the grip of his hands left their mark on Max's shoulders: "That you should think me a mere thumping agitator, stirring up war

he can't quell! There'll be no strike, Max, but they will win—all that's worth winning, I know how much better than they do! How dare you give me notice?" He loosed Max suddenly with a queer short laugh and turned to the window.

But Max neither withdrew his notice nor offered apology. He would rather a hundred times Arrington had flown into one of his royal rages. There was to be no strike, that was a point to the good—if he held to it. For the life of him Max could have given no reason for his doubt of Arrington's ultimate purpose, except that there had been no rage.

With his back to him and still gazing moodily out of the window, Arrington spoke again:

"You've wondered times enough, or said you did, as to why I ever flung my lot in with these people. I'll tell you, then perhaps you'll hold your tongue about deserting me at a bad place,—or perhaps you'll prefer to go."

A sharp unexpected pang of compunction shot across Max's heart. He tried to quench it and to maintain an even impartial mind. He watched his Chief now with what he fondly imagined was a critical eye, but moment by moment he was repudiating his own impulsive act of loyalty to some fundamental part of himself that was yet independent of Arrington's sway. He had a vague feeling the immediate vicinity of Paul was a zone of danger to any independent action on his part, but he had no real desire to escape it.

There was nothing hypnotic about Arrington's vital magneticism. He was even now quite unconscious that apart from any words he might utter or action he might take, his fervent desire and will to keep Max Aston near him were already exerting their subtle influence. He did not trouble to analyse his reasons for wanting Max; he did want him and that was an

all-sufficient reason for using every means he could to attain his object.

He did not face Max, however, nor had he any intention of meeting his words with real explanation of his intentions or aims. In all his life he had held account with no man and it was hard to begin now. Moreover he wanted his secretary's presence independently of anything he had done or would do; he wanted it for the simple reason it was the strongest tie he had with common humanity.

"When I was twenty-one," said Arrington abruptly, "I found myself in possession of everything the world thinks worth having, no relations but a distant cousin who did not even bear my name; no obligation to work—except the sort of obligation that's recognised in your family," he added with a grim little smile. "There I was with sense enough to recognise my own handicap and strength, and will enough to work decently if I could find a job. Naturally all sorts of foolish futile jobs were flung at me. Circumstances seemed to preordain my life. Well, I was too strong for circumstances, I led my own life, I ruled my tiny kingdom till it could rule itself and was too small for me. Politics seemed the inevitable end; I had position and money, and was thought to be a gain. Both parties wrangled for me, I had no special bias but I was not going to be bought. I stood on my own ground, and in eighteen months I was sick to death of the pettiness, the lies and subterfuges of political life. If I'd taken the big position they offered as a bribe (or so I thought) it might have been different, but I chose to walk † that post at my own pace and on my own feet, and the path was less clean than I fancied! Then I met Charles Aston, your grandfather——" his voice changed very slightly and he stopped. In a moment Max knew why he would at all costs stand by

this lonely man, no matter what road he trod. Arrington went on:

"He showed me how to—pick my way. He was the first man I met who took an interest in me apart from what I had and represented. Again circumstances pointed to a particular party and path, again I was too strong for circumstances, and I got clear of it all. I think I should have taken up exploration then but there was a woman. The one thing I wanted to give me balance, so Aston had said."

Again Arrington stopped. This time his voice did not change when he went on except to harden a little.

"For the first time in my life circumstances were too much for me. Murder was the only way out and I thought of it quite seriously." He laughed a little and Max made a sudden movement of dumb protest against the laugh.

"Since then," went on Arrington, suddenly turning and facing Max, "since then I've been getting even with—Circumstances! Where they have pushed me or another to the wall I've fought them and won,—*always!* Is that incredible to you? It's true, but if it goes on to the end of the chapter, I still shall never be even with 'them' for that one victory!"

The concentrated passion of his soul flared up for one moment into his voice and face, so that Max knew beyond doubt that here lay the secret of Arrington's whole existence, the fierce undying desire to swim against the tide, to carry victory in the face of those opposing forces which had once had the mastery,—knew it and recognised the danger.

Arrington walked restlessly the length of the room, and when he turned went on speaking rapidly and coherently:

"I was at war with all the established order of things when I came across Watt, who was in the same

case for a different reason. He had just been elected as a Member of the Labour Congress and had fairly much the same experience I'd had at Westminster. Perhaps it was because his troubles were so different from my own that I saw they were fightable—anyhow—we pulled together. You think it was a queer union, but I wasn't very keen on anything that was mine by right just then, and Watt reminded me of—nothing. Then I found they wanted statistics, so——” He looked round at the full shelves, laden with bound volumes of figures, histories, dry statements of living indisputable facts.

“So I began—so it's gone on, I'm an authority on—Labour statistics, by accident! Sometimes they prove one thing, sometimes another. As you know, most people find what they want—and shut the book!” Again he laughed, and then wheeled round and faced Max again.

“But the point is—circumstances were against Watt and his party, then—they are still, but he'll win yet.”

“Ought he to win? That's the point,” ventured Max bewilderedly.

Arrington shrugged his shoulders.

“Who's to say? If you've stakes either side, you must be biassed, if you are clear of either side, you recognise the game's too big for our mortal sight. It's not enough to win either if one's too crippled to enjoy the fruits of victory. That's what Watt and his sort do not understand, and where I'm useful to them, having no stakes. Do you understand?”

Yes, Max understood now! Paul Arrington himself refused to stake anything against circumstances which had once worsted him. That is what it amounted to. He would lend his brain, his fierce energy, his marvellous head for figures to the losing side, but he himself would jeopardise nothing but his reputation as a winner. In every turn of the Wheel of Fortune un-

expected prizes or hard-earned victories might come to other men, but to him—nothing! Poor in his riches, beggared by his intemperate pride, he was self-doomed to a loneliness that had hugged for its only consolation the belief he suffered to spare a woman's pride. Anne had torn that consolation asunder, shown him how pride, not pity, had brought about his isolation and the woman's sorrow.

That Max did not know, but he had sufficient imagination to fill in the crude outline of his Chief's story, and to see how the reckless expenditure of a generous, hot-headed youth had resulted in the strangely impersonal pursuits of the present. Still Max said little, nor did Arrington seem to expect otherwise.

They both returned to their respective tables, and as Paul seated himself his eye fell on an empty basket in the window. He sprang up again,

"Good heavens, I shut Macdonald out!"

He strode to the door before Max had realised what was wrong. The moment it opened a very haughty and unconcerned Macdonald stalked past him and took up a position on the hearthrug, near to Max's chair.

Max carefully took no notice.

"Basket, Macdonald!" said Arrington severely.

Macdonald's ears twitched, but he made no other movement, not even an apologetic wag of the tail.

Arrington regarded him with an ominous frown for a moment and then turned away.

His one victory had not heartened him to a new engagement that afternoon.

CHAPTER XXIII

"It's Mr. Watt I want to see, I tells you."

She was a very untidy woman, slovenly and down at heel, her grey shawl barely hid the deficiencies of her toilet, though it effectively sheltered a baby asleep in her arms.

She stood on the steps of the small hotel where Joseph Watt and his "suite" were staying, and repeated her request to the scandalised porter with dull persistence. He was about to offer more strenuous objection to her presence when Watt appeared.

"There he is if you want to see him," he said with haughty condescension. He did not approve of Mr. Watt. "One of them socialistic lot and no gentleman," he confided to his wife. Watt indeed wanted little done for him and gave little for that.

"Here he is," he repeated slowly and retreated within the glass swing doors, leaving the woman to speak for herself if she would, and thus ridding himself of that responsibility. She eyed Watt doubtfully, and he indeed hardly noticed her till she accosted him with a timid gesture.

"Want anything?" he demanded laconically. He could not afford indiscriminate charity even had he approved of it.

"Please, sir, they say as how you manage all the Union. Please, sir, I come to ask you not to let there be a strike. My man's just got work again—work is short. There's been iots of trouble. We haven't got anything to fall back on."

The penetrating anxiety of her voice irritated Watt.

"My dear woman, we don't control these things. It's the Board. What's your name?"

"James." The baby gave a little gurgling cry. She looked at it. Suddenly a sort of wild fire lit her face, she got in front of him.

"It's you really!" she cried. "You was a working man yourself once they says. Maybe you've forgotten, maybe you yourself was a baby and carried under no better shawl than this once—and you've forgotten likely as not what it is to have no money coming in and hungry mouths to feed!"

"My mother died of starvation!"

Watt's voice was harsh and bitter. Anne, who had come out behind him, heard him with amazement and gasped. It seemed so odd, so bizarre, to connect Joseph Watt with a mother—*Starved!*

"If that's true you'll not let them strike, you'll not rob us of bread," retorted the woman in the same fiercely hoarse tone. She put out her hand and touched his arm.

"You'll remember it?" she whispered.

"I'll make it impossible for him and his like to starve when he's grown up," said Watt, pointing to the child she held.

"Maybe—that won't help if we and he starve now. I know about strikes! I've been through three! My God, I *know!*" She burst into a laugh, "Do you?—When the funds is all gone—sick funds and all—and there's only the public for one's man——"

Again she put out her hand to touch him.

Watt put her aside impatiently and would have gone on. The street was a quiet one, only the hall porter looked through the door scornfully, and Anne stood still on the top step, waiting and listening. Watt's hand went to his pocket. It seemed the easiest way to get rid of her.

She saw and stopped him. Anne for a second thought she would attack him.

"I'm not come begging!" she flung at him with a

ragged kind of dignity. "We've money enough now if you let us alone."

"Money enough?" sneered Watt eyeing her. "And your employer's mistress drives about in a carriage and pair!"

"What's that to me? Let her if she likes, who's the better or worse for that? It's the strike I want to know about."

"I'm not responsible for strikes," he began and then checked himself. "Anyhow if I am I don't expect you to see your own advantage. I'll see your husband!"

"No you won't," she retorted sharply. "Not if I knows it! He's content now. He'll drop his Union if I has my will. I've seen strikes I tell you!—and strike me you're making one! Curse you!"

She turned quite suddenly and hurried down the street, her head bent over the bundle beneath her shawl.

Watt drew a deep breath and wiped his face with a handkerchief; then he became aware of Anne's presence.

"She's the outcome of it all," he muttered with a certain savage gloom. "She shouldn't be possible! What can one do?"

"I've seen worse outcomes," said Anne quietly. "And I'll see her!"

Before Watt could expostulate she was hurrying down the street after the woman who had stopped a moment to rearrange her shawl and burden, and was still in sight.

Watt looked after her with visible annoyance and then went the other way. He was not in the least annoyed at her following the woman but only at the unnecessary fatigue and worry she was bringing on herself.

"That's the worst of women," he grumbled to himself. "So much damned sentiment! Thought she'd more sense!"

'Anne returned to the hotel an hour later, and went up to her room slowly, forgetful of the lift. Watt was justified in his foresight with regard to the fatigue. She looked tired and white and her lips were a little tightened and her eyes ached dully.

She had followed the woman through street upon street of mean and still meaner houses, till they came to a black cinder path running between dreary rows of grimy two-storeyed houses, each separated from the path by a few yards of "garden,"—garden of broken palings, crockery, rubbish, and pathetic patches of things that had once been green.

The woman had entered one of the houses, and Anne still followed slowly and knocked.

The woman eyed her suspiciously, and then superciliously, and finally, when she discovered she had to do with Mr. Watt, burst into a torrent of abuse and shut the door in her face.

Anne returned to the hotel, dispirited and very tired. She lost her way once or twice and finally had to take the tram. Once in her own room she took off her hat mechanically and stood staring with unseeing eyes in the glass.

She took up her brush and then suddenly dropped it and straightened herself.

"I can't go on!" she said aloud. "I don't know what it all means, what is right, and who is right!—I don't know anything except something is wrong."

As she stood staring before her, the dull confusion of her overstrained mind seemed to enwrap her in an isolation hardly to be borne.

Why couldn't she take things on trust like other people or like Max Aston?—Joseph Watt was at least as much in earnest and sure of himself as Paul Arrington.

"I can't, I can't!" she gasped, and never knew tears

were overflowing: the slow piteous tears of mental and physical exhaustion.

She looked around the dull hotel bedroom almost as a hunted animal. Surely there must be some one somewhere who could help and explain things. There must be more right on one side than another. God couldn't want both sides to win!

"There's Mr. Watt and the people and all the suffering, and all the waste and uselessness the other side! Why can't I feel sure he is right? Why should I have to feel sure about it at all?" She sank down in a big chair beside the bed and leant her head on the pillow, and cried consciously, and was consequently relieved and rested.

The moments slipped by in a silence that was charged with healing. She kept very still waiting on that healing with a patience born of experience.

Slowly there filtered into her recollection odd phrases and expressions of faith that had fallen from Max Aston's lips at various times; yet not his but another's as she had been curiously aware. That other whom Max Aston mentioned very seldom and yet was a factor in his life, of that much she was sure. Joseph Watt mentioned him frequently, with a bitterness that had put Anne quite unconsciously on guard against his judgment.

This Christopher Masters, the epitome of all those evils against which Watt fought, whose very existence as a financial power was productive of them, and who must therefore be cut down as a fosterer of parasitical growths—this Christopher Masters, what had he to say about it all?

A desire awoke in her so ardent as to be unreasonable and yet not to be gainsaid.

She rose, readjusted her toilet with extreme care and went downstairs.

Watt had returned and she met him in the hall.

"Mr. Watt," she began hurriedly, "do you want me again to-night? If not I want to go out. I want to go and see Mr. Masters."

The look she received should have enlightened her as to the impropriety of her desire, but she was still too much in thrall to her own need to heed it.

He flung open the door of his "office," and went in before her.

"What do you want to see him for?" he tossed over his shoulder to her.

"I want to ask him things, to understand."

"What do you want to ask?"

She shook her head.

"I have asked you. I know your answer. It's all quite good—only——" She stopped. Watt thrust his hands into his pockets and eyed her, frowning with displeasure.

"Are you going over to the other side?"

She met his glance with an amazed candour that nearly softened his anger but added to his irritation.

"I can't go over anywhere. I'm standing on no ground at all. I just want to understand. That's why I'm no real use, Mr. Watt."

"It's precisely why you are useful!" he growled. "People with no convictions are heaps more conscientious than people with them. What's the matter with you? What do you want to understand? What does a party matter to you? I thought you just liked being useful."

It was Max Aston's old argument over again stripped of its more subtle dress. She could find nothing to say. She was already convinced of her folly and yet bound to it by ties of temperament and nature, that neither Max Aston nor Joseph Watt could loose.

Watt turned sharply away, walked to the window and jerked the blind straight, muttering angrily.

"Only a woman could think of changing sides in

the middle of a campaign!" he tossed at her scornfully.

Anne's distress grew, honesty and honour seen in antagonism and she was dismally conscious of her limitations as a woman.

"I don't want to change," she said wearily. "I only want to know what they think too. It's not my fault, I want to be convinced about things; I'm married that way."

"The right side is whichever side you find yourself serving," Watt proclaimed doggedly.

"If I'd chosen it," she returned distressfully, "I didn't, you know. I was just put here, I want dreadfully to be sure it is the real right side myself."

"You've been doing too much tramping over the place this afternoon instead of resting like a sensible person. I don't see how these questions matter to a woman, as long as she does the work she has to do."

Again his rather brutal common-sense recalled Mary to her. She sat down rather wearily. Were they right?

"At all events," went on Watt, "you can't go visiting Masters even if he would see you, you aren't a private individual, you're my secretary."

The enormity of her egotistical idea came at last with all its barefaced impossibility on her understanding. She was horrified and turned to him appealing:

"But you don't think, you don't suppose I should have spoken to him of our—of—of your affairs?"

"It's not what I think," retorted Watt, "it's what will be said by the others. You can't go without damaging me."

"I'm not going. I see it was preposterous. A man would have seen it at once, I suppose," she added a little wistfully.

"Of course, but you can't help being a woman!"

There was relief in his voice, he was oddly pleased at his triumph. Oddly conscious too, had she not been

a woman he'd have shown her the door with no ceremony five minutes ago.

She had wasted his time, he ought to have been furiously angry with her, and all he could feel was this ridiculous sense of relief as if her service was of real importance.

"I'm looking up those notes for the meeting to-night," he said indifferently.

Anne rose and helped him in her efficient quiet way. He explained it was quite a small meeting for the leading men of various sections, who were each to bring a doubtful member for complete conversion.

Anne suggested he should take her, but he declined brusquely. There had been great difficulty in getting a hall at all, as Anne had known. He mentioned to her casually he thought the Masters' Federation had something to do with that difficulty.

"Mr. Batherly, I expect!" she said with a woman's quick intuition.

Watt stopped and looked at her thoughtfully. He recognised her unreasoned statement as something more than a possible fact, but all he said was—

"Well, he's one of them!"

He left her some letters to write and went out again. Her apparently random suggestion had excited his curiosity. He wanted to verify it. The hall he had taken for to-night was really a chapel. He determined to call on the minister from whom he had hired it with some difficulty, and see what could be learned from him.

Anne finished her letters mechanically and then reviewed the situation disconsolately. She still believed with almost pitiful eagerness that, somewhere in the world, the Individual or the Cause must exist which was in real concord with that far-off vision of Unity and Love, that had been hers. Here and there a Principle, and once a Man, had called her to surrender her

Quest and accept the part instead of the whole. And it was the Man who had landed her here in the heart of a Cause, whose righteousness should surely be beyond dispute, and whose working should be in accord with her vision.

But justice and righteousness are hard matters to disentangle from the fetters of the world's way, as Anne had found before. But now it had come to her as a new sort of terror that she might even be fighting against the very thing for which she sought. Yet here she was involved in that tangle of honour with which men have endeavoured to fence in their lives from confusion and evil; she had thought herself free, and she was a prisoner.

There seemed no way out.

She tried to put Christopher Masters out of her mind, to remember Watt's strong virile words, to remember the dull degradation, the squalor and misery of places they had visited, which had appeared to move Watt very little, but left her sick and raging, ready to subscribe to his fiercest outcry against Capital—and Christopher Masters. It crystallised itself there. He was the personification of Capital, Watt said.

Then she remembered Runnyford, and Max, and with that the impossibility of her seeing Masters at all.

The vicious circle closed round her again. She sprang up, and determined to go out and shake off her worries.

The lamps showed faintly in the iridescent evening light, and she walked swiftly down the streets and by the roads she had walked with Watt that morning. They were busy parts through which she went. Great warehouses and mills were still disgorging their later workers, and there was a tense strained feeling in the air. She passed unnoticed, except here or there, where she was recognised as Watt's secretary. Little groups of men stood about the corners, talking little, drinking

enough, listening vaguely. Some shopkeepers, aware of an uneasy state of things, closed early. Presently she found herself opposite the little Chapel where Watt had just begun to address his audience of malcontents to-night. The lights inside flared through the yellow blinds, and a sound of voices came out of the open door across the narrow street to her. On the pavement by the entrance, a group of loafers had collected—queer weak-faced, shabby men with furtive faces. This little group increased each minute, and Anne stopped to watch. She would have liked to cross the road and go in, but Watt evidently did not want her. There was very little traffic in the street, an important main thoroughfare crossed it further down, there all was light and bustle and noise, but here there were only distant lights and a few small shops; one, a chemist's against which she stood, dull private houses, some schools higher up and the chapel opposite, outside of which a motor waited.

The doors were opened wide, presumably it was hot within since even without the air was warm. The hum of voices within was quite clear. Now and again she heard Watt's voice, strident and dominant. The little crowd outside swayed and moved forward, and lifted a voice too, a sharp excited note. She saw the men had something in their hands.

Three or four policemen gathered together; one, apparently the chief, spoke to another who disappeared towards the wider street. A motor came tearing down the road from the far end. Then!— The crowd within the Chapel seemed to surge and huddle over as a pot overheated. The contents flowed suddenly out, foaming and furious. There was a compact, little knot of men with Watt, hatless and angry, in their midst; and these were overlapped and surrounded by an angry swarm which seethed over and melted into the crowd without.

The nucleus of the crowd—Watt and his friends—were trying to reach the waiting motor, the others intervened. None saw the approaching motor rushing towards them.

Prompted by some vague protective instinct that waited on no reasoning, Anne flew across the road, struggled to reach Watt, was jostled, shoved roughly away, angry voices drowned her gasping little cry of "Cowards, cowards!" For she saw Watt was alone, his supporters were self-supporters now, and he was struggling towards the car. A stone, whizzing by her ear, caught him on the side of his head and he fell on the steps of the motor just as she reached him.

It was her intervening form that warded off a cowardly blow aimed at the prostrate figure, and then some one caught her in a firm arm and held her, though she—still struggling—muttered thickly, "They've killed him, they've killed him!"

But the hurrying police had got through, and were mingled with the seething angry crowd now, which thinned and widened out miraculously, as if in over-boiling the pot had quenched the fire. A man on horse-back shouted directions. Men were slinking quietly back into the Chapel, which had other exits. The street so quiet five minutes ago seemed full of people, harmless curious people whom the police scattered before their curiosity was gratified. Men from the chemist's shop were bending over Watt, and the arm that sheltered Anne still held her. Some one—not a policeman—was giving orders in a curt decisive voice. Then Anne was lifted straight into a big car, and her captor tucked a rug round her feet. An official-looking man was speaking to him meanwhile, and once Anne was safe he paused a moment to listen and answer, and then sprang into the car.

"I'll come back later. Dr. Ferguson will see to

him," were his last words to the man, and then to Anne sharply:

"Are you hurt? Put up your hand if you are. Don't talk. Of all the mad women!"

Anne shook her head and smiled at him.

The car shot round a corner over sharply, and she almost fell into her rescuer's arms again. She wondered in a blind, dull way if she were hurt or not, speech seemed gone from her. What little power remained was exercised in keeping herself from a last disgrace of fainting. The back of her head was stiff and numb.

Almost before she realised they were away from the crowd they stopped at a door, the private door of an exclusively private hotel, and Anne was again lifted out and could speak no protest. The upward rush of a lift deprived her again of her partially recovered wits. She still held on to a thin thread of consciousness, but it took no cognition of externals, and could not have gripped the fact that fifteen minutes ago the crowd had not "boiled over" in the little Chapel in the quiet street.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE stillness and repose of the room, in which Anne found herself, recalled her to a consciousness of tumult and noise passed through and already blurred in a haze.

She leant back in the deep chair where she had been placed, thankful to be allowed to be still and unquestioned till she could drag herself together to the level of externals.

Some one gave her something in a glass which was extremely nasty, but she could distinguish her surroundings more clearly after she had drunk it. Indeed she appeared far less confused than she really was, and being unable to explain her strange inability to speak, or the curious stiffness at the back of her head, her new friends thought her further on the road to recovery than was actually the case.

There were several people in the room. A very pretty dark girl whom Anne thought she knew, and then thought she didn't. There was the sandy-haired man she had met at Runnyford, and a bullet-headed man who seemed out of touch with his surroundings, and by Anne's side removing her gloves with the same deft fingers that had removed her hat, was a woman with a great swirl of golden hair above a face that to Anne seemed that of a Crowned Woman. As these details grafted themselves on her mind a man who was standing behind her was speaking swiftly and quietly, and all seemed to hang on his words. Anne caught the tag end of his speech.

"It was quite the most foolish thing I've ever seen a woman do."

His voice belied the supposed scorn of his words.

It was full of meaning and underlying kindness. The desire that had haunted her late hours had fulfilled itself. She knew the man who spoke was Christopher Masters, and that it was he who had dragged her out of the confusion that had so bewildered her wits.

The bullet-headed man began shouting rapid angry questions at Christopher who answered them tersely.

"I heard of it by pure fluke not an hour ago—it was too late to do anything but telephone to the police and go—it was non-Union men and unemployables and loafers, a put-up job, scoundrelly business!"

"You'll follow it up?"

"If I can. I'm going back directly." He looked at Anne again as he spoke. Fragments of this came to her. She knew she too was angry about something as they were, but she could not at first remember what it was. Suddenly she sat upright and put out her hands appealing.

"Mr. Watt," she gasped. "Where is he? Let me go at once. He's hurt!"

Christopher came swiftly to her, and caught her hands as she tried to rise.

"Listen, Miss Kempburn. Mr. Watt is being looked after. He is hurt, but not very much. There's a Nursing Home in that street, they've taken him there. He'll have every care. I'm going down to see about him myself directly, and I'll come back at once and tell you if you promise to stay here quietly."

"But Flossie—Miss Watt—I ought to go to her." She struggled with the words, speaking quickly and thickly.

"I'll see her. But if you don't keep quiet and do what my wife says I'll not come back to tell you. Just leave other people alone a bit, you are not to be trusted any more than a baby!"

Some one laughed, and Anne lay back again with a curious sense of relief and rest, and shut her eyes.

When she opened them again, the men had gone and she was lying on the sofa, Mrs. Masters sitting beside her and watching her intently while the pretty girl was busy with a small tea-table. They spoke to each other quietly, and the girl brought some tea and put it on a little table close to Anne. Surely it could not be tea-time.

Then Anne recollected the men had been in evening dress, and she felt a faint pleasure in watching the shimmering light on Mrs. Masters's gown. Their quiet voices too pleased her. It seemed to her the little commercial hotel, the voluble daughter of the house, Flossie Watt, and the rest of her late surroundings, were very far away.

But her head ached, and when she raised her hand she found to her surprise that a thick bandage, soaked in some clean pungent-smelling lotion, was fastened round it. She did not remember it being done.

"You've got rather a big bump on your head," said Mrs. Masters gently. "It might have been worse, however. Did you know you were hit?"

"I forget," said Anne confusedly. "I thought it was Mr. Watt who was hit. Will Mr. Masters come back soon?"

"I expect so; as soon as he can bring you definite news of Mr. Watt."

"Then I must go back. I am much better. It is very kind of you to have kept me here."

Patricia Masters bent over her a moment and touched her forehead with cool fingers.

"You will have to let us be kind a little longer, my dear. You would be in bed now, except that I know it would worry you not to hear Christopher's account yourself."

"But I can't stay!" cried Anne with sudden distress. "Mr. Watt explained to me when I wanted to see Mr. Masters before that it would not do. I'm

his secretary, you see, and they would say all sorts of things. It would be worse now he's ill."

Mrs. Masters at least drew the purpose out of the incoherent speech. She smoothed her agitated guest and assured her she might trust Christopher to do whatever was right and proper under the circumstances, and then asked quickly:

"Why did you want to see my husband?"

"I just wanted to hear his side of things," said Anne wearily. "It's so dreadfully hard to know quite certainly which side is right, I thought it would help me."

"But you are Mr. Watt's private secretary, aren't you?"

Anne said "Yes" faintly and lapsed into silence.

Patricia longed to question further. She had heard of Anne Kempburn from Constantia Wyatt as well as Max; indeed, she and Charlotte Aston, who was staying with her and was the pretty girl of shadowy familiarity to Anne, had spent some hours discussing her with much fluttering of the maternal pinions of protection on behalf of Max Aston. In spite of Constantia's very favorable verdict and intelligent description, Patricia had imagined a quite different person from this weary and rather pathetic-looking girl. Even allowing for the exciting events and narrow escape of the past hours, Patricia decided her guest had a very appealing face, and there was something pathetic in the thin accentuated lines that spoke of over-pressure, or over-strain of some time. They had ascertained the blow was not serious though sufficient to make absolute rest and quiet advisable, and to account for the semi-unconscious lapses that had overtaken her. It was, however, no use to rouse her into argument as to the wisdom of retiring to bed until she had heard what had actually occurred to Joseph Watt. So the three sat quietly there with shaded lights, speaking little at first,

though presently Patricia, noting the gathering anxiety on her patient's face, began an explanation as to what had happened earlier in the evening.

"We were dressing for dinner when a note came for Christopher. He just told me some one was trying to break up a Meeting and he meant to stop it. He telephoned to the police and rushed off in his car. Mr. Fulner and Mr. Barnes came in just as he left, and since he had not said any more they just had to wait. About twenty minutes later he came in with you."

"And you've had no dinner?" said Anne concernedly.

"I don't think we have! Charlotte, have we dined?"

Charlotte laughed.

"No, we chose tea instead. Patricia, you are as bad as Father over meals."

"They are so irregular, of late," sighed Patricia.

At that moment Christopher entered alone. His face was very stern and set, but it softened when he saw his wife and grew very gentle as he came to Anne's side.

"I've been with Watt," he said, smiling at her reassuringly. "He's broken his arm, but beyond that and the shock there is no damage. He will stay quietly where he is for a day or two, and you can go to see him to-morrow if the doctors permit."

"He knows I am here?"

"Yes, and says you are to stay. Then I went to the hotel and saw Miss Watt." In an almost imperceptible pause he looked comically at Patricia who reaped the benefit of that interview later on. "She was naturally very upset," Christopher went on rather hurriedly, "but she is all right with her friends. I locked the door of the sitting-room—the office you know, and here's the key." He handed it to her ceremoniously

"That was the direction given me. Ah, yes, and Mr. Watt insists on your seeing a doctor, so I ordered one."

"A doctor!" protested Anne weakly.

"Yes, to see you haven't done anything worse than bump your head. He'll be here directly, so you'd better go to bed. I'm to go back and see Mr. Watt when the doctor's gone."

"But there's nothing the matter with me."

"No, we know that, of course. Mr. Watt wants to know it too."

There was a moment's pause, then Christopher added gravely:

"I'm afraid the wretched business will be in all the papers to-morrow. It seems hopeless to try and keep your name out of it, because you were recognised and they had been round to Miss Watt before I got there. Is there anyone you would like to reassure by telephone or wire?"

"My father in the morning," said Anne quickly; "but not till then, he will wonder what it means."

Christopher nodded, and did not show nor explain the long message he had noted down from Watt's dictation to be telephoned to Paul Arrington that night, so soon as the doctor had seen Anne. The message was far more concerned with her than with the Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union, and Christopher had liked the short-spoken man the better for his anxiety over his own secretary, an anxiety which, despite the pain of his broken arm, he insisted on having satisfied before he permitted the doctors to deal with him. No one more nearly concerned had appeared to inquire or take directions from Watt, so Christopher filled in the gap, and did it so neatly it never occurred to Watt at the time, that it was an odd position for him to fill.

Anne's anxiety being allayed, Patricia bore her off to bed, and Christopher hurried off to his own private

room where he found David Fulner just arrived breathless and eager.

"I've got the names!" he exclaimed, as Christopher entered. "Here's the list of those taken up and that's a list of 'suspects.' And there's the name of the man who called on Gray, the Chapel parson, and tried to take the place over Watt's head."

"And here's Barnes," interrupted Christopher, as the dark-headed man entered.

"Batherly's not in Mirchester to-night, at least not at the Club nor at his usual hotel," said Barnes in a grim dull voice.

"No, I don't suppose he is." Christopher studied the list. The other two men watched him closely and anxiously.

Presently he put the paper in his pocket and going over to the window stared out frowning. The blinds and curtains were undrawn, and there was a view of the tree-tops in the Square standing out with queer distinctness. The glare of light from the electric standards conflicted with the pale sky that hardly admitted the usurpation of the night. The light streaming from the high windows of the hotel added to the conflict of glare and shadow, a conflict that faded as it rose and died out in space where dim stars were lost and drowned in a vast infinity.

"The Federation must be reconstructed," was all Christopher said, and his two hearers looked at each other with consternation.

"Talking is no good," he went on. "I'm not going to let Watt win, but we'll fight fair."

"They aren't above using queer weapons themselves at a pinch," Barnes suggested in his grim way.

Christopher turned on him.

"Can you wonder, seeing what they see? They base their every claim on such grounds as have been given them to-night. There'd be no Trades Unions,

nor any fighting if it were not for the Batherlys and——" He stopped, for his father's name was on his tongue.

"Don't you see," he went on, "that it's the very essence of our contention that they don't know better wisdom than that sort of warfare. Haven't we had money, leisure, education, granted us just that we should know better! The Batherlys and their like are more dangerous than Watt or twenty Unions. Oh, it's no use talking. I must go and send Watt's message off."

He went off and left them alone, still looking questioningly at each other.

"Is it Batherly?" asked Fulner.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"It will never come out if it is; that's what's wrong with him," with a nod towards the door.

"Reconstruction means ruin," grumbled Fulner.

"Whose?" said Barnes laconically.

CHAPTER XXV

THE disturbance in the little Chapel had more far-reaching and very different results from those its instigator had foreseen. A broken-up meeting and the silencing for a moment of a hostile influence might appear a legitimate and simple proceeding to some minds. No serious harm having been intended an easy-going conscience might acquit itself of responsibility, or even rub its hands in much self-congratulation on a not wholly deplorable accident to the leader of the hostile force.

But the instigator was never brought to book. Christopher did his best, and the police at his instigation did their best; but the connecting links between the perpetrators of the "outrage" and the instigator of it, were not to be traced with anything more conclusive than moral certainty.

The general result of the affair was an increasing bitterness and rancour on the side of Watt and the Union, and further discussion and suspicions on the part of the Employers' Federation. Watt made all the capital he could out of the affair, which threatened to incapacitate him for at least ten days, just when his actual presence and personal authority was wanted in a dozen places at once. He had been too jealous of his work, and too suspicious of his subordinates, for it to be possible that anyone should take his place even temporarily, and Anne spent long hours by his bedside typing from dictation, and acting as a go-between to the incapacitated man and the most urgent of his continual visitors that no amount of bullying would induce the doctor to admit.

She learnt in this way far more of Watt's difficulties

than he had hitherto allowed her to see, and having no means of apprising their just value was not a little alarmed at the frothy anger and vague exaggerated demands, which either in writing or vocally were Watt's daily portion. She gathered that the Southerners hung back and were already muttering "compromise," while the North growled threateningly at the formation of an Arbitration Board; while Mid-England, where Watt's influence was strongest, called out on North and South as traitorous and backsliding.

Had she but known it, Christopher Masters's troubles were on precisely parallel lines. Many members of the Federation, without approving of crooked courses, still considered Masters made too much about the regrettable affair in the Chapel. Not a few openly declared pleasure at the result. The majority, however, silent, phlegmatic men, accustomed to upright dealing, or at least able to appreciate a high code of honour when held up to them as their natural aim, remained true to Christopher, and made no difficulty over the new pledges put before the Federation, pledges which precluded any disconnected action on the part of members, or any support moral or actual to actions savouring of underhandedness or doubtful honesty.

This was quixotic and ridiculous in the judgment of others and of a portion of the Press, who were not slow to point out that it was by strategy battles were won, and that the other side would undoubtedly employ such means. Christopher read and smiled grimly but his only comment was "Exactly." He succeeded, however, at last, in re-forming the Federation, and it gained in cohesion what it lost numerically.

The Socialistic Press naturally made the most of its opportunity and, for days after the affair, raved over the oppression and tyranny of the "Capitalist" attempt to gag the mouth of poor trodden down Labour. Cartoons were rife and Christopher Masters figured

in them as a villain of the blackest dye. About three days after the affair such a cartoon caught Anne's eye as she sat by Watt's side going through the morning's correspondence. He had been moved back to the hotel but was still in bed, the doctors contending it was the only place where he could be kept sufficiently quiet to shake off the effects of his fall and injuries.

A multitude of papers were scattered over the bed, and Anne caught sight of one particular picture.

"May I see that?" she asked abruptly.

Watt caught it in his hand.

"No," he said sharply. "Don't waste time looking at that rot, no one takes any notice of those things."

"I have seen it," said Anne, "in a shop yesterday evening and," her voice shook a little, "it's a pictorial lie. I don't see any difference between that and a spoken one! You say nobody heeds them, but that isn't so, Mr. Watt, there were boys looking at that shop window and believing it!"

Her face was a little flushed now and her voice terribly earnest.

"Pictures are the lesson books of the uneducated, they get impressions into their heads more easily that way than by spelling over pages of words, half of which they don't understand. Mr. Watt, you know it doesn't matter half as much what is said in print as in pictures. That picture's a wicked thing, heaps of people will believe it."

"Well, I can't help it," snapped Watt irritably. "I'm not responsible. Do you expect me to draw another of Masters with a halo on?"

Anne sighed. She knew, of course, Watt was not responsible, but she wanted him to disclaim such methods, to share her own hot anger, and rise to something beyond mere indifference. But she said no more and resumed work, and found Watt's temper had not improved. It was only when they had come to an end

of the morning's work that she ventured to put a question that had been suppressed for some days.

"Mr. Watt, will you tell me *really*—not officially, if you will give way in some of those Causes rather than strike?"

His answer, flashed back at her with a sort of snarl of anger, struck her dumb.

"Does Masters want to know?"

The meaning of his words seemed to reach her outward self more quickly than her inner mind, for she was still incredulous of them, while her cheeks flamed and her heart beat with loud thumps.

She began mechanically collecting the letters she had written and she said nothing at all.

Watt was conscious of his offence, conscious of its inadmissible injustice, but his irritability had been increased by a bad night and bitter experiences in the past, and above all his strange increasing jealousy of Christopher Masters clouded his common-sense. He could not account for himself, nor did he make much attempt to do so. He told himself Anne was like the rest of them, and that was why he contemplated setting himself free of her; but it was no such reason as that which had disturbed his night's rest.

"You haven't finished," he said curtly, seeing what she was doing.

Anne paused and looked at him.

He was not a very beautiful object at the best of times, and now clad in a gorgeous Japanese jacket provided by his sister, with his grizzled hair standing on end, and his small green eyes alight with helpless resentment, he was almost comical. She longed to usurp the office of nurse and tidy him up.

"I don't quite know," said Anne doubtfully; "but I think I have—finished."

"You've finished when I have," he returned overbearingly.

She shook her head.

"I think you must have finished when you doubt my honesty, Mr. Watt."

"Rubbish, I don't. Don't ask ridiculous questions."

"It sounded as if you did a minute ago. You didn't say it as if you were just cross for the moment."

"Well, why shouldn't I doubt you?" burst out Watt in wild self-defence against himself. "You stayed two days with these people. You've been hankering after them for weeks, according to you they are everything that's desirable to make heaven of—of the world. They are 'your' people, the sort you belong to, you're their class—education, everything. What do you want to mix yourself up with us for? You with your fine ideas and ridiculous scruples. It's no side for you—it's against Nature—unless you've a reason!"

Anne stopped him.

"Mr. Watt, stop saying things like that. It's not just to yourself and it's not—not fair to me. You know perfectly well I'm here because Mr. Arrington sent me."

She broke off suddenly. A realisation of the profound truth of the last remark dawned on her, with confusion and mistrust.

"And because it seemed the weaker side——" she added lamely and untruly.

"Weaker? Is it?" snorted Watt. "We'll soon alter that. They've been on top, now it's our turn. We're going to be masters. Weaker!" Then he pulled himself together and delivered himself of the night's demon.

"I'm not blaming you, but it's all nonsense your sticking to us. You're real enough, you see things aren't even in the world and you want to have a finger in the readjustment. Well, look here, I know something of life, and I tell you plainly the people who

belong naturally to one side of a question aren't of use on the other side. I don't know why, but they aren't. I've seen it times and times. You've too much behind you."

"What about Mr. Arrington?" said Anne steadily. Watt stared.

"Mr. Arrington? He isn't on any side. He just supplies facts and figures to either party, whether they are what we want or not."

Anne felt sorry for Joseph Watt. Her silent enduring anger with Arrington had another notch in it.

"But you can't stay," went on Watt. "There's pretty sure to be rows, you'll get killed or something, you care too much."

"You want me to go?"

"When I'm about again and can use my arm, not till then. I won't be responsible for you. I'll tell Mr. Arrington so. He must do as he likes."

"There's no need to tell Mr. Arrington anything. It's nothing to do with him," interposed Anne quickly.

Watt smiled a little grimly, but he did not betray the unpalatable truth that so far as money was concerned, she was still in Paul Arrington's service.

"You practically saved my life," he began awkwardly.

"And therefore you turn me adrift."

"Yes; daresay it wouldn't have occurred to me else! You aren't dependent on a job I understood," he added still more awkwardly.

"I shall not starve without one."

She was amazed at her own lack of concern, or was it lack of imagination to view herself cut off from the strenuous life she had shared with him!

"I didn't mean to tell you to-day," he went on. "There's no hurry. If you want a job the other side ought to get you one, they owe you something. Here's that nurse coming to hurry you out. Go and lock up

those papers now and see no fools of housemaids go in to dust and muddle things up."

He did not look at her again, nor answer her quietly "Good-morning"; but the nurse who took Anne's place found fresh reason to wonder how that Miss Kempburn could put up with such a temper!

On her way downstairs Anne met Miss Flossie, on whom she had hardly set eyes for the past three days but who was obviously lying in wait for her now.

"I didn't come up as I knew I shouldn't see Joseph if you were there," she said hurriedly. "When do you think he'll be up again, Miss Kempburn?"

"The doctor says on Saturday, but of course he won't be able to move his arm for weeks."

"Is he going to stay here or move on?"

"Stay, I think, he says it's the best centre," answered Anne, wondering where all this was tending.

"Well, now you've taken up with the Masters, don't you think you could do without me? Janet and I want to go to Malvern, I'm sick of this place."

"It's not me, it's your brother," began Anne.

"Oh, he won't want me. He's got you and a nurse, and besides it's such stuff. Mrs. Lambden will look after you too. Do ask Joseph; he'll listen to you, you've made a regular conquest of him," she added with a giggle. "He never thought anything of women before, but he thinks mountains of you!"

Anne studied the pattern of the stair carpet thoughtfully, and managed to hold before her mind that Miss Flossie Watt was only speaking after the manner of her kind, and that however ill or well put, the words had the same meaning behind them, viz., that Joseph Watt thought well of her in comparison to the few women with whom he was acquainted, so well indeed that he was sending her away! It was no use to be angry with Flossie Watt for being herself.

"I will mention it to your brother, if you wish it.

Miss Watt," she said; "but I think it would be kinder to wait a few days longer. One feels so helpless with one arm. I sprained my wrist once, so I know."

"He has you," returned the unsympathetic sister. "Do ask him. I'm so sick of this place, and Janet has friends at Malvern, now."

"Very well. But he's just as likely to listen to you."

Anne pursued her way to the little sitting-room, retained as an office for the Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union. She addressed and stamped her letters, made various newspaper cuttings, and got through the usual routine in a rather perfunctory manner.

Was she glad or sorry to see freedom in front of her again? She knew now she had been desiring it for days, knew also that now it had come it was less welcome than she expected. She felt dispirited and in a sense disheartened. She wondered why Mr. Watt dismissed her. She did not honestly believe he mistrusted her, his other reasons were too vague to carry weight. The point was she was not necessary. Just as the actually monetary side of her work was unnecessary to her, so she was unnecessary to the actual job on which she was employed. It hurt her, unaccountable to realise it, to stand face to face with the discovery there was no permanent niche for her in the life she had chosen.

But she had not chosen it, not this last phase. It was Mr. Arrington, and he had foreseen this. She was sure of it now.

She wished Mr. Watt had not said that about her own people being on the other side. It was cruel and it was not true. She tried to fix her mind on the wider issues of the great struggle, but her own absurd intrusive self stood defiantly between her and the larger view.

In the midst of her despondency the hall porter

knocked at the door, and announced a gentleman to see Miss Kempburn in the ladies' drawing-room.

"A gentleman to see me? It must be a mistake!" said Anne.

He pushed forward a card on a salver with an air of one who washed his hands of the matter.

"Mr. Aston!"

There was no disguising the sound of pleasure in her voice, and the porter took a less detached view of the event.

"In the ladies' drawing-room, Miss," he remarked woodenly again.

Anne looked around the room where she sat and sighed. It was not beautiful but it was a shade less awful than the ladies' drawing-room. However, it would never do, she thought, and rising she went out, locking the door behind her.

The room devoted to ladies, who never extended their patronage to it, was a little dark back room at the end of a corridor, its only outlook discreetly shaded by glacial decoration and white lace curtains. There was a piano stool but no piano, a sofa with the usual lack of springs, and more than the usual supply of anti-macassars, some appalling paintings, and plush-framed views of the neighbourhood on the wall and on the table in the centre a week-old *Daily Graphic*, and two ladies' papers of mature age.

When Anne entered Max was studying the local views.

"Mr. Aston, how glad I am to see you! And how did you come here?"

"By the '9.3' from town," he returned laughing, but with anxious eyes fixed on her, noting every line of her face, every passing shadow on it as one who had hungered for such a chance.

"But what brings you to Mirchester? and oh, what a dreadful room to ask you into, but there's nowhere

else! I daren't ask you into the office and we've no private sitting-room."

"Let's pretend it's a side chapel in a great cathedral with real saints and angels watching us through the blazoned glass."

"It surpasses my powers of imagination," she sighed.

"It doesn't mine," returned Max, who would have sat in a coal cellar without complaining just then, if such were his only method of securing Anne's company.

"Tell me," he said hurriedly, dropping his lighter tone, "are you quite well again? No bad effects, no headaches?"

"It was Mr. Watt who was hurt, not me."

"Hang Watt! It was you, it was in the papers, besides Patricia told me. Are you really well?"

"Quite well. If Mrs. Masters told you anything she must have told you that I am perfectly well. It is Mr. Watt who is still laid up."

"How could you be so silly!" he broke in almost impatiently, "as to rush into a fight like that. What Arrington and Watt and all of them are thinking about to allow you I can't conceive. Anne—please let me call you so for five minutes, I can't say what I want to Miss Kempburn—you must give it up. I simply can't bear it. I'm willing to wait till—till you can answer me as I want, but what's the use of my waiting if you are going to get killed!"

"But I'm not going to get killed!" Anne tried to laugh but something in Max's face stopped her.

"There are worse times coming, you mustn't stay here. Oh, Anne, if you could only care for me a bit and let me take you out of it all. I mightn't understand all the things you care about and are looking for but I'd not hinder you; I'd try to help, and I could take care of you."

He stopped and looked at her with such aching longing in his boyish face that Anne looked away.

She almost wished she could say "yes." It would be so restful to give up—for a time! Then, quite irrelevantly as it might seem, Christopher Masters's face came to her mind.

Her eyes were very sorrowful as she turned and put her hand on his arm with a faint little negative gesture of her head.

"All right, I understand," he said quickly, with a catch in his voice. "Don't bother, I can wait."

"But there's nothing to wait for!" she protested.

"There's you," he returned. "I *had* to say it, Miss Kempburn; you aren't vexed, are you?" She shook her head.

"The next point is when are you going home?"

"I'm not going home," she protested. "At least, only for a holiday."

"Well, how soon can you get away from here?"

"In about a fortnight. You needn't worry, Mr. Watt has given me notice."

She sat down on the uncomfortable sofa, and was suddenly aware she was fighting with tears.

"Given you notice! What ever for?" cried Max as indignantly as if the object of his visit was frustrated instead of fulfilled by such a fact.

"Because he's tired of me I suppose, or thinks I am too interested in the Masters,—or—no, it's not that. He thinks as you do, that I am too great a baby to take care of myself!"

Max's indignation evaporated. For the first time he felt almost kindly disposed towards Joseph Watt.

But Anne was staring blankly at the carpet, not kindly disposed towards anyone, but conscious of a desperate desire to run away and escape from every one she had ever known.

"When do you go?" demanded Max in a matter-of-fact voice.

"When Mr. Watt is about again."

"And you'd go home?"

"I don't know in the least," returned Anne with exasperation. "I've not had time to think. You needn't tell Mr. Arrington about it—or anyone. Have you had lunch?"

At this very pointed reminder that Anne's affairs were not his, Max became instantly the polite guest, and on her suggestion that he should lunch with her and Miss Watt, declared it would give him great pleasure.

"It won't," said Anne perversely. "But you'll pretend it does and be dreadfully bored really. I'll go and tell Miss Watt." She rose but when she reached the door stopped again.

"Are you going to stay with Mr. Masters?"

Max shook his head.

"No. I wish I could. The Chief wouldn't like it."

"Mr. Watt doesn't either," said Anne with a sigh and apparent irrelevance. "That's the worst of being a secretary, isn't it?"

And he replied promptly it was.

The lunch was not hilarious. Miss Watt behaved in her best "rustling" manner, but was cross because Anne had not allowed her time to change her dress. She made affectionate inquiries for various plays as if she had been out of London for months, and the theatres were her constant companions. Max was studiously polite, and avoided Anne's eye until Miss Watt practised a little coyness on him, when he just shot a look of sorrowful wrath at her which reduced Anne to the poor expedient of dropping her dinner napkin to hide her laughter.

Anne suggested he should visit Mr. Watt after lunch but he declined, and finding further delay seemed to oblige Miss Watt's company as well as Anne's, he recollected he must catch the 3.20 train back to town.

Anne was seized with a fit of repentance and man-

aged to evade Miss Flossie as far as to walk to the station with Max across the public gardens.

"Why did you come?" she asked abruptly with troubled eyes.

"To see you. I couldn't be sure you were all right else."

"Well, I am you see."

To which he made no reply.

"Is Mr. Arrington expecting you back?"

"No, I don't think he is. We parted rather—hastily."

Anne looked her surprise.

"In fact, I don't think he expects me back at all," Max went on. "I'm going home for a day or so."

"Oh, do say you are dismissed too!" cried his fellow-worker with a sudden sense of companionship.

"I'm not. I dismissed myself!" he returned indignantly. "I've done it pretty often lately."

"Why?"

He looked at her out of the corner of his eye. The last reason had been Anne herself. He had said some very plain things to the Chief on the subject of Anne and the disturbance in the chapel, and Arrington had lost his temper in return, largely because Max's accusations were in the main true. However, Max could not tell her this, so he vaguely said it was the usual thing, and he supposed it would end as it did before.

"Mr. Arrington does just what he likes with you."

"I'm not singular in that!"

"You are a man. Why don't you do as you like?"

"Because a woman won't let me."

She hastily turned the subject, and was a little relieved when they finally parted. But the relief only lasted a short time. Towards evening after another interview with Joseph Watt, and tea with Miss Flossie who essayed to be "funny" on the subject of Mr. Aston, and asked Anne if it were fixed up yet, the

depression of the morning redescended in full force; and as an only possible cure she shut herself into the office and sternly insisted on pasting up the newspaper cutting book, which was a job she hated and had somewhat neglected.

It grew dusk, but she switched on no light. She sat still with her hands idle, looking straight before her, passing many things in review. Max Aston, Flossie Watt, Joseph Watt, the affairs of the Union, the coming strike, and again she realised that in none of these things, and with none of these people had she any real concern. Her being there was a mistake. Somehow or other she had been deceived, dragged into issues apart from her Quest. Nay, the very Quest itself was dim and uncertain. What did she want out of Life, for what was she seeking?

A terror of self-deception came over her. Suppose there was no Quest, no real Vision, no Unity in the World! Her breath came fast and quick in the rising horror. If Life were really as little as it looked on the surface, and the Eternal Purpose only the passionate desire of humanity? If there were no central fact to take hold of and cling to? The whole cry of the feminine life rose in her, the cry of the soul of things for shelter, protection, for right to live behind the mere appearances of the material world, for right of vision, right of intuitive knowledge, right to live, give, and serve through some intermediary force.

And to Anne in this new hour of self-revelation in the dingy little room and gathering dusk, there came the unexpected answer to her need.

She had not heard the knock at the door. She only knew it opened, that some one turned on the light and Christopher Masters stood opposite to her.

PART III
CHRISTOPHER MASTERS

CHAPTER XXVI

SUMMER singed her beautiful garments in a heat wave that year, and those who in the ordinary way complained "We never have enough sun," fell back on protestations of our lack of preparation when it did come. It was bearable in the country for those who had nothing to do and no garden to worry their heart, but in towns—especially in the narrower parts of them—the heat was fever-haunted and disastrous. Helpless babies shuffled off their mortal coil with appalling swiftness, and sanitary officers fought desperate unrecognised battles with ugly foes that throve under the blistering sun. Summer is not all beautiful when enmeshed in the black web men have laid about their habitations; perhaps she resents the narrowing of her ways and lack of decoration for her progress.

The heat wave was worst in the Midlands, and at Stormly one side of the Park was converted into a vast nursery, where, all day long, hordes of babies brought in from the suffering towns lay kicking and rolling in the shade of great trees in charge of blue-gowned nurses.

The south of England suffered less, but even there looking out from the flagged western terrace at Bannerton Castle, the oaks looked shrivelled and the bracken parched and dry.

Paul Arrington, sauntering there with Macdonald panting at his heel, cared only that it was cooler and less crowded than London. So little crowded indeed that through the heat of the day not so much as a keeper's footfall disturbed the stillness of the vast woods, nor any voice but the low tones of Matthews, Arrington's devoted old servant, broke the silence of the dim rooms and long terraces.

At one end of the terrace was a paved cloistered enclosure with a small fountain splashing a thin jet of silver shiveringly heavenward; a table near this, littered with papers and letters, proclaimed the spot Arrington's present study.

His work, however, with the exception of matters relating to the Ironworkers' Union, was left in London. The estate matters that his old steward considered so pressing were rapidly disposed of in the morning hours; it was now late in the afternoon, and Arrington was reduced to the poor entertainment of listening to the silence of the place, and as an alternative, trying to picture the shortcomings of a new secretary, whom presumably he would have to seek since he had heard nothing of Max for four days.

Matthews brought him out the evening's letters.

"Tell Lyons to have the Napier round at seven o'clock," he ordered as he took them. "I'll drive myself."

He had spoken on a sudden impulse that crossed his mind as he thought of Max, and for a minute after Matthews had gone he stood wondering at himself, and then—with an impatient shrug—sauntered back to the lounge chair by the table and examined his letters in a desultory way. Seldom had he wanted to see a familiar handwriting so badly but, as he was not going to allow as much to himself, he exaggerated his indifference.

The letter for which he hoped was not there, but there was one in Joseph Watt's pointed scrawl, which had seldom troubled him since he had provided that gentleman with a secretary. It was the only letter that seemed worth opening.

"Dear Mr. Arrington," it ran.

"I'm making shift to write myself till they send me a man from town. I've sent Miss Kempburn away,

or rather arranged for her to go to Stormly for a change, and I don't mean her to come back. It's too hot for one thing, but mostly it isn't work for her. I'm sorry to bother you, she's useful enough, but it's not the sort of job for a girl like that. I can't do with her. Are you going to accept a place on the Conciliation Board? because we'd like to know at once. If we don't hurry up the Board of Trade will be offering to help, and that's no use to us. The tension is rather bad but it suits us best to keep it up. That cursed Federation is in such a state of chaos I think we may win all along the line if we chose our moment. I'm depending on you joining us. Can you send me figures of wage statistics for 1880.

"Yours truly,

"J. WATT.

Paul tossed the letter down impatiently.

"I'll send him the figures, but he won't see what they really mean! Confound him! what business has he to count on me?"

His eyes travelled the empty length of terrace and he frowned over it. Macdonald by his side heaved a sigh and crawled an inch or so further into his shadow.

So Anne was at Stormly with the Masters, and no doubt Max was there too, since he had intimated he should go to see her.

All the world seemed to go to Stormly and desert him, the trouble of it all heated him more than the weather. In some unaccountable way the fact that Anne was with Christopher Masters seemed to Arrington the death knell of his secret hopes. The idea may have been possibly born of the lonely silence and the heat but it crystallised rapidly. The subtle jealousy he felt towards Christopher with relation to Max found fresh food here. He foresaw with bitterness

that the younger man's influence would drown any remnants of his own, and that even should Anne be in a position to render him service in the future, it would be by reason of Christopher's mind and will, and not his. A thought that, in his present mood, made the jealous nature ready to trample on his dearest desires!

Max too! If he did come back to him after a stay in the same neighbourhood, it would be by force of the same influence! He would as soon he stayed away altogether.

It was not that either Anne or Max was of such weak fibre or plastic mould that they would sit at Christopher's feet and blindly follow oracular advice, or even that they would turn to him for advice and act as do all children on receiving it. Arrington was so far just to Christopher as to absolve him from even the intention of influencing others, and knew him to be the last man in the world to deliver advice save under great pressure; but Arrington also had no superficial knowledge of life, none knew better the influence of the unspoken thought, of environment, of strongly held principles—lived rather than discussed. It was because Christopher was Christopher—that dear elder brother of Max's youth, precisely the man to appeal to Anne Kempburn's fervent truthfulness—that both she and Max would act in any event which befell differently from how they would have acted if their paths had not crossed his.

For youth was still their heritage, youth, that having no experience to feed on, demands such food from others, drawing into itself all that is most allied to its own nature.

The silent emptiness of the terrace, the silent emptiness of the great house, smote into Arrington's heart as the silence of his London home had done. His thoughts wandered resentfully, as they had often

of late towards the far distant cousin who did not even bear the name, to whom all this silent space and heritage of past traditions would go—unless Paul Arrington married.

Would it at last come to the point he must marry to preserve the name and line? That was a thought he had trampled on many times.

He would not do it! not while the woman he loved was in the world. The passion of his life beat at the doors his folly and pride had closed on it, with bitter accusations. For since Anne's hot words on the subject he had never pretended, even to himself, that his action in refusing to allow Naomi to face the inquisition of the Divorce Court was dictated by anything but his own dread of publicity, and the desperate pride of race that fed on the sacrifice of individuality. He had deceived himself into thinking he was prompted by chivalrous motives, and tenderness for her; but now he knew he had not loved Naomi Matoni then as he loved her at this time. In all the empty years her memory had grown in his heart, beating down all else, standing at last triumphant over ambitions, racial instincts, and even his thirst for power, out-topping all but the pride that dared not stoop to ask forgiveness.

He resented his own inclination to dwell on this unprofitable line of thought, since he could not obliterate the past, nor even recall Anne or Max to his side to still the foolish jealousy that was fretting his heart. He was alone, and presumably he would remain alone; meanwhile Joseph Watt's letter demanded an answer.

Should he accept the offer made him a week ago and still unanswered to Watt's evident anxiety? Ever since his first disillusionments with public life he had steadily avoided coming into direct touch with it, crushing back his strongest instincts rather than jeopardising the fine-strained sense of honour of his youth.

The result was that here he stood at middle life, consumed with unexpended energy, chafing under unfulfilled desires and ready to embark on any Cause so that it provided an outlet for the imprisoned authoritative power of the man. Rather than let that panoply of honour get soiled in the rough wars with the world, he had allowed it to grow tarnished and rusty in an idle peace.

He could not endure that peace no longer. He must be at war with himself or with another. Watt's Cause was as good as anything else, since all were tainted with party politics, self-interest intrigue, and fanaticism. The Labour Party at least were not decadents in honour, they had yet to plant their estate within the borderland of traditions and customs. Much could be forgiven them that would spell damnation for those with a greater past.

If he joined them it would be to lead them to victory. He would not put himself in opposition to his own party for anything less than winning a losing game. To fight and to win—nothing less! The irony of it, that Labour and Socialism should seek a champion in the very ranks against which they waged war, appealed to him as it ever had. Still he hesitated.

It was the great empty space of terrace stretching before him that clinched the matter.

Arrington turned to the table, wrote one letter to Watt, a private one, and another to the Executive Committee, expressing his willingness to take a place on the Conciliation Board.

His man came out and bore the letters away to post, and he sat and listened to the footsteps dying away in the distance and knew he was now committed.

He sat there still thinking, still brooding, still bitter, oblivious of the ordered car, oblivious even of Matthews's gentle reminder that it waited. The sun set, fiercely glaring to the last, and the earth seemed to

heave a sigh, though the relief was slight, and the night threatened to be breathless and wearying.

Shade seemed to fall over terrace and house, shade that was not shadow, but rather a melting of outline making fit background for the ghost shadows that confronted Arrington.

The shadow of a young man full of strong purpose, and high desire, who looked at him with wonder. The shadow of a man slightly older, wounded in his first tilt against the world, who looked at him with scorn. Always and for ever the two shadows were alone, and knew it. The pity of it lay there, and Arrington felt it and flared into sudden anger.

"A young squeamish fool, who was too fine for his weapons! Kill him, bury him! I've had more than enough of such folly! I'm for Watt and action now! Max, why did you leave me!"

He said the last words aloud, startling himself.

Perhaps the killing and burying of that scornful shadow were heavier jobs than he expected, for a sudden agony as a death throe seemed to eat up his strength. He sat with clenched hands and head erect, bidding still bodily defiance to his bowed soul as one too deeply smitten by grief may stand erect and expressionless by the grave of a great loss. He stood by the grave of his own youth with all its brave illusions and faiths, and it was his own hand that piled the earth on top.

As to Anne Kempburn in her hour of need there came one who unknowingly carried healing to her, so now to Paul Arrington. Macdonald suddenly sat up and cocked his ears, and thumped his tail on the stones.

Paul saw some one come out by the library window towards him and sprang up.

"Max!"

So far his soul had its way, no less generous impulses could drown the welcome conveyed in the one word.

And as he held out his hand in greeting, Arrington realised with strange confusion the letter to Watt was posted.

"I thought you were at Stormly," remarked Paul, as Max stopped to receive Macdonald's cordial welcome.

"Stormly? I've been at Marden, I told you so."

"You mentioned Mirchester."

"Yes. I went there—to see Miss Kempburn; she looks very seedy and she is going to Stormly to stay."

"So Watt tells me."

Max was puzzled at his tone. The situation was not altogether without embarrassment having regard to their last stormy meeting and plain speaking over the same subject; but Max followed it up resolutely.

"Watt is giving her up. He seems to think she is out of her element with him."

"It's not my doing, Max," said Arrington abruptly, "if you've come back on that impression."

"Not in the least," returned the young man, dropping into the lounge chair with the air of one who is perfectly content and perfectly at home. "I just thought you might want me to put in a last month's work."

Paul looked at him through the dim mystic evening light, and knew better the extent of the need about him during the last week. Also he knew Max was holding out the olive branch. It was in his heart to seize it and clinch it, without allusion to the fateful decision of the last hours. He was perfectly certain Max would more than disapprove of the step; moreover it would bring him into direct opposition with Max's cousin. He made no attempt to deceive himself as to what his position on the Board would be. He was there not so much to bring about a settlement of the fierce dispute, but to back the Labour Party and

strengthen Watt's hands, and this in addition to his private passionate desire for battle and conquest.

Max must know before matters went further. He wasted no time in preparing the ground.

"I've been asked to sit on the Board of Conciliation," he announced.

"I thought they'd do that," Max answered unconcernedly.

"And I've accepted."

The unconcernedness vanished. Max spun round and dropped his cigarette.

"Sir!"

"It is supposed to be an honourable if harassing post," said Paul reflectively.

Max was silent, he saw exactly what it meant; he felt all the bitterness of any struggle in which the whole power of his Chief should be thrown. What he did not understand was how it had happened; what had caused Arrington to fling aside his mantle of inactivity and indirect control for open active participation in a quarrel that was not his own.

"What made you accept?" he asked at last, half expecting Arrington to fly out in a rage at his presumption, but instead he got a vague ambiguous answer.

"The place, I think; it got on my nerves. It's so confoundedly empty," and he added with a little spurt of anger, "and you,—away just when you are wanted. Is that month off now? It would be convenient to know what your intentions are."

Max smoked a cigarette to the end, thinking over his Chief's words, rather than his own concern in them.

"I'll stay," he said quietly at last, "if you don't mind a secretary who—who——"

"Thinks his Chief a fool or a rogue, you were going to say."

"I wasn't," said Max indignantly, but he wouldn't say what he had been going to say all the same.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE Children's Garden at Stormly was full of shady places, and where the little stream tinkled so pleasantly over its miniature rapids, it made a fine pretence of being cool, so at least the children asserted in their plaintive objection to the dim, shady nursery that Nurse declared the only livable spot. Patricia conceded her own opinion which coincided with Nurse's so far as to allow the three elder children to gather their own experience, but four-year-old Elizabeth must be content with the house.

Anne rather shyly intimated she too longed for garden air with the children and they, being friendly mortals and polite withal, bestowed on her the Freedom of their garden with all solemnity. That is to say they presented her with a twig of weeping willow, the wearing of which she was gravely informed entitled her to free access at any hour of the day to their domain.

"I am afraid I was very presumptuous in asking," she said somewhat abashed, and was politely and truthfully assured the honour would in any case have been conferred on her.

It was Anne's third day at Stormly, and of all the many interests around her the children appeared to her the most absorbing. She knew so little about children; Mrs. Jones's at Applebury had been without particular attractions and rather inaccessible. Of gutter children with abnormally dull or prematurely sharp wits she had had painful experience; but the normal socially well-cared for child with all its enviable advantages was a stranger to her, and struggling

with her own desperate shyness she sought the company of these children on every opportunity. Patricia noticed it and let well alone, knowing it was the best thing that could happen to Anne at the present time.

For Anne had come to them very tired and weary. Those last few hot days in Mirchester, with an irascible Watt and a deepening sense of danger in the air, would have been insupportable but for Christopher's quiet encouragement and assurance of her right to rest so soon as Watt could do without her. Then one Saturday afternoon he appeared and bore her off, evidently by previous arrangement with Watt, whose farewell was of the briefest.

She was more inclined to listen than talk the first evening with her new friends. Charlotte Aston was still there, and there was no lack of conversation, but Anne noticed it was entirely of intimate and domestic affairs.

"When I do get Christopher on a Saturday," Patricia explained to her later, "I just steep him in domestic atmosphere. Sundays, he's allowed a wider range, but Saturday is 'at home.'"

On Sunday the sense of freedom and quiet brought about a reaction in Anne's nervous energy, and she spent most of it in a hammock, visited from time to time by the children, and forbidden by her host to exert herself by more than a walk in the rose garden at dusk. When she came down on Monday both Charlotte and Christopher had gone, the former to Marden Court, and of Christopher's movements she heard nothing.

The children chose a particular bend of the stream where the shallow water lapped the bare roots of a spreading beech tree, roots which higher up formed mossy, comfortable niches. Anne was invited to take the most approved one, and the others grouped themselves round her, each with a book, and for a short

time silence ensued. Anne's book, however, was either not absorbing or her surroundings possessed superior attractions. It lay unopened on her knee, while her eyes and thoughts were busy with more vital interests: the little dancing stream with its jumps of gurgling laughter, brown-gold in the shadow, and almost non-existent in its clearness as it flowed over its green and silver carpet: the distant vistas of lawn and flower borders, the green mosaic roof overhead, and above all the children. She understood their longing through the hot morning for this special spot, which was ever afterwards associated in her mind with them.

There was Regina with her dark head and promise of beauty, really absorbed in her book: Aymer reading in a desultory way and tossing beechnuts into the stream; and Charles turning over pages that were too wearying to read so long as his imagination could find explanation for the pictures. Christopher Masters's children! Would they ever know, Anne wondered, the great good fortune that was theirs? She thought of Stormly and all it meant as his, and his only, either because to think of him at all included thinking of Patricia, or because she failed yet to recognise the great part the latter played in her husband's life.

Stormly was indeed the most speaking outcome of their union,—beauty divorced from extravagance, comfort without luxury, leisure and work, a sense of freedom and health, of personal service and lack of mechanism. Anne realised all that and how ill it fitted with her own small experience of the vastly rich, or the chronicles of them as recorded in the modern novel. She could not, however, guess how hard had been Christopher and Patricia's first serious resistance to the burden of their wealth or what a continuous struggle had been wanted to make it their servant rather than their master, a struggle against inward and outward

temptations to make the present life with its "open doors" and satisfactory adjustment possible.

Aymer, taking example from their guest, abandoned all pretence of reading and appealed to Anne to emulate him in the feat of nut-throwing.

"I can't throw anything," said Anne regretfully. "I'm an awful baby, I never learnt."

She made an attempt and justified her words.

Aymer regarded her with scornful amazement.

"You see," she added apologetically, "I had no brothers nor anyone to show me those sorts of things. I suppose it's too late to learn now."

He regarded her critically.

"It is rather late; still you might try. What a bore it must have been."

"What?"

"Having no brothers or sisters."

"Oh, I had a sister!" said Anne hastily, "but she was much older than I, about like Regina and Elizabeth, with no one between."

"Regina's awfully fond of Elizabeth and she teaches her things."

"Ah, but Naomi hadn't time, she was so busy learning singing."

"All day?" gasped Aymer aghast.

"Most of it, but not at home, you know."

"Didn't she learn other things?" This from Regina who had been listening.

"Yes, but it was the singing that interfered."

She clung to the idea of Naomi as giving her a solitary point of contact with these other brothers and sisters. It made her feel less isolated. Moreover, Regina was clearly interested.

"Did she sing very beautifully in the end?"

"Yes, most people think so. She is singing in Canada now, and I wish she'd come home."

"I can sing," piped Charles. "I'll sing now," he began a lusty refrain in a high treble.

"You've not learnt, Charles," interrupted Regina. "Singing's only a noise unless you've learnt."

"'Tisn't a noise," retorted Charles indignantly. "Mummy likes it."

"I expect you'll have lessons some day," interposed Anne, fearing a quarrel.

"Men haven't time for those sorts of things," put in Aymer.

"Uncle Max sings."

Anne gave a little start of surprise. First, because it was new to her to think of these children as connected with Mr. Aston; secondly, she had never suspected Max Aston of singing.

"Uncle Max sings beautifuller than any one," echoed Charles, "betterer than your sister."

"That's rude, Charles!" Regina said. "You mustn't mind him," she added, slipping her hand under Anne's arm. "He doesn't mean anything, only he's crazy about Uncle Max ever since he stayed at Marden Court so long, while Elizabeth was getting born."

Charles had drawn himself up into a funny little heap with his arms tucked round his knees. He looked from one to another gravely.

"Uncle Max," he announced with great decision, "is the nicest man of all next to Daddy! And I wish he'd marry and settle down like Auntie Charlotte says, then I could go and stay with him. Are you the lady he's going to marry, Miss Aunty?"

Anne gasped, and Regina got pink to the tips of her pretty ears.

"Cos I think her name's Anne and you is the only Anne I know." He looked at her anxiously as if summing up her possible suitability for his hero.

"Charles, you know you mustn't listen and repeat!"

cried poor embarrassed Regina. "Please do not mind him," she urged again.

"Miss Kempburn, Miss Anne Kempburn," chanted Charles in a dreamy way. "Why won't it do, Miss Aunty?"

Before Anne could reply or the harassed elder sister intervene again, a curious accident nearly precipitated Charles into the stream. Aymer apparently just saved him.

"What did you want to do that for, you little stupid?" growled Aymer, dragging him to a safe distance.

"I didn't do nothing," shrieked Charles. "You upsetted me and——"

The rest was lost in the loud roaring of an imaginary lion who sprang on Charles, and carried him off in the direction of the rabbit pens.

Regina's face was troubled. She talked politely for a few minutes, but with obvious embarrassment.

Anne smiled at her.

"My dear," she said softly, "there is nothing to mind."

"He is only a baby, is he?" Regina pleaded wistfully. "Ch—people will forget he's got such sharp ears, and pricks them if Uncle Max is mentioned, he just misunderstands things."

"It's all right. Every one knows it would not do, even if everyone wanted it which no one does! So Uncle Max sings and is great friends with Charles. Do you know I thought I knew Mr. Aston quite well, but I don't believe I know anything at all about him."

"You couldn't know as much as we do, could you?"

It might be true, but it struck Anne as a little odd. She became suddenly jealous of her acquaintanceship with Max Aston, anxious to demonstrate to herself and Regina it was a less trivial thing than the latter thought.

"I worked with him for some months, every day."

"But he has always spent Christmas and the summer holidays with us at Marden or the sea. This is the first year we've not gone away," she sighed. "It meant going without Father or Mother if we did and we begged to stay. I expect the babies are glad though."

"What babies?"

"The Park babies—in the Nursery, you know. Oh, I forgot you did not come with us last night. Somehow it seems as if you'd been here ever so long, and that we must all know the same things. Do you feel like that?"

Anne assured her fervently she felt just like that.

"About the Park babies. Perhaps I may take you after tea. They come out from Birmingham and other places every morning, heaps and heaps of them in a special train and go home at night. There's lots of nurses and tents, and people to see to them. We are not supposed to go there except sometimes with Mother."

"What a lovely idea!" said Anne softly with shining eyes.

"But where else could they go? The doctor says it's so hot in the towns they just die there. This is the only really shady treey place with room, so they must come."

The alternative of their remaining to die in the heat did not seem to occur to Regina.

"The boys don't care much about it," she went on confidentially. "In fact, just at present they aren't keen on babies at all. You see we were going to have a yacht this summer, and then Mother found the babies in Birmingham wanted a crèche, and we couldn't have both and she thought the babies wanted their want most. So Aymer and Charles don't much like them."

She paused. "A yacht would have been very nice," she added thoughtfully.

"Perhaps your father wouldn't have had much time after all."

Regina considered this for awhile and her face brightened. As the boys did not rejoin them, she presently suggested their finding her Mother and getting permission to visit the Park nursery. But Patricia demurred.

"If Father comes back early he'll take you all out in the motor," she said.

"It's not that I don't like her seeing the babies," Patricia explained as Regina wandered off again, "but they come from all sorts of places, the only qualification is that they are vaccinated. The Medical Officer sends them, and of course they are watched and inspected each day, but we've had one or two narrow escapes, and three deaths; but that's not much out of two hundred and fifty, is it?"

She looked at Anne in a slightly troubled way, and Anne discerned the likeness to dark-haired Regina which escaped most people.

"I want other people to have camps, but they seem afraid. Still it's really the nurses who have all the trouble; they are so good, and we've got twelve Runnyford girls there under them getting trained. They will make quite good nursemaids later on."

"I have been to Runnyford once," said Anne dreamily.

"So David Fulner told us."

"How did he know it was me?" laughed Anne, forgetful she at least told him her employment.

"Mr. Watt doesn't travel round with several admiring young ladies after him. Of course, it might have been his sister," she added demurely.

Anne was conscious of disappointment when tea arrived and still her host had not returned. Perhaps

her hostess noticed her involuntary glance at the tea-cups, for as she handed one to Anne, she said:

"Christopher is going to try to get home to-night by six. If he does, and you were inclined for an early morning jaunt to-morrow, he would take you to Runnyford with him; but it's really early breakfast at half-past six, starting at seven."

Anne could conceive nothing more delightful; a little colour came to her pale face.

Later on, as they went by a circuitous shady route to visit the Park nursery, Patricia asked Anne a question that startled her considerably.

"I wish you'd tell me," she said suddenly, stopping and looking very earnestly into Anne's eyes, "why Mr. Watt dislikes Christopher so? I mean personally dislike him, not because of sides?"

The thought that first occurred to Anne was that Mrs. Masters was very young to be Regina's mother. The second thought a wonder as to how she could possibly discern the antagonism of an almost unknown man. She had not yet learnt Patricia's almost miraculous openness of soul to all and everything pertaining to her husband.

"I understand people like Mr. Batherly really hating him, but Joseph Watt always *sounds* like a real straight honest man. Do you know?"

"It is not Mr. Masters himself, I think; it's because of his father," Anne answered slowly.

Patricia gave a little quick intake of her breath.

"Yes, I thought so. It's still there!"

She turned the subject almost directly, but Anne continued to wonder.

They reached the Baby Camp in time to see it break up. Blue-gowned nurses were packing babies into baskets and convenient bundles for transit; about twenty were remaining for the night in the big temporary room or spacious tents, that accommodated the

nurses. Patricia sat amongst them and took two babies on her lap. Anne, who was looking at her in her usual intent way, drew a long breath. For the first time in her life she understood the real beauty of womanhood.

"If one could only keep them here altogether," said Patricia, regretfully rubbing her cheek against a downy little head. "Not for a week, nor a month—but always!"

Anne knelt down on the grass at her feet and touched a tiny crumpled pink hand.

"It wouldn't be fair on—on other women," she whispered with a little catch in her voice.

Patricia smiled ruefully.

"No, of course not. Isn't it awful to think what they would be like if the babies were all taken away—to State nurseries! It takes all this condensed possibility (she hugged a baby to her) to keep womanhood alive in them! It seems an awful waste of life sometimes, but it keeps women—women!"

The words and picture of Patricia and the babies remained with Anne for a long time. She went to sleep that night with both before her mind. Some belief, which had been but a theory, had become a visible truth to her, yet she had no words for it, and never recognised it as the stirring of the deep-seated mother instinct in herself.

She made the morning trip with Christopher, and many other trips afterwards. On these occasions he spoke frankly enough to her on all subjects, spoke of his people with the authority of one whose knowledge is intimate and personal, who understood not only their possibilities but their limitations; their virtues and their vices, their strength and their weaknesses."

"They are still children," he said to her one day. "Victims of the most rotten education that was ever planned by unpractical men. And you want them to be

free, and to handle hundreds, when they can't lay out a shilling to advantage. You want to put them at liberty when they haven't even wit to interfere with their wretched children's schooling. I grant you most of them grumble at it!" he added grimly. It was a subject which easily roused him to wrath Anne found.

"Heaven help the coming generation!" he commented another day. "No discipline, a smattering of a dozen undigested subjects, a fictitious value of their own worth, and an unshakable belief in the almighty power of money."

"It is a power, though," protested Anne, half laughing. She had given up trying to convince him, she was no social democrat.

"It isn't if you don't know how to use it!" he retorted. "It's a tyrant. The tyranny of money is no fiction."

"Poverty is a slave-driver though."

"Not Poverty—but Want. Poverty is the test stone. Believe me, I know, Miss Kempburn. I've been there." He told her a part of his story and she understood.

Such talk was very different from Dr. Risler's hot tirades and visionary plans, very different even from Paul Arrington's cold irony and crystallised facts. Anne listened and argued for sheer pleasure at being set right by him. A sense of rest and satisfaction grew within her, as in one who had found an end to a long journey. He would get hot and keen on a question, a shade dogmatic, perhaps from sheer weight of knowledge, and then laugh at himself for his own intolerance.

"One's always making mistakes at other people's expense!" he told her once. "If ever I lay down the law I'm certain to be tripped up over that very point sooner or later!"

"But there must be some settled definite rule!" cried

Anne, aghast. "Some path where one doesn't make mistakes."

He looked at her quizzically.

"Miss Kempburn," he said, "that's the mirage that people like you lose their way pursuing. A certain path clear right and wrong! Good heavens! how easy life would be. It isn't the paths one goes on, it's the way one walks that matters. There's no fixed rule and no broad road, it's all as broad or as narrow as one's own understanding. Don't make any mistake, you won't find any creed nor any man, who'll just make it possible for you to dismiss yourself and follow blindly. You have no right either to make some one else's creed your rule of life."

She remembered things like these the more, because they were really very scarce, utterances struck out of him as it were by her own persistent efforts. Mostly, he just spoke of his own pet theories and hobbies with a humourous tolerance, and occasionally, when it was anything very near to his heart, with a boyish shamefacedness. Sometimes Patricia accompanied them, but generally they went alone; and during his absence Anne spent long hours with the children.

Always Patricia watched her with a pitiful tenderness.

"Dear stupid old Christopher," she said to herself one morning, as she watched them off. "He thinks he's teaching her sense, so he is, but not the kind he believes. She's learning the value of the—individual!"

She was greatly amused when Christopher announced to her one day with the air of one who has made a discovery:

"Miss Kempburn is not a Socialist after all!"

Patricia laughed.

"Did you suppose she was?"

"Well, she has been playing round trying to regene-

rate the people and right their wrongs, and breaking her heart over the misery of the world, and all that sort of thing!"

"I've known other people—not Socialists—feel rather keenly about the same matter, and even put themselves to some trouble to set them a little straighter!"

He could not pretend to misunderstand her, so he laughed in turn.

There is no doubt Anne gained greatly by her removal from the direct sphere of the agitated Labour world. She recovered her sense of proportion, and it was good for her to realise there were aspects of life which did not lie under the advancing black shadow, but of its advance and increasing blackness she was kept well aware, for Christopher spoke freely to her and Patricia of all that transpired.

It was not much. He got his Employers' Federation reorganised during those hot weeks, and Joseph Watt ascertained the Trades Council would support the main purpose of the now famous Memorandum. It was decided to form a Board of Conciliation, and this proved no easy task. Christopher made no secret of his dissatisfaction when the President of the British Statistic Society was proposed.

"He's the sort of man who doesn't like making concessions," he said to Patricia rather gloomily.

"I know some one else like that!" she retorted, carrying him off to inspect a damaged fence in the Children's Garden. For it was Saturday and such topics were forbidden.

Little by little the doctrine of individual value began to draw Anne away from that world of abstract ideas in which she was most at home. She began to see that men fail as often in rightly stating their own beliefs as in interpreting them into action: and that there was no formula or creed not subject to the mystery of individuality, that out of the crucible of truth

each *ego* will gather to itself those particles which will best assist it to self-expression. She was indeed groping towards the doors of self-realisation so long closed to her, and lack of which rendered her at once so immature and isolated in her aims. It was her lack of regard for her own individual value that made it so difficult for her to appreciate Max Aston's love. She could not conceive it to be so serious a matter as he would have her think, not because she failed to appreciate love in the abstract, but, in the particular and applied to herself, it appeared to her trivial and of small import beside other matters.

Patricia understood this very well. She soon arrived at the conclusion Anne would be an excellent wife for Max, and told Constantia so in no measured terms, but added:

"She will have to be in love with some one else first, and she'll never love like an ordinary woman. Just at present she is only learning qualities count for nothing in love."

Anne wrote to Joseph Watt once, but he did not answer her. It might be work was too heavy to allow of the frivolity of friendly correspondence, or that, having placed her in the hands of his antagonists, he thought well to avoid further contact. Or there might be a third and more powerful reason. No one could accuse Joseph Watt of being sentimental. He certainly would have resented the accusation even from himself, yet as certainly he missed Anne Kempburn's presence as he had missed nothing else in his life.

There was some magic about Anne which made all men and women about her anxious to serve her and to give her a helping hand along a road she followed so bravely, even when they knew nothing of the goal. Joseph Watt was no exception. He had dimly felt the niche she occupied in his life was unsuitable, and because of Anne's magic gift or because of some unsuspected grain of heroic unselfishness in himself, he let

her pass into hands more fit to help her, though they were the hands of one he regarded as his enemy. She thought of him often, never with anger, but still as an opponent.

She was often at Runnyford during these days, sometimes with Patricia, sometimes without. The state of unrest was markedly evident there. Sometimes echoes of Watt's forcible speeches came back to them, and sometimes, when she was alone, she heard complaints of summary justice dealt out with a peremptory hand. But the only element that really appeared to her serious, the only argument of Watt's that had taken strong hold, was the doubt of the permanence of the great capitalist's "fads." She mentioned this to Patricia one day as they sat working in the garden, and added thoughtfully:

"It is so amazingly preposterous!"

"You don't share the doubt then?"

Anne laughed.

"That's because you happen to know him and like him," commented Patricia in her serene, calm way. "It's personal feeling."

She was startled by the wave of colour that swept over Anne's face.

"But I know it!" she stammered.

Patricia shook her head. "You wouldn't be so sure if you didn't happen to like him."

"But you, *you* know?"

The other dropped her work.

"I have experience behind me," she said dreamily. "I've known him since he was a boy. He doesn't change. It's more than mere personal conviction. That's no argument at all, is it? Though it's the only thing worth having."

"But surely personal conviction is the strongest weapon in argument!"

"To convince your adversary of your own good

faith, yes. You would persuade even Mr. Watt you believed in Christopher's methods, but you would not convert him by it. Now, I could bring logic to bear on it, too!"

Anne was silent, a little troubled in mind. Presently she spoke again.

"I've often wondered why you don't work with him, speak for him, and all that. They'd listen to you in Runnyford."

Patricia looked at her with a new light in her eyes.

"But I speak," she said very softly, "through him. Don't you understand? He comes back here so tired and sick of it all, and talks to me, who am not tired but can bring a fresh mind to bear on it—and then he's ready again. If I were to go out and use up my own ideas, how could I help him? And he makes much more of my thoughts than I ever could."

Anne drew a deep breath.

"Of course, if it happened I couldn't help him, it would be different," Patricia went on thoughtfully. "At least, I suppose so. Sometimes I don't even agree with him, but even that does not really matter. What matters is that he should be true to himself, and I know that self better than he does. Now you see why I try not to have too definite opinions of my own in any matter. It's enough to give him my thoughts, he can use them so much better than I can."

"Oh!" cried Anne tremulously, all her soul kindled with a new knowledge that was too beautiful to bear. "Now I know—why, that is Love."

"My dear!" Patricia's voice, with its tender protest, was almost as caressing as the hand she put on Anne.

They sat silent awhile, and deep into Anne's very soul sank this, to her, so strange and wonderful a conception of a woman's love and a woman's work.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"You give me leave to try then?" said Malcolm Strangeway, giving a last grip to Naomi's hand as she leant out of the window.

"Try what you like, only give me three months' holiday," she answered.

"You deserve that!"

A sudden sense of his deserts, his long faithfulness, his patience with the sentiment that had hampered her public life, and his daily care of her, filled her heart.

"My dear friend," she said gently, "I am in your hands, do what you like except the one thing. But I warn you all the disappointment will be yours."

He shook his head. He knew her meaning. They had threshed it out during the last night on board, going over and over the ground with a dull persistence that met the same gentle unconquerable answer.

"Risk no money of yours on me."

The train was moving off. She waved to him. So did the figure by her side, and he turned away to face an existence suddenly strangely empty and desolate.

Anne and Naomi sat hand-locked in the carriage his care had reserved for them.

It was "Oh, Anne!" and "Oh, Naomi!" and no more for awhile. They had met an hour previously on the boat, this was their first moment alone.

Presently Anne asked:

"What is he to try to do?"

"Get me work in London again," said Naomi, with a little sigh. "He has set his heart on it, Anne, and he's been so kind, I could not refuse."

Anne made no comment, the faintest shadow of a

shadow crossed her face, for she instantly saw the difficulty of keeping Paul Arrington and Naomi apart if her sister really took up public life in London again.

Beyond this tiny cloud the meeting of the sisters was full of joy beyond their expressing.

"Take off your hat," commanded the elder woman. And Anne obeyed laughing.

"Yours too then."

"Not at all," said Naomi firmly. "Mine isn't a hat, it's a creation designed to make you think me ten years younger than I am, adjustable in fifteen minutes. You see me at my best."

All the time her eyes scanned Anne eagerly, but she made no remark beyond saying she was very thin.

"Patricia says I'm fatter."

Naomi raised her eyebrows slightly.

"Patricia? I've missed the two last mails."

So Anne told her of her late experiences, speaking first in her old eager open way of things that had happened, of Joseph Watt, the interrupted meeting, the struggle that was threatening to tear England in two, and at last of Stormly and the Masters. She spoke fluently of it all, except when she touched on Christopher, and then a restraint came over her. It was not self-consciousness, it was not self-knowledge, it was solely that in that subject lay something for which she could not account, and Naomi, listening, knew the little Anne from whom she had parted two years ago was gone for ever.

Before the journey was over, however, she had gathered a fair impression of the new influences that were pressing Anne towards full self-expression, and the fear that had seized her when she first knew her sister was brought into close contact with Paul Arrington, and which had not died even when she knew her further removed from him, now flickered out.

Sometimes, instead of talking, they sat silently, look-

ing out at the dear, familiar, tiny country, as Naomi called it; and occasionally, when their route lay through darkened smoke-laden regions, Anne spoke of the trouble collecting there.

"You cannot guess what it means even now," she said earnestly. "Work goes on but in such a broken way. Trade is paralysed. Last month in the great heat it seemed as if it would all be settled at the first meeting. But there have been two meetings and nothing's settled."

"Whatever do they want?" demanded Naomi, not that she felt much interest, but it was all evidently of vital import to Anne.

"They want the control of their working arrangements entirely. Power to make their own terms, work their own hours, power to terminate, power to co-operate. They want too much, I think, and some want a strike—the younger ones, just as some masters wanted a lock-out at once; but now each want the other side to bear the onus of *that*."

"Well, I wouldn't have any of your Union men working for me!" exclaimed Naomi. "It sounds so absurd."

Anne laughed and put her hands on her sister:

"You dear! How exactly typical it is! It's all so simple till you get inside the problem."

"Well, I'd rather remain outside as long as there's room," was the flippant rejoinder. "And I wish you'd stay with me. I can't think what dragged you into it!"

But Anne herself could not have answered that,—it had just happened. She was there and she did care. It was no assuming on her part. It had become a vital background to her life.

It was not till the long journey drew to an end that Naomi asked the question that was most vital to her at that moment.

"Do you hear anything of Paul Arrington now?"

Her sister had known this would come; many nights had she sat pondering over what her answer should be. For here, at this juncture of affairs, when Anne's usual impersonality might have been of most service to her, it failed her. She could not regard Paul Arrington impersonally. She could not forgive him for being just what he was, too strong a personality for a weak woman to fight against. If she had ever entertained a pitying suspicion of Naomi being "weak," her own experiences with Paul had drowned it. Just as the stronger the physical strength of a man, the greater the indignation if such strength be directed against a weakling, so Anne, measuring Paul's power of inflicting mental suffering by the standard of his marvellous attraction, felt nothing but an impotent indignation that such a power should be directed against her dear one, so little framed for resistance. It could not be for Naomi's happiness that he should again cross her path. Whether Luigi Matoni were alive or dead was immaterial in Anne's eyes. She could not contemplate any idea of marriage for her sister with the man who had proved so unworthy of the treasure he had once gained; but if these two met, not only would all the sorry past be revived, but Naomi in the generosity of her heart would offer her friendship at least to him; and to Anne, that even was intolerable. She shut her eyes deliberately to Paul's love and need, she saw only her own passionate impulse to keep the two apart. The alternative was in her hands and she rejected it fiercely.

So when Naomi asked her so quietly and naturally if she ever saw Paul Arrington now, she replied after a little pause full of tremulous thought, that she had not seen him since she went to Mr. Watt, and added:

"We hardly parted good friends. I think he should have told me before, who he was—and left me to

choose whether to know him or not; he must have known it would be 'not.'"

Naomi spoke of other matters and tried to quench the unreasonable little heartache Anne's words caused her. It was so absurd to be disappointed over the very conclusion, for which not long ago she had hoped, of her sister's escape from the vicinity of Paul Arrington. Yet, unmistakably she was disappointed. It needed an effort to reject the thought. But she betrayed no sign of this to Anne, who was equally ready to shelve a subject she was suspiciously unready to face.

Many times in those first few days of rest and peace in the old Rectory, Naomi regretted her promise to Malcolm Strangeway. It seemed to her the sleepy little village, the familiar faces, the flowered garden, and her father's dreamy contented presence, constituted all that was necessary for happiness, and that it was mere folly to return to the outer world and open life, which had so little to offer her. At first too, there was Anne to rediscover, to wonder over, and even sigh over a little; but Anne was not going to stay. Daily papers proved poor substitutes for living discussions; in spite of the joy it gave her to be with Naomi, a good half of her heart remained in that stormy central England, and though geographically Stormly was on the borders of the real fighting country, still actually it was as near the vortex as the neighbourhood of Joseph Watt himself.

Patricia told her to come when she would, wrote to her frequently of developments and side issues, of the difficulties of the first meetings of the Conciliation Board. She wrote well, but Anne envied her the earlier information in Christopher's plain, direct words that conveyed so much. She broached the subject to Naomi diffidently one night, when they had gone to their rooms. Would it seem unkind if she went to Stormly again till the crisis was over?

Naomi put down her book and looked at her.

"Anne," she said gently, "do you really care so much—for the dull Labour Question?"

"It isn't dull to me. It's living, vital, it *matters*. I know it doesn't seem real here, to any one, only something one reads about in the papers. But with Patricia and Christopher it's different, it's vital there, too!"

Naomi made no comment on the "Christopher" which slipped out so easily. She was vaguely uneasy. She could not in any degree understand Anne's absorption in these matters. Had it been a question of Art or Literature, it would have been so simple—but a question of Economics was outside the general order of things.

The unknown element of Christopher Masters worried Naomi. Anne had always been apt to be deeply swayed by any strong influence, but she said very little of Mr. Masters's theories, ideas, and aims. If he had a gospel of his own, either Anne did not know it, or did not choose to expound it. Naomi too had noticed she never mentioned him without a strangely puzzled expression clouding her grey eyes. Perhaps it was pardonable that the elder sister fancied other forces than those of Trades Unionism conspired to pull Anne back to the neighbourhood of Stormly, and so fancying became anxious and doubtful.

It was Anne who unexpectedly made matters clearer. She was leaning out of the window, gazing into the moonlit garden.

"I don't know just how to express it, Naomi," she said, resting her head on her arms. "But I feel so queerly incomplete. There's something I've got to have, or to learn about; I know it when I am with Patricia Masters."

Naomi almost held her breath. Anne stood so perilously near the discovery that no one must make for her, or must shield from her.

Anne's eyes wandered over the beautiful silver-

dipped world with its black shadows and clear cool spaces of light. The cold remoteness of it seemed so in tune with her own heart that she sighed with sheer satisfaction.

"It is of course Love that Patricia has," she said dreamily, and her voice came back to her sister, so selfless and dispassionate that Naomi felt tears rise to her eyes with some remotely envious pain.

"Love is such a wonderful thing as she sees it," Anne went on. "It is so beautiful to watch, and yet it's not only the watching, it's something else that's there and nowhere else, something for me to learn. It pulls me. Do you mind, Naomi?"

"Mind? Mind your going?"

Her whose soul ached with longing to stop her, to keep her from the lesson and she dared not.

"Yes. It's really the Strike Question first. I mean I shouldn't go but for that, but the rest makes me want to go back more."

"You must go then, dearest." Then with a little uncertain laugh she said, putting her hand on her sister's head caressingly:

"Don't talk of Strikes and Labour on a night like this, it's sacrilege."

They were silent a moment, and then Anne remarked in her former dreamy manner:

"Do you feel on nights like this, Naomi, a deep down joy that all has been before, and will go on being? That this beauty will still be here when we're gone, and that others will love it and rejoice in it, as we do? It's so good, so good to feel that!"

"Eternal Beauty!" murmured Naomi.

"Eternal perfection. Nothing wrong, nothing out of drawing. Divine Law everywhere. Naomi, it's only we who are privileged to make mistakes!"

"Privileged?"

"Isn't it that? I don't know, but we couldn't *see* the pure real beauty of all if we didn't."

She looked round at her sister.

"Are you making mistakes, dear?"

"I expect so," said Anne cheerfully. "But at least, I've learnt it does not matter! The moon goes on being beautiful."

CHAPTER XXIX

NAOMI stood still under the trees watching Jane take the letters from the afternoon postman. They stopped to exchange remarks on the weather, and Jane explained why she was annoyed at there being no letter from her niece Janet. Her sister Maria was ill. "The young folks is that careless!" The postman groaned and sighed. He was an admirable postman, but with a tendency to dawdle in Jane's company. He had indeed made futile attempts to woo her, but the years had passed them both by and mocked at his feeble weak-handed efforts.

Meanwhile Naomi stood under the nut-trees and waited, with no sign of impatience to betray she felt any particular concern about the letters Jane was bringing her across the sunny gravel sweep.

"Nothing from Miss Anne again!" exclaimed Jane with the frank interest of an old retainer. "One letter for you, Miss." (Jane could never twist her tongue to the *Madame*, or indeed bring herself to regard her once young lady as a married woman, when she'd never seen as much as a bit "orange blossom or a crumb of sugar from a cake.") "Three letters for the Master, mostly begging ones by looks o' em. Shall I take them in, Miss?"

"Please," said Naomi.

She held her letter very tightly in her hand, her desire to read it struggling with her chronic distaste to face probably unpalatable facts. She walked quite slowly down the garden to her favourite arbour, stopping now and then, to caress with gentle finger some

velvety rose or listen to a bird song, or to gaze into the clear crystal of the little singing stream.

At length the arbour and the letter. Even so her fingers moved reluctantly to open the envelope, and her eyes had to be brought to bear on the words.

“Queen Anne Mansions,
“St. James’s Park.

“My dear Lady,

“Is there any way of breaking bad news gently? I can’t discover it, nor ever wanted it more.

“Briefly then, to get it over and done with, Richter says he can’t have you, declares—the thrice-born idiot he is—it’s too big a risk after all these years. I tried for Leeds at once. They have no place, that slip of a girl Sepreton must have someone behind her. It’s presumption her trying your things; she’s a trained doll with no more music in her than a musical box. It’s all too sickening for words, no one has any money to risk anywhere; everywhere you hear trade’s bad, no risks must be run, certain bad season ahead! Just because some fools of workmen want a raise! Why doesn’t someone give them their deserts? But it could be done so well—I don’t mean the wages, dash them—I mean *you*, if you’d let me make a thoroughly sound investment—Steinway Hall, for example. It’s ridiculous, still what could one lose over it? But I see your obstinate—to use no stronger word—placid smile.

“Well, will you take Christiania if I can work it? It sounds possible.

“I met a man who knows Georgio Matoni. There’s a screw loose somewhere. For heaven’s sake, give me *carte blanche* and let me go to Italy. I’ll not get you into any difficulty one way or another, and I’m not supposing anything makes any difference as far as I’m concerned, but you can’t be so hard as not to let me be of service to you. Christiania in the autumn and a

trip to Italy for me now? Say 'yes' to both. Christiania isn't what I'd choose for you, but if you *won't* let me invest, it's the best I can do.

"Yours honestly and ever,

"MALCOLM STRANGWAY "

Naomi read it very carefully and put it back in the envelope with fingers that shook a little, vaguely wondering why the warmth had gone out of the garden.

As on her homeward journey, Anne's brief dismissal of the subject of Paul Arrington had caused her such an unexpected thrill of disappointment, so did Malcolm Strangeway's letter now. She had yielded to his entreaties to face a London audience again very reluctantly, had regretted her promise more than once since, and now suddenly felt herself pushed to the brink of some disaster. So long as her absence from the musical world of London was her action, she had never regarded it as irretrievable. It was her weakness indeed to regard nothing in life as irretrievable. The very word was terrible to her. It chained her to the past, it cut her adrift from the shadowy Hope anchored in the future. It left her not even mistress of her present self, but slave to a past personality.

She had told Malcolm Strangeway with a smile that London had forgotten her, but she had not thought the same truth reflected back to her would hurt so much.

Great fatigue seemed to lay hold of her. The weight of coming years unwinged with purpose, achievement, or desire, shut down on her soul like grey mists on a mountain side.

How cold and unfriendly Christiania sounded. She had never sung there. There was nothing to make it bearable but Strangeway's kind ugly face. And Strangeway wanted to go to Italy!

That made her shiver. It was the last unbearable thing against which she pressed panic-stricken hands.

And Anne had said mistakes did not matter! How young she was, how dreadfully young!

So she sat with folded hands looking at the garden that had held such joy for her just now, and at the moment held nothing.

Suddenly, quite suddenly, she stood up, and the whole false fabric of the outward serenity, in which she had clothed herself, fell from her. Her voice and its market value, her career, her friendships, even the dear quiet garden and all it stood for, home, affection, and rest, it all meant nothing, it was all empty space in which she had sought protection from a hurt crueller than death. It was all mist and vapour, this with which she had tried to satisfy her soul's hunger through the long, long years.

Paul! Paul! Every fibre of her being, every fibre of her soul called to him. What mattered those long starving years? What mattered right or wrong, pride or humility, if the real mystery of Love had once been born between them?

She knew now how she had never accepted, never resigned herself to the parting of the ways, that the most she had done had been to shut herself off from conscious realisation of it. Anger with him for his blindness, an anger compatible with love so great as hers, broke the sharp limits of the acute pain of her longing.

Across space, into the very heart of all things, the cry of her soul's desire went, an unsounded prayer strong in its sharp bitter necessity, vibrating through those mysterious aerial spaces till the shore of its desire was touched, and the vibrations gathered into their abiding place.

At length the rustling of the paper beneath her locked fingers recalled her to her letter, which with its crude disappointment had seemed but now of such consequence, and was so no more. Christiania, Lon-

don, Leeds—what did these poor secondary things matter?

Never had the wave of realised consciousness carried her to so pitiless a height, from which to view the shadowed depths where she daily lived and into which, in the dizzy moment of viewing, she longed to plunge again rather than face the empty solitude around her.

The revelation was too complete. She might dread the solitude but she could not fall into the betraying shadows again at present. It seemed to her at that moment she was bound for ever to that desolation, with no escape.

Mr. Kempburn came slowly down the grassy path, stopping as she had done, to view rose and stream, and listen, yet like her full of thought of other things. Watching him, she felt the blessed shadow rise around her again. It was not she who fell, but a merciful power that drew them to her to hide the heights and depths.

He joined her smiling, with an exquisite red bud in his hand which he tried to pin into her dress.

"It is just like you, my dearie," he said. "So still and serene and so full of possibilities within."

She took out a brooch and fastened the flower more closely to her.

"I think it more like Anne," she remarked quietly.

"Anne? Oh, no! Presently, I will show you Anne in the lower border by the strawberry bed, but that reminds me, it is of Anne I meant to speak to you, Naomi."

Naomi nodded and waited. How quickly the dear shadows rose now!

"I had a letter from an old school friend who has a living near Stormly, and who knows the Masters."

"And to whom you wrote, and asked what he thought of them?" smiled Naomi.

"Now, how did you guess that? You understand.

dear, it's not that I mistrusted Anne," he added anxiously; "but as I was writing—at least, as I knew him—(his native honesty could not trifle with details), I did write and ask whether he knew the Masters, and if he liked them. Here is his letter."

He laid it on the table before her. For a moment she could not see it for tears. It was to her so strangely pathetic that their dear, dreamy father, who outwardly, at least, seemed to count for so little in their lives, should awake from his abstraction to assure himself in so guileless a way of the quality of his little Anne's new friends. The letter began by a page on botanical subjects, that evidently formed the pretext for Mr. Kempburn's letter. Presently it went on:

"I heard there was a Miss Kempburn staying at Stormly but it did not seem credible she was your daughter, somehow. You ask if I know the Masters, so I conclude you do not. They are a wonderful people—one speaks of them collectively somehow, he and his wife and children. If sometimes, working here amongst a type that makes one despair of Heaven's purpose, I feel too disheartened to go on for the moment, I think of Christopher Masters, and say, 'Well, there's one result, we aren't all worms, thank God!' Can I say more? But indeed, you could wish your daughter no better friends."

Naomi laid it down.

"Satisfied now?"

"Oh, yes, yes. Knowles is a good fellow. Of course, I was sure Anne was right, but it seemed a prudent thing to do."

Again Naomi smiled, and again was conscious of tears. Her father and prudence sat so ill together in her mind.

"Of course, with Mr. Arrington it was different; he

was not really a stranger even before he called, belonging to the neighbourhood one might almost say in these wonderful days; and he assured me that Mr. Watt was quite respectable and safe, before I asked, which was kind of him."

Naomi listened while the shadows fell away again. Anne had never told her of this visit, which to her meant so much. Had he come solely on Anne's account, or with desire at his heart to see the home of the woman he had lost? Why had Anne never mentioned it? Was there more she had not mentioned? The safe shadows retreated with alarming rapidity.

But her father noticed nothing strange in her silence; he went on in his slow dreamy fashion, saying things that had been in his mind to say many days.

"Anne is very happy in finding friends, and in these wide interests of hers. It will make her unselfish, don't you think? I could wish it were a less terrible question in which she was engaged. It is so grim and deep and Anne is so young. It might overwhelm her; older people than Anne have made mistakes over what is really their work in the world. Don't you agree with me, my dear?"

He put his hand over hers.

"But at least, father, Anne is terribly honest and always seeking the true relation of things; when she sees it is not her work, she will give it up, she won't stay on from a sense of false pride."

He still looked unconvinced. Naomi thought earnestly a moment and then voiced the inner belief of her heart with diffidence. She did not wish to betray her sister's still unguessed state of heart, but her father's apprehensions must be quieted. It seemed so cruel to leave him to them.

"Anne will go on, father, living on external questions until she falls in love. I think she is in love now, but she does not know it, and no one must discover it

for her. When she knows, she will come back to us, and she will find out what her work really is."

The concern died slowly out of his face, and left a tenderness there that had a touch of awe in it.

"Thank you, Naomi. I feel you are right as usual. My little Anne, why did that never occur to me?"

He paused a moment. Naomi heard a bird singing as if the world were heaven's concert room.

"One should not pry into these things," said Mr. Kempburn softly. "But I wonder if it is Mr. Arrington, Naomi?"

But Naomi gave no answer. She stood up and the bird's song ceased. It was awful that hands so dear could unconsciously deal so agonising a stroke.

They walked back together as they had done after a similar discussion two years ago, examining the garden favourites on the way. She made no attempt to be alone again to probe this incredible suggestion of her father, but rather clung to his presence, making quaint excuses for remaining with him, and sharing his pursuit for the time under the plea he was overworking himself, and she must look into it.

There was, indeed, no desire in her at all to face the suggestion that her instinct denied *in toto*, and yet near which insidious false reasoning lay careful nets to enmesh her better understanding and heart. How should she suspect Anne of lack of loyalty to her? Anne, whose honesty and faith were the only fixed qualities of her life so far? If she had said but little about Paul Arrington, it was that she felt more keenly than Naomi herself the wrong that had been hers, and feared her anger should hurt her sister. Naomi knew this, yet because of her weakness and terrible awakening to her actual need, that reasonless suggestion seemed a new cause of alienation between herself and Paul, and the first faint impalpable barrier that had ever risen between her and Anne.

That evening she wrote to Malcolm Strangeway a letter unlike any he had ever had from her. She refused Christiania. She refused public life at all, she repudiated her promise to him.

"Why should I go on with this? It means nothing, there is nothing to be gained from it." That was the tenor of the letter. He had combated passing moods of distaste for her life in her often, but there was something new in this. She was not arguing gently on the advantages of a restful life, or the vanity of pursuing fame. There was a note new to him, and it struck his faithful heart with keen fear. He knew her for a disappointed woman, but he also knew her for a brave one who had never yielded to her own private sorrow. Now suddenly, it would appear it had conquered her.

Had he known how far his own letter was answerable, his fear would have magnified itself fourfold. As it was, he laid all the weight on one guilty head, flung his obedience to his "dear lady" to the winds, and without word to her of his intention, took route for Southern Italy.

CHAPTER XXX

"WATT would climb down if he were let alone," said Christopher moodily. "He knows they have made a mistake."

"Then who is it?" asked Anne in a troubled voice, though she knew before she was answered.

"It's Arrington. Arrington, who has no interest, no fear, nothing to do with the matter at all, no reason but his determination to get his own way. The last man to be on a Board of Conciliation."

Christopher spoke with fierce indignation, and turned shortly away from the window. During these last days he had become restless and irritable. The tension told on him all ways. He fought hard to keep personal feeling out of the matter, but almost every day, as the struggle narrowed itself down to a duel between him and Paul Arrington, the sense of personal antagonism deepened. He had allowed concession after concession, stopped his ears to the muttered complaints of his own party, kept his eyes fixed fast on the country's interest and need, and now this deadlock had come. He had reached his last concession, to yield Clause IV. of the preposterous Memorandum would be to deliver the Masters of England's Iron Trade bound hand and foot into the power of the Unions.

The Unions knew it,—and greedy for power as they were, some still hesitated to grasp so great a measure. Watt himself, weary of the struggle and gauging Christopher Masters's will to a fine certainty, had protested privately to Arrington that they were wasting time, and had better be content with what they had secured already.

"Be content with half a loaf when you have the whole with a little more effort?" scoffed Arrington.

He had all the weight of the extreme Socialist party behind him. Whether he would or not, he had become their temporary idol. The majority of them knew nothing of his real social position, of the great Bannerton estates and the lonely Castle with its feudal rule and aloofness from the suffering world. Arrington spoke at no meetings, was present at no mass gatherings, yet by some curious law that rules the mind of crowds, they recognised him as a leader, a strong man, strong as their wildest dreams of power, to whom all the lesser speaking, working, better known leaders were as henchmen.

He was "new." They had not yet had time to tire of him. No one spoke of his riches, but the finances of the Union of Ironworkers were exceedingly prosperous, a strike had little terror for those who looked at it from the point of a prolonged holiday. If Arrington's cry was "No surrender," the voice of the majority was with him.

Joseph Watt knew it,—knew that if at this moment he lifted up a flag of opposition to his "Frankenstein," he himself would go down in the angry tumult that would follow.

Arrington knew it—knew the false position in which he had allowed himself to arrive, the actual leader of a party with whom his every personal interest was at variance.

His passionate desire for action and power had led him into a fearful place indeed. He who had been too fine-handed to touch the weapons of political warfare in his own class, had become a mercenary, and sold the sword of his fighting strength for the mercenary joy of fighting! He accepted the situation with a cynicism that appalled Max Aston.

"I've no private opinions!" he declared stormily.

Max once. "They wanted a general to lead their side and I took their offer. The least I can do is to play them fair and win their game. The odds are against them though they don't know it."

So matters crept on. Organisation and unaccustomed loyalty drew the ranks of the Ironworkers' Union together; daily man after man would pass by Max Aston's expressionless mask into the presence of a power that was felt rather than seen, and would go away, confident that the most sacred Clauses of the Social Democrats' creeds were secure in the hands of the man, who ruled over them by sheer virtue of the laws of the autocrat, against which they warred.

Christopher Masters knew what he was saying when he declared he could have managed Joseph Watt alone, though as far as the Press and general public were concerned the Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union remained the figurehead of affairs, mouthing the sentiments of greedy malcontents, or voicing the just demands of shackled Labour according to reporters' pens.

Anne was again at Stormly, and though she did not see much of Christopher, she felt less restless there and attributed it to being on the scene of action. Patricia was glad enough to have her; most of the women she knew in the neighbourhood were profoundly ignorant of the questions so vital to their husbands and fathers, or hopelessly one-sided. Anne's impersonal interest was a welcomed change.

Christopher returned unexpectedly one day to find his wife had gone in to Birmingham on business connected with the crèche, and Anne alone in the Library. He was obviously vexed at Patricia's absence, and told Anne frankly he was in a bad temper, and had come home to be smoothed! Then he told her about Arrington.

"Next Wednesday is the last meeting of the Con-

ciliation Board," he said presently. "I suppose you've seen to-day's papers?"

"Yes. We breakfasted on them,—

"The Employers' Federation so ably captained by Mr. Masters will undoubtedly triumph, as we said yesterday, unless the Social Democrats who really command the Ironworkers' Union should win the day, as is not unlikely.'"

misquoted Anne, half laughing.

"Ah, yes, that's the sober, well-balanced Press of the breakfast table. You should read the *Liberator!*"

"I have," said Anne. "It amounts to precisely the same thing in the end."

She was a little surprised at his minding, it was so unlike him to care what the papers said one way or another.

Christopher flung himself into a chair. He looked so harassed and worried that Anne longed as ardently as he did for Patricia's return.

"It will end in a strike after all," he said moodily. "I've given in all I mean to, all I can, in every one's interests. Arrington won't see me, and it's he who's at the bottom of their pigheadedness I know. Watt knows as well as I do what a strike means in the end—the demoralising effect of it. Perhaps *he* can't see further, but Arrington ought to understand. It's the country!—we're on the eve of a General Election, threatened with war, and in order to win wholly unjust points he'd plunge us all into the worst of wars.—Class War! I might have succeeded in patching up terms if it were not for Arrington. All the Moderates would give it. Look at my own people. They don't want to fight, what have they to gain? Oh, damn the Unions!"

And the late secretary to the Controller of the most powerful Union of all thrilled with assent. Christopher lifted his head from his hands rather confusedly.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Kempburn,—but it's how I feel, and I'd forgotten you!"

He got up and began restlessly altering the position of small things on the mantelpiece, keeping his back to her, but speaking now and then, in a broken, uncertain way.

"Wednesday will settle it, that's the last meeting. Unless a miracle happens it can only end one way. They'll say I might as well have had a lock-out at first as they wanted. It's only a question of time then—and the longest purse," he gave a curt little laugh, "Arrington's or mine really. If it were only the men, Miss Kempburn," he turned quickly on her with a grim face, "I'd welcome it. It's the women and children, and——" he laughed again, "I suppose I don't like being beaten any more than Arrington does—or being abused either."

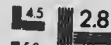
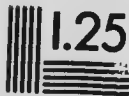
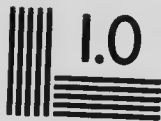
There was a silence, in which every crude reproach and dull-witted taunt that would be levelled at Christopher, if he failed to carry his policy of conciliation to a successful end, smote her on her heart. Blind, furious anger with Paul Arrington surged within her, a wave of colour rose to her very temples. Christopher seeing it, was pulled back to recognition of her actual presence.

"Life is a queer game," he said more calmly. "If this does end in a strike, it will be Arrington's doings. Arrington, who has no stake in the matter at all, and who is the antithesis of the men whose cause he's chosen to champion! If only he'd married as he ought years ago, he'd have found some better outlet for his energy than collecting figures and gambling with other people's quarrels."

Anne turned a startled face to him.



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"Why do you say that? He ought to have married?"

"Of course he ought! Last of his name, Banner-ton, and all the rest of it! He'd have been a fine man too, if he had, but men like him are only safe with the right woman behind them."

There was a light in Anne's eyes, reflected from the sudden illumination of her heart. It was a woman's intuitive jump at the crux of a matter.

"Suppose," she said in a breathless hurried way, "suppose Paul Arrington had any other great concern, anything that took his attention from this business, would it help matters?"

He looked at her puzzled, but a little amused at her desperate earnestness.

"I think if some excellent person could make him go lion-shooting or start for the South Pole, or land him in the middle of a right-to-succession dispute, or even marry him—that the rest of them would climb down. Cecil Marks is half way down, Langley two-thirds. It's only Watt who holds on—to Arrington."

"You think this, you are not sure?"

Her whole soul seemed to hang on his answer; mystified as he was, he was struck by her attitude and answered gravely enough.

"I am quite sure if Arrington's attention could be taken off the question, if indeed he were not at the meeting next Thursday, we should make terms with Watt. But it's impossible you know."

"No, I think it's possible. I see a way," Anne answered half under her breath.

Christopher's eyes were grave and rather pitiful.

"Are you thinking of kidnapping him, because that's been proposed already to me?"

He spoke with gentle scorn, but she had no ears even for the reproach conveyed. The certainty of her inspiration blinded her to all else.

She paused. "A yacht would have been very nice," she added thoughtfully.

"Perhaps your father wouldn't have had much time after all."

Regina considered this for awhile and her face brightened. As the boys did not rejoin them, she presently suggested their finding her Mother and getting permission to visit the Park nursery. But Patricia demurred.

"If Father comes back early he'll take you all out in the motor," she said.

"It's not that I don't like her seeing the babies," Patricia explained as Regina wandered off again, "but they come from all sorts of places, the only qualification is that they are vaccinated. The Medical Officer sends them, and of course they are watched and inspected each day, but we've had one or two narrow escapes, and three deaths; but that's not much out of two hundred and fifty, is it?"

She looked at Anne in a slightly troubled way, and Anne discerned the likeness to dark-haired Regina which escaped most people.

"I want other people to have camps, but they seem afraid. Still it's really the nurses who have all the trouble; they are so good, and we've got twelve Runnyford girls there under them getting trained. They will make quite good nursemaids later on."

"I have been to Runnyford once," said Anne dreamily.

"So David Fulner told us."

"How did he know it was me?" laughed Anne, forgetful she at least told him her employment.

"Mr. Watt doesn't travel round with several admiring young ladies after him. Of course, it might have been his sister," she added demurely.

Anne was conscious of disappointment when tea arrived and still her host had not returned. Perhaps

her hostess noticed her involuntary glance at the tea-cups, for as she handed one to Anne, she said:

"Christopher is going to try to get home to-night by six. If he does, and you were inclined for an early morning jaunt to-morrow, he would take you to Runnyford with him; but it's really early breakfast at half-past six, starting at seven."

Anne could conceive nothing more delightful; a little colour came to her pale face.

Later on, as they went by a circuitous shady route to visit the Park nursery, Patricia asked Anne a question that startled her considerably.

"I wish you'd tell me," she said suddenly, stopping and looking very earnestly into Anne's eyes, "why Mr. Watt dislikes Christopher so? I mean personally dislike him, not because of sides?"

The thought that first occurred to Anne was that Mrs. Masters was very young to be Regina's mother. The second thought a wonder as to how she could possibly discern the antagonism of an almost unknown man. She had not yet learnt Patricia's almost miraculous openness of soul to all and everything pertaining to her husband.

"I understand people like Mr. Batherly really hating him, but Joseph Watt always *sounds* like a real straight honest man. Do you know?"

"It is not Mr. Masters himself, I think; it's because of his father," Anne answered slowly.

Patricia gave a little quick intake of her breath.

"Yes, I thought so. It's still there!"

She turned the subject almost directly, but Anne continued to wonder.

They reached the Baby Camp in time to see it break up. Blue-gowned nurses were packing babies into baskets and convenient bundles for transit; about twenty were remaining for the night in the big temporary room or spacious tents, that accommodated the

nurses. Patricia sat amongst them and took two babies on her lap. Anne, who was looking at her in her usual intent way, drew a long breath. For the first time in her life she understood the real beauty of womanhood.

"If one could only keep them here altogether," said Patricia, regretfully rubbing her cheek against a downy little head. "Not for a week, nor a month—but always!"

Anne knelt down on the grass at her feet and touched a tiny crumpled pink hand.

"It wouldn't be fair on—on other women," she whispered with a little catch in her voice.

Patricia smiled ruefully.

"No, of course not. Isn't it awful to think what they would be like if the babies were all taken away—to State nurseries! It takes all this condensed possibility (she hugged a baby to her) to keep womanhood alive in them! It seems an awful waste of life sometimes, but it keeps women—women!"

The words and picture of Patricia and the babies remained with Anne for a long time. She went to sleep that night with both before her mind. Some belief, which had been but a theory, had become a visible truth to her, yet she had no words for it, and never recognised it as the stirring of the deep-seated mother instinct in herself.

She made the morning trip with Christopher, and many other trips afterwards. On these occasions he spoke frankly enough to her on all subjects, spoke of his people with the authority of one whose knowledge is intimate and personal, who understood not only their possibilities but their limitations; their virtues and their vices, their strength and their weaknesses."

"They are still children," he said to her one day. "Victims of the most rotten education that was ever planned by unpractical men. And you want them to be

free, and to handle hundreds, when they can't lay out a shilling to advantage. You want to put them at liberty when they haven't even wit to interfere with their wretched children's schooling. I grant you most of them grumble at it!" he added grimly. It was a subject which easily roused him to wrath Anne found.

"Heaven help the coming generation!" he commented another day. "No discipline, a smattering of a dozen undigested subjects, a fictitious value of their own worth, and an unshakable belief in the almighty power of money."

"It is a power, though," protested Anne, half laughing. She had given up trying to convince him, she was no social democrat.

"It isn't if you don't know how to use it!" he retorted. "It's a tyrant. The tyranny of money is no fiction."

"Poverty is a slave-driver though."

"Not Poverty—but Want. Poverty is the test stone. Believe me, I know, Miss Kempburn. I've been there." He told her a part of his story and she understood.

Such talk was very different from Dr. Risler's hot tirades and visionary plans, very different even from Paul Arrington's cold irony and crystallised facts. Anne listened and argued for sheer pleasure at being set right by him. A sense of rest and satisfaction grew within her, as in one who had found an end to a long journey. He would get hot and keen on a question, a shade dogmatic, perhaps from sheer weight of knowledge, and then laugh at himself for his own intolerance.

"One's always making mistakes at other people's expense!" he told her once. "If ever I lay down the law I'm certain to be tripped up over that very point sooner or later!"

"But there must be some settled definite rule!" cried

Anne, aghast. "Some path where one doesn't make mistakes."

He looked at her quizzically.

"Miss Kempburn," he said, "that's the mirage that people like you lose their way pursuing. A certain path clear right and wrong! Good heavens! how easy life would be. It isn't the paths one goes on, it's the way one walks that matters. There's no fixed rule and no broad road, it's all as broad or as narrow as one's own understanding. Don't make any mistake, you won't find any creed nor any man, who'll just make it possible for you to dismiss yourself and follow blindly. You have no right either to make some one else's creed your rule of life."

She remembered things like these the more, because they were really very scarce, utterances struck out of him as it were by her own persistent efforts. Mostly, he just spoke of his own pet theories and hobbies with a humourous tolerance, and occasionally, when it was anything very near to his heart, with a boyish shamefacedness. Sometimes Patricia accompanied them, but generally they went alone; and during his absence Anne spent long hours with the children.

Always Patricia watched her with a pitiful tenderness.

"Dear stupid old Christopher," she said to herself one morning, as she watched them off. "He thinks he's teaching her sense, so he is, but not the kind he believes. She's learning the value of the—individual!"

She was greatly amused when Christopher announced to her one day with the air of one who has made a discovery:

"Miss Kempburn is not a Socialist after all!"

Patricia laughed.

"Did you suppose she was?"

"Well, she has been playing round trying to regene-

rate the people and right their wrongs, and breaking her heart over the misery of the world, and all that sort of thing!"

"I've known other people—not Socialists—feel rather keenly about the same matter, and even put themselves to some trouble to set them a little straighter!"

He could not pretend to misunderstand her, so he laughed in turn.

There is no doubt Anne gained greatly by her removal from the direct sphere of the agitated Labour world. She recovered her sense of proportion, and it was good for her to realise there were aspects of life which did not lie under the advancing black shadow, but of its advance and increasing blackness she was kept well aware, for Christopher spoke freely to her and Patricia of all that transpired.

It was not much. He got his Employers' Federation reorganised during those hot weeks, and Joseph Watt ascertained the Trades Council would support the main purpose of the now famous Memorandum. It was decided to form a Board of Conciliation, and this proved no easy task. Christopher made no secret of his dissatisfaction when the President of the British Statistic Society was proposed.

"He's the sort of man who doesn't like making concessions," he said to Patricia rather gloomily.

"I know some one else like that!" she retorted, carrying him off to inspect a damaged fence in the Children's Garden. For it was Saturday and such topics were forbidden.

Little by little the doctrine of individual value began to draw Anne away from that world of abstract ideas in which she was most at home. She began to see that men fail as often in rightly stating their own beliefs as in interpreting them into action: and that there was no formula or creed not subject to the mystery of individuality, that out of the crucible of truth

each *ego* will gather to itself those particles which will best assist it to self-expression. She was indeed groping towards the doors of self-realisation so long closed to her, and lack of which rendered her at once so immature and isolated in her aims. It was her lack of regard for her own individual value that made it so difficult for her to appreciate Max Aston's love. She could not conceive it to be so serious a matter as he would have her think, not because she failed to appreciate love in the abstract, but, in the particular and applied to herself, it appeared to her trivial and of small import beside other matters.

Patricia understood this very well. She soon arrived at the conclusion Anne would be an excellent wife for Max, and told Constantia so in no measured terms, but added:

"She will have to be in love with some one else first, and she'll never love like an ordinary woman. Just at present she is only learning qualities count for nothing in love."

Anne wrote to Joseph Watt once, but he did not answer her. It might be work was too heavy to allow of the frivolity of friendly correspondence, or that, having placed her in the hands of his antagonists, he thought well to avoid further contact. Or there might be a third and more powerful reason. No one could accuse Joseph Watt of being sentimental. He certainly would have resented the accusation even from himself, yet as certainly he missed Anne Kempburn's presence as he had missed nothing else in his life.

There was some magic about Anne which made all men and women about her anxious to serve her and to give her a helping hand along a road she followed so bravely, even when they knew nothing of the goal. Joseph Watt was no exception. He had dimly felt the niche she occupied in his life was unsuitable, and because of Anne's magic gift or because of some unsuspected grain of heroic unselfishness in himself, he let

her pass into hands more fit to help her, though they were the hands of one he regarded as his enemy. She thought of him often, never with anger, but still as an opponent.

She was often at Runnyford during these days, sometimes with Patricia, sometimes without. The state of unrest was markedly evident there. Sometimes echoes of Watt's forcible speeches came back to them, and sometimes, when she was alone, she heard complaints of summary justice dealt out with a peremptory hand. But the only element that really appeared to her serious, the only argument of Watt's that had taken strong hold, was the doubt of the permanence of the great capitalist's "fads." She mentioned this to Patricia one day as they sat working in the garden, and added thoughtfully:

"It is so amazingly preposterous!"

"You don't share the doubt then?"

Anne laughed.

"That's because you happen to know him and like him," commented Patricia in her serene, calm way. "It's personal feeling."

She was startled by the wave of colour that swept over Anne's face.

"But I know it!" she stammered.

Patricia shook her head. "You wouldn't be so sure if you didn't happen to like him."

"But you, *you* know?"

The other dropped her work.

"I have experience behind me," she said dreamily. "I've known him since he was a boy. He doesn't change. It's more than mere personal conviction. That's no argument at all, is it? Though it's the only thing worth having."

"But surely personal conviction is the strongest weapon in argument!"

"To convince your adversary of your own good

faith, yes. You would persuade even Mr. Watt you believed in Christopher's methods, but you would not convert him by it. Now, I could bring logic to bear on it, too!"

Anne was silent, a little troubled in mind. Presently she spoke again.

"I've often wondered why you don't work with him, speak for him, and all that. They'd listen to you in Runnyford."

Patricia looked at her with a new light in her eyes.

"But I speak," she said very softly, "through him. Don't you understand? He comes back here so tired and sick of it all, and talks to me, who am not tired but can bring a fresh mind to bear on it—and then he's ready again. If I were to go out and use up my own ideas, how could I help him? And he makes much more of my thoughts than I ever could."

Anne drew a deep breath.

"Of course, if it happened I couldn't help him, it would be different," Patricia went on thoughtfully. "At least, I suppose so. Sometimes I don't even agree with him, but even that does not really matter. What matters is that he should be true to himself, and I know that self better than he does. Now you see why I try not to have too definite opinions of my own in any matter. It's enough to give him my thoughts, he can use them so much better than I can."

"Oh!" cried Anne tremulously, all her soul kindled with a new knowledge that was too beautiful to bear.

"Now I know—why, that is Love."

"My dear!" Patricia's voice, with its tender protest, was almost as caressing as the hand she put on Anne.

They sat silent awhile, and deep into Anne's very soul sank this, to her, so strange and wonderful a conception of a woman's love and a woman's work.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"You give me leave to try then?" said Malcolm Strangeway, giving a last grip to Naomi's hand as she leant out of the window.

"Try what you like, only give me three months' holiday," she answered.

"You deserve that!"

A sudden sense of his deserts, his long faithfulness, his patience with the sentiment that had hampered her public life, and his daily care of her, filled her heart.

"My dear friend," she said gently, "I am in your hands, do what you like except the one thing. But I warn you all the disappointment will be yours."

He shook his head. He knew her meaning. They had threshed it out during the last night on board, going over and over the ground with a dull persistence that met the same gentle unconquerable answer.

"Risk no money of yours on me."

The train was moving off. She waved to him. So did the figure by her side, and he turned away to face an existence suddenly strangely empty and desolate.

Anne and Naomi sat hand-locked in the carriage his care had reserved for them.

It was "Oh, Anne!" and "Oh, Naomi!" and no more for awhile. They had met an hour previously on the boat, this was their first moment alone.

Presently Anne asked:

"What is he to try to do?"

"Get me work in London again," said Naomi, with a little sigh. "He has set his heart on it, Anne, and he's been so kind, I could not refuse."

Anne made no comment, the faintest shadow of a

shadow crossed her face, for she instantly saw the difficulty of keeping Paul Arrington and Naomi apart if her sister really took up public life in London again.

Beyond this tiny cloud the meeting of the sisters was full of joy beyond their expressing.

"Take off your hat," commanded the elder woman. And Anne obeyed laughing.

"Yours too then."

"Not at all," said Naomi firmly. "Mine isn't a hat, it's a creation designed to make you think me ten years younger than I am, adjustable in fifteen minutes. You see me at my best."

All the time her eyes scanned Anne eagerly, but she made no remark beyond saying she was very thin.

"Patricia says I'm fatter."

Naomi raised her eyebrows slightly.

"Patricia? I've missed the two last mails."

So Anne told her of her late experiences, speaking first in her old eager open way of things that had happened, of Joseph Watt, the interrupted meeting, the struggle that was threatening to tear England in two, and at last of Stormly and the Masters. She spoke fluently of it all, except when she touched on Christopher, and then a restraint came over her. It was not self-consciousness, it was not self-knowledge, it was solely that in that subject lay something for which she could not account, and Naomi, listening, knew the little Anne from whom she had parted two years ago was gone for ever.

Before the journey was over, however, she had gathered a fair impression of the new influences that were pressing Anne towards full self-expression, and the fear that had seized her when she first knew her sister was brought into close contact with Paul Arrington, and which had not died even when she knew her further removed from him, now flickered out.

Sometimes, instead of talking, they sat silently, look-

ing out at the dear, familiar, tiny country, as Naomi called it; and occasionally, when their route lay through darkened smoke-laden regions, Anne spoke of the trouble collecting there.

"You cannot guess what it means even now," she said earnestly. "Work goes on but in such a broken way. Trade is paralysed. Last month in the great heat it seemed as if it would all be settled at the first meeting. But there have been two meetings and nothing's settled."

"Whatever do they want?" demanded Naomi, not that she felt much interest, but it was all evidently of vital import to Anne.

"They want the control of their working arrangements entirely. Power to make their own terms, work their own hours, power to terminate, power to co-operate. They want too much, I think, and some want a strike—the younger ones, just as some masters wanted a lock-out at once; but now each want the other side to bear the onus of *that*."

"Well, I wouldn't have any of your Union men working for me!" exclaimed Naomi. "It sounds so absurd."

Anne laughed and put her hands on her sister:

"You dear! How exactly typical it is! It's all so simple till you get inside the problem."

"Well, I'd rather remain outside as long as there's room," was the flippant rejoinder. "And I wish you'd stay with me. I can't think what dragged you into it!"

But Anne herself could not have answered that,—it had just happened. She was there and she did care. It was no assuming on her part. It had become a vital background to her life.

It was not till the long journey drew to an end that Naomi asked the question that was most vital to her at that moment.

"Do you hear anything of Paul Arrington now?"

Her sister had known this would come; many nights had she sat pondering over what her answer should be. For here, at this juncture of affairs, when Anne's usual impersonality might have been of most service to her, it failed her. She could not regard Paul Arrington impersonally. She could not forgive him for being just what he was, too strong a personality for a weak woman to fight against. If she had ever entertained a pitying suspicion of Naomi being "weak," her own experiences with Paul had drowned it. Just as the stronger the physical strength of a man, the greater the indignation if such strength be directed against a weakling, so Anne, measuring Paul's power of inflicting mental suffering by the standard of his marvellous attraction, felt nothing but an impotent indignation that such a power should be directed against her dear one, so little framed for resistance. It could not be for Naomi's happiness that he should again cross her path. Whether Luigi Matoni were alive or dead was immaterial in Anne's eyes. She could not contemplate any idea of marriage for her sister with the man who had proved so unworthy of the treasure he had once gained; but if these two met, not only would all the sorry past be revived, but Naomi in the generosity of her heart would offer her friendship at least to him; and to Anne, that even was intolerable. She shut her eyes deliberately to Paul's love and need, she saw only her own passionate impulse to keep the two apart. The alternative was in her hands and she rejected it fiercely.

So when Naomi asked her so quietly and naturally if she ever saw Paul Arrington now, she replied after a little pause full of tremulous thought, that she had not seen him since she went to Mr. Watt, and added:

"We hardly parted good friends. I think he should have told me before, who he was—and left me to

choose whether to know him or not; he must have known it would be 'not.'"

Naomi spoke of other matters and tried to quench the unreasonable little heartache Anne's words caused her. It was so absurd to be disappointed over the very conclusion, for which not long ago she had hoped, of her sister's escape from the vicinity of Paul Arrington. Yet, unmistakably she was disappointed. It needed an effort to reject the thought. But she betrayed no sign of this to Anne, who was equally ready to shelve a subject she was suspiciously unready to face.

Many times in those first few days of rest and peace in the old Rectory, Naomi regretted her promise to Malcolm Strangeway. It seemed to her the sleepy little village, the familiar faces, the flowered garden and her father's dreamy contented presence, constituted all that was necessary for happiness, and that it was mere folly to return to the outer world and open life which had so little to offer her. At first too, there was Anne to rediscover, to wonder over, and even sigh over a little; but Anne was not going to stay. Daily papers proved poor substitutes for living discussions in spite of the joy it gave her to be with Naomi, a good half of her heart remained in that stormy central England, and though geographically Stormly was on the borders of the real fighting country, still actually it was as near the vortex as the neighbourhood of Joseph Watt himself.

Patricia told her to come when she would, wrote her frequently of developments and side issues, of the difficulties of the first meetings of the Conciliatory Board. She wrote well, but Anne envied her the earlier information in Christopher's plain, direct words that conveyed so much. She broached the subject Naomi diffidently one night, when they had gone to their rooms. Would it seem unkind if she went Stormly again till the crisis was over?

Naomi put down her book and looked at her.

"Anne," she said gently, "do you really care so much—for the dull Labour Question?"

"It isn't dull to me. It's living, vital, it *matters*. I know it doesn't seem real here, to any one, only something one reads about in the papers. But with Patricia and Christopher it's different, it's vital there, too!"

Naomi made no comment on the "Christopher" which slipped out so easily. She was vaguely uneasy. She could not in any degree understand Anne's absorption in these matters. Had it been a question of Art or Literature, it would have been so simple—but a question of Economics was outside the general order of things.

The unknown element of Christopher Masters worried Naomi. Anne had always been apt to be deeply swayed by any strong influence, but she said very little of Mr. Masters's theories, ideas, and aims. If he had a gospel of his own, either Anne did not know it, or did not choose to expound it. Naomi too had noticed she never mentioned him without a strangely puzzled expression clouding her grey eyes. Perhaps it was pardonable that the elder sister fancied other forces than those of Trades Unionism conspired to pull Anne back to the neighbourhood of Stormly, and so fancying became anxious and doubtful.

It was Anne who unexpectedly made matters clearer. She was leaning out of the window, gazing into the moonlit garden.

"I don't know just how to express it, Naomi," she said, resting her head on her arms. "But I feel so queerly incomplete. There's something I've got to have, or to learn about; I know it when I am with Patricia Masters."

Naomi almost held her breath. Anne stood so perilously near the discovery that no one must make for her, or must shield from her.

Anne's eyes wandered over the beautiful silver-

dipped world with its black shadows and clear cool spaces of light. The cold remoteness of it seemed so in tune with her own heart that she sighed with sheer satisfaction.

"It is of course Love that Patricia has," she said dreamily, and her voice came back to her sister, so selfless and dispassionate that Naomi felt tears rise to her eyes with some remotely envious pain.

"Love is such a wonderful thing as she sees it," Anne went on. "It is so beautiful to watch, and yet it's not only the watching, it's something else that's there and nowhere else, something for me to learn. It pulls me. Do you mind, Naomi?"

"Mind? Mind your going?"

Her whose soul ached with longing to stop her, to keep her from the lesson and she dared not.

"Yes. It's really the Strike Question first. I mean I shouldn't go but for that, but the rest makes me want to go back more."

"You must go then, dearest." Then with a little uncertain laugh she said, putting her hand on her sister's head caressingly:

"Don't talk of Strikes and Labour on a night like this, it's sacrilege."

They were silent a moment, and then Anne remarked in her former dreamy manner:

"Do you feel on nights like this, Naomi, a deep down joy that all has been before, and will go on being? That this beauty will still be here when we're gone, and that others will love it and rejoice in it, as we do? It's so good, so good to feel that!"

"Eternal Beauty!" murmured Naomi.

"Eternal perfection. Nothing wrong, nothing out of drawing. Divine Law everywhere. Naomi, it's only we who are privileged to make mistakes!"

"Privileged?"

She stopped then, biting her lip, looking away from Anne.

"He was incredulous at first—then wild—then——!" She suddenly put her hands to her face. "Oh, God, that any woman can make a man look so and live, remembering!"

The memory now swamped nearer things, things that came after. Anne never heard of the three dreadful days of silence between them, of Paul's desperate duel with legal wits, of his decision to save her from what he thought worse than death. If Naomi recognised the truth then, she was too proud to plead with him. No word of reproach nor weakness had dulled the maternal gentleness of her dealing with him in those last hours. Then the brief meeting in this very room when he had given her back her letters, gone out and left her alone.

Anne had to fill in the gap herself, and as she did so, kneeling by her sister's side, her fierce anger and bitter contempt for the man surged up again. She was bringing about a meeting between them, with Naomi's heart over full of her old deep love and no depth of resentment to give strength of resistance. She sprang up with a shake back of her head, and eyes glowing with passionate resentment.

"Oh, Naomi, and I'm letting you see him again, letting you offer him forgiveness! I can't, I can't! Love for you, care for your good name! It wasn't *you* he protected, it was that race of his with their pride and intolerance, with their rows of decorous proper women shut up in their cages with never a story between them! It was they who stood between you, not Luigi Matoni! —You can't meet him, Naomi, can't forgive!"

It was Naomi who was for the defence now. The fierce accusations Anne flung at Paul had lain like a sleeping torment in the depth of her heart all these long years. For which reason she had buried her story as

far as possible from all curious eyes, all critical speech, lest she should be forced to look again on the face of that thought and recognise it as true. She would not do so now on the eve of victory. Her love leapt to life, and outstretched its protecting wings instantly.

"No, no, Anne!" she cried almost with anger. "You are not to say things like that. I won't hear them. You don't understand Paul. He did think of me, he knew of what Matoni was capable—the sort of things he could twist and distort to charges. I was so young and so alone at first, and so many were kind friends to me. . . . He was quite right, it would have been worse than death. I should never have felt the same with him afterwards, not on the same level—can't you see it? Now, nothing is spoilt or stained. It was to keep our love white—you can't understand because you don't know what a pillory public life is—and oh, even if he did think of his race and name, he was right a hundred times! But, Anne, Anne, it's a fearful thing you've done to send for him for nothing, for I am still Luigi's wife, and though I don't know where he is, I've sent his brother money for him all the time; and oh, I couldn't go through the fire now, even with Paul beside me. I am a coward, and Paul won't take me as I am—Paul, who loves honour more than life,—My Paul, that none of you understand!"

She broke off with a low choking cry, and dropped her head on her arms on the table beside her.

Anne stood quite still with a strange shining light on her face, and she looked across Naomi to the door of the room where Paul Arrington stood in obedience to her silent command, and had heard.

Then Anne went out swiftly and silently without even looking round to see Paul kneeling by her sister's side, and she shut the door.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE hall with its black and white diamond tiles and heavy panelling and thick doors was very silent. The ticking of a clock on the stairs seemed to mechanically insist on the lack of noise. The dining-room door, however, was ajar, and a sense of movement within rather than actual sound drew Anne there. She pushed open the door and entered. Max was standing by the fireplace, looking at a picture hanging over it, but he turned and came to her quickly.

"You here?" she faltered uncertainly.

"You asked me to come?"

"I had forgotten."

She seemed to have forgotten many things, there was a strained nervous look in her eyes, and her hands moved restlessly.

Max looked at her critically and pushed up a big chair, which she took in obedience to his gesture.

"Is all well?"

"How can I say?" returned Anne with a little gasp.

"How can one judge? Oh, Max, I am frightened! It is a terrible thing to have interfered!"

She put her hands suddenly over her face, shaking a little with nervous excitement.

"Nonsense!" said Max, erect on the hearthrug, in a suspiciously calm voice that went very ill with the look in his eyes. "What is there terrible about it? You've done the thing that seemed right to you, why worry over results which are not yours?"

"Mrs. Heriod?" she interpreted, half laughing.

"I haven't seen her to-day; no doubt they are her sentiments, this being her house."

"How quick you were, you said lunch time."

"I met him on the steps of the Club just getting into the motor."

"Then how long you were."

"He had to read the letter—true, it wasn't a long one, apparently." He paused.

"Well?" Anne's eyes were all questions.

"He asked if I'd seen you. Then he told the man to drive—straight on hard till he told him to stop. Then we came back, that's all."

Without any apparent reason, and just as Max had congratulated himself he had saved her, Anne began to cry. It was extremely silly and discreditable on her part, but she did it, nevertheless, and Max's presence, which should surely have restrained her, had not the least effect in that direction. Max watched her destroy a possible shadowy reputation for strong-mindedness with no great disfavour, but again with a statement in his eyes which he was at pains to banish from his voice.

"Anne," he said gently, sitting down by her and trying to take her hands away. "It's all quite right and proper and the rest of it that you should cry your excitement away; but please remember the time could be much better spent explaining matters to me a little bit—if I may know what it all means. I may make some big blunder when I see them, if you don't."

So Anne told him as much as she might, and when she had finished, he said gently:

"So that accounts for it."

"For what?"

"Your coming to us—and his keeping touch with you."

"That's not very polite!" she protested, forcing a smile. "Why not for my own merits?"

"He was blind to them. No, it was that he meant you to lead him into touch with her again—and you have."

Anne quite jumped.

"That is all nonsense," she protested hurriedly. "I got away from him directly I knew. I did it only because of the strike."

"If you set a ball rolling it will go to the bottom of the hill, whether you go with it or not. It will always arrive there!"

Anne sat bolt upright with indignation.

"It had nothing to do with Mr. Arrington at all! It just came to me as a way out of a dreadful *impasse*. It is sacrificing Naomi for the sake of the country—I can't help it if that sounds grandiloquent and absurd, it's what it is! It was only just now, when it was too late, that I realised what I'd done. If it had been myself, my own future, it would have been one thing, but I've treated Naomi as if she were mine to use and deal with, and even for so good an end has any one the right to do that? It is terrible."

So they were back at the point where they had started. Anne still maddeningly impersonal, criticising with ruthless honesty her own actions. Max looked down at her, curiously stirred to anger with her, yet still struggling with his longing to take her in his arms and hold her till she woke and understood.

"Anne," he said abruptly, and offered no excuse for so addressing her. "When are you going to consider your own importance in the scale of things instead of other people's. You seem to forget you have a value at all. It is a great deal more terrible to me that you can miss seeing what a big thing love is, than that you've used your sister or Arrington or any one for any outside Cause whatever. Don't you even try to realise what you mean to me and how I want you? I am trying to be patient—but it's a bit hard now and then, because I don't believe you do your part. You won't think about your own value, you go on bothering over beastly strikes and Labour Questions, and

Social Reforms, and you can't really know anything about any of it till you—till you love. It's nonsense at your age! You must know the other thing to—grow up."

She looked up at him quickly, and something in her eyes arrested his words.

"But I do know," she said hurriedly. "It's not that I don't think it important,—it's too important. I—daren't, I'm afraid of it!"

Her voice sank and faltered, the depth of her earnestness carried her beyond all embarrassment, she spoke as freely to him as to her own soul, and recognising this he dared scarcely look at her, or foretell where her words might lead.

She went on:

"There's the little dotty sort of feeling that passes for love generally. I don't mean that, neither do you. But there's this other, the real thing! It is too big! I've seen it. It's beyond all I dreamed—it's too beautiful—absent or present, still unity; in accord or not, still unity. Nearer than thought or action, the union of Fire and Heat! Then to see one's ideals and conceptions shape themselves in the visible world, one's highest thought translated to action, to be a shelter for the strong and sheltered by strength! Oh, I understand! I understand!"

Still less had he words to answer now. The constraint he set on his heart was sharp anguish to endure, but Anne had forgotten him in the sense in which he would have her remember. She herself was lost in wonder at the strange knowledge and complete understanding that welled from her heart as some treasured spring, of whose presence she was, till the moment of utterance, in ignorance.

"It is not agreement in tastes; it's not admiration for gifts or qualities, it's not a process of good fellowship. It outlasts all that. It does more than give, it

takes all that's offered, even sacrifice, gives all in return—you do well to be patient, Max—and I to be afraid!"

She rose and stood facing him with parted lips and a colour on her cheeks. The spoken word had brought her self-revelation at last. She might fear but Love had smitten deeply into her heart.

He, too, took a step towards her, holding out his hands. She laid hers in them—for one second.

For one dreamy second, she saw before her, not Max Aston but Christopher Masters, strong, virile, giver and taker, for whom all sacrifice on her part would be subject for thanksgiving, and to whom no sacrifice could be offered.

It was Max who withdrew his hands.

"Who taught you? Who is it?" he demanded huskily.

She answered quite simply, looking at him with eyes that ached with pain:

"Christopher!"

The tension on his face relaxed.

"I see. Yes, it is a good school."

"I did not know, indeed I did not," she murmured hurriedly.

And he smiled at her, so little need was there of such a statement.

Her glance wandered to the door, and her mind to the room opposite, and a sudden tremor seized her, so that involuntarily he caught her and held her, and her hands clung to his arms.

"I did *that* for *him*, for Christopher," she whispered in a strained voice. "And I thought it was for the People, because of the Strike, and it was that *he* might win! Max, I've played with Naomi's happiness for that!"

"My dear, my dear!" he cried pitifully. "Don't look like that. You didn't know, don't you see it

makes all the difference. Besides you've made her happy."

"And that's why I liked being there," went on 'Anne despairingly. "I thought it was Patricia and the children, and being in touch with—with the Labour people, and I see it wasn't. It was just the being with him—nothing else from the evening he came into the office and found me!"

"Anne!"

It was Paul who appeared at the door, and recalled them both abruptly to outside matters and a passing wonder at some new quality in his face, that was strange to it but only reborn.

"Naomi would like to see you, Anne," he said, and in the simple use of the two names told his hearers that they desired to know.

As Anne passed him, Paul stopped her, and taking her hands, kissed them, saying no word at all.

When she had gone he confronted his secretary a little doubtfully.

"I never explained to you Max, why I took a new secretary, did I?"

"I thought because Macdonald took to her," returned Max with hurried flippancy, dreading questions. "At all events she made a good one, a credit to our teaching, which need not lead you to repeat the experiment, sir!"

Paul let him run on, pretending in the meantime to select a cigarette, but he only pretended.

"Isn't it all right yet?" he asked kindly.

"Not yet," answered Max through shut teeth. "It will be, though."

They went out to find the Heriods whom they had so long exiled from their own rooms. The two were sitting in apparent idleness in the little paved court, but they rose on hearing footsteps, and no onlooker would have guessed Paul Arrington's last visit had been ten

years ago. They asked no questions, but Paul volunteered the information he was going to Italy shortly.

Max, thinking he was a restraint on them, found excuse to say good-bye, and left the three together. In the hall he paused a little wistfully. Either chance favoured him or Anne had heard him for she came out. The tender light that was on her face died out as she shut the door and unmasked an uneasy anxiety.

"Is it well?" he asked.

She nodded.

"I hardly knew her."

"And the Conciliation Question?" he demanded relentlessly.

She raised piteous eyes to him.

"She's forgotten all about it!" she whispered, with a catch in her voice.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WEDNESDAY was born in faint mists that clung long in narrow street and entangled imagination in dim vistas. It hung in curling wreaths over the river, now sucked into the eddying brown waters, now skimming over oily smooth surfaces or rising in faint spiral forms into its ultimate sphere.

"The day would be hot presently," thought an intelligent policeman returning to breakfast after a night's duty. His way lay over Westminster Bridge, and he met many workers, coming and going, and one who was no worker, but an idler—a tall woman in furs and a hat which shielded her face—she stood looking at the water, her arms resting on the stone-work. The attitude was suggestive and he could not see her expression. He was off duty certainly, but he hung on his steps a little as he passed, with half a mind to turn back and look at her again. A motor, a big plain aristocratic-looking car, passed him as he hesitated. It was going Londonwards and seemed as ill-fitted to the hour as the woman. The policeman turned, the woman did the same as the motor passed her. The guardian of the peace saw her face, returned on his steps and went on wondering why anyone who had evidently nothing but pleasant thoughts to trouble her, should be out of bed at that hour!

The occupant of the motor had seen neither policeman nor woman but the latter, who thoughts had been companionship enough till then, saw not only the car flash by but recognised the owner. The woman was Naomi Matoni, the occupant of the car Paul Arrington.

For the little room in the quiet street near by was all too small to contain Naomi and the new world she

had found around her. She had longed through the dark hours for space and air in which to reduce to fair proportion the absurd unreasoning joy that throbbed within her. For her, Time's clocks had been put back and the emptiness of ten long years was already a dim picture. It mattered not at all that she was still Naomi Matoni, wife of a released criminal whom she had for ten years subsidised in silence unbroken on either side. It mattered little—or it seemed so to her at the moment,—that between her and Paul Arrington was a barrier strengthened by her silent acceptance in those long years. All that she could take in, understand, or feel, was that they were no longer apart, that he had been with her and would be again: that this breaking day with its circling mists was clearing for the one event, the hour that would bring him to her again. As she thought of this, he passed her in the mists, shadow-like. An almost incredible joy to have seen him thus unrecognised. It was so then he looked when away from her. It was in this manner he passed through the world of men, and to her ultimately.

She walked on a little, unconscious of the benediction her morning happiness cast on passersby. She had not even room just then for anger in her heart with their own two foolish selves that had allowed the fatal error ten years old, the parting that should not have been, though the fires of Hell had scorched both. She thought with a little pitiful contempt on their ignorance. She troubled nothing as to the future, that was left in Paul's hands,—Paul, who had learnt his lesson!

She reached the further side of the bridge where a little group of people were watching an accident—a case being taken in to the hospital. The streets beyond were getting busy, the earliest trams just making their start. She felt profoundly sorry for the sick man just gone into the Gates of Healing, because he was temporarily cut off from the joy of living which had suddenly

become so obvious and convincing. The hurrying beings with their day's work before them seemed to be clothed with a new dignity and they were no longer objects for pity, far less distaste. Life, Labour, Love, the three words seemed to hold all the needs of men.

Yet gradually humanity began to hedge her in. The free spaces vibrated with rushing thought waves, as the calm of the dawn merged into the turmoil of day. Naomi retraced her steps. The latch was still up as she had left it, there was no sign of stirring yet. She softly refastened the door and went upstairs to her room. Anne, seeking her later on, found her sleeping in a big easy chair, her hat and furs tossed carelessly on the table. She wondered a little, but withdrew without waking her, her purpose in coming still undone. That purpose haunted all her morning hours. It was Arrington's intention, she knew, to motor them back to Applebury after lunch, and he was going to Italy at the end of the week, but of the Conciliation Board of tomorrow she had heard nothing, and a hundred small cords pulled and hampered her against her primary instincts to ask Naomi straight out what she would do with that subject.

Max came about eleven with a letter from Paul. He asked Anne no question this time, but listened quietly while they spoke of the time of departure and vague plans of the morrow. Once or twice Anne looked at him, as if with intent to speak, but always her glance would stray back to her sister with her face of shining benediction, and the words remained unspoken. Presently just when Naomi had spoken of the possibility of Paul staying the night at Applebury, Max remarked quietly:

"What about the Conciliation Board Meeting? Is he not attending it?"

Anne turned swiftly with an involuntary movement

as if to intervene between Naomi and him, but Naomi repeated the phrase in a consciously slow manner.

"The Conciliation Board?"

She looked from one to the other. From Max, all placid unconcern, to Anne so conscious and agitated.

"I remember now," she said quietly.

She, Naomi, had been given back to youth, to a resurrection of love for a purpose. It was an understood bargain and she had forgotten it! It was shameful, and the distress in her face, just now so radiant, lent Anne's vague misgivings a show of reason.

"Why did you not remind me before?" asked Naomi with reproachful humility.

"I had no right to make such a bargain," began Anne breathlessly. "It was not fair."

Max intervened.

"That isn't the point," he said quietly. "The thing is, whether Mr. Arrington attends to-morrow's meeting or not?"

"No, no!" This from Anne.

Max's face was fixed. He looked straight at Naomi.

"It was understood you should try," he said.

"Of course. What is it you want?"

"Mr. Arrington must not attend the Meeting to-morrow, and must leave Watt free to make the concessions he will if left alone."

"Yes! I see. Is he at Playdon House now?"

Max said "Yes," and stopped Anne's faint remonstrance with a little imperious gesture.

Naomi rose and took up her gloves and scarf from the table, they had not long come in from a short walk when Max was announced.

"Wait here till I come back," she said, "both of you if you can." She looked at Max rather than Anne. Two minutes later they saw her leave the house in a hansom.

Anne's purpose having been achieved, she turned with reproach on the achiever.

"What have you done? It may spoil everything for her?"

"It will make no difference to her, except knowing she paid her debt. Can't you be true to yourself, Anne? I thought you above other women's sentiment."

Her amazement at the tone he chose to adopt towards her changed into a subtle comprehension of a new relationship that existed between them. It would seem it was no longer hers to command or even direct,—more, that another might more nearly interpret for her her own truest purpose at moments of cloud.

Max walked to the window and looked out moodily.

"I've given the Chief away," he said abruptly; "and his Cause! What a beastly business it all is!"

"Don't!" cried Anne, with a painful catch in her breath. "Why did you do it if you feel like that?"

"You wouldn't do it in time," he returned almost sternly, veering round on her. "It was the whole purpose of everything, and you were flinging it away for a fancy. How would you have felt when Christopher asked what you'd done? But anyhow," he went on quickly and speaking with more deep purpose than Anne had heard from him before. "Do you think I don't care myself? I've had to help Arrington all through this precious business which I've hated, partly because I understood him and partly because I hoped to stop him. But I couldn't, and it will take all she knows to do it, as it is. Arrington goes on believing they'll give in, you see. I've talked till I'm sick of it. He won't realise Christopher is as obstinate as himself, and it's his policy to win anyhow. He says they are bound to get their terms sooner or later, the sooner they do the sooner they'll learn their mistake, he says——" He stopped.

"What are those two going to do?" he asked in a different voice.

"Naomi and Mr. Arrington? I don't know. It seems Mr. Strangeway thinks there's something not straight about the Matoni family. He's gone to Italy already, so Mr. Arrington says in his letter just now."

They fell into vague surmisings over the situation with its dead *impasse*. Spoke of many things rather than speculate on that slender thread of possibilities which linked a woman with the well-being or disaster of thousands of fellow-creatures. The irony of the situation lay in the fact that to Naomi, neither collectively nor individually, did those thousands of lives appeal as a cause for action. The dominant thought in her, as the hansom carried her northward, was to retrieve her promise to Anne.

She did not feel the slightest resentment that Anne, having held the power of restoring her to communion with Paul, had refrained from using it till pressed by a purpose wholly unconcerned with her—Naomi's—happiness. She was well aware that however deep a grudge Anne might have held against the destroyer of her sister's happiness, she had no knowledge of how intensely that white flame of love still burned beneath the serene front Naomi had offered to the world.

Naomi indeed was little given to analyse, and her mind was solely set on satisfying Anne's wishes, however incomprehensible. It was only as she slowly faced the possibility of failure, that her own personality became involved and a deeper issue opened up.

Paul Arrington's attendance or non-attendance at the coming Meeting would not sever or reunite them. That was done for ill or good beyond recall. But what would it actually mean if, at this moment of reunion, Paul should still place the dictates of his imperious will before the demands of Love? It was a strange anomaly that the three people who knew Paul

Arrington best, never for a moment believed his convictions to be involved in the Cause he had taken in hand, while the outside world, with its usual lack of subtle distinction between creed and actions, quoted him as a renegade or convert with a confidence almost ludicrous in its simplicity.

Circumstances and convictions govern all men's lives and the former masquerade so continually in the latter's cloak that men sometimes lose clear discernment of their respective lineaments, even entertain the one for the other unawares.

But two women and one man had not made this mistake with regard to Paul Arrington, and therefore Naomi, in seeking for the readiest means to bring this truth home to him himself felt no compunction in arraying for battle against his will.

She had faced at last the hitherto unfaceable knowledge that it was Paul's pride and the fetish of his race tradition that had brought about their separation, and because of her great love, even this had become not only a pardonable act, but a mark for pity rather than scorn.

Yet because in his mistaken pride, he had willed her to those wasted years of solitude, it became imperative for her to prove to herself that his arbitrary will could impose no more conditions her Love could not surmount. The sacrifice of his Will in this matter became to her in a few rapid incisive moments a touchstone of his Love. Her love was in no way dependent on the proof for its existence but her chance of happiness was lying as a bare stake on the board.

And as she thus came towards him, dipped in the inner tangle of their problem, Paul Arrington was busy solving it on the outer plane. He had had a message from Malcolm Strangeway in answer to his own that set him studying a continental *Bradshaw*, and swearing occasionally at Max's prolonged absence.

Now and again he flung down his pen and listened. He had motored to Bannerton on the previous night, and the purpose of this journey lay in a small leather case beside him on his desk. When he stopped writing or noting the non-arrival of trains at distant unknown spots, his eyes fell on this little worn case and grew gentle. Yet it was at those moments the silence of the house seemed to gather force in his consciousness and wed itself with the solitude of Bannerton that was ever full of dim reproaches for him.

There came a knock at the door, which he may have answered unconsciously. Any way the door opened and Naomi entered.

Some half-awake perception made him aware of the soft swish of her dress. He paused, pen in hand, not turning because it was so fanciful.

"Paul!"

How wonderful that at his age Life could still hold in reserve such exquisite joy as the sound of her voice again in the great room calling him. The house was empty no longer, its silence held no reproach but only music. He himself was quite content for a moment to stand looking down at her in the chair to which he led her.

"Paul, have you been making arrangements yet?" she asked, when their full silent greeting was done.

"I have answered Strangeway's wire, of which I told you by the letter Max brought. You had that?" he questioned, thinking she might have gone out before Max arrived.

"Yes, I had it."

"I've told Strangeway I'll be there by Friday."

She nodded, but her air was so grave that he felt alarmed, and on impulse knelt at her side and turned her face towards him.

"What is it, my dear?"

She put her hands on his shoulders and smiled, a

very Circe of dear pure womanhood to him, destructive of self, even of self-reproach.

"Paul, I want you to give me a present!" The very music of her voice might well lull him into false security; and make easy the road of non-resistance.

"That means two then," he smiled back at her. "One of your choice and one to express my gratitude."

But she delayed yet, touching his hands very gently, hovering round her idea with a woman's disinclination to cast the stake down openly. Anne's wish and her debt had become but accessories to her own need and instinct bade her play fine.

"I have thought of a strange thing, Paul; but I want it more than any other gift you can give me."

"It's yours already."

She held up her finger warningly:

"Suppose I took advantage of that! But I will not. There will be nothing to show for it when it is given, except in my heart. It will live there always."

"Name it!"

"I want you to give me to-morrow, Paul, from sunrise to sunset. One golden day in which no one nor anything else has claim on you only my will."

"You call that a gift?"

"Do you give it?"

He was silent a moment.

"You want a day to ourselves?"

"No, not a day. I want Thursday, September the seventeenth."

"Nothing but that?"

"*And all it means.*"

She saw he had forgotten the date, but she would not trick him into compliance. It must be a gift freely rendered. Her voice so grave and pleading, brought back to him remembrance of many things, and he was silent, thinking of that rather than her words. Then he rose to his feet again.

"To-morrow," he said slowly, "is the last Meeting of the Board of Conciliation in a big Labour dispute, but you will know—from Anne?"

"Yes, I know—from Anne. That is why it has all happened. She brought us together for this, Paul."

"For what?" He would not understand till she forced the meaning in, and she also stood up and put her hands on his arms and looked at him with troubled eyes.

"That I might persuade you not to go, to give up,—what is it?—wanting to strike—the point or whatever it is you *are* wanting to do."

"Anne did it for this?" His voice was set and hard as flint.

Naomi nodded, watching him closely. He caught her hands so firmly in his that it was pain, and the passion that flamed beneath his bent brows would have frightened any woman but her. But she had no fear of him then or ever. His passions were to her but a child's temper, deplorable but disastrous to himself only.

"Could you think she did it for a whim? That it happened to cross her mind we might as well meet?" she said, half mockingly. "Oh, Paul, don't you know Anne better? She'd far rather have kept us apart. She just thought she could bribe you! Are you bribable?"

And she laughed softly at the absurdity of the question.

"Answer yourself," he returned shortly, still gripping her hands with that fierce hold.

"You are not bribable, but you are generous, Paul. It is a matter of my honour after all. Nothing can undo yesterday, but I knew why Anne brought it about, in allowing it at all I pledged myself. I should be dishonoured!"

"What about me?" he said grimly.

"If I had made it a bargain,—at the first, Paul?" He laughed sharply and suddenly and let her go so that her whitened hands fell helplessly to her side.

"Won't you name the price in plain words?" he demanded brutally.

"It is no price, Paul. I am asking for a gift. Refuse it if you will, nothing is altered, except my knowledge of where I stand."

"Name it," he insisted.

"That you withdraw your influence from the Conciliation Board, and leave Joseph Watt free."

"Is that all?"

She ignored the sarcasm, and answered with firmness.

"Anne thinks as I do, Paul; it is no question of conviction with you. It's just a matter of winning. Your Will—I want that as your present to me. Oh, I know it is a great thing I am asking, it is the only thing about you that I fear and if once I *had* held this Will in my own custody, even that fear would go.—I should not doubt again!"

The anger in his eyes died down before the steadfast pleading in hers. He walked away from her and back, and when he spoke, his voice was in tune with the echoes that had haunted her these ten years.

"Naomi, my woman, my own woman, what have we to do with these foolish things? Do you suppose after all these years I should let you go again because of the fancies of a child like Anne?—Naomi, there's nothing in all those empty years that I'd link with you in any way. To my shame I own it, but I'd keep them apart from you, I would not let the dust of anything I've done in them touch your shoe. Let me sweep up my own dust, and away with it. Take what is yours, the man who's slept all this time, who's only alive now. Isn't it enough for you that the house that was silent

is full of music, that its emptiness is but room left for you, my beloved. . . ."

Naomi's eyes closed,—the intervening years melted, they were back again in the evening when she had first recognised him as her mate. For so had he wooed her in those days, with that magic in his voice, and the swift eloquence that never stumbled nor faltered, but rang true to her then as now.

To listen meant to yield, to take shelter behind the very force she sought to command. With a great effort she gathered herself back from him and stood free.

"Paul, Paul, it isn't worthy of you! How can you cut yourself apart from anything you've done? I must share in it—and—oh, it's not Anne, it's not the Question I care about——"

"Naomi," he said hurriedly, "let me show you first what I fetched from Bannerton last night—for you."

He turned to take the little leather case from the table and she again sank into a chair, unnerved now by the unequal struggle. He came back and knelt beside her again and opened the case. It held a curious ring, a gem seal ring, but so exquisite in setting, so delicate in cut, that even on Naomi's thin white hand it looked a fragile beautiful thing.

"It was my mother's," he said, and paused. "And my grandmother's,—and before, seven generations have worn it, Naomi. Now you."

She was shaking all over and she took it off in spite of him.

"Paul, you forget—there was a way out, then—there is not now!"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you understand? I told you! I've paid Luigi a hundred a year through his brother to keep him away from me—ever since. Then was the time

to have put this on me, to have fought my folly, not now, when it's too late! This ring is for your wife—but I, your friend, I ask—claim if you will—something else of you, a sacrifice on your part! a proof you *can* bend; I'm afraid of your unbroken pride, Paul, afraid of your Will—I've suffered in these years. I know you'd give up to anything you thought could touch me, that you'd sacrifice even your pride of race for me, *now*." She touched the ring with a smile so sad that he understood her meaning and her reading of him to the very depth, and hid his face. But for all her gentleness there was that in Naomi Matoni that could be ruthlessly cruel on occasions, when those she loved were concerned. She was hurting Paul now with every word and she knew it, and dared it, knowing also her love to be as an healing ointment to salve all wounds later on.

"I am not blaming you, Paul, you are as you were born and bred, as I am too—but we have suffered, you and I, for that race pride of yours and my fear." Her white hand touched his hair very gently just where the grey encroached on the dark brown.

"It was all wrong on our parts, I see that now, and you too, my dearest, and God only knows if we see too late—but this I ask of you as a seal of our friendship, our love if you will, however it end shall I tell you why you want to refuse it me? It's not because it's a question of right or wrong, of justice or injustice, it's because you don't like men to say, 'He flung it up—just when it was nearly won.' Nothing obliged you to take the place you've chosen to take, Paul,——"

"Stop!" he said suddenly, raising his head, and putting his hands on hers. "I'll finish it for you,—something did oblige me. I was at Bannerton when Watt asked me to do this. I had kept in touch with Anne because I dimly meant her to lead me back to

you,—and it seemed suddenly as if she'd slipped from me and you were beyond reach—for ever. For I recognised enough of what I had done to know I could not come to you—uncalled—of myself. Give me that much grace, Naomi. Bannerton was full of ghosts, unbearable. It was a chance of action, of forgetting, so I took it, and it's brought me to you by a crooked road. Now you ask me to tell these men who chose me, who believe in me, *whom I can sway, Naomi, as I will*, that I've lost interest in their Cause, that I can't finish it, that they must manage for themselves,—that's what you ask, as a proof of my love for you?"

"Yes."

She said it firmly and steadily.

"You ask it to quench your fear that I'm stronger than you, and to pay your debt to Anne?"

"Yes." Her voice was less firm this time.

"It seems to you justifiable to ask it?"

She looked at him.

"No, it is as unjustifiable as—our parting!"

He understood her in a flash. The strange mixture of tenderness and hardness, that could exact a penalty in the very face of its own pardon, and yet he knew too it was not of him she exacted it, she separated him too completely from his race and pride, and it was of these she demanded sacrifice, the ignoring of all outward appearance for the manifestation of some inner truth. If he refused, their reconciliation would be untouched, she would still take his hand in friendship but he knew as she hardly did, that the seal ring would never rest on it, whatever might befall.

Yet he owed her something. He saw that as clearly as Anne herself. The fastidious folly, that had forced on them years of loss and suffering, had exacted the heaviest penalty from the woman. He saw not only the justice, but the necessity that matters should be

equalised between them. If she had held a brave face in the humiliation that had been hers, then he too must drink of the same cup, and face the world.

He thought with grim bitterness how little it would avail him that he had never admitted even to Joseph Watt, the justice of the Union's Contentions. He had but accepted the matter as it stood and captained them towards victory. It would not even count in his favour that sober men of the moderate party would welcome the inevitable end, if his support were withdrawn from the extremists. All that would be remembered was that he had taken their Cause in hand and then thrown it over. He knew it would end so, knew it even when the struggle was sharpest.

Naomi watched him in agonised silence. She would have given a year of her new happiness to save him now, but it was too late. Wave upon wave from Anne's sudden inspiration spread in circumference, overlapping, pressing on to an appointed end, entailing deeper forces, and stranger complexities than Anne herself had dreamt about. There is no simplicity in life save for those who hold the end of the thread in their hand, no easily defined boundary to action or thought, both spread to a margin our eyes cannot see, leaving there who knows what record of good or ill. As events hung thus in suspense, the commonplace arrival of a telegraph boy cut the knot for them.

It was a telegram from abroad and, having read it, Paul hastily wrote an answer and put both wire and reply in Naomi's hands. The telegram was from Strangeway, and sent from Potenza, the town near which—as Naomi knew well—Luigi Matoni's brother lived. It ran:

"Join me here as soon as possible. Strangeway."

Paul's answer:

"Starting to-night."

She gave both back to him in silence. He despatched it and then came back to her.

"You can tell Anne," he said a little hoarsely, "that you've paid your debt."

CHAPTER XXXV

HIGH up above the valley of the Basento lies the sleepy little village of Tallio, sunning itself, producing its grapes, celebrating its festivals of life or death or marriage, without reference to the world beyond the mountains that form the Basento's cradle, with little regard even for the little world of Potenza, capital of Tallio's own province, a busy thriving town enough, lying absolutely above the river, tremulous with earthquake and strange movements at times, and forgetful of its fright and peril with enviable ease, while the spirit of earth slept with normal breathing, and made no turn in her deep bed.

Tallio was but a village and a poor one at that, but it possessed a Plazzo on the verge of precipitous cliffs that gave wide views towards Potenza, and up and down the narrow valley with its rushing river and tunnelled railway. Tallio found amusement in watching the infantine trains swirl screaming into blackness and emerge, triumphant and smoke-wreathed, a minute or two later. One could descend the precipitous road into the valley, and find within a fair distance a little roadside shanty that did duty for station, and by summoning patience for a long wait, might ultimately take seat in the train, and be whirled with it through tunnel and over bridges to Potenza, or even to far off Brindisi. But the inhabitants of Tallio seldom burdened the train with their heavy company; there was a road to Potenza over the mountain for pony, mule, or donkey. No reasonable being could need anything not procurable in Potenza.

Once when the earth had shuddered underneath the rickety little village, part of the wall of the Plazzo

that overhung the precipice had fallen. Some day it would be built up again, meanwhile some wooden poles were lashed across the open rent. In ten years no one had fallen over, there was therefore clearly little need to hurry over the rebuilding of the wall.

The inn, or as it called itself in blazoned letters, *Café Zittoria*, had been rebuilt at that period of necessity since there was nothing left of it to afford shelter for even a wine bottle, and what was Tallio without its inn? The new walls were covered with vines now, vines which had spread even over the trellis before the pink walls, forming the desirable shelter beneath which the chief inhabitants of Tallio met to discuss the affairs of the Universe from the point of view of Tallio.

Such inhabitants were gathered there one late afternoon in September. Signor Bari the host, Padre Pietre the priest, almost as shabby and forlorn as his little yellow church on the hillside behind the inn; Carroni, the man who had travelled as far as Rome and never forgot it or allowed others to do so; and a round-faced, fat, florid man with podgy fingers and small twinkling eyes who had travelled much farther than Rome and was well content the world should forget it. This was Giorgio Matoni, born and bred in Tallio, late practitioner of the cult of law in Potenza, where he had a certain reputation in small bad streets, with people none too well favoured by fortune or luck. He was the richest man in Tallio, which is saying very little but by comparison, for example, with Carroni, owner of considerable (from Tallio's point of view) vine fields, Matoni was a millionaire beside a mere counter of hundreds.

"But I say," remarked Carroni, shaking a grave head, "that strangers are not wanted here, we need them not."

"Still it is good for trade," smiled the host, rubbing

his hands together as if trade had of late become worthy of extra polish.

"And for our minds," put in the priest, remembering a coin that was no soldi and yet had found a way into the poor box of the shabby little church.

"Bah!" returned Matoni. "*Travellers* are all very well. For my part I care nothing for those carrying their little red books, their bundles and their quills here!" He slapped his thigh, "But such do not come to Tallio with their money. This man just comes here, orders a mere pint of wine and sits and smokes, smokes, and listens, listens, listens to what goes on here. I ask what is there to see? He sees a view!"

The wave of his hand had swept in the wonder-panorama before them, but all burst out laughing at the childish pretence, except the priest, who took no snuff.

"I say he is a spy, a danger, he should not be made welcome!"

Matoni laid down the law thus, rapping one finger on the table.

"No doubt, no doubt, you know best, Signor Matoni," said Bari humbly; "and now I recollect, the store of best Chianti is running low. He must go elsewhere for it."

He winked slowly and solemnly, keeping the other eye anxiously on Matoni to see if he approved.

"My children!" remonstrated the priest, a little timidly; it must be owned for a person of authority "is it quite charitable to condemn unheard this—"

"No, no, not charitable, good father, but prudent. Should I be in Potenza to-morrow, I will make inquiries. There are ways—you understand." The priest understood his condescension and power at least. Carroni made haste to identify himself with the occasion.

"Yes, yes, when one has travelled one understands these matters. In Rome I saw——"

"Another time, good Carroni," interrupted Matoni, rising. "I have work to do this evening. Matters will certainly take me to Potenza shortly. Rest assured I will attend to your safety."

With a wave of his hand as if to assuage the fears he had himself aroused he bade them good-night, and returned to the little yellow stone house that occupied the northern angle of the Plazzo. It was the only house in the village whose front door did not open directly from the living-room to the street, the only one also where the green shutters hung properly hinged and unbroken, and where the front doorstep was made of a painful whiteness every morning. Margetta, the very old deaf woman who served Matoni as cook and housekeeper, marvelled greatly, and grumbled more, at this curious fad of her "patron," but she obeyed. Margetta was not a beautiful object but she could cook, and, it was rumoured, had plenty of opportunity of exercising her talents within Giorgio Matoni's comfortable house, for Signor Giorgio Matoni—since matters had prospered with him—had meals that differed from those of other inhabitants of Tallio, and brought weekly from Potenza provisions that were unknown at the tiny shop that supplied the simple wants of the village.

Matoni closed the door behind him carefully as was his wont and, having looked into the kitchen to see Margetta was progressing with his evening meal, he went out into the garden behind the house, which rose in a succession of steep narrow little terraces up the side of the hill. A small paved court separated the house from these terraces where a vine-covered pergola formed a pleasant shade.

Matoni did not, however, wait beneath the pergola though supper was preparing on a table there. He

climbed the twisty rough stone steps to the second terrace which ended in a seat placed under a thick mass of shrubs. There was a small clipped cypress at the other end, and the grass of the terrace was thick, coarse, and green, and in spring starred with flowers.

Here Matoni seated himself and took a letter from his pocket for re-perusal. He had evidently read it so often that the short twilight settling over the earth was no hindrance to the following of its meaning:

"Illustrious and honoured signor, It should perhaps bear upon your excellency's fortune which I pray the saints have in good charge, that the same foreign signor who would so vainly question my noble master officially on matters which should more nearly concern you than a stranger, has at last approached His Excellency the noble Count Lucario by way of friendship, and so obtained from him information which his presumptuous demands before failed to procure. I am aware of this and the exact information desired having had to make for him certain copies and extracts, concerning your Excellency's brother, the unfortunate Luigi Matoni. These matters were read over to this stranger in my presence and he betrayed particular surprise and interest in the date of the release of Signor Matoni. It would seem to me as a humble observer that he has no good will towards your illustrious family. . . ."

The light failed completely when Matoni refolded the letter. He continued sitting there gazing down at the heavy crop of grass at his feet and mopping his brow with a coloured handkerchief, or spreading his fat podgy hands out on his knees.

At last he roused himself, walked with a curious heavy deliberation over the grass and returned to the house with a dubious uneasy smile on his face.

"Lepoli is useful so far as he goes but it is not far enough," was the sum total of his thoughts, further completed with a determination to visit Potenza to-morrow.

The determination came too late. Giorgio Matoni did not visit Potenza on the morrow, instead he took a further journey, probably more curious.

As he was sitting beneath the vines next morning eating a late breakfast, or early lunch, of fruits, bread, and black coffee served with epicurean daintiness by the unsightly Margetta, his eyes, wandering to the door left open by his handmaid, were arrested by the substantial vision of a grey-clothed, soft-hatted Englishman—or there about,—the particular stranger of his meditations on the previous night. Matoni had given plentiful proof in his life he was not a nervous man, so it was strange he should now at least appear agitated.

"Good-morning," said the visitor politely. "I could make no one hear, and finding the door open I ventured in."

His Italian was idiomatic, but it did not come trippingly to his tongue, and the slow utterance gave Matoni time to recover his habitual bland smile.

He rose, bowed very low, and assured the stranger he was welcome, would he partake of breakfast, and would he honour him with his name.

"I think, Signor Matoni, you can make a shrewd guess at it; we have corresponded. I thank you, but I have breakfasted."

He handed a card across the table. Somehow it fell to the ground between them. The hander's fingers were firm enough but the receiver's strangely flabby. He stooped and picked it up with difficulty, and read "Mr. Malcolm Strangeway," and pencilled below: "Café Pergola, Potenza."

"They make you comfortable at the Café Pergola I trust? Margetta, another cup, more coffee."

"No, no," Strangeway intervened hastily. "I have breakfasted. Do you continue while we talk."

"I cannot see," said Matoni, his mouth full of grapes which he ate inelegantly, rejecting the pips with a violence unoccasioned by their size. "I cannot imagine about what we should talk. It is all as I wrote to you. My brother has gone to America, every six months I forward to him the money from his wife, he acknowledges it by receipt, there is no more. Luigi never was a letter writer. Sometimes I do not hear," he paused and looked round, "for months!" He spread his hands abroad. "Soon when the remittance is due, I shall hear; no doubt of it. My brother is like that! There is no doubt he will write."

"None whatever!" returned the other with a grim smile. "No doubt, even if no remittance came he might return to seek it, eh?"

Matoni drained his cup of coffee, sucking his lips after and wiped his mouth.

"Possibly, signor, but one does not know. I think not. My brother does not care for his native place as I do."

"Supposing," said Strangeway slowly, resting his arms on the table and speaking confidentially, "it is but a supposition—but supposing Madame——" he choked a little over the name, "Madame Matoni found she needed a man's presence and bethought her of her husband and said: 'Luigi, if you return to me, you shall have half of my income.' Would he desert—America—then?"

Almost involuntarily Matoni turned on his stool and his eyes wandered furtively round the little garden with its steep grass terraces, where in spring the bulb broke into flower.

"It is too late, signor," he said, shaking his head. "Too late in the day. My poor Luigi has his pride. He would not do it. He is content—as things are. She insisted on his never coming near her once,—now?" He shrugged his shoulders.

"But you, his brother, his only relation, you have power with him. If it were to the advantage of both that he appear—eh?"

"Signor Strangeway, it would not conduce to the honour of our family that my brother should return to the house of a woman who——"

Strangeway's grip on the soft, smooth hand was like steel.

"Oblige me by making no mention of the Lady—so," he said through his teeth.

Matoni's face grew strangely easy and smiling.

"That is so? You are—a friend—interested, so to speak."

The tone, the words, the look were coarsely insolent, and the change was sudden and complete.

Strangeway's rejoinder was as sudden and as complete. The glass Matoni raised to his lips shot out of his hand, only the width of the table between them saved him from a broken jaw, as it was, his hands went up to his cut mouth, as he stammered and spluttered out his rage in inarticulate fury. Strangeway without a word went out again through the house as he had come in, the injured man made no attempt to stop him.

Strangeway strode through the little village, down the steep hill into the valley where the train, that looked like a small toy from above, puffed in and out of the many tunnels, picking up infrequent passengers at the shanties of stations.

It was a crestfallen, defeated Strangeway who presently set foot in such a train, mechanically cursing the indiscreet spirit of fury that had broken his plans

in pieces, and left Matoni practically victor in the contest before it had well begun. His dejection and gloom increased with every mile he drew nearer Potenza, for at Potenza, at the Café Pergola, Paul Arrington would be awaiting his arrival, and Strangeway had desired intensely to accomplish something definite before he encountered him. It was the hope of tricking the truth out of Giorgio Matoni that had led to his early visit to Tallio. Now he must face Arrington with a wholly discreditable tale of failure and bad management.

For in spite of any lack of direct evidence Strangeway was convinced Luigi Matoni was dead and that his brother knew it. After a week's sojourn in Potenza, he had by tortuous and difficult routes arrived at the knowledge that Luigi Matoni had been released from prison at the termination of his sentence some seven years before, and was reported to have gone to America. He learnt also that Giorgio had the reputation for being a devoted brother, to have visited Luigi as often as was permissible and to have been waiting to receive him on the day of release; that he, Giorgio, was accounted a rich man and practised no longer his rather doubtful legal business in Potenza. Common report said he had reached prosperity through the aid of a grateful client, and his accession to opulence dated, as far as Strangeway could ascertain, to the time Madame Matoni had ceased to sing in London.

This was all pertinent matter enough but for all that it was not the matter. Strangeway had hoped to lay before this Paul Arrington who was so evidently concerned in Mme. Matoni's life. Without direct knowledge, he accepted him as the former arbitrator of his dear Lady's fate. It was impossible he could feel particularly friendly towards Arrington, but he was convinced her happiness was somehow bound up with

this man's, and with his rare unselfishness he was ready to leave no stone unturned to promote that happiness even at the cost of placing her for ever beyond his own care.

The two men met in the courtyard of the Café Pergola, a singular pair of men amongst the rather second-rate frequenters of the little hotel. Lunch was awaiting them, and over it Strangeway reluctantly told his story.

Paul made no comment till he spoke of the sudden termination. Then he looked very strangely at Strangeway, and said, "Thank you."

There was a little pause. Strangeway went on eating macaroni nonchalantly.

"You see," Paul remarked meditatively. "If you had not done it I should have had to do it, and I should have killed him. I never remember how I'm built—in time."

Strangeway ran a critical eye over him. He would have liked to find reason for criticism but gave it up with a sigh.

Then he told Paul how his suspicions, as to Luigi Matoni's existence, had been roused by a man, whom he had met in London, speaking of the death of a very aged couple in this mountain village, Matoni by name. The old man had died from sudden heart failure on hearing of his wife's death and Strangeway, noted the date given for this event was previous to the year when Giorgio in his brother's name had requested help for his aged parents from his wife, "because they were nearly destitute during his imprisonment."

"It seemed possible if he lied over one thing he might over others," Strangeway said. "It seemed worth investigating, and so far I see there was no reason for visiting America."

Then it was Paul Arrington's turn to speak. He

had three hours to account for in Potenza and he accounted for them well.

Again as the daylight waned, Giorgio Matoni walked on the little terraces behind his house, finding apparent pleasure in stamping down the green rank grass. The hot little Plazzo outside had no attraction for him this evening; he would have to provide excuses for his disfigured mouth, and though that might have caused him little trouble, still the garden behind the house and especially the seat on the grassy terrace seemed to hold strange attractions for him.

Now and again his eyes wandered furtively to the door where Strangeway had appeared that morning with an oddly haunting look of expectancy.

"They can do nothing, nothing, these pigs of English," he muttered now and again. "I have but to hold on and keep quiet, they can only go away—when they go I will give a new carved statue of St. Joseph to the church, painted and gilded, richly gilded—and candles also. It shall be beautiful and I shall be called a benefactor. Perhaps, too, I will repair the broken wall of the Plazzo, then all the village and further—even people on Potenza will recognise I am a public spirited man—and when the clerkship is vacant——!"

So he planned on, the while his lip smarted and his smile turned into a queerly twisted grin, for the "pigs of English" were not gone from Potenza yet, nor was the carved and gilded figure standing in the shabby little church.

At length his eyes were arrested by what they feared and sought, only it was not Strangeway this time. Matoni's hand went to his mouth and fell again, and his glance shifted restlessly from the tall man who stood looking at him through the dusk to the grass at his feet. Then he rose laboriously and walked with

heavy reluctant feet down the twisty rickety steps towards Arrington. It flashed into his mind as he went reluctantly down, that he would widen these in the spring, and again incongruously, that he would plant a new vine over the last pillar of the pergola, and still far away behind such surface thought, the vague uneasiness with regard to his visitor settled into dull fear.

Yet he did not betray it. Giorgio was no coward, he never looked over his shoulder into the past, all his anxiety was for the future, for the continuance of the wave of prosperity that had landed him head and leader of the little village where he had been born, the village the handsome, indolent, insolent Luigi had held in such contempt.

It was borne in very heavily on him that the newcomer's presence boded ill for the long future he had planned. Still he bowed low and inquired the reason of the honour.

Paul Arrington said nothing at all, only he looked at him as one might at a dog who had bitten one's friend, with merciless curiosity. This then was the man who had taken such toll of an unprotected woman, and that woman Naomi. This fat, smiling, bland creature of twinkling eyes and red face, and cut lips. Paul's eyes rested on the last items with keen pleasure and he smiled.

"How long did your brother live after he was released from prison, Matoni?" he demanded in the quiet harsh voice that Max Aston dreaded.

"Heaven and the saints preserve him still," faltered Giorgio, with almost heroic effrontery, in the face of the shadow creeping over his heart as shadows crept over the patch of grass on the terrace up there.

Paul's voice hard as flint, inexorable as judgment, answered him.

"Luigi Matoni was released, suffering from a disease that must inevitably kill him in two years, or sooner."

The man changed before him as if he had uttered some unholy magic spell. His hand went to his throat and fell. For once he looked back over his shoulder smitten with fear, muttering incoherently.

How quickly the darkness was coming on!

"I have seen the prison doctor, there is no room to question it. He told Matoni the morning he was released, offered to help him when he got worse, as he would. Now, you damned liar, will you tell the truth? When did Luigi Matoni die?"

The fury in his voice might have frightened any man but it was doubtful if this man heard it. He gave a horrible little choking shriek and spun round on his heel. Up the steps he ran, on to the second grassy terrace, with arms outstretched, and there fell prone on his face, babbled vaguely, and then silence.

Arrington stood still a moment, struck out of his fury with sickening amazement. Then he too ran up the steps and knelt by the fallen man. The disfigured lips still moved, a half finished sentence seemed to fall from the weak mouth as from the lips of the dead.

Then no more.

Paul got up, and groped his way towards the house with no voice to call, no mind to fully grasp this dreadful thing.

Giorgio Matoni was dead. The terrace steps would never be widened nor the new vine planted; nor would the carved and gilded St. Joseph shine resplendent in the church on the hill. No, nor would the exact story of the two brothers ever come to light until the Day of Judgment that waits on the borders of the Kingdom of Time.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THOSE last forty-eight hours of waiting told severely on Christopher Masters. He remained at Stormly under the pretext he was taking a holiday, but it was a supremely unsatisfactory one. The children instinctively let him alone, and no one, unless it was Patricia herself, found great pleasure in his company.

He did his best to put all thoughts of Anne and her mad scheme out of his head. In her absence it was too fantastic to bear investigation, so he told himself, too flimsy a dream from which to hang even a thread of hope.

His concern was all as to whether he had indeed reached the limit of concessions honour and expediency demanded. How much of will and how much of reason governed his determination to make no more? It was terrible to feel how his animosity to Arrington lent strength to his determination.

Yet further concession would be rank betrayal of his fellow employers and of his own wide unpronounced principles!

So he tossed the question to and fro.

Wednesday drew to a close and still there was no line nor word from Anne. It was impossible that there should be any bearing on this subject. . . .

The garden became too small to contain him and his anxieties, and he pushed open the gate leading to a woodland walk that came out on the open country above Runnyford.

He had not gone far when there was a sound of running steps behind him, and looking back he saw Patricia *racing*, there was no word for it but that—after him, hat in hand in a most unmatronly fashion.

How young and buoyant she was, he thought as he waited,—“A mere girl to look at!”

She reached him breathless and laughing, and he pretended to look shocked.

“There was no one to see,” she protested, rubbing her cheek against his arm, “not even a baby! Take me for a walk, Christopher.”

“Certainly not for a run, Madame! and I thought Helerichs were coming out to see you about the crèche furniture?”

“It bored me so to-day,” she asserted mendaciously, “I wired and put them off. Let us walk sedately.”

“There’s none too much room. The weeds are so high.”

“The *what?*”

“The Green things then!”

Patricia had a little fad against hearing weeds called “weeds” out of the garden.

They walked on silently. The harassing thoughts returned to Christopher, but the burden of them was divided.

“You’ve no business to be worrying, Christopher,” said his wife calmly. “You *know* Anne will succeed in detaching Mr. Arrington and you can manage the others.”

“But that’s just what I don’t know, besides it’s preposterous!”

She regarded him with pained surprise.

“Why, Christopher, you *know* it’s not preposterous, and you *know* it’s all right. Do exercise a little faith!”

“My dear girl, you can do that for me.”

“So I do; so don’t worry. After all,” she went on, “it’s not that you doubt, it’s only you are restless because action is taken out of your hands and put into someone else’s. If you were doing it you’d be quite quiet and certain.”

He stood still and regarded her, half puzzled, half amused.

"I believe you are right!" he admitted ruefully. "Only it seems preposterous to think of such a national affair as this being influenced by the sentiment of a man and woman."

"Isn't the nation composed of men and women, or do you think of it as a machine?"

"Well, there's no news of Anne anyhow. I don't even know where she is!"

"You dear old stupid, what difference would it make if you did? Anne is doing her part and I feel it's all right. Am I ever wrong when I feel things, Christopher?"

"No," he admitted reluctantly. "I must confess you are usually right."

"Always! What's the use of being a woman if one can't trust one's intuitions. Why don't women really use their power, Christopher, instead of plodding after men? You arrive by steps at the end we foresee in a jump, but so long as you fill in the details of the map, why should we bother, and plod too?"

"I can't plod after you to-day anyhow," he answered. "Don't speculate. Here we are."

They had reached a little open space where, on a jutting-out ledge, a summer-house had been built. A wide undulating view rolled out before them and on the slope opposite Runnyford lay smiling and prosperous.

It was a familiar view and they looked at it without words, though to-day it seemed to mean more than usual to both, to be an actual living protest against the claims and accusations of Joseph Watt.

"Garden City will not be so pretty," said Christopher regretfully. "I've learnt too much since we did Runnyford. Of course, it won't be ugly but——"

"Well?"

"The real difficulty is to get the right caretaker, Patricia, to look after it, see the right people take the right houses, and all that. I had thought, Max!"

"Oh, would he? It would be just right!"

"I think he will—but he'd want Anne too."

She clapped her hands.

"They are made for it! Oh, Christopher, what a lovely plan!"

"He'll have to train someone else, that's the difficulty."

"Some one else who'll understand?"

"Yes, understand responsibilities, who's got a large and old enough code of honour behind him to be safe, who won't be afraid of having his own way, or doing his own job."

"It will mean work!"

"Yes, that's the pull—for someone not dependent on it for a living, but who'll work because he's a man and daren't be idle. Max of course—but there's not enough of them yet!"

"When your school for millionaires' sons is built!" she proclaimed.

"The masters have to be trained yet. I've only found two so far!"

"Christopher!"

He looked at her quizzically with a little lift of his brows.

"Did you think I was only talking, you silly child?"

"But—masters?"

"In training. London University and travel after, of course."

"You are doing it?"

"Oh, no, only helping to. It's far off yet. The Garden City must be started first. Anne and Max to marry."

"That is sure—ultimately."

He laughed.

"I trust you in those things."

They dropped again into silence.

When he next spoke, his voice was rather stern and his eyes were on Runnyford.

"How would they be better off if they were under the State? What proof has this State or any State given that it's a good master, that its service is superior to—ours, that its servants are better cared for, more developed? How are journalism and law going to replace individual effort, allow for individual development? I grant you we are indeed but bits of a whole, mere atoms if you will, but as such we are answerable to a law that is above any creed of man's devising, and are already members of a State that's a bigger thing than any State men will found. Oh, I allow a State composed of perfect individuals will be—well, the beginning of the millennium; but composed of the men of to-day it would be a mere bundle of cranks tied together with red tape! Well, I'd rather be free to choose my own master. Is a bad State going to reform itself, guarantee its officials against bribery, corruption, and all unrighteousness? Root out all its Bumbles and inoculate men with honesty and justice? Nonsense! The cry of 'The State' is the cry of weaklings too mean to reform themselves! There's nothing here in this country to prevent the millennium coming—if that's what's wanted—but individual effort for the good of all. It's so simple. If we take the world as a place for self and pleasure we make a hell of it for others. If we take it as a workshop where we've each got a job, and pleasure consists in doing it, we bring about the completion of the whole.—What are you laughing at, Patricia?"

"Are you trying to convert the blackberries or me, Christopher, because it's mere wasted effort."

He regarded the blackberries doubtfully. They were

approaching ripeness and he took one to eat and made so wry a face Patricia laughed again.

"You silly boy!"

"Granted, to expect ripe blackberries in September—and to waste my valuable sentiments on unreciprocative ground. Besides, it's all nonsense, Patricia. I daresay the other side can make out quite a good case too. Anyhow, my case is Capital for ever and the School for Millionaires!"

"President, Charles Aston!" she murmured softly.

"President, Charles Aston!" he answered gravely, lifting his cap.

They walked home again after that, and Christopher forgot to think of the morrow, for all the woods were full of shy wild things, and a still spirit of beauty seemed to lurk in the leafy depth, already half fearful of the first cold breath that would warn her from her green retreat. Patricia beguiled him into the Children's Garden where he was taken into a gay captivity till the tyranny of the nursery State decreed bed-time. It was not till he wandered through the hall about seven o'clock, that he remembered the evening post was in and still no news from Anne had arrived.

As he stood considering the matter in the inner hall and deliberating over sending a wire, the door bell rang.

Patricia, who was coming downstairs, heard it, and saw also from her post of vantage who it was who entered. A glance at Anne's face was enough. With a rare generosity Patricia remained where she was, and saw Anne pass on to the inner hall where Christopher still lingered irresolute.

Patricia signed to the butler not to follow. Anne should tell her news to Christopher only. He, hearing a footstep, turned and saw Anne standing between the curtains with a strange look on her face that had

never dawned there when they parted three days ago.

"Paul Arrington started for Italy last night," she said tremulously. "He has written to Joseph Watt and the Board."

Christopher reached her in two steps. The strained gravity and anxiety of weeks seemed to slip from him, and leave him boyishly exuberant and excited.

"You wonderful girl!" he cried, seizing her hands and nearly shaking them off. "How did you do it? Come and tell Patricia. Patricia! Patricia!"

His voice rang through the house, but Patricia was beside them in a moment and caught Anne in her arms.

"You great baby!" she cried, half laughing at him over Anne's shoulder. "Run away and send wires, or let off fireworks, or get ready for dinner. Anne, come upstairs with me, dearest."

For Patricia understood by the look she had surprised in Anne's eyes as Christopher released her, that Anne was awake, and the awakening was almost too hard to bear at that supreme moment.

CHAPTER XXXVII

LITTLE groups of people loitered about outside the west entrance of the imposing Town Hall at Mirchester. Not a few were habitual loafers, but there was also a sprinkling of anxious-faced men, looking particularly uncomfortable in clothes peculiar to Sunday, a very few women, still more anxious looking, and one or two chatty "gentlemen" with shiny hats, and an air of interest rather than anxiety. Except for these last, who talked with each other cheerfully, the loiterers exchanged few words; they walked up and down, or read papers that appeared to have had hard usage, and occasionally glanced at a modest notice board, whereon a paper was pinned, stating "The Conciliation Board of the Employers' Federation and Ironworkers' Union Dispute" would meet at "11.30 a. m. precisely" that day.

It was twelve-thirty now, and minute by minute the little crowd increased till when the various great concerns had poured forth their thousands of employees, the crowd was little no longer but surged across the road, in a swaying mass.

It remained a strangely silent anxious crowd, but ominous of different conditions later on, so the police-sergeant reported, sending for additional safeguards of the peace.

Within the west Council Chamber where the Board met, there was no show of excitement or any betrayal that questions concerning the well-being or ill-being of many thousands of citizens was at stake.

The room was a handsome panelled one. The red leather chairs were luxuriously upholstered, the light

filtered in pleasantly through richly stained windows. There was more than enough evidence of wealth to justify the repeated sniffs of contempt from Mr. Jacklin, who objected to money on principle, and used it of necessity. The remaining nine gentlemen who composed the Board consisted of Lord Clatterton, who was chairman, whose simple honesty and straightforwardness more than compensated for his poor qualities as a speaker; Christopher Masters and three other members of the Employers' Federation; and a Mr. Rosney, who did not belong to the Federation but represented outside interests, but who nevertheless cherished a fervid admiration for Christopher Masters; Joseph Watt, the above-mentioned Mr. Jacklin, who, like Rosney, represented outside interests; Cecil Marks, and Langley and two others. Paul Arrington's seat was empty.

After the ordinary preliminaries the Board had opened with the reading of Arrington's letter. It was characteristic, curt, and authoritative in tone, stating his inability to be present at the Meeting and expressing a perfunctory wish an arrangement would be arrived at. Christopher Masters, who was the only Member who knew the history of how it came to be written, felt a sudden sense of compunction when he heard it read. It caused unmitigated surprise to the men on his side, but on the other they were evidently prepared, if only recently. Watt sat opposite to Christopher and he had come in late with a haggard face and a preoccupied manner. Christopher watched him digging holes in his blotting-paper with a pen, and keen observer as he was could not determine whether relief or consternation played the largest part in his evidently perturbed mind.

The business lagged, no one seemed inclined to begin the final tussle. It had so far on other occasions been mostly a duel of words between Christopher and Ar-

rington, with an occasional telling shot from Watt, but Watt seemed unready to take his leader's place.

At last Christopher Masters got up and began to speak. The speech was read far and wide over England and beyond the next day. It was quoted in leaders, and it was and remained one of the finest explanatory speeches of the relations of Labour and Capital in the country's record. But to the ten men who heard it the printed report was but a poor thing beside the power and the quiet insistent voice. It was more sound than brilliant; had Arrington been present, flashes of wit, quick repartee would have been forced on, but there was no Arrington, and Masters thought only of his subject and nothing of his audience.

"That there are abuses," he said finally, "neither I nor any here refuse to admit. There are many, and because that is so, we have made such concessions as a generation ago could never have been mooted. Personally, I doubt the value of many of them to you, but you believe they will help and you will have opportunity of proving your belief. You persist in believing you alone represent the interests of your fellow-workers; and that you and they must know best what is required and wanted. I told you just now that I for one do not believe that, that I consider I am here quite as much in the interests of the men as for my own. You wish to experiment: for your remedies are *all* experiments, you must admit, but experimenters must be safeguarded, or the experimenters will suffer even more than the onlooker. . . . We have made the last concession that we think compatible with reason and honour, for we too have rights and privileges as men which are a heritage we must leave to our sons, and not lightly toss away as of no account. They are the rights of the individual to free conditions within the bounds of common welfare, not the welfare of one class, or one set of people, but the welfare of all. An-

other concession such as was still demanded of us at the last Meeting is to jeopardise those rights of ours. We consider such worth holding, worth fighting for if it must be, but in the face of all that has been conceded on both sides, in the face of all that is entailed by any failure of this Board to fulfil its work of Conciliation, in the interests of wage earner and wage payer, I beg of you to let to-day end a situation which is damaging to the country, to every trade, every individual, and to the sense of justice and fair play which does exist—however apparently remotely buried—in the breast of each downtrodden Labourer and oppressive Capitalist."

So he ended in a lighter note, for the faces opposite were glum and sombre enough, and he was rewarded with a series of strained crooked, or broad smiles; only Joseph Watt did not smile, nor even apparently listen.

They settled down to the actual business after that, and whether it was the absence of Arrington or the conviction that a limit had been touched on either side, but the spirit of hostility seemed to have died out. The tension was gone, each side vied with each other in hastening to an agreement. The Employers had perhaps least cause for congratulation and betrayed less eagerness over the conclusion, but the Labour Party were clearly weary of the contest. Watt maintained an absolutely neutral attitude. He criticised nothing, he raised no objections. Christopher could not determine whether relief or disappointment ruled him.

It was over at last. The last signature was put, the last directions given the harassed secretaries. There was a pushing back of chairs, a consultation of watches, and general returning of thanks and the work of the Conciliation Board was done.

The shadow was gone. England would not yet be plunged into the dismal modern form of civil war called "Strikes." Peace was secured for some years at least.

How far Paul Arrington's absence had helped to the desirable results of this last Meeting, it was impossible to say. Christopher Masters always declared the whole thing turned on it, that the line of demarcation between failure and success was so fine, a cleverly turned sentence would have effected the scale. But it was the sudden absence of his influence on Watt that had told most powerfully. Watt had known long they had got all they might hope to get, and that further fighting was mere wasting time, but he had chosen not to know it so long as Arrington was at the helm, but Arrington's desertion of the Cause was a blow that bereft him of desire for further victory. There had been a dash of romance and wild adventure appealing to who knows what unexpected boyish spirit in the stolid hard-working man in following the brilliant Arrington. For the time it had carried him beyond the prosaic grey world of his life. It was akin to strange fear and pleasure he had found in his dismissed secretary's company. It had defied reason and passed his understanding, but he had been conscious of something good and pleasant in it. In Anne's company or in Paul Arrington's, he could believe there were other colours than grey in the world.

He had himself swept Anne and those paler tints from his vision but the stronger more vigorous pleasure of following the man he had clung to, and the man had swept him from his path.

Watt was a strangely pathetic figure, little as he could imagine it. The very qualities by which he had risen were guarantees for his capabilities of wider and more brilliant life, flashes of which came to him too late for his slow hands to seize.

He was the last to leave the Hall, and as he appeared at the door Christopher Masters was getting into his motor.

The waiting crowd had gleaned from the first Mem-

bers of the Board to leave the Hall the news for which they waited, and had melted away. There was no excitement, no expression of relief or disappointment. They had stood on the brink of a national disaster and few had realised it. It was arguable the disaster was possible merely because of the few who expected it had such overclear vision, but whether or no, since no disaster, no fighting, no perceptible results in the way of prolonged holiday and the early excitements of a strike, were forthcoming, the interest in the event faded off almost instantly.

Later on men would discuss it, talk, argue, grumble, and re-fight it; now the dinner-hour was over and work waited.

Watt looked round broodingly, seemed to hesitate, and then hurried up to Christopher.

"I want to see you," he said huskily.

Christopher indicated the seat beside him.

"Come and lunch at the Club. I'm going straight home afterwards."

Watt hesitated a moment and then got in. He said not a word on the way, and Christopher would not permit a word on business when they had arrived till lunch was half over.

"What made him do it?" demanded the Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union, so abruptly and after so complete a silence that Christopher almost jumped.

"What made him give up, do you mean?" He felt time was required for that answer.

Watt waved his hand impatiently.

"What made him take it up at all?"

That was scarcely easier, but he attempted it.

"I suppose he thought he could help and he wanted a job that wanted some doing."

"Then why did he stop doing it?"

"Why do you ask me, Watt?"

"You know," returned Watt stolidly. "You are the kind of person who would know." His voice implied he was not, could never understand, nor indeed be permitted to understand the reasons of "persons" like Paul Arrington.

"I don't want his official reasons," he went on curtly. "He wrote to me, said he chucked us over and we'd better make terms."

"No reason?"

"None."

Christopher was silent. For the life of him he could think of no decent excuse to offer.

"I've got to know," Watt said in a dogged manner. "Why not? We were—friends in a way, as much as could be, I suppose."

The words seemed to stick in his throat. His listener became aware that he, and Arrington, yes, and Anne Kempburn herself, had been involved in a business of many intricacies, some of which it was more comfortable to ignore.

"Watt," he said slowly, "I can't tell you much, but you've a right to know a little. Arrington flung you over because he couldn't get what he most wanted in the world without it. It was my doing. I'm a bit ashamed now."

"What did he want?"

"A woman."

Watt's eyes contracted. He fidgeted with a glass.

"Miss Kempburn?"

His voice was thick and halting.

"No, no, her sister. I don't know if I ought to have told you, but hang ought sometimes—but Miss Kempburn and I did it. So if you are angry we should be the objects of it."

Watt shook his head.

"I thought he biassed the Board, that he did not give you a chance."

The other pushed back his chair, rose, and brushed crumbs from his creasy waistcoat.

"He didn't, not in one way. In another he did. Well, you were right. He'd have carried us further than—we wanted."

"What are you going to do? Take a holiday?" questioned Christopher, rising too.

Watt laughed in his short, ugly way.

"I've had enough of holidays. There's plenty of work to do. Good-bye, Mr. Masters. You don't fit into my scheme of things anywhere. You ought to be different with your money."

"Arrington was tolerably rich too!" protested the accused man laughing.

"Was he?"

Watt paused for a moment, hat in hand, gazed at it in an abstracted manner and remarked at last with a sort of slow surprise:

"Was he? It's queer, I never thought of him like that."

He barely remembered to say good-bye. Christopher watched him go away down the street, and disappear in a crowd of workmen occupied in raising a vast iron girder to position.

It was a curiously grey day. Christopher was struck by it. There was nothing cold in the air but there was here in the teeming city at all events an absence of light.

"Autumn's coming on," he thought, as he went back into the Club.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

It may be taken as an axiom that the Law finds haste incompatible with dignity. Italy certainly offered no exception to the rule, the unkind might even remark there were occasions when dignity was incompatible with delay. Paul Arrington fretted and stormed and expostulated, but he had to remain in Potenza or the neighbourhood a good three weeks while the Law made due and deliberate inquiries into the cause of Giorgio Matoni's death and the subsequent discoveries.

The courteous kindly little doctor, who by some good stroke of Fortune had chanced to be dining at Bari's café when Paul had hastened out for assistance on the discovery of Matoni's death, did his very best for both the unhappy foreigners then plunged into such tragic difficulties.

Margetta, who was the principal—indeed, almost the only witness called at the inquiry—was in dire terror of Arrington, whom she swore had the evil eye, and from her it was ascertained Luigi Matoni on his release from prison had returned to Tallio with his brother and remained there for some time, quarrelling a great deal with the usually good-tempered Giorgio.

The sole point of resemblance between the two brothers seemed to be a desire to get as much out of the world and each other for their private use, as might be managed with safety. Whether Giorgio had really intended to assist Luigi to America or not, no one knew. There was no trace of a passage being booked, but that was not considered conclusive evidence either way. All that was actually known was that on the evening before the intended departure, Margetta

heard them quarrelling more violently than ever as she worked in her tiny kitchen, and shut the front door lest their voices should be heard on the Plazzo. The voices rose higher and higher and then came a sudden silence. They quarrelled no more. She felt vaguely alarmed and declared a cold shiver came over her when, as usual, she carried out supper to the little garden. Luigi was sitting with his back to the table and neither moved nor spoke. Giorgio had fetched the wine out himself and gruffly ordered her to bed, saying they would be off early next morning, and would breakfast at Potenza, where Luigi would take the express to Brindisi, from Brindisi to London, thence to America. So he told her harshly.

Margetta obeyed him and went to bed. But in the night, sleeping fitfully, worried by bad dreams, she rose and looked out of her tiny window into the garden. It was moonlight, and Signor Giorgio was standing on the second little terrace, doing something to the grass or soil, it appeared to her.

In the morning both brothers had gone, Giorgio returning at nightfall.

It was only after much discussion and persistence on the part of the friendly little doctor that an order was obtained to dig up the grass at the spot where Giorgio Matoni had fallen.

It proved to be the grave of Luigi Matoni. Whether Giorgio had killed him, or whether his incurable malady had merely been hastened to its inevitable conclusion by mental excitement, was known only to his brother and would never be revealed now.

Paul believed Giorgio killed him with intention of securing the allowance Naomi was making him for his entire use, and that Giorgio's own death was hastened by the shock of discovering the same result might have been secured in a little while by letting well alone. It was ascertained Giorgio himself suffered from the

same heart affection that had killed their father, and which, according to Strangeway's belief, had also killed Luigi, leaving Giorgio in the predicament that a public inquiry into Luigi's death would mean an end to a comfortable competence. Either belief was tenable, but all that was certain was that, after a violent quarrel with his brother, Luigi Matoni died and was buried on the little terrace, and Giorgio still continued to draw his brother's allowance from the unsuspecting Naomi, and to send receipts duly signed with his brother's name. Naomi's own stipulation that her husband should never attempt to communicate with her had made it so simple a matter, that there was practically no risk whatever of discovery. Her fatal tendency to turn her back on disagreeable things was a factor on which Giorgio could not have counted, but which served his purpose only too well. Notwithstanding the discovery of the far-off crime or tragedy, the little village put on mourning for Giorgio Matoni and betrayed very little agitation over Luigi's fate.

"Luigi was of no account," Carroni said, "of no use to us here. We were nothing in his eyes. As well he was beneath as above ground; Giorgio bestowed an importance and grace to the place which we shall long regret."

Such was the popular sentiment, and both Arrington and Strangeway, who were extremely unpopular, were very thankful to get away from it. They discussed it for the last time on the journey home.

"Think of the nerve of the man," said Strangeway, reflectively. "Sitting there placidly evening after evening, with his feet on his dead brother's grave!"

"Giorgio was a materialist," returned Paul drily. "His fears were centred in the preservation of his gold mine, otherwise——"

It was impossible to express the otherwise, or what the life in the little yellow house with its blue doors

would have been like had Giorgio been otherwise than a materialist. Even then, imagination might fail at times to grasp the character of the man who could sit so calmly through the spring evenings, with the flowers breaking into bloom in the long grass, and the garden full of the whispers of eternal resurrection.

So Paul went back to Naomi to tell her she was free, and told her also as little of the story as might be, but even the little was grim and ugly enough, and bad telling. He had chosen to tell her, or she chose to hear out in the garden in her favourite arbour, and when it was told, she sat still with locked fingers and a grey look of pain on her face, as if the shadows that were crowding together in the garden gathered her within their ever-widening boundaries.

The shadows crept on, deepening from grey to black in obscure corners, and with unobtrusive insistence joining grey to grey, till Paul could only see the white face so still and unmovable and unreadable.

How was the knowledge of her freedom affecting her? He had not the least means of knowing. With a vast sense of humiliation and grief he realised he knew next to nothing of the working of her mind, that the years had built a barrier between them—over which he could but grope blindly. It was dumb anguish to feel his lack of power to aid her in this hour, a humiliation beyond his dreams to leave her to face it alone, knowing himself impotent to help.

Her white hands moved restlessly now and then as if the right fingers were seeking something on the other hand, and it flashed on him that he had never seen her wear a wedding ring. Yet one might think the restless fingers sought for it now.

She spoke at last, low and bitterly, as one whose sorrow has no side that is not ugly, sordid, and cruel.

"If I had had in me one part of Anne's courage, one drop of any good woman's courage, all this would

never have been. I am not sorry for Luigi, nor for Giorgio, they are not real to me. But it is real, that I am and have been a coward and that these men died because of it. I have to live knowing it, and I can only bear it alone!"

"Nonsense!" he said brusquely, with a sudden quaking at his heart; "you are a woman, that is all it was."

She interrupted him fiercely. The swish of her dress as she turned to him was full of meaning. He could see only her white face against the dim background.

"A woman! That is what I was *not*. Women are *not* cowards. There is nothing a woman won't face, for vanity even. I am less than a woman. Go away, Paul. I can bear it alone, but to see you and know—and to know you know!"

She broke into sudden pitiful weeping, so that he forgot his own impotence and leant over her, still not daring to touch her, but pleading gently.

"Naomi, my true woman, I can never think of you but to know you are heights above me,—leave the past and our blunders, call them 'ours' if it helps you, but call the future ours too. Let me try to make up a little of the years I've lost to you, Naomi!"

He touched her very gently but she drew away.

"You are saying it because you must, because it's the right thing; oh, you believe it now, I know, but I can't. I was a coward to ever let you go."

He interrupted again in such a tone she held her breath, with a sudden fear.

"Never speak of that again. Do you think I don't know what I was that you must drive it home by accusing yourself. You asked me for a proof of my love and I gave it you, in return I ask you to be my wife, and you reply by reminding me I let you go!"

"No, no!" she cried under her breath.

"But, yes!" he persisted. "It amounts to it. If you send me away to-night, it's for good and all."

"Give me time."

"No, you are not to be trusted with it."

He stepped suddenly out of the harbour into the clearer light beyond. Somewhere behind the trees the moon was rising who would turn the shadows into things of beauty.

She made a faint movement of protest, yet if he had gone then, she would still have lacked courage to stop him.

But he did not go, he stood still outside and then called to her.

"Naomi!"

Nothing else but a world of meaning, of love, of tenderness in his voice.

She rose with a little cry and ran to him, and at last knew as his arms went round her, there was nothing in the world she would fear to face again.

The moon climbed to her distant place in heaven and made the shadows beautiful.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THEY were married quietly, and almost immediately, in the little church at Applebury, and went straight to Bannerton, there day by day to chase back the shadows that clung about the place.

And the silence became music, and the emptiness full of beautiful thoughts, as they planned a future not unworthy the goodly heritage they guarded.

The world said bitter things of Arrington, things hard to be borne and impossible to confute. His consolation lay in the fact Naomi did not realise it. His one care was to make good to her, if could be, some of those long grey arid years of waste, which assuredly he had brought to her.

Anne was with them after, she judged him with more lenient measure now, and understood again Max Aston's loyal devotion to a man whose ways were not his ways.

Macdonald was the only person really dissatisfied with the position. He did not take to Naomi as he had taken to Anne, though he was too much a gentleman to make marked show of disapproval. But when Arrington happened to be alone he would find the soft pressure of a silky little head against him, insinuating that, after all, there was and had been something between them that no newcomer could blot out or cancel.

Max Aston accepted the post Christopher offered him as "Caretaker of the New Garden City."

He came down to Bannerton, however, very often, nominally to Bannerton but most of the time was spent at Applebury. Anne talked to Patricia, or Patricia to

Anne, with the result the latter took time as a teacher and rested quietly at home, letting the result of the past three years work itself out.

"You'll get mental indigestion if you go so fast," Patricia had said.

And indeed she spoke truth. Anne needed rest, needed time and quiet to realise what those years had done for her, to find where she stood and listen in patience for the next unfolding of the self according to the eternal pattern of the Originator.

Not in haste, nor in strenuous continual struggle does such unfolding take place, such are well enough for growth, but the hour of flowering is the stillness of summer. It is then the results of the wind-tossed autumn, the cold barren winter, and the long protracted spring are found in full blossom, open leaf, and perfect fruit. So Anne, dimly understanding, waited to see what was permanent and what transitory of all the life notes she had gathered to herself in those three years of search.

And Max Aston waited too, very patiently but very surely, never swerving in his intention, never losing faith in the appointed end, which was but a new beginning.

CHAPTER XL

ONCE more Spring whispered her spells in the little sheltered glade, and the pine needles hid themselves under a tangle of moss and violets. Once more the pulse of life beat through the varied kingdoms into which it has pleased man to divide the Universe.

The spruce firs whispered of the mystery on high, and the rabbits scuttling in and out of their earthy homes felt it tingle in their bones. The oldest tree and the youngest violet responded to the compelling power, and put forth strength for the completion of its own beauty and purpose, without thought of envy or emulation.

Anne, lying on the bank of moss and pine needles, felt again her heart beat in unison with the encircling Power that wrapt all in one embrace. The vision was clearer and wider now than it had been three years before, she saw now—dimly enough may be, still she did see—the Unity of Life was not encompassed by the measured limits of even the widest creed that man could devise, but that through all we call right and wrong, Wisdom and Unwisdom, the Eternal Purpose of God works on; achieving itself through narrow fanaticism or indolent tolerance, regardless of all but the Law of Self-Fulfilment of each separate Fragment of the whole. A true Brotherhood of men consists not in a State governed by set rules laid down by men for a particular end, but rather in an honourable freedom of the individual to reach the highest self-fulfilment through the law of his own individuality.

The standard by which we shall each be measured is the standard of the secret self we are thus privileged to unfold. It is the possibilities hidden within, not the

possibilities fashioned by men without, by which our achievement or failure shall be counted. In such a community there is room for the Joseph Watts, and the Christopher Masters, for Paul Arringtons, and Max Astons. Not all are called to one pattern or one law of life; the accident of birth has no impassable barriers here. The motive and not the deed is the real touchstone of achievement, for to achieve unworthily is to deny the inner self which is akin to Life itself.

It is to the hidden mysterious self the Spring calls with clarion voice. To rose, to oak, to wind-tossed pine, to bird, to man, calls to an awakening, for the fulfilment of the Life within, each in its own order, since there is room on God's earth for all.

All else but the fulfilment of ourselves is but the husk of things, by which we are deceived and blinded, till we lose ourselves in vain endeavour to fulfil that which is and must be stranger to us, purposes of man at war with our souls. Such thoughts filtered through Anne's mind and she slowly passed from them into the blissful hour of union with the mother of all. Set free for the timeless space of one minute from the trammels of personality into the real self that *was* her in the mind of the Eternal Purpose. From such a moment she awoke to new vigour and new understanding, new and humble awe, of the vastness of Life under her little comprehension.

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Up the glade there came a man walking with a quick step and alert eyes. Anne saw him and made no movement. She just sat still as a purpose came to her, straining the silence almost to breaking point.

He saw her and came across the dusty brown carpet, and sat down by her in silence too. In the stillness the spell that had held Anne so enthralled descended again. She heard again the rushing pulse of Life, the voice

of the brown earth, the chorus of green things, the secret whisper of the violets. Not a chord of the great harmony was broken by his presence there beside her, but rather a new deeper note throbbed through the chorus, and it came to her as a great wonder how that every experience, that belongs to the hidden self within, opens our hearing to fresh harmonies that will only reach completion in the Day of Realisation, when Shadows will pass away.

She knew by the perfection this new note lent to the music and her own forgetfulness of this other in the Unity of all, that the law of her being and his were one, never henceforth to be divided.

She leant forward and touched him.

"How did you find me, Max?"

"The road is straight enough, and you left the gate open!"

She smiled back at him.

"It is always open," she answered softly.

"I am not trespassing?"

"No."

"Anyhow, I found you, Anne."

"Yes."

Some new tone in her voice caught his ear, he turned quickly to her, drew a deep breath and put out his hand.

She laid hers in it.

The little glade echoed with Harmony, for the Eternal Purpose had gathered one more achievement into its garner.

THE END

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