Ivan Greet's Masterpiece

Etc.

Grant Allen

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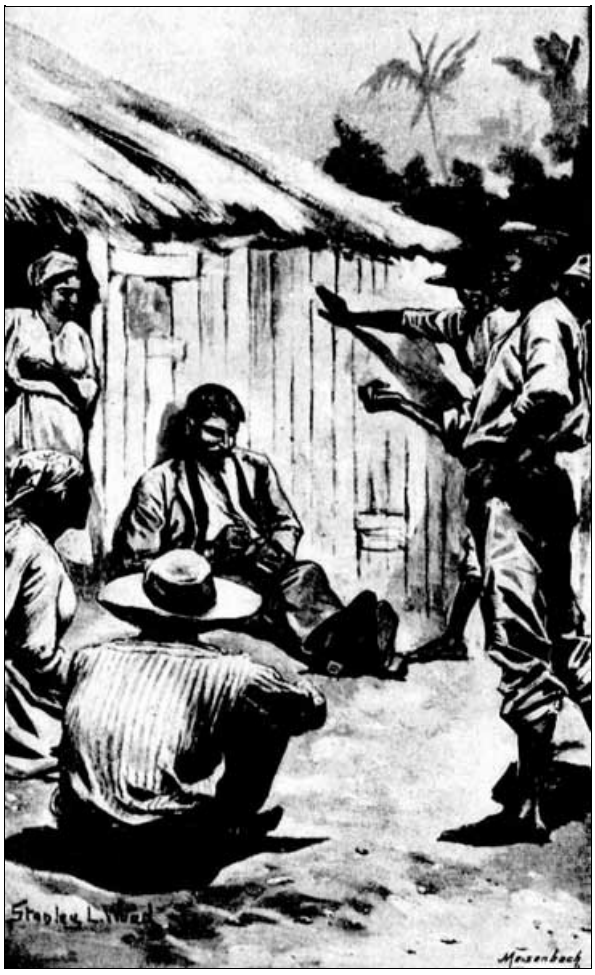

ADMIRING NEGROES AND NEGRESSES STOOD ROUND. [*p.* 18.]

IVAN GREET'S MASTERPIECE

ETC.

BY

GRANT ALLEN

AUTHOR OF

"STRANGE STORIES," "THE TENTS OF SHEM," "BLOOD ROYAL," ETC.

[Illustration: Colophon]

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY STANLEY L. WOOD

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1893

PREFACE.

I HAVE collected in this volume such of my more recent short stories as seemed to me to possess the best claim to literary treatment. They are mostly those which have been written more or less to please myself, and not to please the editor of this or that periodical. Others, however, are cast as a sop to Cerberus.

The first on the list, "Ivan Greet's Masterpiece," was originally published in the *Graphic*. I sent it, I confess, in fear and trembling, and was agreeably surprised when I found the editor had the boldness to print it unaltered. Two of the other stories here given to the world, however, met with less good fortune: "The Sixth Commandment" and "The Missing Link." This is their first public appearance on any stage. They were sent round to every magazine in which they possessed the ghost of a chance; but, as usually happens when one writes anything in which one feels more than ordinary personal interest, they were unanimously declined by the whole press of London. Hitherto, I have been in the habit of cremating in one annual holocaust all such stillborn children of my imagination; henceforth I shall keep their poor little corpses by my side, and embalm them from time to time in an experimental volume of Rejected Efforts.

Of the other pieces here submitted to the reader, "Karen" first appeared in the *Graphic*; "Pallinghurst Barrow," in the *Illustrated London News*; "The Abbé's Repentance," in the *Contemporary Review*; "Claude Tyack's Ordeal," "The Pot-boiler," and "Melissa's Tour," in *Longmans' Magazine*; "Tom's Wife," in the *Novel Review*; "The Great Ruby Robbery" and "The Conscientious Burglar," in the *Strand Magazine*; "A Social Difficulty," in the *Cornhill*; "The Chinese Play at the Haymarket" and "My Circular Tour," in *Belgravia*; and "The Minor Poet," in the *Speaker*. My thanks are due to the editors and proprietors of those periodicals for kind permission to reprint them here.

Many of these stories I like myself. I hope "The Pot-boiler" and "The Minor Poet" may soften the hard heart of the man who reviews me for the *National Observer*.

G. A.

HOTEL DU CAP, ANTIBES.
March, 1893.

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IVAN GREET'S MASTERPIECE.

I.

'Twas at supper at Charlie Powell's; every one there admitted Charlie was in splendid form. His audacity broke the record. He romanced away with even more than his usual brilliant recklessness. Truth and fiction blended well in his animated account of his day's adventures. He had lunched that morning with the newly-appointed editor of a high-class journal for the home circle—circulation exceeding half a million—and had returned all agog with the glorious prospect of untold wealth opening fresh before him. So he discounted his success by inviting a dozen friends to champagne and lobster-salad at his rooms in St. James's, and held forth to them, after his wont, in a rambling monologue.

"When I got to the house," he said airily, poising a champagne-glass halfway up in his hand, "with the modest expectation of a chop and a pint of porter in the domestic ring—imagine my surprise at finding myself forthwith standing before the gates of an Oriental palace—small, undeniably small, a bijou in its way, but still, without doubt, a veritable palace. I touched the electric bell. Hi, presto! at my touch the door flew open as if by magic, and disclosed—a Circassian slave, in a becoming costume *à la* Liberty in Regent Street, and smiling like the advertisement of a patent dentifrice! I gasped out——"

"But how did ye know she was a Circassian?" Paddy O'Connor inquired, interrupting him brusquely. (His name was really Francis Xavier O'Connor, but they called him "Paddy" for short, just to mark his Celtic origin.)

Charlie Powell smiled a contemptuously condescending smile. He was then on the boom, as chief literary lion. "How do I know ye're an Oirishman, Paddy?" he answered, hardly heeding the interruption. "By her accent, my dear boy; her pure, unadulterated Circassian accent! 'Is Mr. Morrison at home?' I gasped out to the Vision of Beauty. The Vision of Beauty smiled and nodded—her English being chiefly confined to smiles, with a Circassian flavour; and led me on by degrees into the great man's presence. I mounted a stair, with a stained-glass window all yellows and browns, very fine and Burne-Jonesey; I passed through a drawing-room in the Stamboul style—couches, rugs, and draperies; and after various corridors—Byzantine, Persian, Moorish—I reached at last a sort of arcaded alcove at the further end, where two men lay reclining on an Eastern divan—one, a fez on his head, pulling hard at a chibouque; the other, bare-headed, burbling smoke through a hookah. The bare-headed one rose: 'Mr. Powell,' says he, waving his hand to present me, 'My friend, Macpherson Psaha!' I bowed, and looked unconcerned. I wanted them to think I'd lived all my life hob-nobbing with Pashas. Well, we talked for a while about the weather and the crops, and the murder at Mile End, and the state of Islam; when, presently, of a sudden, Morrison claps his hands—so—and another Circassian slave, still more beautiful, enters.

"'Lunch, houri,' says Morrison.

"'The effendi is served,' says the Circassian.

"And down we went to the dining-room. Bombay black-wood, every inch of it, inlaid with ivory. Venetian glass on the table; solid silver on the sideboard. Only us three, if you please, to lunch; but everything as spick and span as if the Prince was of the company. The three Circassian slaves, in Liberty caps, stood behind our chairs—one goddess apiece—and looked after us royally. Chops and porter, indeed! It was a banquet for a poet; Ivan Greet should have been there; he'd have mugged up an ode about it. Clear turtle and Chablis—the very best brand; then smelts and sweetbreads; next lamb and mint sauce; ortolans on toast; ice-pudding; fresh strawberries. A guinea each, strawberries, I give you my word, just now at Covent Garden. Oh, mamma! what a lunch, boys! The Hebes poured champagne from a golden flagon; that is to say, at any rate"—for Paddy's eye was upon him—"the neck of the bottle was wrapped in gilt tinfoil. And all the time Morrison talked—great guns, how he talked! I never heard anything in my life to equal it. The man's been everywhere, from Peru to Siberia. The man's been everything, from a cowboy to a communard. My hair stood on end with half the things he said to me; and I haven't got hair so easily raised as some people's. Was I prepared to sell my soul for Saxon gold at the magnificent rate of five guineas a column? Was I prepared to jump out of my skin! I choked with delight. Hadn't I sold it all along to the enemies of Wales for a miserable pittance of thirty shillings? What did he want me to do? Why, contribute third leaders—you know the kind of thing—tootles on the penny-trumpet about irrelevant items of non-political news—the wit and humour of the fair, best domestic style, informed throughout with

wide general culture. An allusion to Aristophanes; a passing hint at Rabelais; what Lucian would have said to his friends on this theme; how the row at the School Board would have affected Sam Johnson.

"'But you must remember, Mr. Powell,' says Morrison, with an unctuous smile, 'the greater part of our readers are—well, not to put it too fine—country squires and conservative Dissenters. Your articles mustn't hurt their feelings or prejudices. Go warily, warily! You must stick to the general policy of the paper, and be tenderly respectful to John Wesley's memory."

"'Sir,' said I, smacking his hand, 'for five guineas a column I'd be tenderly respectful to King Ahab himself, if you cared to insist upon it. You may count on my writing whatever rubbish you desire for the nursery mind.' And I passed from his dining-room into the enchanted alcove.

"But before I left, my dear Ivan, I'd heard such things as I never heard before, and been promised such pay as seemed to me this morning beyond the dreams of avarice. And oh, what a character! 'When I was a slave at Khartoum,' the man said; or 'When I was a schoolmaster in Texas;' 'When I lived as a student up five floors at Heidelberg;' or 'When I ran away with Félix Pyat from the Versaillais;' till I began to think 'twas the Wandering Jew himself come to life again in Knightsbridge. At last, after coffee and cigarettes on a Cairo tray—with reminiscences of Paraguay—I emerged on the street, and saw erect before my eyes a great round Colosseum. I seemed somehow to recognize it. 'This is *not* Bagdad, then,' I said to myself, rubbing my eyes very hard—for I thought I must have been wafted some centuries off, on an enchanted carpet. Then I looked once more. Yes, sure enough, it *was* the Albert Hall. And *there* was the Memorial with its golden image. I rubbed my eyes a second time, and hailed a hansom—for there were hansoms about, and policemen, and babies. 'Thank Heaven!' I cried aloud; after all, this *is* London!"

II.

"It's a most regrettable incident!" Ivan Greet said solemnly.

The rest turned and looked. Ivan Greet was their poet. He was tall and thin, with strange, wistful eyes, somewhat furtive in tone, and a keen, sharp face, and lank, long hair that fell loose on his shoulders. It was a point with this hair to be always abnormally damp and moist, with a sort of unnatural and impalpable moisture. The little coterie of authors and artists to which Ivan belonged regarded him indeed with no small respect, as a great man *manqué*. Nature, they knew, had designed him for an immortal bard; circumstances had turned him into an occasional journalist. But to them, he represented Art for Art's sake. So when Ivan said solemnly, "It's a most regrettable incident," every eye in the room turned and stared at him in concert.

"Why so, me dear fellow?" Paddy O'Connor asked, open-eyed. "I call it magnificent!"

But Ivan Greet answered warmly, "Because it'll take him still further away than ever from his work in life, which you and I know is science and philosophy."

"And yer own grand epic?" Paddy suggested, with a smart smile, pouncing down like a hawk upon him.

Ivan Greet coloured—positively coloured—"blushed visibly to the naked eye," as Paddy observed afterwards, in recounting the incident to his familiar friend at the United Bohemians. But he stood his ground like a man and a poet for all that. "My own epic isn't written yet—probably never *will* be written," he answered, after a pause, with quiet firmness. "I give up to the *Daily Telephone* what was meant for mankind: I acknowledge it freely. Still, I'm sorry when I see any other good man—and most of all Charlie Powell—compelled to lose his own soul the same way I myself have done." He paused and looked round. "Boys," he said, addressing the table, "in these days, if any man has anything out of the common to say, he must be rich and his own master, or he won't be allowed to say it. If he's poor, he has first to earn his living; and to earn his living he's compelled to do work he doesn't want to do—work that stifles the things which burn and struggle for utterance within him. The editor is the man who rules the situation; and what the editor asks is good paying matter. Good paying matter Charlie can give him, of course: Charlie can give him, thank Heaven, whatever he asks for. But this hack-work will draw him further and further afield from the work in life for which God made him—the philosophical reconstitution of the world and the universe for the twentieth century. And that's why I say—and I say it again—a most regrettable incident!"

Charlie Powell set down his glass of champagne untasted. Ivan Greet was regarded by his narrow little circle of journalistic associates as something of a prophet; and his words, solemnly uttered, sobered Charlie for a while—recalled him with a bound to his better personality. "Ivan's right," he said slowly, nodding his head once or twice. "He's right, *as* usual. We're all of us wasting on weekly middles the talents God gave us for a higher purpose. We know it, every man Jack of us. But Heaven help us, I say, Ivan: for how can we help ourselves? We live by bread. We must eat bread first, or how can we write epics or philosophies afterwards? This age demands of us the sacrifice of our individualities. It will be better some day, perhaps, when Bellamy and William Morris have remodelled the world: life will be simpler, and bare living easier. For the present I resign myself to inevitable fate. I'll write middles for Morrison, and eat and drink; and I'll wait for my philosophy till I'm rich and bald, and have leisure to write it in my own hired house in Fitzjohn's Avenue."

Ivan Greet gazed across at him with a serious look in those furtive eyes. "That's all very well for *you*!" he cried half angrily, in a sudden flaring forth of long-suppressed emotion. "Philosophy can wait till a man's rich and bald; it gains by waiting; it's the better for maturity. But poetry!—ah, there, I hate to talk about it! Who can begin to set about his divine work when he's turned sixty and worn out by forty years of uncongenial leaders? The thing's preposterous. A poet must write when he's young and passionate, or not at all. He may go on writing in age, of course, as his blood grows cool, if he's kept up the habit, like Wordsworth and Tennyson: he may even let it lie by or rust for a time, like Milton or Goethe, and resume it later, if he throws himself meanwhile, heart and soul, into some other occupation that carries him away with it resistlessly for the moment; but spend half his life in degrading his style and debasing his genius by working for

hire at the beck and call of an editor—lose his birthright like that, and then turn at last with the bald head you speak about to pour forth at sixty his frigid lyrics—I tell you, Charlie, the thing's impossible! The poet must work, the poet must acquire his habits of thought and style and expression in the volcanic period; if he waits till he's crusted over and encysted with age, he may hammer out rhetoric, he may string fresh rhymes, but he'll never, never give us one line of real poetry."

III.

He spoke with fiery zeal. It was seldom Ivan Greet had an outbreak like this. For the most part he acquiesced, like all the rest of us, in the supreme dictatorship of Supply and Demand—those economic gods of the modern book-market. But now and again rebellious fits came over him, and he kicked against the pricks with all the angry impetuosity of a born poet. For the rest of that night he sat moody and silent. Black bile consumed him. Paddy O'Connor rose and sang with his usual verve the last new Irish comic song from the music-halls; Fred Mowbray, from Jamaica, told good stories in negro dialect with his wonted exuberance; Charley Powell bubbled over with spirits and epigrams. But Ivan Greet sat a little apart, with scarcely a smile on his wistful face; he sat and ruminated. He was angry at heart; the poetic temperament is a temperament of moods; and each mood, once roused, takes possession for the time of a man's whole nature. So Ivan remained angry, with a remorseful anger; he was ashamed of his own life, ashamed of falling short of his own cherished ideals. Yet how could he help himself? Man, as he truly said, must live by bread, though not by bread alone; a sufficiency of food is still a condition-precedent of artistic creation. You can't earn your livelihood nowadays by stringing together rhymes, string you never so deftly; and Ivan had nothing but his pen to earn it with. He had prostituted that pen to write harmless little essays on social subjects in the monthly magazines; his better nature recoiled with horror to-night from the thought of that hateful, that wicked profanation.

'Twas a noisy party. They broke up late. Fred Mowbray walked home along Piccadilly with Ivan. It was one of those dull, wet nights in the streets of London when everything glistens with a dreary reflection from the pallid gas-lamps. Pah! what weather! To Fred, West-Indian born, it was utterly hideous. He talked as they went along of the warmth, the sunshine, the breadth of space, the ease of living, in his native islands. What a contrast between those sloppy pavements, thick with yellow mud, and the sun-smitten hillsides, clad in changeless green, where the happy nigger lay basking and sprawling all day long on his back in the midst of his plaintain patches, while the bountiful sun did the hard work of life for him by ripening his coconuts and mellowing his bananas, unasked and untended!

Ivan Greet drank it in. As Fred spoke, an idea rose up vague and formless in the poet's soul. There were countries, then, where earth was still kindly, and human wants still few; where Nature, as in the Georgics, supplied even now the primary needs of man's life unbidden! Surely, in such a land as that a poet yet might live; tilling his own small plot and eating the fruits of his own slight toil, he might find leisure to mould without let or hindrance the thought that was in him into exquisite melody. The bare fancy fired him. A year or two spent in those delicious climates might enable a man to turn out what was truest and best in him. He might drink of the spring and be fed from the plaintain-patch, like those wiser negroes, but he would carry with him still all the inherited wealth of European culture, and speak like a Greek god under the tropic shade of Jamaican cotton-trees.

To the average ratepayer such a scheme would appear the veriest midsummer madness. But Ivan Greet was a poet. Now, a poet is a man who acts on impulse. And to Ivan the impulse itself was absolutely sacred. He paused on the slippery pavement, and faced his companion suddenly. "How much land does it take there for a man to live upon?" he asked, with hurried energy.

Fred Mowbray reflected. "Well, two acres at most, I should say, down in plantain and yam," he answered, "would support a family."

"And you can buy it?" Ivan went on, with surprising eagerness. "I mean, there's lots to be had—it's always in the market?"

"Lots to be had? Why, yes! No difficulty there! Half Jamaica's for sale, on the mountains especially. The island's under-peopled; our pop's half a million; it'd hold quite three. Land goes for a mere song; you can buy where you will, quite easily."

Ivan Greet's lip trembled with intense excitement. A vision of freedom floated dimly before him. Palms, tree-ferns, bamboos, waving clumps of tropic foliage; a hillside hut; dusky faces, red handkerchiefs; and leisure, leisure, leisure to do the work he liked in! Oh, soul, what a dream! You shall say what you will there! To Ivan that was religion—all the

religion he had perhaps; for his was, above all things, an artistic nature.

“How much would it cost, do you think?” he inquired, all tremulous.

And Fred answered airily, “Well, I fancy not more than a pound or two an acre.”

A pound or two an acre! Just a column in the *Globe*. The gates of Paradise stood open before him!

They walked on a hundred yards or so again in silence. Ivan Greet was turning over in his seething soul a strange scheme to free himself from Egyptian bondage. At last he asked once more, “How much would it cost me to go out by the steerage, if there is such a thing on the steamers to Jamaica?”

Fred Mowbray paused a moment. “Well, I should think,” he said at last, pursing his lips to look wise, “you ought to do it for about a tenner.”

Ivan’s mind was made up. Those words decided him. While his mother lived he had felt bound to support her; and the necessity for doing so had “kept him straight,” his friends said—or, as he himself would have phrased it, had tied him firmly down to unwilling servitude. But now he had nobody on earth save himself to consult, for Ethel had married well, and Stephen, dull lad, was comfortably ensconced in a City office. He went home all on fire with his new idea. That night he hardly slept; coconuts waved their long leaves in the breeze before him; dusky hands beckoned him with strange signs and enticements to come over to a land of sunlight and freedom. But he was practical too; he worked it all out in his head arithmetically. So much coming in from this or that magazine; so much cash in hand; so much *per contra* for petty debts at home; so much for outfit, passage money, purchase. With two acres of his own he could live like a lord on his yams and plantains. What sort of food-stuff, indeed, your yam might be he hadn’t, to say the truth, the very faintest conception. But who cares for such detail? It was freedom he wanted, not the flesh-pots of Egypt. And freedom he would have to work out his own nature.

IV.

There was commotion on the hillside at St. Thomas-in-the-Vale one brilliant blazing noontide a few weeks later. Clemmy burst upon the group that sat lounging on the ground outside the hut-door with most unwonted tidings. "You hear dem sell dat piece o' land nex' bit to Tammas?" she cried, all agog with excitement; "you hear dem sell it?"

Old Rachel looked up, yawning. "What de gal a-talking about?" she answered testily, for old Rachel was toothless. "Folk all know dat—him hear tell long ago. Sell dem two acre las' week, Peter say, to 'tranger down a' Kingston."

"Yes, an' de 'tranger come up," Clemmy burst out, hardly able to contain herself at so astounding an incident, "an' what you tink him is?" Him doan't nagur at all! Him reel buckra gentleman!"

A shrill whistle of surprise and subdued unbelief ran sharply round the little cluster of squatting negroes. "Him buckra?" Peter Foddergill repeated to himself, half incredulous. Peter was Clemmy's stepfather; for Clemmy was a brown girl, and old Rachel, her mother, was a full-blooded negress. Her paternity was lost in the dim past of the island.

"Yes, him buckra," Clemmy repeated in a very firm voice. "Him reel white buckra. Him come up to take de land, an' him gwine to lib dere."

"It doan't can true!" old Rachel cried, rousing herself. "It doan't can possible. Buckra gentleman doan't can come an' lib on two-acre plot alongside o' black nagur. Him gwine to sell it agin; dat what it is; or else him gwine to gib it to some nagur leeady. White buckra doan't can lib all alone in St. Tammas."

But Clemmy was positive. "No, no," she cried, unmoved, shaking her comely brown head, with its crimson bandanna—for she was a pretty girl of her sort was Clemmy. "Him gwine to lib dere. Him tell me so himself. Him gwine to build hut on it, an' plant it down in plantain. Him berry pretty gentleman, wit' long hair on him shoulder; him hab eyes quick and sharp all same like weasel; and when him smile, him look kinder nor anyting. But him say him come out from England for good becos him lub better to lib in Jamaica; an' him gwine to build him hut here, and lib same like nagur."

In a moment the little cluster of negro hovels was all a-buzz with conjecture, and hubbub, and wonderment. Only the small black babies were left sprawling in the dust, with the small black pigs, beside their mothers' doors, so that you could hardly tell at a glance which was which, as they basked there; all the rest of the population, men, women, and children, with that trifling exception, made a general stampede with one accord for the plot next to Tammas's. A buckra come to live on the hillside in their midst! A buckra going to build a little hut like their own! A buckra going to cultivate a two-acre plot with yam and plantain! They were aghast with surprise. It was wonderful, wonderful! For Jamaica negroes don't keep abreast of the Movement, and they didn't yet know the ways of our latter-day prophets.

As for Ivan Greet himself, he was fairly surprised in turn, as he stood there in his shirt-sleeves surveying his estate, at this sudden eruption of good-humoured barbarians. How they grinned and chattered! What teeth! what animation! He had bought his two acres with the eye of faith at Kingston from their lawful proprietor, knowing nothing but their place on the plan set before him. That morning he had come over by train to Spanish Town, and tramped through the wondrous defile of the Bog Walk to Linstead, and asked his way thence by devious bridle-paths to his own new property on the hillside at St. Thomas. Conveyancing in Jamaica is but an artless art; having acquired his plot by cash payment on the nail, Ivan was left to his own devices to identify and demarcate it. But Tammas's acre was marked on the map in conspicuous blue, and defined in real life by a most warlike boundary fence of prickly aloes; while a dozen friendly negroes, all amazement at the sight, were ready to assist him at once in finding and measuring off the adjacent piece duly outlined in red on the duplicate plan he had got with his title-deed.

It was a very nice plot, with a very fine view, in a very sweet site, on a very green hillside. But Ivan Greet, though young and strong with the wiry strength of the tall thin Cornishman, was weary and hot after a long morning's tramp under a tropical sun, and somewhat taken aback (as well he might be, indeed) at the strangeness and squalor of his new surroundings. He had pulled off his coat and laid it down upon the ground; and now he sat on it in his shirt-sleeves for

airiness and coolness. His heart sank for a moment as he gazed in dismay at the thick and spiky jungle of tropical scrub he would have to stub up before he could begin to plant his first yam or banana. That was a point, to say the truth, which had hardly entered into his calculations beforehand in England, he had figured to himself the pineapples and plantains as a going concern; the coconuts dropping down their ready-made crops; the breadfruits eternally ripe at all times and seasons. It was a shock to him to find mother-earth so encumbered with an alien growth; he must tickle her with a hoe ere she smiled with a harvest. Tickle her with a hoe indeed! It was a cutlass he would need to hack down that matted mass of bristling underbrush.

And how was he to live meanwhile? That was now the question. His money was all spent save a couple of pounds, for his estimates had erred, as is the way of estimates, rather on the side of deficiency than of excess; and he was now left half-stranded. But his doubts on this subject were quickly dispelled by the unexpected good-nature of his negro neighbours. As soon as those simple folk began to realize, by dint of question and answer, that the buckra meant actually to settle down in their midst, and live his life as they did, their kindliness and their offers of help knew no stint or moderation. The novelty of the idea fairly took them by storm. They chuckled and guffawed at it. A buckra from England —a gentleman in dress and accent and manner (for negroes know what's what, and can judge these things as well as you or I can) come of his own free-will to build a hut like their own, and live on the tilth of two acres of plantain! It was splendid! it was wonderful! They entered into the spirit of the thing with true negro zest. "Hey, massy, dat good now!" They would have done anything for Ivan—anything, that is to say, that involved no more than the average amount of negro exertion.

As for the buckra himself, thus finding himself suddenly in the midst of new friends, all eager to hear of his plans and intentions, he came out in his best colours under stress of their welcome, and showed himself for what he was—a great-hearted gentleman. Sympathy always begets sympathy. Ivan accepted their proffered services with a kindly smile of recognition and gratitude, which to those good-natured folk seemed most condescending and generous in a real live white man. The news spread like wild-fire. A buckra had come who loved the nagur. Before three hours were over every man in the hamlet had formed a high opinion of Mistah Greet's moral qualities. "Doan't nebber see buckra like a' dis one afore," old Peter murmured musingly to his cronies on the hillside. "Him doan't got no pride, 'cep de pride ob a gentleman. Him talk to you and me same as if he tink us buckra like him. Hey, massy, massa, him good man fe' true! Wonder what make him want to come lib at St. Tammas?"

V.

That very first day, before the green and gold of tropical sunset had faded into the solemn grey of twilight, Ivan Greet had decided on the site of his new hut, and begun to lay the foundations of a rude wooden shanty with the willing aid of his new black associates. Half the men of the community buckled to at the work, and all the women: for the women felt at once a novel glow of sympathy and unspoken compassion towards the unknown white man with the wistful eyes, who had come across the great sea to cast in his lot with theirs under the waving palm-trees. Now, your average negress can do as much hard labour as an English navvy; and as the men found the timber and the posts for the corners without money or price, it came to pass that by evening that day a fair framework for a wattled hut of true African pattern stood already four-square to all the airts of heaven in the middle frontage of Ivan Greet's two acres. But it was roofless, of course, and its walls were still unbuilt: nothing existed so far but the bare square outline. It had yet to receive its wattled sides, and to be covered in on top with a picturesque waterproof thatch of fan-palm. Still, it was a noble hut as huts went on the hillside. Ivan and his fellow-workers stood and gazed at it that evening as they struck work for the day with profound admiration for their own cunning handicraft.

And now came the question where Ivan was to sleep, and what to do for his supper. He had doubts in his own mind how all this could be managed. But Clemmy had none; Clemmy was the only brown girl in the little community, and as such, of course, she claimed and received an acknowledged precedence. "I shall have to sleep *somewhere*," Ivan murmured, somewhat ruefully, gazing round him at the little cluster of half-barbarous cottages. "But how—Heaven help me!"

And Clemmy, nodding her head with a wise little smile, made answer naturally—

"You gwine sleep at mo fader, sah; we got berry nice room. You doan't can go an' sleep wit' all dem common nagur dah."

"I'm not very rich, you know," Ivan interposed hastily, with something very like a half-conscious blush—though, to be sure, he was red enough already with his unwanted exertion in that sweltering atmosphere. "I'm not very rich, but I've a little still left, and I can afford to pay—well, whatever you think would be proper—for bed and board till I can get my own house up."

Clemmy waved him aside, morally speaking, with true negro dignity.

"We *invite* you, sah," she said proudly, like a lady in the land (which she was at St. Thomas). "When we ax gentleman to stop, we doan't want nuffin paid for him board and lodgin'. We offer you de hospitality of our house an' home till your own house finish. Christen people doan't can do no less dan dat, I hope, for de homeless 'tranger."

She spoke with such grave politeness, such unconsciousness of the underlying humour of the situation, that Ivan, with his quickly sympathetic poet's heart, raised his hat in return, as he answered with equal gravity, in the tone he might have used to a great lady in England—

"It's awfully kind of you. I appreciate your goodness. I shall accept with pleasure the hospitality you offer me."

Old Peter grinned delight from ear to ear. It was a feather in his cap thus to entertain in his hut the nobility and gentry. Though, to be sure, 'twas his right, as the acknowledged stepfather of the only undeniable brown girl in the whole community. For a brown girl, mark you, serves, to a certain extent, as a patent of gentility in the household she adorns; she is a living proof of the fact that the family to which she belongs has been in the habit of mixing with white society.

"You come along in, sah!" old Peter cried cheerily. "You tired wit' dat work. You doan't accustom' to it. White gentleman from England find de sun berry hot out heah in Jamaica. You take drop o' rum, sah, or you like coconut water?"

Ivan modestly preferred the less spirituous liquor to the wine of the country; so Clemmy, much flattered, and not a little fluttered, brought out a fresh green coconut, and sliced its top off before his eyes with one slash of the knife, and poured

the limpid juice (which came forth clear as crystal, not thick and milky) into a bowl-shaped calabash, which she offered with a graceful bow for their visitor's acceptance. Ivan seated himself on the ground just outside the hut as he saw the negroes do (for the air inside was hot, and close, and stifling), and took with real pleasure his first long pull at that delicious beverage. "Why, it's glorious!" he exclaimed, with unfeigned enthusiasm (for he was hot and thirsty), turning the empty calabash upside down before his entertainers' eyes, to let them see he fully appreciated their rustic attentions. "Quite different from the coconuts one gets in London! So fresh, and pure, and cool! It's almost worth coming out to Jamaica to taste it."

Clemmy smiled her delight. Was ever buckra so affable! Then she brought out a spoon—common pewter, or the like—which she wiped on her short skirt with unaffected simplicity, and handed it to him gravely. After that she gave him the coconut itself, with the soft jelly inside, which Ivan proceeded to scoop out, and eat before her eyes with evident relish. A semi-circle of admiring negroes and negresses stood round and looked on—"Hey, massy, massa! him da eat de coconut!"—as though the sight of a white man taking jelly with a spoon were some startling novelty. Now, Ivan was modest, as becomes a poet; but he managed to eat on, as little disconcerted by their attentions as possible; for he saw, if he was to live for some time among these people, how necessary it was from the very beginning to conciliate and please them.

The coconut finished, Clemmy produced boiled yam and a little salt fish; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish, and sat down by Ivan's side to their frugal supper. Being a brown girl, of course she could venture on such a liberty with an invited guest; old Peter and her mother, as two pure-blooded blacks, sat a little apart from their new friend and their daughter, not to seem too presumptuous. And still, as Ivan eat, the admiring chorus ran round the semi-circle, "Hey, massy, but dat fine! hey, massy, but him no proud! My king! you see him eat! You ebber know buckra do de same like a' dat afore?"

That night—his first night in the Jamaican mountains—Ivan slept in old Peter's hut. It was narrow and close, but he opened the wooden window as wide as possible to let in the fresh air, and lay with his head to it; he was young and strong, and had a fancy for roughing it. Next morning, early, he was up with his hosts, and afoot, for his work, while still the Southern sun hung low in the heavens. Fresh plantains and breadfruit, with a draught from a coconut, made up the bill of fare for his simple breakfast; Ivan thought them not bad, though a trifle unsatisfying. That day, and several days after, he passed on his plot; the men—great hulking blacks—gave him a helping hand by fits and starts at his job, though less eagerly than at first; the women, more faithful to their waif from oversea, worked on with a will at the wattling and thatching. As for Clemmy, she took a personal interest in the building from beginning to end; she regarded it with a vague sort of proprietary pride; she spoke of it as "de house" in the very phrase we all of us use ourselves about the place we're engaged in building or furnishing.

At last, after a fortnight, the hut was finished. The entire hillside turned out with great joy to celebrate its inauguration. They lighted a bonfire of the brushwood and scrub they had cleared off the little blank platform in front of the door; each man brought his own rum; Ivan spent some five of his hoarded shillings in supplying refreshments for his assembled neighbours. Such a housewarming had never before been known in St. Thomas. Till late that evening, little groups sat round the embers and baked yam and sweet potatoes in the hot wood-ashes. It was after midnight when the crowd, well-drunken, began to disperse. Then they all went away, one by one—except Clemmy.

Ivan looked at her inquiringly. She hung her head and hesitated.

"You tink buckra gentleman can lib alone in house widout serbant?" she asked, at last, in a very timid tone. "You doan't want housekeeper? Buekra must hab someone to cook for him an' care for him. You no want me to go. I tink I make good housekeeper."

"Of course," Ivan answered, with a gleam of comprehension, "I never thought about that. Why, just the right thing. How very kind of you! I can't cook for myself. I suppose I must have somebody to manage about boiling the yams and plantains."

VI.

So, for eight or ten months, Ivan Greet lived on in his wattled hut on that Jamaican hillside. He was dead to the world, and the world to him; he neither wrote to nor heard from any friend in England. In the local planters' phrase, he simply "went nigger." What little luggage he possessed he had left at Spanish Town station while he built his hut; as soon as he was fully installed in his own freehold house, and had got his supplies into working order, he and Clemmy started off for Spanish Town together, and brought it back, with much laughter, turn about, between them. Clemmy bore the big box on her head, whenever her turn came, as she was accustomed to carry a pail of water. It contained the small wardrobe he brought out from England, and more important still the pen, ink, and paper, with which he was to write—his immortal masterpiece.

Not that Ivan was in any hurry to begin his great task. Freedom and leisure were the keynotes of the situation. He would only set to work when the impulse came upon him. And just at first neither freedom nor leisure nor impulse was his. He had his ground to prepare, his yams and bananas to plant, his daily bread, or daily breadfruit, to procure, quite as truly as in England. Though, to be sure, Clemmy's friends were most generous of their store, with that unconscious communism of all primitive societies. They offered what they had, and offered it freely. And Ivan, being a poet, accepted their gifts more frankly by far than most others could have done: he would repay them all, he said, with a grateful glance in those furtive eyes of his, when his crop was ready. The negroes in turn liked him all the better for that; they were proud to be able to lend or give to the buckra from England. It raised them no little in their own esteem to find the white man so willing to chum with them.

Five or six weeks passed away after Ivan had taken possession of his hut before he attempted to turn his hand to any literary work. Meanwhile, he was busily occupied in stubbing and planting, with occasional help from his negro allies, and the constant aid of those ever-faithful negresses. Even after he had settled down to a quiet life under his own vine and fig-tree, some time went past before the spirit moved him to undertake composition. To say the truth, this *dolce far niente* world exactly suited him. Poets are lazy by nature—or, shall we put it, contemplative? When Ivan in England first dreamt of this strange scheme, he looked forward to it as a noble stroke for faith and freedom, a sacrifice of his own personal worldly comfort to the work in life that was set before him. And so, indeed, it was, from the point of view of the flesh-pots of Egypt. But flesh-pots, after all, don't fill so large a place in human existence as civilization fancies. When he found himself at last at ease on his hillside, he was surprised to discover how delightful, how poetical, how elevated is savagery. He sat all day long on the ground under the plantains, in shirt and trousers, with Clemmy by his side, or took a turn for exercise now and again in the cool of the evening through his sprouting yam plot. Palm-leaves whispered in the wind, mangoes glowed on the branches, pomegranates cracked and reddened, humming-birds darted swift in invisible flight from flower to flower of the crimson hibiscus. What need to hurry in such a land as this, where all the world at once eats its lotus in harmony?

After a while, however, inspiration came upon him. It came unsought. It hunted him up and constrained him. He brought forth pen and paper to the door of the hut, and, sitting there in the broad shade (Clemmy still at his side), began from time to time to jot down a sentence, a thought, a phrase, a single word, exactly as they came to him. He didn't work hard. To work hard, indeed, or, in other words, to spur his Pegasus beyond its natural pace, was to Ivan nothing short of sheer worldly infidelity. Literature is the realization of one's inmost personality in external form. He wanted freedom for that very purpose—that he might write the thing he would in the way that occurred to him. But slowly, none the less, a delicate picture grew up by degrees on the canvas before him. It wasn't a poem: the muse didn't move him just so to verse, and he would be true to the core to her. It was a little romance, a vignette of tropical life, a *Paul et Virginie* picture of the folk he saw then and there on the hillside. And, indeed, the subject exactly suited him. A Bohemian in the grain, the easy, Bohemian life of these children of nature in their wattled huts appealed to him vividly. For a month or so now he had lived in their midst as one of themselves; he had caught their very tone; he had learned to understand them, to know them, to sympathize with them. "I'll tell you what it is, sir," a dissipated young planter had said to him at Kingston during the few days he spent there, "people may say what they like about this blessed island; but what I say's this, it's a jolly good place to live in, all the same, where rum is cheap and morals is lax!" Not so did the poet's eye envisage that black Arcadia.

To Ivan it was an Eden of the Caribbean Seas; he loved it for its simplicity, its naturalness, its utter absence of guile or wile or self-consciousness. 'Twas a land indeed where the Queen's writ ran not; where the moral law bore but feeble sway; where men and women, as free as the wind, lived and loved in their own capricious, ancestral fashion. Its ethics were certainly not the ethics of that hateful Mayfair from which he had fled in search of freedom. But life was real, if life was not earnest; no sham was there, no veiled code of pretence; what all the world did all the world frankly and openly acknowledged. Censors and censoriousness were alike unknown. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes, and no man hindered him. In such an environment what space for idylls! Never, since Theocritus, had poet's eye beheld anything like it. In the midst of this *naïf* world he so thoroughly understood and so deeply appreciated Ivan Greet couldn't help but burst into song, or at least into romance of Arcadian pattern. Day by day he sat at the door of his hut, or strolled through the hamlet, with a nod and a smile for black Rose or black Robert, noting as he went their little words and ways, jotting mentally down on the tablets of his brain each striking phrase or tone or native pose or incident. So his idyll took shape of itself, he hardly knew how. It was he that held the pen; it was nature herself that dictated the plot, the dialogue, the episodes.

In the evenings, whenever the fancy seized him, he would sit and read aloud what he had written during the day to his companion Clemmy. There, in the balmy glow of tropical dust, with the sunset lighting up in pink or purple the page as he read it, and the breeze rustling soft through the golden leaves of the star-apple, that simple tale of a simple life was uttered and heard in its native world, to the fullest advantage. But Clemmy! As for Clemmy, she sat entranced; was there ever so grand a man on earth as Ivan? Never before had that brown girl known there was anything other in the way of books than the Bible, the hymn-book, and the A, B, C, in which she learned to read at the negro village-school down yonder at Linstead. And now, Ivan's tale awoke a new interest, a fresh delight within her. She understood it all the better in that it was a truthful tale of her own land and her own people. Time, place, surroundings, all were wholly familiar to her. It made her laugh a low laugh of surprise and pleasure to see how Ivan hit off with one striking phrase, one deft touch, one neat epithet, the people and things she had known and mixed with from her earliest childhood. In a word it was Clemmy's first glimpse into literature. Now, Clemmy was a brown girl, and clever at that. European blood of no mean strain flowed in her veins—the blood of an able English naval family. Till Ivan came, indeed, she had lived the life and thought the thoughts of the people around her. But her new companion wakened higher chords, unsuspected by herself, in her inner nature. She reveled in his idyll. Oh, how sweet they were, those evenings on the hillside, when Ivan took her into his confidence, as it were, and poured forth into her ear that dainty tale that would have fallen so flat on the dull ears of her companions! For Clemmy knew now she was better than the rest. She had always prided herself, of course, like every brown girl, on her ennobling mixture of European blood; though she never knew quite why. This book revealed it to her. She realized now how inheritance had given her something that was wanting to the black girls, her playmates, in the village. She and Ivan were one, in one half their natures.

VII.

Ten months passed away. Working by fits and starts, as the mood came upon him, Ivan Greet completed and repolished his masterpiece. It was but a little thing, yet he knew it was a masterpiece. Every word and line in it pleased and satisfied him. And when *he* was satisfied, he knew he had reckoned with his hardest critic. He had only to send it home to England now, and get it published. For the rest, he cared little. Let men read it or not, let them praise or blame, he had done a piece of work at last that was worthy of him.

And Clemmy admired it more than words could fathom. Though she spoke her own uncouth dialect only, she could understand and appreciate all that Ivan had written—for Ivan had written it. Those ten months of daily intercourse with her poet in all moods had been to Clemmy a liberal education. Even her English improved, though that was a small matter; but her point of view widened and expanded unspeakably. It was the first time she had ever been brought into contact with a higher nature. And Ivan was so kind, so generous, so sympathetic. In one word, he treated her as he would treat a lady. Accustomed as she was only to the coarsely good-natured blacks of her hamlet, Clemmy found an English gentleman a wonderfully lovable and delightful companion. She knew, of course, he didn't *love* her—that would be asking too much; but he was tender and gentle to her, as his poet's heart would have made him be to any other woman under like conditions. Sometimes the girls in the village would ask her in confidence, "You tink him lub you, Clemmy? You tink de buckra lub you?"

And Clemmy, looking coy, and holding her head on one side, would answer, in the peculiar Jamaican sing-song, "Him mind on him book. Him doan't tink ob dem ting. Him mind too full. Him doan't tink to lub me."

But Clemmy loved *him*—deeply, devotedly. When a woman of the lower races loves a man of the higher, she clings to him with the fidelity of a dog to its master. Clemmy would have died for Ivan Greet; her whole life was now bound up in her Englishman. His masterpiece was to her something even more divine than to Ivan himself; she knew by heart whole pages and passages of it.

In this delicious idyllic dream—a dream of young love satisfied (for Clemmy didn't ask such impossibilities from fate as that Ivan should love her as she loved him)—those happy months sped away all too fast, till Ivan's work was finished. On the morning of the day before he meant to take it in to the post at Spanish Town, and send it off, registered, to his friends in England, he walked out carelessly bare-footed—so negro-like had he become—among the deep dew on the grass in front of his shanty. Clemmy caught sight of him from the door, and shook her head gravely.

"If you was my pickney, Ivan," she said, with true African freedom, "I tell you what I do: I smack you for dat. You gwine to take de fever!"

Ivan, laughed, and waved his hand.

"Oh, no fear," he cried lightly. "I'm a Jamaican born by now. I've taken to the life as a duck takes to the water. Besides, it's quite warm, Clemmy. This dew won't hurt me."

Clemmy thought no more of it at the time, though she went in at once, and brought out his shoes and socks, and made him put them on with much womanly chiding. But that night, after supper, when she took his hand in hers, as was her wont of an evening, she drew back in surprise.

"Why, Ivan," she cried, all cold with terror, "your hand too hot! You done got de fever!"

"Well, I don't feel quite the thing," Ivan admitted grudgingly. "I've chills down my back and throbbing pain in my head. I think I'll turn in and try some quinine, Clemmy."

Clemmy's heart sank at once. She put him to bed on the rough sack in the hut that served for a mattress, and sent Peter post haste down to Linstead for the doctor. It was hours before he came; he was dining with a friend at a "penn" on the mountains; he wouldn't hurry himself for the "white trash" who had "gone nigger" on the hillside. Meanwhile Clemmy

sat watching, all inward horror, by Ivan's bedside. Long before the doctor arrived her Englishman was delirious. Tropical diseases run their course with appalling rapidity. By the time the doctor came he looked at the patient with a careless eye. All the world round about had heard of the white man who "lived with the niggers," and despised him accordingly.

"Yellow fever," he said calmly, in a very cold voice. "He can't be moved, and he can't be nursed here. A pretty piggery this for a white man to die in!"

Clemmy clasped her hands hard.

"To die in!" she echoed aloud. "To die in! To die in!"

"Well, he's not likely to *live*, is he?" the doctor answered, with a sharp little laugh. "But we'll do what we can. He must be nursed day and night, and kept cool and well-aired, and have arrowroot and brandy every half-hour, awake or asleep —a couple of teaspoonfuls. I suppose you can get some other girl to help you sit up with him?"

To help her sit up with him! Clemmy shuddered at the thought. She would have sat up with him herself every night for a century. What was sleep or rest to her when Ivan was in danger! For the next three days she never moved from his side except to make fresh arrowroot by the fire outside the hut, or to bring back a calabash of clear water from the rivulet. But how could nursing avail? The white man's constitution was already broken down by the hardships and bad food, nay, even by the very idleness of the past ten months; and that hut was, indeed, no fit place to tend him in. The disease ran its course with all its fatal swiftness. From the very first night Ivan never for a moment recovered consciousness. On the second he was worse. On the third, with the suddenness of that treacherous climate, a tropical thunderstorm burst over them unawares. It chilled the air fast. Before it had rained itself out with peal upon peal and flash upon flash, in quick succession, Ivan Greet had turned on his side and died, and Clemmy sat alone in the hut with a corpse, and her unborn baby.

VIII.

For a week or two the world was a blank to Clemmy. She knew only one thing—that Ivan had left her two sacred legacies. To print his book, to bring up his child—those were now the tasks in life set before her. From the very first moment she regarded the manuscript of his masterpiece with the profoundest reverence. Even before six stalwart negroes in their Sunday clothes came to bury her dead poet on the slope of the hillside under a murmuring clump of feathery bamboos, she had taken out that precious bundle of papers from Ivan's box in the corner, which served as sofa in the bare little shanty, and had wrapped it up tenderly in his big silk handkerchief, and replaced it with care, and locked up the box again, and put the key, tied by a string, round her neck on her own brown bosom. And when Ivan was gone for ever, and her tears were dry enough, she went to that box every night and morning, and unrolled the handkerchief reverently, and took out the unprinted book, and read it here and there—with pride and joy and sorrow—and folded it up again and replaced it in its ark till another evening. She knew nothing of books—till this one; it had never even struck her they were the outcome of human brains and hands: but she knew it was her business in life now to publish it. Ivan Greet was gone, and, but for those two legacies he left behind him, she would have wished to die—she would have died, as negroes can, by merely wishing it. But now she couldn't. She must live for his child; she must live for his idyll. It was a duty laid upon her. She knew not how—but somehow, some time, she must get that book printed.

Six weeks later, her baby was born. As it lay on her lap, a dear, little, soft, round, creamy-brown girl—hardly brown at all, indeed, but a delicate quadroon, with deep chestnut hair and European features—she loved it in her heart for its father's sake chiefly. It was Ivan's child, made in Ivan's likeness. They christened it Vanna; 'twas the nearest feminine form she could devise to Ivan. But even the baby—her baby, his baby—seemed hardly more alive to Clemmy herself than the manuscript that lay wrapped with scented herbs and leaves in the box in the corner. For that was all Ivan's, and it spoke to her still with his authentic voice—his own very words, his tone, his utterance. Many a time she took it out, as baby lay asleep, with tender eyelids closed, on the bed where Ivan had died (for sanitary science and knowledge of the germ theory haven't spread much as yet to St. Thomas-in-the-Vale) and read it aloud in her own sing-song way, and laughed and cried over it, and thought to herself, time and again, "*He* wrote all that! How wonderful! how beautiful!"

As soon as ever she was well enough, after baby came, Clemmy took that sacred manuscript, reverently folded still in its soft silk handkerchief, among its fragrant herbs, and with baby at her breast, trudged by herself along the dusty road, some twenty-five miles, all the way into Kingston. It was a long, hot walk, and she was weak and ill; but Ivan's book must be printed, let it cost her what it might; she would work herself to death, but she must manage to print it. She knew nothing of his family, his friends in England; she knew nothing of publishing, or of the utter futility of getting the type set at a Kingston printing-office; she only knew this—that Ivan wrote that book, and that, before he died, he meant to get it printed. After a weary trudge, buoyed only by vague hopes of fulfilling Ivan's last wish, she reached the baking streets of the grim white city. To her that squalid seaport seemed a very big and bustling town. Wandering there by herself, alone and afraid, down its unwonted thoroughfares, full of black men and white, all hurrying on their own errands, and all equally strange to her, she came at last to Henderson's, the printer's. With a very timid air, she mustered up courage to enter the shop, and unfolded with trembling fingers her sacred burden. The printer stared hard at her. "Not your own, I suppose?" he said, turning it over with a curious eye, like any common manuscript, and evidently amused at the bare idea of a book by an up-country brown girl.

And Clemmy, half aghast that any man should touch that holy relic so lightly, made answer very low, "No, not me own. Me fren's. Him dead, and I want to know how much you ax to print him."

The man ran his eye through it, and calculated roughly. "On paper like this," he said, after jotting down a few figures, "five hundred copies would stand you in something like five-and-thirty pounds, exclusive of binding."

Five-and-thirty pounds! Clemmy drew a long breath. It was appalling, impossible. "You haven't got so much about you, I suppose!" the printer went on, with a laugh. Clemmy's eyes filled with tears. Five-and-thirty pounds! And a brown girl! Was it likely?

"I doan't want it print jes' yet," she answered, with an effort, hardly keeping back her tears. "I only come to ax—walk in

all de way from St. Tammas-in-de-Vale, so make me tired. Bime-by, p'raps, I print him—when I done got de money. I doan't got it jes' yet—but I'm gwine home to get it."

And home she went, heavy-hearted; home she went to get it. Five-and-thirty pounds, but she meant to earn it. Tramp, tramp, tramp, she trudged along to St. Thomas. Between the pestilential lagoons on the road to Spanish Town she thought it all out. Before she reached the outskirts, with her baby at her breast, she had already matured her plan of campaign for the future. Come what might, she must make enough money to print Ivan Greet's masterpiece. She was only a brown girl, but she was still in possession of the two-acre plot; and possession is always nine points of the law, in Jamaica as in England. Indeed, with her simple West Indian notions of proprietorship and inheritance, Clemmy never doubted for a moment they were really her own, as much as if she were Ivan's lawful widow. Nobody had yet come to disturb or evict her; nobody had the right, in Jamaica at least: for Ivan Greet's heirs, executors, and assigns slumbered at peace, five thousand miles away, oversea in England. So, as Clemmy tramped on, along the dusty high road, and between the malarious swamps, and through the grey streets of dismantled Spanish Town, and up the grateful coolness of the Rio Cobre ravine to her home in St. Thomas, she said to herself and to his baby at her breast a thousand times over how she would toil and moil, and save and scrape, and earn money to print his last work at last as he meant it to be printed.

IX.

And she worked with a will. She didn't know it was a heroic resolve on her part; she only knew she had got to do it. She planted yam and coffee and tobacco. Coffee and tobacco need higher cultivation than the more thriftless class of negroes usually care to bestow upon them; but Clemmy was a brown girl, and she worked as became the descendant of so many strenuous white ancestors. She could live herself on the yams and breadfruit; when her crop was ripe she could sell the bananas and coffee and tobacco, and hoard up the money she got in a belt round her waist, for she never could trust all that precious coin away from her own person.

From the day of her return, she worked hard with a will; and on market-days she trudged down with her basket on her head and her baby in her arms to sell her surplus produce in Linstead market. Every quattie she earned she tied up tight in the girdle round her waist. When the quatties reached eight she exchanged them for a shilling—one shilling more towards the thirty-five pounds it would cost her to print Ivan Greet's last idyll! The people in St. Thomas were kind to Clemmy. "Him doan't nebber get ober de buckra deat'," they said. "Him take it berry to heart. Him lub him fe' true, dat gal wit' de buckra!" So they helped her still, as they had helped Ivan in his lifetime. Many a one gave her an hour's work at her plot when the drought threatened badly, or aided her to get in her yams and sweet potatoes before the rainy season.

Clemmy was an Old Connexion Baptist. They all belonged to the Old Connexion in the Linstead district. Your negro is strong on doctrinal theology, and he likes the practical sense of sins visibly washed away by total immersion. It gives him a comfortable feeling of efficient regeneration which no mere infant sprinkling could possibly emulate. One morning, on the hillside, as Clemmy stood in her plot by a graceful clump of waving bamboos, hacking down with her cutlass the weeds that encumbered her precious coffee-bushes—the bushes that were to print Ivan Greet's last manuscript—of a sudden the minister rode by on his mountain pony—sleek, smooth-faced, oleaginous, the very picture and embodiment of the well-fed, negro-paid, up-country missionary. He halted on the path—a mere ledge of bridle-track—as he passed where she stood bending down at her labour.

"Hey, Clemmy," the minister cried in his half-negro tone—for, though an Englishman born, he had lived among his flock on the mountains so long that he had caught at last its very voice and accent—"they tell me this good-for-nothing white man's dead who lived in the hut here. Perhaps it was better so! Instead of trying to raise and improve your people, he had sunk himself to their lowest level. So you've got his hut now! And what are you doing, child, with the coffee and tobacco?"

Clemmy's face burned hot; this was sheer desecration! The flush almost showed through her dusky brown skin, so intense was her indignant wrath at hearing her dead Ivan described by that sleek fat creature as a "good-for-nothing white man." But she answered back bravely, "Him good friend to me fe' true, sah. I doan't know nuffin' 'bout what make him came heah, but I nebber see buckra treat nagur anywhere same way like he treat dem. An' I lubbed him true. And I growin' dem crop dah to prin' de book him gone left behind him."

The minister reflected. This was sheer contumacy. "But the land's not yours," he said testily. "It belongs to the man's relations—his heirs or his creditors. Unless of course," he added, after a pause, just to make things sure, "he left it by will to you."

"No, sah, him doant make no will," Clemmy answered, trembling, "an' him doan't leave it to anybody. But I lib on de land while Ivan lib, an' I doan't gwine to quit it for no one on eart' now him dead and buried."

"You were his housekeeper, I think," the minister went on, musing.

And Clemmy, adopting that usual euphemism of the country where such relations are habitual, made answer, hanging her head, "Yes, sah, I was him housekeeper."

"What was his name?" the minister asked, taking out a small note-book.

"Dem call him Ivan Greet," Clemmy answered incautiously.

“Ivan Greet,” the minister repeated, stroking his smooth double chin and reflecting inwardly. “Ivan Greet! Ivan Greet! No doubt a Russian!... Well, Clemmy, you must remember, this land’s not yours; and if only we can find out where Ivan Greet belonged, and write to his relations—which is, of course, our plain duty—you’ll have to give it up and go back to your father.” He shook his pony’s reins. “Get up, Duchess! ” he cried calmly. “Good morning, Clemmy; good morning.”

“Marnin’, sah,” Clemmy answered, with a vague foreboding, her heart standing still with chilly fear within her.

But, as soon as the minister’s ample back was turned, she laid down her cutlass, took up little Vanna from the ground beside her, pressed the child to her breast, and rushed with passionate tears to the box in the hut that contained, in many folds, *his* precious manuscript. She took the key from her neck, and unlocked it eagerly. Then she brought forth the handkerchief, unwound it with care, and stared hard through her tears at that sacred title-page. His relations indeed! Who was nearer him than herself? Who had ever so much right to till that plot of land as she who was the guardian of his two dying legacies? She would use it to feed his child, and to print his last book. She could kill his own folk if they came there to take it from her!

X.

For weeks and weeks after that, Clemmy worked on in fear and trembling. Would Ivan's friends come out to claim that precious plot from her—the plot that was to publish his immortal masterpiece? For she knew it was immortal; had not Ivan himself, while he read it, explained so much to her? But slowly she plucked up heart, as week after week passed away undisturbed, and no interloper came to destroy her happiness. She began to believe the minister had said rather more than he meant; he never had written at all to Ivan's folk in England. Month after month slipped away; and the mango season came, and the tobacco leaves were picked in good condition and sold, and the coffee-berries ripened. Negro friends passed her hut, nodding kindly salute. "You makin' plenty money, Clemmy? You sell de leaf dear? Hey, but de pickney look well? Him farder proud now if him can see de pickney."

At last the rainy season was over, and the rivers were full. Mosquito larvæ swarmed and wriggled by thousands in the shallow lagoons; and when they got their wings, the sea-breeze drove them up in countless numbers to the deep basin of St. Thomas, a lake-like expanse in the central range ringed round by a continuous amphitheatre of very high mountains. They were a terrible plague, those mosquitoes; they drove poor little Vanna half wild with pain and terror. A dozen times in the night the tender little creature woke crying from their bites. Clemmy stretched a veil over her face, but that made little difference. Those wretched mosquitoes bit right through the veil. Clemmy didn't know where to turn to protect her baby.

"Him buckra baby; dat what de matter," old Rachel suggested gravely. "Nagur baby doan't feel de 'skeeter bite same like o' buckra. Nagur folk and 'skeeter belong all o' same country. But buckra doan't hab no 'skeeter in England. Missy Queen doan't 'low dem. Now dis 'ere chile buckra—tree part buckra an' one part nagur. Dat what for make him so much feel de 'skeeter."

"But what can I do for 'top him, marra?" Clemmy inquired despondently.

"It only one way," old Rachel answered, with a very sage face, "Burn smudge before de door. Dat drive away 'skeeter."

Now a smudge is a fresh-cut turf of aromatic peaty marsh vegetation; you light it before the hut, where it smoulders slowly during the day and evening, and the smoke keeps the mosquitoes from entering the place while the door stands open. Clemmy tried the smudge next day, and found it most efficacious. For two or three nights little Vanna slept peacefully. Old Rachel nodded her head.

"Keep him burning," she advised, "till de water dry up, an' de worm, dem kill, and it doan't no more 'skeeter."

Clemmy followed her mother's advice to the letter in this matter. Each morning when she went out to work on her plot, with little Vanna laid tenderly in her one shawl on the ground close by, she lighted the smudge and kept it smouldering all day, renewing it now and again as it burnt out through the evening. On Thursday, as was her wont, she went down with her goods to Linstead to market. On her head she carried her basket of "bread-kind"—that is to say, yam, and the other farinacious roots or fruits which are to the negro what wheaten bread is to the European peasant. She walked along erect, with the free, swinging gait peculiar to her countrywomen, untrammelled by stays and the other abominations of civilized costume; little Vanna on her arm crowed and gurgled merrily. 'Twas a broiling hot day, but Clemmy's heart was lighter. Was there ever such a treasure as that fair little Vanna, whitest of quadroons?—and she was saving up fast for the second of those thirty-five precious pounds towards printing Ivan's manuscript!

In the market-place at Linstead she sat all day among the chattering negresses, who chaffered for quatties, with white teeth displayed, or higgled over the price of breadfruit and plantain. 'Tis a pretty scene, one of these tropical markets, with its short-kirtled black girls, bare-legged and bare-footed, in their bright cotton gowns and their crimson bandannas. Before them stand baskets of golden mangoes and purple star-apples; oranges lie piled in little pyramids on the ground; green shaddocks and great slices of pink-fleshed water-melon tempt the thirsty passer-by with their juicy lusciousness. Over all rises the constant din of shrill African voices; 'tis a perfect saturnalia of hubbub and noise, instinct with bright colour and alive with merry faces.

So Clemmy sat there all day, enjoying herself after her fashion, in this weekly gathering of all the society known to her. For the market-place is the popular negro substitute for the At Homes and Assembly Rooms of more civilized communities. Vanna crowed with delight to see the little black babies in their mother's arms, and the pretty red tomatoes scattered around loose among the gleaming oranges. It was late when Clemmy rose to go home to her hamlet. She trudged along, gaily enough, with her laughing companions; more than a year had passed now since Ivan's death, and at times, in the joy of more money earned for him, she could half forget her great grief for Ivan. The sun was setting as she reached her own plot. For a moment her heart came up into her mouth. Then she started with a cry. She gazed before her in blank horror. The hut had disappeared! In its place stood a mass of still smouldering ashes.

In one second she understood the full magnitude of her loss, and how it had all happened. With a woman's quickness she pictured it to herself by pure instinct. The smudge had set fire to the clumps of dry grass by the door of the hut; the grass had lighted up the thin wattle and palm thatch; and once set afire, on that sweltering day, her home had burnt down to the ground like tinder.

Two or three big negroes stood gazing in blank silence at the little heap of ruins—or rather of ash, for all was now consumed to a fine white powder. Clemmy rushed at them headlong with a wild cry of suspense. "You save de box?" she faltered out in her agony. "You save de box? You here when it burning?"

"Nobody doan't see till him all in a blaze," one young negro replied in a surly voice, as negroes use in a moment of disaster; "an' den, when we see, we doan't able to do nuffin."

Clemmy laid down her child. "De box, de box!" she cried in a frenzied voice, digging down with tremulous hands into the smoking ashes. The square form of the hut was still rudely preserved by the pile of white powder, and she knew in a moment in which corner to look for it. But she dug like a mad creature. Soon all was uncovered. The calcined remains of Ivan's clothes were there, and a few charred fragments of what seemed like paper. And that was all. The precious manuscript itself was utterly destroyed. Ivan Greets one masterpiece was lost for ever.

XI.

Clemmy crouched on the ground with her arms round her knees. She sat there cowering. She was too appalled for tears; her eyes were dry, but her heart was breaking.

For a minute or two she crouched motionless in deathly silence. Even the negroes held their peace. Instinctively they divined the full depth of her misery.

After a while she rose again, and took Vanna on her lap. The child cried for food, and Clemmy opened her bosom. Then she sat there long beside the ruins of her hut. Negresses crowded round and tried in vain to comfort her. How could they understand her loss? They didn't know what it meant: for in that moment of anguish Clemmy felt herself a white woman. They spoke to her of the hut. The hut! What to her were ten thousand palaces! If you had given her the King's House at Spanish Town that night it would have been all the same. Not the roof over her head, but Ivan Greet's manuscript.

She rocked herself up and down as she cowered on the ground, and moaned inarticulately. The rocking and moaning lulled Vanna to sleep. His child was now all she had left to live for. For hours she crouched on the bare ground, never uttering a word: the negresses sat round, and watched her intently. Now and again old Rachel begged her to come home to her stepfather's hut; but Clemmy couldn't stir a step from those sacred ashes. It grew dark and chilly, for Ivan Greet's plot stood high on the mountain. One by one the negresses dropped off to their huts; Clemmy sat there still, with her naked feet buried deep in the hot ash, and Ivan Greet's baby clasped close to her bosom.

At last with tropical unexpectedness, a great flash of lightning blazed forth, all at once, and showed the wide basin and the mountains round as distinct as daylight. Instantly and simultaneously a terrible clap of thunder bellowed aloud in their ears. Then the rain-cloud burst. It came down in a single sheet with equatorial violence.

Old Rachel and the few remaining negresses fled home. They seized Clemmy's arm, and tried to drag her; but Clemmy sat dogged and refused to accompany them. Then they started and left her. All night long the storm raged, and the thunder roared awesomely. Great flashes lighted up swaying stems of coconuts and bent clumps of bamboo; huge palms snapped short like reeds before the wind; loud peals rent the sky with their ceaseless artillery. And all night long, in spite of storm and wind, the rain pelted down in one unending flood, as though it poured by great leaks from some heavenly reservoir.

Torrents tore down the hills; many huts were swept away; streams roared and raved; devastation marked their track; 'twas a carnival of ruin, a memorable hurricane. Hail rattled at times; all was black as pitch, save when the lightning showed everything more vivid than daylight. But Clemmy sat on, hot at heart with her agony.

When morning dawned the terrified negroes creeping forth from their shanties, found her still on her plot, crouching close over *his* child, but stiff and stark and cold and lifeless. Her bare feet had dug deep in the ashes of Ivan's hut, now washed by the rain to a sodden remnant. Little Vanna just breathed in her dead mother's arms. Old Rachel took her.

And that's why the world has never heard more of Ivan Greet's masterpiece.

KAREN.

A CANADIAN ROMANCE.

I.

It was a Mennonite clearing on the Upper Ottawa. All round, a stunted pine-forest covered the low granite hills—slim stems scarcely able to root themselves obliquely in the rare clefts of that barren ice-worn rock. In the foreground, a deep lake slumbered calm between high crags, the peaty soil that surrounded its margin starred thick underfoot with great white cups of the creeping American calla-lily. A group of log-huts occupied a nook by the shore; behind them, some rude corn-plots; then the unbroken forest. It was a beautiful scene, but very sombre and desolate; most romantic to sketch, most gloomy to live in. Above all in winter!

To this lonely spot, miles away from the world, a small colony of Russian religious fanatics had drifted, to take refuge from the despotism of the Orthodox Church. They are a simple, toilsome, God-fearing lot, these bronze-faced and bearded Mennonites, very austere and ascetic—a sort of mild-eyed, melancholy Russian edition of the Quakers or the Moravians; and they flock to Canada, partly because the country is congenially cold and forest-clad, but partly also because the life and the mode of labour there exactly suit them. In those unbroken wilds, far from the din of cities, they fell timber, and plant Indian corn, and speak with tongues, and worship God in their own quaint fashion, no man hindering. The winter is hard on the Upper Ottawa, but the iron grip of the Czar is many degrees harder. It sinks often below the zero of human endurance.

In the spring, however, even the Mennonite fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love. Now it was a glorious spring day, of the true American sort, when the maples were just clothing themselves in the first wan green of early youth, and the blood-root was opening its pale petals timidly to the warm Canadian sun. A young man and a girl stood on the trail through the wood that led from Nijni Ouralsk to Robinson's Portage, the next raw settlement. They were Russians by birth, but their speech was English; the common-school system of the country had given them that. The young man was tall, and lissome, and blue-eyed, and handsome; the girl was shrinking and delicate, like an Indian pipe-plant.

"To-morrow we shall know all, Karen," the young man was saying hopefully, as he held her hand in his, though she half strove to disengage it, like one who tries hard to do her duty, in spite of inclination. "To-morrow we shall know all; and, perhaps, we shall know the best—the very best—my darling."

The girl looked back at him doubtfully, with a very wistful look. Tears swam in her dim eyes. She was very much in love with him. "And perhaps we shall know the worst," she said, with a sigh of resignation. "It is as the Lord wills it, Ivan."

Ivan raised that little white hand, all trembling, to his lips. Karen was always a pessimist—though he hadn't such a fine word at his tongue's tip to express it with. He kissed the struggling little hand with profound devotion. These Russians are intense in whatever they do.

"And if it comes to the worst," he said, in very tentative tones, "if it goes against us, you will obey them, Karen?"

The girl drew back as if shocked.

"Oh, Ivan!" she cried, in alarm. "You would not surely rebel! It is His will, Ivan!"

The young man passed a puzzled hand over his fair brown beard.

"It is His will, I suppose," he said slowly, "since the Elders tell us so. But it's very mysterious."

Karen gazed deep into his true eyes—those clear, honest blue eyes of his, and answered with a burst—

"I sometimes think He won't put this burden upon our two poor hearts, Ivan. I have prayed so hard. I think you *must* draw me."

"I think so, too," Ivan answered, with the hopeful optimism of early manhood. "For I also have prayed. Prayed earnestly,

fervently."

"Ah, yes, but perhaps your prayers were too carnal," the girl exclaimed in an anxious voice, with a faint shade of terror passing slowly across her face. "It may be ill for our souls that your petition should be answered. And Peter Verstoff has prayed too. I know he loves me."

"But not as *I* love you, Karen," Ivan cried, all eager, with a red glow on his face. "No, my child, not as I love you! Oh yes, I know he follows you about, and sighs after you, and dreams of you. How could he help it, indeed? There's no girl in all Ouralsk a man could love but you." He plucked two white snow-blossoms, with a tiny sprig of tamarack for feathery verdure, and placed them reverently in the opening of her simple bodice. "Peter Verstoff! " he exclaimed once more, with profound contempt in his tone. "I tell you, Karen, he hasn't got it in him. Peter doesn't know how to love as I do!"

"I'm afraid not," Karen answered demurely, true to her austere faith. "I'm afraid you make an idol of one who is, after all, but of the earth, earthy. For your soul's sake, I may be denied you. It is as He wills, Ivan."

"If you *are* denied me——" Ivan began, in a wild outburst of hot youth. But Karen clapped her small hand on his mouth disapprovingly.

"Oh, don't say it, dear Ivan," she cried, with a persuasive look. "For both our sakes, don't say it! It may be counted against us, to-morrow. Let us be wise. Let us be humble. I'll go home and pray. Much may be done by praying."

The young man leant forward, and pursed his lips. Even Mennonites are human. "Just this once, Karen! This once!" he said, oh so softly and wistfully.

Karen drew back, all tremulous. "But, Ivan," she cried, aghast, "is it right? Is it allowed us? Should we do so, unbetrothed? Suppose, to-morrow, I was to belong to Peter?"

The young man smiled, and held her sweet face between his two hands, unabashed. No such scruples checked him. He answered never a word, but stooped down and kissed her. A thrill ran through Karen's blood at that delicious touch. "Let Peter guard his own!" the young man said lightly. "While I can I will take one." He was a terrible reprobate!

Karen tore herself away from him with a sudden rush of remorse. "This is sinful," she cried. "This is sinful!—sinful! How could I ever allow you! Oh, Ivan, let us go home and pray harder than ever. Temptation besets us. Perhaps to-morrow all this will be imputed for sin to us."

II.

Next morning, in the little log shanty that served for chapel to the settlement, the Elders of the Church assembled in due form to carry out a solemn religious ceremony. Seven young men and five young women stood in line facing one another to right and left before the table that filled the place of an altar. Four of the young women were hard-faced stern-featured Russian Canadians, strong of build and bronzed by the sun, born drudges of the log-huts, with no souls above their slavery. The fifth was Karen. All the young men looked eagerly at her with longing in their eyes, but most of all Ivan Utovitch and Peter Verstoff.

The Elders, all burly men with bushy Russian beards, ranged themselves in a row beside the plain deal table. No smile seemed possible for those hard cold lips. The fanatical asceticism of the Muscovite mind, that speaks out on every page of Tolstoi's or Dostoieffsky's, had soured their faces. One had but to look at them to see at a glance that love, as we Westerns understand it, was to them a mere worldly toy, whose name was never so much as to be spoken among them. The will of the flesh was an enemy to be held resolutely at arm's length, with all their force, for ever. The notion of marrying a woman merely because you loved her was a notion, to them, wafted straight from the devil.

The presiding Elder looked round, and held up his hand for silence. A deep hush fell at once upon the little assembly of believers. All felt only too profoundly the full importance of the moment. For the future of ten lives—nay, more, of ten thousand unborn souls—trembled that day in the balance.

"Friends," the presiding Elder began, in fluent vulgar Russian, "we of the Lord's folk have met in chapel this morning for the performance of a very solemn function. For the third time since we came here, to this lodge in the wilderness, our young men and maidens, by the Church's desire, are to be joined together in holy wedlock. The Lord has prospered seven sons of our flock so that in due time they have become separate house-masters; and to these five of our daughters shall five of the seven be duly united. Not for the lust of the flesh or the pride of the eyes are they to be joined together, but for the godly upbringing of the lambs of the fold, in time to come, to fulfil our places. Therefore, according to the holy custom of the Church, to us Elders delivered, we do not permit that each man should choose for himself a wife, after the fashion of the world, according to his own carnal desires and longings. We bring our young men and maidens here bodily before the Lord, certain that He will choose for them of His Divine goodness more wisely than either they or we can. We will pray for His guidance on the lots that we cast; then we will proceed to assign husband to wife, in full confidence of right, after the wont of the Saints, under the heavenly benediction."

The rude farmers and hard-worked housewifes in the body of the chapel fell on their knees in concert as he spoke these words. So did the Elders who stood by the table. The young men and women, whose fate was at issue, ranged still in their appointed place, bowing their heads silently.

The Elder prayed a long extempore prayer. The congregation listened, and answered "Amen." Then the Elder said once more, "Our maidens will give praise." The five girls, raising their heads, sang a favourite Russian hymn to a simple melody. Four of them sang like born drudges of the log-huts. But Karen's voice, though untrained, was like the voice of the nightingale. When they had finished, the Elder placed seven slips of paper, with ostentatious openness, in a bag on his right, and five slips in a similar bag on his left. "Come up, Vera Rustoff!" he cried, singling a child with his eye from the congregation below. "For out of the mouths of babes and sucklings has He ordained praise. Come up, and be our minister."

The child stood forward, half reluctant, and took her place with much trembling at the table beside him. She was a rosy, small girl, with fair hair, like one of Fra Angelico's angels.

"Draw a paper!" the Elder said. The child drew one, and handed it to him.

"Nicolas Koscialkovski!" the Elder read out, unfolding it. "Draw another, Vera Rustoff." And the child drew one. There was a deep pause of suspense. It was the name of a woman.

“Leopolda Sianojenska!” the Elder went on, still droning in the same business-like voice as before. “Nicolas and Leopolda, it is the Lord’s will. Stand forward, you two, and join hands for betrothal.”

Without a moment’s hesitation, without a word of reluctance, though with a painful twitching that he could not quite subdue at the corners of his mouth, one of the stalwart young men stepped forward, and accepted his destiny. At the same moment the least pleasing of the four born drudges stepped forward in turn, and took her future husband’s hand in hers with a certain stolid and honest uncomplaining indifference. It was the Lord’s doing. Who were they that they should repine at it?

“Draw yet a third,” the Elder went on, as those two clasped hands and stood aside from among the candidates. And the child, dipping her hand into the bag, drew one.

“Fedor Noross,” the old man read out, without one tinge of emotion. It was his own son’s name. He gazed at the lad blankly. Even *he* was interested now. What wife would be vouchsafed him?

“Again!”

And the child drew. Another deep pause.

“Sophie Alexandrovitch,” the Elder said, with a slight gasp. And silently a second pair stepped forward to the sacrifice.

The child drew again, this time unbidden. The Elder read out a name. “Peter Verstoff,” he said. Peter Verstoff’s face was rigid with suspense. The child’s hand plunged deep into the answering bag. “Karen Selistoff,” the Elder read out, unfolding the paper. A sigh of relief burst from many lips at once. Peter Verstoff’s face flushed crimson in a second. Karen’s grew white as the flowers at her bosom—the flowers that Ivan had placed there yesterday—two milky snow-blossoms backed with a spray of tamarack. There was a moment’s lull. Everybody felt the great event of the day was finished.

“Peter and Karen,” the presiding Elder said, breaking the solemn silence, “it is the Lord’s will. Come forward, you two, and join hands for betrothal.”

Peter Verstoff stepped forward—tremulous, ruddy, exultant. The Lord had indeed heard his earnest petition! The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much! He had won her! He had won her!

Karen hung back for a moment—pale, reluctant, uncertain. A terrible conflict was going on unseen in her breast. It was love against duty—duty as she conceived it. Nay, more, against conscience, religion, faith, authority, the express will of Heaven there openly revealed to her.

Ivan hung upon her movements with mute eagerness for a second. Would she obey or rebel? Oh, great heavens, what a sacrilege!

Then slowly, reluctantly, obeying, as she thought, the higher law, Karen stepped forward, and held out her hand, trembling. “It is the Lord’s will!” she said faintly, while two tears stole down her cheek. Her heart belied her words. But Religion had conquered.

At that second Ivan broke forth from the rank with an ashen face and quivering lips, held his hand up in warning, as if to forbid the betrothal. The revulsion of the moment had revealed many truths to him, hidden away till then behind the thick cloak of authority in the fanatical faith he had learnt from childhood to reverence. “It is *not* the Lord’s will!” he cried, with desperate energy, and with the wild force of helplessness, though the words half choked him. “It is *not* the Lord’s will! This thing is of Satan! Your lottery is a disgrace! We have guides with us far purer than any casting of paper lots—the voice of Nature, the voice of instinct, the voice of our own hearts, the voice of all that is most divine and most sacred within us. Let us listen to those, not to meaningless oracles. If we will not hear them, no lot will help us. This is heathenish divination, I tell you, not Christian worship. Is it for us to neglect the plain promptings of the good feelings that God has given us in favour of such chances as the tossing of names in a bag? Karen, Karen, hold forth your hand. It isn’t his. It is mine. I claim it! I claim it!”

Karen gazed up in his face, all aghast, with a thrill of wondering admiration. It was wrong of him; oh, how wrong! But still, she loved and admired him for it. Her cheek flushed red again. She clasped her hands hard for a moment over her heaving breast. Then she looked from Peter to Ivan, and from Ivan to Peter. Which of the two must she obey? Love or Religion?

But the presiding Elder, with the infinite quiet dignity of the Russian peasant, waving her aside to her place, took no notice of the brawler. "Karen Selistoff," he said austerely, lifting her right hand in his, "the Lord has spoken. Disobey not His will for the will of the flesh, lest ill betide you. Resist the devil and he will flee from you! Take no heed of this apostate! Give your hand as the Lord ordains to Peter Verstoff."

The colour fled suddenly from Karen's face once more. She dared not turn her eyes for one glance at Ivan. The voice of the Elder was the voice of the Church. What woman could disregard it? With a deadly effort, she stretched forth that white marble hand. It was cold as ice. In a wild burst of delight, Peter Verstoff clasped it, for, in the eyes of the Church, they two were now finally married.

Ivan waited for no more; he could stand it no longer. Before the very faces of those harsh ascetics, he flung himself fiercely upon Karen's neck; he kissed her on her lips; he strained her hard to his bosom. "Good-bye," he said, in English, with hot tears on his cheek. "Good-bye, my darling! This is no place for me now; I will go to Toronto."

And, shaking off the dust of the Mennonite faith from his feet, as it were, he strode forth alone, leaving the scandalized Church to rejoice at its leisure that it was so easily rid of so unworthy a member.

But Karen fell fainting into the arms of her betrothed husband.

III.

A great deal may happen in five years; above all, in a new country.

During the next five years, Ivan lived much; so much, indeed, that his previous existence seemed separated from him by the whole length of a lifetime. New ideas, new worlds crowded thick upon his brain. He had left the narrow age of the Mennonites behind for ever, and had emerged all at once into the full blaze and glare of the Nineteenth Century.

The Nineteenth Century laid hold upon him with a firm hand. In Toronto, that busy, bustling, modern Toronto, the quick young Russian, with his fresh intelligence all unwarped and undimmed by the blunting influence of custom, expanded and developed as none but a Russian could expand and develop—and even he only under the stimulus of the vivid and quickening Western environment. Ivan's advance was rapid and steady. He began upon the railway, where he picked up with ease the first rudiments of mechanics; then he took a place in turn in an electric lighting establishment; after that, he soon set to work to make inventions of his own; and before three years were fairly over he had gone on so far that he perfected and patented an improved electro-motor on his special pattern. Edison spoke with respect of "this new man Utovitch," and Erastus Wiman, the Canadian millionaire, helped to float the shares in all the young inventor's new schemes and companies.

During those five rapid years in Toronto, however, Ivan heard little or nothing in any way of Karen. She was married to Peter Verstoff—so much he knew from stray letters from the village; but soon after her wedding, the couple had left Nijni Ouralsk in search of work, and had "gone forth into the world," as his simple correspondents phrased it in their native Russian. But the world is big even in this age of steam. Where Karen might be Ivan hadn't the least idea. Nevertheless, for her sake he still held himself always disengaged and unmarried. Perhaps the Muscovite leaven in part wrought that resolve within him. Your Russian is always ascetic in heart. If he couldn't have Karen he would die a bachelor.

Well, at the end of five years, the prospects of the electro-motor had improved so immensely that the directors of his company urged Ivan with great warmth to undertake a journey to England and France in order to push his patents with European capitalists. Ivan consented, nothing loth, and took his passage from New York, to see for himself, for the first time in his life, the wonders and glories of old-world civilization.

It is an event in a man's life, his maiden trip to Europe.

As Ivan lounged on the deck of the *Atlas*, the first day out from Sandy Hook, in a long wicker chair, a fellow-passenger, well dressed in a handsome fur-lined overcoat, attracted his attention, leaning against the bulwarks. Something in the man's figure and build seemed strangely familiar to him. Surely, Ivan thought, he had seen that tall shape and that well-set head before. In Toronto? or where? The passenger turned round as he gazed, and their eyes met with a start. Ivan turned pale with surprise. It was Peter Verstoff!

Could Karen be on board? Was he once more to see her?

Too full of that one absorbing thought to remember all the incidents of their last meeting, Ivan Utovitch stepped forward with outstretched hand to greet his old friend of the Upper Ottawa clearing. But Verstoff—naturally enough, no doubt—seemed somewhat less eager than Ivan himself to renew their lapsed acquaintance. He held out his hand coldly; it was sleek and well-gloved. Ivan surveyed the man as he did so from head to foot. A great change had come over the simple Russian backwoodsman—as great as the change in Ivan himself, possibly. His very dress, his manner—his whole mien proclaimed it. Verstoff was rich, well-clad, cosmopolitanized, European.

"How's this?" Ivan cried in surprise. "You've got on, like myself! You seem to have done well for yourself in this world's goods. How are you? And Karen?"

"Thanks," his fellow-countryman answered in a more frigid tone, with just a trifle of affectation, "Madame Verstoff is well. Many things have happened to us since I had the pleasure of seeing you last at Nijni Ouralsk. We don't live in

America now. I'm on my way back to Europe."

"And your wife?" Ivan cried, unable to repress his eagerness.

"No, not my wife," Verstoff answered, still stiffly, looking hard at his fur cuffs. "Her professional engagements didn't allow her, in fact, to accompany me on this trip across the water. I came over alone, to make arrangements beforehand for the American tour she proposes to undertake next winter."

"Karen's not on the stage, surely?" Ivan exclaimed, bewildered. His beautiful, pure Karen? Such a profanation as that would indeed be too terrible.

"No, not on the stage, unfortunately," her husband echoed with a faint tone of half-suppressed regret. "Madame Verstoff's profound religious convictions won't allow her to sing in opera, I grieve to say—at least, not as yet. A year or two more may, of course, do wonders. She has broadened: she has broadened. Indeed, we've all of us broadened a good deal, no doubt, Utovitch, since we left Nijni Ouralsk. Oh, yes, we've heard of your discoveries and your rise in life. You must have heard of my wife's, too, though perhaps you didn't recognize her under the Italianized name. She sings only in oratorio, and as Madame Catarina Veristo."

"What! not the great soprano?" Ivan exclaimed, astonished. For her fame had reached even to the Toronto workshops.

Peter Verstoff nodded. "Yes, she had always a good voice," he admitted with marital pride. "We thought so at Ouralsk."

"She sang like an angel!" Ivan put in enthusiastically.

"Exactly," Verstoff assented. "So all the critics say. Well, when we moved to New York, we learned for the first time its commercial value, and found it had only to be cultivated aright to make it one of the most paying concerns in all America. So I made up my mind at once to exploit the discovery. I borrowed money for the speculation from admiring friends, took Madame Verstoff for three years to Brussels and Munich, gave her the best musical training that Europe could afford—and at the end of that time launched her on the world fully found—launched her off hand in Vienna. She took the stage by storm; ever since, it has been one long triumphal progress. Ever since she's been coining money—that's the only word I know for it; just coining money!"

Ivan gazed at him aghast. And *this* was the simple, toilsome, God-fearing Peter Verstoff, who, as Karen had said, wrestled hard in prayer for her! Ah, well—ah, well, it is an age of evolution! Truly, as he himself so tersely expressed it, Verstoff had broadened a good deal since leaving Nijni Ouralsk. But some natures, Ivan thought to himself, with a curl of the lip, are just like rivers—as they grow broad, they grow shallow, most painfully shallow. The deceitfulness of riches had been too much for Verstoff. Better one day of that old Mennonite earnestness than a hundred years of this Mammonite self-complacency. The old-fashioned backwoodsman in his woollen shirt and toque was worth fifty of the new-fangled, fine-spoken, cosmopolitan gentleman in his fur-lined coat and his neatly buttoned gaiters!

And Karen? Had she "broadened," too, in the same way, Ivan wondered? Had she developed into a worldly-wise professional singer? Had she taken kindly to that sea on which Verstoff had "launched" her? And even as he thought so, Ivan hated himself in his heart for so much as thinking it.

IV.

After this first recognition, Verstoff seemed for the next few days rather to avoid Ivan Utovitch. At that, Ivan, after his kind, was somewhat naïvely surprised. For he was still in many ways the unsophisticated son of the soil. Too loyal himself to dream of rousing jealousy, he hardly knew how easily jealousy can be aroused in the minds of others.

So for the first three days, Verstoff lounged about on deck in his fur-lined coat, taking little notice in any way of Ivan Utovitch.

On the third night out, they were off the Banks of Newfoundland. You know the Banks of old, no doubt—cold, calm, and foggy. Ivan sat on deck, wrapped in his warmest coat. Verstoff stood a little way off by the companion-ladder, looking over into the water, and smoking a very fragrant cigar. It was a dark, raw night. The sea was smooth, with a long, glassy swell, but the engines had slowed, and were going half-speed. Impossible from the bridge to see as far as the bow for fog and darkness.

But Ivan, who was quite new to sea-going ways, watched the sailors languidly, as they threw something overboard, attached to a cord, and then hauled it up quick again in monotonous succession. What it all meant, he hadn't the slightest idea: not soundings certainly. For at each rapid haul, they called out a number afresh, in a sing-song voice: "Thirty-seven; thirty-six; thirty-four and a half; thirty-four; thirty-three and three-quarters!"

Ivan listened unconcerned. It was nothing to him. On so calm a night the bare notion of danger seemed absolutely inconceivable.

At last the sailors hauled, and gave an audible "Whew!" "How much?" the officer cried who superintended the work. And the quarter-master answered, in a hushed tone of expectation, "Just above thirty-two! They can't be far off now, sir!"

At the word, Verstoff lounged over with a rather pale face. "That's bad," he said quietly, "very bad indeed; they must stop her, or back her!"

"Why so?" Ivan asked innocently. "What's wrong? What are they trying to find out with this thing there, anyhow?"

"Trying?" Verstoff echoed. "Why, don't you know? The temperature of the water, to be sure! It's almost on freezing. You can guess what that means. We must be close upon icebergs!"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when a terrible jar thrilled loud and fierce through the hull from stem to stern. The whole framework staggered. Three bells rang sharp, with a quick note, in the engine-room below. The great ship stopped dead short, and seemed to reel in terror. She had struck against something huge, that shattered her bows like glass. Then Ivan was aware that tons and tons of ice lay tossed in vast fragments over the forward deck. All was tremor and gurgle. Black water was rushing in as he looked towards the forecastle. They had come into collision, end on, with an iceberg!

In one second, the deck was all alive with struggling terrified humanity. "Lower the boats!" was the word; and then Ivan understood that the ship was sinking. Already the wild water was pouring resistlessly into the hold, by vast floods at a time, through the shattered bows. It was a case of total wreck. The *Atlas* was filling with ominous speed. One chance alone remained—to lower the boats as fast as human hands could lower them.

And still the hubbub thickened, and still the turmoil increased. Passengers came rushing up, half clad, from their state-rooms. From every ladder and gangway they surged towards the quarter-deck. The water stood ankle-deep in the passages by this time. Sailors loosed the boats from the davits with practised haste, and hurried in the women and children with rough, kindly hands. Officers lent their aid, and ordered the procedure with the coolness of their craft in any great emergency. The captain on the bridge gave his orders above the cries and shouts of the terrified passengers in a loud voice of command, and his men obeyed like so many passionless automata. The electric lights had gone out. Tho

fires were smothered. All was noise and darkness.

In such a juncture as this, the old Ouralsk training told with both Ivan and Verstoff. With one accord they both turned, unbidden, to aid the sailors in lowering the boats and marshalling the passengers. No thought of self occurred to either. It was duty or death.

But when the last boat was lowered, and the last passenger provided with a vacant seat, the captain, descending, turned round to the crew and the few men who had helped them. “Save yourselves, boys!” he cried in a loud voice, coming down to the quarter-deck. “Every man for his own neck! Take the belts and life-rafts! Never mind the ship. She won’t last thirty seconds.”

And, indeed, the water by that time had almost reached the deck, and the ship was sinking before their eyes in a great swirling eddy.

In this last extremity, Ivan seized one of the deck-seats, which doubled back into a life-raft. He said not a word; but Verstoff helped him to unbend it. Between them, they pushed it off, and jumped on together. A sailor, hard by, in charge of the provisioning, flung them a small barrel of biscuits and a keg of fresh water. The biscuits reached their mark, but the keg fell short. As they looked, the *Altas* swang round and careened, then she disappeared with a great gurgle into the black abyss of the ocean. They were alone, on the raft, in the midst of the Atlantic.

V.

Three days later, two worn and haggard men floated hopelessly by themselves, with a waterlogged raft, on a boundless ocean. By good luck it had remained calm, and they had been caught by the Gulf Stream, which carried them eastward in its flow; but what words can tell, even so, the agony and suspense of those three nights on the open Atlantic? The wind was rising now, and the little lopping waves that it drove into small crests began to break over the raft, wetting the two men to the skin, already cold and wretched enough as they were in their thirst and misery.

For three whole days and nights they had not tasted water.

A thought rose up, as they sat there in despair, into Ivan's mind. The Russian peasant nature doesn't cling to life with the same unreasoning persistence as our more sophisticated English temperament. The raft was weighed down by two people's weight. With one only it would ride higher, and the waves would take a longer time before they could sweep completely over it. He looked at Verstoff, who sat there, the picture of despondency, hugging his knees with his hands. In a few brief words, Ivan explained his idea. "Peter," he added, calling him once more by the name he had always used, till then, from childhood, "you're married; I'm single; you are Karen's husband; it is right that I should go. If ever you reach land safe, tell her I leapt from the raft to save you."

He stood up, and made ready to plunge headlong into the sea. In an agony of remorse, Verstoff rose, like one possessed, and laid his hand with a firm grip on his old friend's arm. "No, Ivan," he said, holding him back by main force. "Not you! Not you! If either of us goes, it must be *I* who do it. Anywhere but here, I wouldn't have confessed it to you for a world. But here, face to face as I stand with death, I will tell you the truth. I have always known it. Ever since that day at Nijni Ouralsk, those words you said to her have been audible in my ears. You were right. I was wrong. I should never have taken her. You said, 'Hold back your hand, Karen! It's mine! I claim it!' And ever since then I've known you spoke the truth. The Elders of the Church gave me her body that day. But they couldn't give me her heart. It was yours! It was yours! Live on, and take it."

As he spoke, with the wild energy of self-renunciation spurring him on beyond himself, Verstoff flung off the fur coat he was wearing, and stood, in act to leap, with one hand aloft to heaven. It was Ivan's turn now to hold him back and restrain him. "Stop, Peter," he cried, laying his hand upon that stalwart arm, with a fierce force of restraint. "You have no right to do this. You are her's. You must live for her. I may do as I like. My life is my own. But your life is Karen's. You *must* not get rid of it."

Verstoff turned to him piteously. He was pale as death. How the real man came out at this juncture, from beneath the mere veneer of cosmopolitan polish! "Ivan," he cried aloud, in the agony of his self-abasement; "she would be happier with you. She was your's from the beginning. I sinned in taking her—the Church misled me. Let me die to atone for it. Go home and comfort her."

Ivan glanced around with a bitter smile at the gathering waves. "There's small hope for either of us to go home," he answered, grasping his friend's hand hard. "But, Peter, I could never allow you to do that. Sit down again, and let us both face it out together. After all, it would be more terrible still than it is, if either of us were to stand quite alone by himself in the midst of the ocean."

For even as he spoke, a second thought, yet more terrible, rose spontaneous in his soul. How could either of them ever face Karen again, with this message on his lips—that he had allowed the other to die for her sake on the mid-Atlantic?

VI.

They sat that day out, for the most part in the silence of despair. From hour to hour the waves rose higher, and washed over the raft time and again, in ever-increasing force, drenching them through and through to the skin; but the two men still crouched side by side in speechless misery, peering, in vain, with weary eyes for a speck of white sail on that monotonous horizon.

Towards late afternoon, Verstoff began to grow delirious with thirst. The fever increased upon him. He babbled feebly of thousands of francs and exacting managers. His talk was of Karen. Ivan held him in his arms, lest the waves should wash his failing body overboard. And now a still more ghastly terror disturbed Ivan Utovitch's mind. Suppose Peter were to die, there in his very arms, and he himself were to be picked up alive by some passing ship afterwards! How could he ever face Verstoff's widow with that tale upon his lips? Would Karen believe he had done his best in that final crisis to save her husband's life?

That internal torment was worse to him now than all the terrors of the sea, or of hunger and thirst. It almost decided him to jump off as he first intended. But as things now stood, even that resort was impossible: do what he would, he couldn't desert Verstoff.

By sunset, for the first time, rain began to fall, at first in stray drops, then steadily, heavily. At sea rain means fresh water. With a burst of relief Ivan held out his handkerchief, caught the precious drops in its folds as they fell, and wrung them out eagerly into Verstoff's mouth. Only after he had done so five or six times running did Ivan venture to pour a little at last upon his own parched tongue. For Karen's sake, though he died himself, he must do his very best to save her husband.

It rained without intermission for some hours at a stretch, and they were able to quench their thirst as much as they liked before the shower ended. Meanwhile, darkness came on. A fourth night of horrors opened out before them. Verstoff couldn't hold out much longer; cold and exposure were killing him.

And if he died, Ivan thought, he would feel himself almost a suspected murderer.

About eleven o'clock, as Ivan judged, a faint gleam showed dim upon the water to westward. He shaded his eyes, and looked out through the rain towards the dark horizon. Slowly the faint gleam divided itself up into two vague red lights, and then by degrees drew nearer and nearer. Yes, yes; it drew nearer! It was coming towards them! It was a liner under full steam! No doubt about that. Would she pass close enough to see them? Could they manage in that thick gloom to attract her attention?

Twenty minutes of intense anxiety followed. Ivan saw the great ship shaping her course straight towards them. His heart beat high. Surely, surely she would pass alongside! She would be well within hailing distance. He could wave his handkerchief above his head and signal to the look-out! He could——

And then, all at once, with an awful revulsion of still blacker despair, a new horror burst upon him. She was coming near indeed, but too near! She was bearing down upon them in a straight line. Her great sharp bows, and her gigantic shearwater were ploughing the sea with mad haste to devour them. That knife-like edge—keen, powerful, irresistible—would cut in two their frail raft without ever feeling or knowing it. He held his breath, and looked up. Great heavens, the huge monster was close upon them. There was nothing for it now but to die together. He shut his eyes tight, and clasped Verstoff spasmodically.

Next instant, he was aware, by a sudden bound of the raft, that the wash from the steamer's bows had caught them on its crest and cast them out of her course; they were tossing in the trough of the wave by the great creature's broadside.

With one last despairing effort, Ivan staggered to his feet, and waved his handkerchief wildly over his head towards the passing steamer. He shouted with all his voice. He cried aloud through the gloom. He gesticulated and shrieked like a madman.

There was another faint pause. Then a voice spoke out clear from the liner's forecastle. "Raft on the starboard bow!" it cried aloud, in sharp tones. "Two men on the raft! More survivors from the *Atlas*!"

It was the steamer's look-out man. He had seen them! He had seen them!

In a second, a search-light was turned hastily over the waters where they tossed helpless in the trough. The giant ship slackened speed; she slowed; she was at a standstill. A boat!—a boat! Something danced on the waves. They were saved! They were saved! Men were coming to rescue them!

Ten minutes later Ivan and Verstoff lay half dead on the deck of a Cunard liner. Passengers offered them food and drink, while the doctor leaned over them with his flask of brandy.

It was almost too late; Verstoff was seriously ill with cold and exposure. He reached Liverpool just alive, and that was all. Ivan watched by his berth till they got him into port. Then the ship's doctor took him on to rooms in London, where Karen was hastily summoned by telegram from Berlin to meet him.

At such a moment of suspense Ivan couldn't bear to see her.

Before a week was out, a pencilled note arrived at his hotel. He tore it open and read it. There were just four lines, with no beginning at all. "My poor husband died, conscious, at five o'clock this morning. He knew every one to the last. He told me of all your kindness. So many—many thanks. It was good of you.—KAREN."

When men have faced deadly peril together, all else is forgotten. Ivan burst into tears as he read that letter. His thoughts went back to the old days when they had roamed side by side as boys in the woods of the Upper Ottawa, and when Karen as yet was nothing to either of them.

VII.

Even so, for six months, Ivan never sought to meet his old love in her solitary widowhood. So many things prevented him. He was busy with the affairs of his company in London and Paris. Karen might have developed and changed so much meanwhile! She might not wish to see him. Above all, respect for Karen's own feelings restrained him so soon after her loss from communicating with her.

At the end of six months, however, an announcement appeared in the *Figaro* one day that Madame Catarina Veristo, the famous soprano, so long in retirement, would appear next evening at a concert in Vienna for the first time since the death of her husband.

It was at a *café* on the Boulevards that Ivan read those words. He didn't hesitate one second. In half an hour his portmanteau was packed, and he was on his way to the Gare de l'Est—destination, Vienna.

The concert-room where Karen—his Karen—was to sing was densely packed and crowded with an enthusiastic audience. Ivan secured a seat with difficulty halfway down the hall. He waited anxiously while the minor stars performed their parts. What would Karen be like now? How would success have changed her? Would the great singer care at all for her old Canadian lover? For he hadn't seen her, of course, since she was a girl of eighteen in the dark pine forest at Nijni Ouralsk on the Upper Ottawa.

At last, a movement, a stir, a craning of necks in eager expectation. One great storm of applause rent the air on every side as a pale, frail girl, in a simple black dress, stepped timidly on to the platform, and glided forward towards the footlights. A thrill ran through Ivan's frame at the familiar figure. It was Karen indeed—no one else—just the same sweet, old Karen. She was shrinking and delicate, like an Indian pipe-plant.

She advanced to the front, graceful, modest, tremulous, with a roll of music clasped nervously in her tender little hand, and began to pour forth her spontaneous song—so it seemed—in exquisitely pathetic modulation. Ivan thrilled once more at the sound. It was the same beautiful voice he had known in the log hut at Nijni Ouralsk—trained and strengthened, to be sure, by five years of study and assiduous practice, but natural and rich and daintily sweet-toned as of yore. Ivan looked at her and loved. The beauty of holiness shone in every feature. A great renunciation had but heightened the tender charm of that exquisite face. Sorrow had made Karen more lovely and more lovable than ever.

For many minutes she sang as though the room before her were absolutely empty, and she were pouring forth her full heart in unpremeditated music. Then, in the midst of the song, at a very critical moment, her eye chanced to wander down the central aisle, and caught Ivan's fixed on her face with wrapt and eager attention. At that sight she started; her mouth twitched nervously. She knew him at a glance, though he sat there, not in the old familiar Canadian toque and jersey, but in the black evening dress of a European gentleman. For one second she faltered, as though she would fail in her piece. A delicate flush broke like dawn over her cheek; she seemed to forgot her song; she seemed to forgot her audience. The whole hall sat hushed at this unexpected pause in the diva's performance. But it was only for a second. Next instant, Karen had recovered herself, and with her eyes fixed firmly on that one swimming spot in the central aisle—with Ivan for its focus—was pouring forth her whole soul in one wild, spasmodic burst of swan-like music. The audience hung entranced. It was marvellous, marvellous! Never before, said the Vienna papers next day, had Madame Veristo conquered her native timidity with such utter inspiration, such entire self-forgetfulness. She seemed lost in her song: one would say she existed in her voice alone. All else was as though it were not. She was wrapped up in her art as in a cloak of invisibility.

At the end of her song, the applause burst forth still more rapturous than ever. Loud cries of "Bis!—Bis!" rent the air like thunder. But Karen heeded them not. Walking backwards, as in a maze, she bowed herself off the platform. Two minutes later, an attendant made his way up through the crowded alley with a note for Ivan. He tore it open hastily. It was short—but long enough. "Come and see me after the concert in my room here.—KAREN."

He went. She received him at the door of her robing-room with one white little hand stretched out, tenderly, to meet him.

“At last!” she said, trembling. He closed the door and looked hard at her. She stood before him there in her simple little black grenadine evening dress—the selfsame Karen he had known in those far woods by the Ottawa. His heart was full. He took her two hands in his and held them in silence for a moment. Then he clasped her to his breast: “My Karen!—my Karen!”

“Ivan!” Karen cried simply, “you were right—I was wrong. The Church taught me ill. You would have taught me better. We have truer guides, as you said, within us, than the casting of a lot. I chose badly that day when you called out, ‘Your hand is mine!’ Oh, Ivan, I have paid for it. Forgive me!—forgive me!”

“Then you have loved me always!” Ivan cried, half beside himself with delight.

Karen answered not a word. She only slipped her white hand into the bosom of her bodice, and drew out something. Ivan had noticed that she kept pressing one palm there hard as she sang, when her eyes caught his, and that she went on pressing through the rest of the song, as if to keep that wild heart of hers from bounding and bursting. She handed the thing across to him with a beautiful smile. He took it reverently. It was a tiny square packet, containing something that evidently had lain long next her own pure heart. “Undo it,” she murmured, rosy-red with a certain tremulous joy. And Ivan undid it.

It contained just a couple of dried Canadian flowers—two faded white snow-blossoms, and a feathery spray of tamarack.

They were the flowers he had given her the day before her marriage. She had worn them ever since next her bosom, no doubt. Then he thought of the words Peter Verstoff spoke on the raft that night: “Her hand is mine; but her heart—her heart is always yours, Ivan.”

PALLINGHURST BARROW.

I.

Rudolph Reeve sat by himself on the Old Long Barrow on Pallinghurst Common. It was a September evening, and the sun was setting. The west was all aglow with a mysterious red light, very strange and lurid—a light that reflected itself in glowing purple on the dark brown heather and the dying bracken. Rudolph Reeve was a journalist and a man of science; but he had a poet's soul for all that, in spite of his avocations, neither of which is usually thought to tend towards the spontaneous development of a poetic temperament. He sat there long, watching the livid hues that incarnadined the sky—redder and fiercer than anything he ever remembered to have seen since the famous year of the Krakatoa sunsets—though he knew it was getting late, and he ought to have gone back long since to the manor-house to dress for dinner. Mrs. Bouverie-Barton, his hostess, the famous Woman's Rights woman, was always such a stickler for punctuality and dispatch, and all the other unfeminine virtues! But, in spite of Mrs. Bouverie-Barton, Rudolph Reeve sat on. There was something about that sunset and the lights on the bracken—something weird and unearthly—that positively fascinated him.

The view over the common, which stands high and exposed, a veritable waste of heath and gorse, is strikingly wide and expansive. Pallinghurst Ring, or the "Old Long Barrow," a well-known landmark, familiar by that name from time immemorial to all the country-side, crowns its actual summit, and commands from its top the surrounding hills far into the shadowy heart of Hampshire. On its terraced slope Rudolph sat and gazed out, with all the artistic pleasure of a poet or a painter (for he was a little of both) in the exquisite flush of the dying reflections from the dying sun upon the dying heather. He sat and wondered to himself why death is always so much more beautiful, so much more poetical, so much calmer than life—and why you invariably enjoy things so very much better when you know you ought to be dressing for dinner.

He was just going to rise, however, dreading the lasting wrath of Mrs. Bouverie-Barton, when of a sudden a very weird yet definite feeling caused him for one moment to pause and hesitate. Why he felt it he knew not; but even as he sat there on the grassy tumulus, covered close with short sward of subterranean clover, that curious, cunning plant that buries its own seeds by automatic action, he was aware, through no external sense, but by pure internal consciousness, of something or other living and moving within the barrow. He shut his eyes and listened. No; fancy, pure fancy! Not a sound broke the stillness of early evening, save the drone of insects—those dying insects, now beginning to fail fast before the first chill breath of approaching autumn. Rudolph opened his eyes again and looked down on the ground. In the little boggy hollow by his feet innumerable plants of sundew spread their murderous rosettes of sticky red leaves, all bedewed with viscid gum, to catch and roll round the struggling flies that wrenched their tiny limbs in vain efforts to free themselves. But that was all. Nothing else was astir. In spite of sight and sound, however, he was still deeply thrilled by this strange consciousness as of something living and moving in the barrow underneath; something living and moving—or was it moving and dead? Something crawling and creeping, as the long arms of the sundews crawled and crept around the helpless flies, whose juices they sucked out. A weird and awful feeling, yet strangely fascinating! He hated the vulgar necessity for going back to dinner. Why do people dine at all? So material! so commonplace! And the universe all teeming with strange secrets to unfold! He knew not why, but a fierce desire possessed his soul to stop and give way to this overpowering sense of the mysterious and the marvellous in the dark depths of the barrow.

With an effort he roused himself, and put on his hat, which he had been holding in his hand, for his forehead was burning. The sun had now long set, and Mrs. Bouverie-Barton dined at 7.30 punctually. He must rise and go home. Something unknown pulled him down to detain him. Once more he paused and hesitated. He was not a superstitious man, yet it seemed to him as if many strange shapes stood by unseen, and watched with great eagerness to see whether he would rise and go away, or yield to the temptation of stopping and indulging his curious fancy. Strange!—he saw and heard absolutely nobody and nothing; yet he dimly realized that unseen figures were watching him close with bated breath, and anxiously observing his every movement, as if intent to know whether he would rise and move on, or remain to investigate this causeless sensation.

For a minute or two he stood irresolute; and all the time he so stood the unseen bystanders held their breath and looked on in an agony of expectation. He could feel their outstretched necks; he could picture their strained attention. At last he broke away. "This is nonsense," he said aloud to himself, and turned slowly homeward. As he did so, a deep sigh, as of

suspense relieved, but relieved in the wrong direction, seemed to rise—unheard, impalpable, spiritual—from the invisible crowd that gathered around him immaterial. Clutched hands seemed to stretch after him and try to pull him back. An unreal throng of angry and disappointed creatures seemed to follow him over the moor, uttering speechless imprecations on his head, in some unknown tongue—ineffable, inaudible. This horrid sense of being followed by unearthly foes took absolute possession of Rudolph's mind. It might have been merely the lurid redness of the afterglow, or the loneliness of the moor, or the necessity for being back not one minute late for Mrs. Bouverie-Barton's dinner-hour; but, at any rate, he lost all self-control for the moment, and ran—ran wildly, at the very top of his speed, all the way from the barrow to the door of the manor-house garden. There he stopped and looked round with a painful sense of his own stupid cowardice. This was positively childish: he had seen nothing, heard nothing, had nothing definite to frighten him; yet he had run from his own mental shadow, like the veriest schoolgirl, and was trembling still from the profundity of his sense that somebody unseen was pursuing and following him. "What a precious fool I am," he said to himself, half angrily, "to be so terrified at nothing! I'll go round there by-and-by, just to recover my self-respect, and to show, at least, I'm not really frightened."

And even as he said it he was internally aware that his baffled foes, standing grinning their disappointment with gnashed teeth at the garden gate, gave a chuckle of surprise, delight, and satisfaction at his altered intention.

II.

There's nothing like light for dispelling superstitious terrors. Pallinghurst Manor-house was fortunately supplied with electric light; for Mrs. Bouverie-Barton was nothing if not intensely modern. Long before Rudolph had finished dressing for dinner, he was smiling once more to himself at his foolish conduct. Never in his life before—at least, since he was twenty—had he done such a thing; and he knew why he'd done it now. It was a nervous breakdown. He had been overworking his brain in town with those elaborate calculations for his *Fortnightly* article on "The Present State of Chinese Finances"; and Sir Arthur Boyd, the famous specialist on diseases of the nervous system, had earned three honest guineas cheap by recommending him "a week or two's rest and change in the country." That was why he had accepted Mrs. Bouverie-Barton's invitation to form part of her brilliant autumn party at Pallinghurst Manor; and that was also doubtless why he had been so absurdly frightened at nothing at all just now on the common. Memorandum: Never to overwork his brain in future; it doesn't pay. And yet, in these days, how earn bread and cheese at literature without overworking it?

He went down to dinner, however, in very good spirits. His hostess was kind; she permitted him to take in that pretty American. Conversation with the soup turned at once on the sunset. Conversation with the soup is always on the lowest and most casual plane; it improves with the fish, and reaches its culmination with the sweets and the cheese; after which it declines again to the fruity level. "You were on the barrow about seven, Mr. Reeve," Mrs. Bouverie-Barton observed severely, when he spoke of the after-glow. "You watched that sunset close. How fast you must have walked home! I was almost half afraid you were going to be late for dinner."

Rudolph coloured up slightly; 'twas a girlish trick, unworthy of a journalist; but still he had it. "Oh dear, no, Mrs. Bouverie-Barton," he answered gravely. "I may be foolish, but not, I hope, criminal. I know better than to do anything so weak and wicked as that at Pallinghurst Manor. I *do* walk rather fast, and the sunset—well, the sunset was just too lovely."

"Elegant," the pretty American interposed, in her language.

"It always is, this night every year," little Joyce said quietly, with the air of one who retails a well-known scientific fact. "It's the night, you know, when the light burns bright on the Old Long Barrow."

Joyce was Mrs. Bouverie-Barton's only child—a frail and pretty little creature, just twelve years old, very light and fairylike, but with a strange cowed look which, nevertheless, somehow curiously became her.

"What nonsense you talk, my child!" her mother exclaimed, darting a look at Joyce which made her relapse forthwith into instant silence. "I'm ashamed of her, Mr. Reeve; they pick up such nonsense as this from their nurses." For Mrs. Bouverie-Barton was modern, and disbelieved in everything. 'Tis a simple creed; one clause concludes it.

But the child's words, though lightly whispered, had caught the quick ear of Archie Cameron, the distinguished electrician. He made a spring upon them at once; for the merest suspicion of the supernatural was to Cameron irresistible. "What's that, Joyce?" he cried, leaning forward across the table. "No, Mrs. Bouverie-Barton, I really *must* hear it. What day is this to-day, and what's that you just said about the sunset and the light on the Old Long Barrow?"

Joyce glanced pleadingly at her mother, and then again at Cameron. A very faint nod gave her grudging leave to proceed with her tale, under maternal disapprobation; for Mrs. Bouverie-Barton didn't carry her belief in Woman's Rights quite so far as to apply them to the case of her own daughter. We *must* draw a line somewhere. Joyce hesitated and began. "Well, this is the night, you know," she said, "when the sun turns, or stands still, or crosses the tropic, or goes back again, or something."

Mrs. Bouverie-Barton gave a dry little cough. "The autumnal equinox," she interposed severely, "at which, of course, the sun does nothing of the sort you suppose. We shall have to have your astronomy looked after, Joyce; such ignorance is exhaustive. But go on with your myth, please, and get it over quickly."

"The autumnal equinox; that's just it," Joyce went on, unabashed. "I remember that's the word, for old Rachel, the gipsy, told me so. Well, on this day every year, a sort of glow comes up on the moor; oh! I know it does, mother, for I've seen it myself; and the rhyme about it goes—

'Every year on Michael's night
Pallinghurst Barrow burneth bright.'

Only the gipsy told me it was Baal's night before it was St. Michael's; and it was somebody else's night, whose name I forget, before it was Baal's. And the somebody was a god to whom you must never sacrifice anything with iron, but always with flint or with a stone hatchet."

Cameron leaned back in his chair and surveyed the child critically. "Now, this is interesting," he said; "profoundly interesting. For here we get, what is always so much wanted, firsthand evidence. And you're quite sure, Joyce, you've really seen it?"

"Oh! Mr. Cameron, how can you?" Mrs. Bouverie-Barton cried, quite pettishly; for even advanced ladies are still feminine enough at times to be distinctly pettish. "I take the greatest trouble to keep all such rubbish out of Joyce's way; and then you men of science come down here and talk like this to her, and undo all the good I've taken months in doing."

"Well, whether Joyce has ever seen it not," Rudolph Reeve said gravely, "I can answer for it myself that I saw a very curious light on the Long Barrow to-night; and, furthermore, I felt a most peculiar sensation."

"What was that?" Cameron asked, bending over towards him eagerly. For all the world knows that Cameron, though a disbeliever in most things (except the Brush light), still retains a quaint tinge of Highland Scotch belief in a good ghost story.

"Why, as I was sitting on the barrow," Rudolph began, "just after sunset, I was dimly conscious of something stirring inside, not visible or audible, but——"

"Oh, I know, I know!" Joyce put in, leaning forward, with her eyes staring curiously; "a sort of a feeling that there was somebody somewhere, very faint and dim, though you couldn't see or hear them; they tried to pull you down, clutching at you like this: and when you ran away, frightened, they seemed to follow you and jeer at you. Great gibbering creatures! Oh, I know what all that is! I've been there, and felt it."

"Joyce!" Mrs. Bouverie-Barton put in, with a warning frown, "what nonsense you talk! You're really too ridiculous. How can you suppose Mr. Reeve ran away—a man of science like him—from an imaginary terror?"

"Well, I won't quite say I ran away," Rudolph answered, somewhat sheepishly. "We never do admit these things, I suppose, after twenty. But I certainly did hurry home at the very top of my speed—not to be late for dinner, you know, Mrs. Bouverie-Barton; and I *will* admit, Joyce, between you and me only, I was conscious by the way of something very much like your grinning followers behind me."

Mrs. Bouverie-Barton darted him another look of intense displeasure. "I think," she said, in that chilly voice that has iced whole committees, "at a table like this, and with such thinkers around, we might surely find something rather better to discuss than such worn-out superstitions. Professor Spence, did you light upon any fresh palæoliths in the gravel-pit this morning?"

III.

In the drawing-room, a little later, a small group collected by the corner bay, remotest from Mrs. Bouverie-Barton's own presidential chair, to hear Rudolph and Joyce compare experiences on the light above the barrow. When the two dreamers of dreams and seers of visions had finished, Mrs. Bruce, the esoteric Buddhist and hostess of Mahatmas (they often dropped in on her, it was said, quite informally, for afternoon tea), opened the flood-gates of her torrent speech with triumphant vehemence. "This is just what I should have expected," she said, looking round for a sceptic, that she might turn and rend him. "Novalis was right. Children are early men. They are freshest from the truth. They come straight to us from the Infinite. Little souls just let loose from the free expanse of God's sky see more than we adults do—at least, except a few of us. We ourselves, what are we but accumulated layers of phantasmata? Spirit-light rarely breaks in upon our grimed charnel of flesh. The dust of years overlies us. But the child, bursting new upon the dim world of Karma, trails clouds of glory from the beatific vision. So Wordsworth held; so the Masters of Tibet taught us, long ages before Wordsworth."

"It's curious," Professor Spence put in, with a scientific smile, restrained at the corners, "that all this should have happened to Joyce and to our friend Reeve at a long barrow. For you've seen MacRitchie's last work, I suppose? No? Well, he's shown conclusively that long barrows, which are the graves of the small, squat people who preceded the inroad of Aryan invaders, are the real originals of all the fairy hills and subterranean palaces of popular legend. You know the old story of how Childe Roland to the dark tower came, of course, Cameron? Well, that dark tower was nothing more or less than a long barrow; perhaps Pallinghurst Barrow itself, perhaps some other; and Childe Roland went into it to rescue his sister, Burd Ellen, who had been stolen by the fairy king, after the fashion of his kind, for a human sacrifice. The Picts, you recollect, were a deeply religious people, who believed in human sacrifice. They felt they derived from it high spiritual benefit. And the queerest part of it all is that in order to see the fairies you must go round the barrow *widershins*—that is to say, Miss Quackenboss, as Cameron will explain to you, the opposite way from the way of the sun—on this very night of all the year, Michaelmas Eve, which was the accepted old date of the autumnal equinox."

"All long barrows have a chamber of great stones in the centre, I believe," Cameron suggested tentatively.

"Yes, all or nearly all; megalithic, you know; unwrought; and that chamber's the subterranean palace, lit up with the fairy light that's so constantly found in old stories of the dead, and which Joyce and you, alone among moderns, have been permitted to see, Reeve."

"It's a very odd fact," Dr. Porter, the materialist, interposed musingly, "that the only ghosts people ever see are the ghosts of a generation very, very close to them. One hears of lots of ghosts in eighteenth-century costumes, because everybody has a clear idea of wigs and small-clothes from pictures and fancy dresses. One hears of far fewer in Elizabethan dress, because the class most given to beholding ghosts are seldom acquainted with ruffs and farthingales; and one meets with none at all in Anglo-Saxon or Ancient British or Roman costumes, because those are only known to a comparatively small class of learned people; and ghosts, as a rule, avoid the learned—except you, Mrs. Bruce—as they would avoid prussic acid. Millions of ghosts of remote antiquity must swarm about the world, though, after a hundred years or thereabouts, they retire into obscurity and cease to annoy people with their nasty cold shivers. But the queer thing about these long-barrow ghosts is that they must be the spirits of men and women who died thousands and thousands of years ago, which is exceptional longevity for a spiritual being; don't you think so, Cameron?"

"Europe must be chock-full of them!" the pretty American assented, smiling; "though Amurrica hasn't had time, so far, to collect any considerable population of spirits."

But Mrs. Bruce was up in arms at once against such covert levity, and took the field in full force for her beloved spectres. "No, no," she said, "Dr. Porter, there you mistake your subject. You should read what I have written in 'The Mirror of Trismegistus.' Man is the focus of the glass of his own senses. There are other landscapes in the fifth and sixth dimensions of space than the one presented to him. As Carlyle said truly, each eye sees in all things just what each eye brings with it the power of seeing. And this is true spiritually as well as physically. To Newton and Newton's dog

Diamond what a different universe! One saw the great vision of universal gravitation, the other saw—a little mouse under a chair, as the wise old nursery rhyme so philosophically puts it. Nursery rhymes summarize for us the gain of centuries. Nothing was ever destroyed, nothing was ever changed, and nothing now is ever created. All the spirits of all that is, or was, or ever will be, people the universe everywhere, unseen, around us; and each of us sees of them those only he himself is adapted to seeing. The rustic or the clown meets no ghosts of any sort save the ghosts of the persons he knows about otherwise; if a man like yourself saw a ghost at all—which isn't likely—for you starve your spiritual side by blindly shutting your eyes to one whole aspect of nature—you'd be just as likely to see the ghost of a Stone Age chief as the ghost of a Georgian or Elizabethan exquisite."

"Did I catch the word 'ghost'?" Mrs. Bouverie-Barton put in, coming up unexpectedly with her angry glower. "Joyce, my child, go to bed. This is no talk for you. And don't go chilling yourself by standing at the window in your nightdress, looking out on the common to search for the light on the Old Long Barrow, which is all pure moonshine. You nearly caught your death of cold last year with that nonsense. It's always so. These superstitions never do any good to any one."

And, indeed, Rudolph felt a faint glow of shame himself at having discussed such themes in the hearing of that nervous and high-strung little creature.

IV.

In the course of the evening, Rudolph's head began to ache, as, to say the truth, it often did; for was he not an author? and sufferance is the badge of all our tribe. His head generally ached: the intervals he employed upon magazine articles. He knew that headache well; it was the worst neuralgic kind—the wet-towel variety—the sort that keeps you tossing the whole night long without hope of respite. About eleven o'clock, when the men went into the smoking-room, the pain became unendurable. He called Dr. Porter aside. "Can't you give me anything to relieve it?" he asked piteously, after describing his symptoms.

"Oh, certainly," the doctor answered, with that brisk medical confidence we all know so well. "I'll bring you up a draught that will put that all right in less than half an hour. What Mrs. Bruce calls Soma—the fine old crusted remedy of our Aryan ancestor; there's nothing like it for cases of nervous inanition."

Rudolph went up to his room, and the doctor followed him a few minutes later with a very small phial of a very thick green viscid liquid. He poured ten drops carefully into a measured medicine-glass, and filled it up with water. It amalgamated badly. "Drink that off," he said, with the magisterial air of the cunning leech. And Rudolph drank it.

"I'll leave you the bottle," the doctor went on, laying it down on the dressing-table, "only use it with caution. Ten drops in two hours if the pain continues. Not more than ten, recollect. It's a powerful narcotic—I dare say you know its name: it's Cannabis Indica."

Rudolph thanked him inarticulately, and flung himself on the bed without undressing. He had brought up a book with him—that delicious volume, Joseph Jacobs's "English Fairy Tales"—and he tried in some vague way to read the story of Childe Roland, to which Professor Spence had directed his attention. But his head ached so much he could hardly read it; he only gathered with difficulty that Childe Roland had been instructed by witch or warlock to come to a green hill surrounded with terrace-rings—like Pallinghurst Barrow—to walk round it thrice, widershins, saying each time—

> "Open door! open door!
> And let me come in,"

and when the door opened to enter unabashed the fairy king's palace. And the third time the door did open, and Childe Roland entered a court, all lighted with a fairy light or gloaming; and then he went through a long passage, till he came at last to two wide stone doors; and beyond them lay a hall—stately, glorious, magnificent—where Burd Ellen sat combing her golden hair with a comb of amber. And the moment she saw her brother, up she stood, and she said—

> "Woe worth the day, ye luckless fool,
> Or ever that ye were born;
> For come the King of Elfland in
> Your fortune is forlorn."

When Rudolph had read so far his head ached so much he could read no further; so he laid down the book, and reflected once more in some half-conscious mood on Mrs. Bruce's theory that each man could see only the ghosts he expected. That seemed reasonable enough, for according to our faith is it unto us always. If so, then these ancient and savage ghosts of the dim old Stone Age, before bronze or iron, must still haunt the grassy barrows under the waving pines, where legend declared they were long since buried; and the mystic light over Pallinghurst moor must be the local evidence and symbol of their presence.

How long he lay there he hardly quite knew; but the clock struck twice, and his head was aching so fiercely now that he helped himself plentifully to a second dose of the thick green mixture. His hand shook too much to be Puritanical to a drop or two. For a while it relieved him; then the pain grew worse again. Dreamily he moved over to the big north oriel to cool his brow with the fresh night air. The window stood open. As he gazed out a curious sight met his eye. At another oriel in the wing, which ran in an L-shaped bend from the part of the house where he had been put, he saw a child's

white face gaze appealingly across to him. It was Joyce, in her white nightdress, peering with all her might, in spite of her mother's prohibition, on the mystic common. For a second she started. Her eyes met his. Slowly she raised one pale forefinger and pointed. Her lips opened to frame an inaudible word; but he read it by sight. "Look!" she said simply. Rudolph looked where she pointed.

A faint blue light hung lambent over the Old Long Barrow. It was ghostly and vague, like matches rubbed on the palm. It seemed to rouse and call him.

He glanced towards Joyce. She waved her hand to the barrow. Her lips said "Go." Rudolph was now in that strange semi-mesmeric state of self-induced hypnotism when a command, of whatever sort or by whomsoever given, seems to compel obedience. Trembling he rose, and taking his bedroom candle in his hand, descended the stair noiselessly. Then, walking on tiptoe across the tile-paved hall, he reached his hat from the rack, and opening the front door stole out into the garden.

The Soma had steadied his nerves and supplied him with false courage; but even in spite of it he felt a weird and creepy sense of mystery and the supernatural. Indeed, he would have turned back even now, had he not chanced to look up and see Joyce's pale face still pressed close against the window and Joyce's white hand still motioning him mutely onward. He looked once more in the direction where she pointed. The spectral light now burnt clearer and bluer, and more unearthly than ever, and the illimitable moor seemed haunted from end to end by innumerable invisible and uncanny creatures.

Rudolph groped his way on. His goal was the barrow. As he went, speechless voices seemed to whisper unknown tongues encouragingly in his ear; horrible shapes of elder creeds appeared to crowd round him and tempt him with beckoning fingers to follow them. Alone, erect, across the darkling waste, stumbling now and again over roots of gorse and heather, but steadied, as it seemed, by invisible hands, he staggered slowly forward, till at last, with aching head and trembling feet, he stood beside the immemorial grave of the savage chieftain. Away over in the east the white moon was just rising.

After a moment's pause, he began to walk round the tumulus. But something clogged and impeded him. His feet wouldn't obey his will; they seemed to move of themselves in the opposite direction. Then all at once he remembered he had been trying to go the way of the sun, instead of widershins. Steadying himself, and opening his eyes, he walked in the converse sense. All at once his feet moved easily, and the invisible attendants chuckled to themselves so loud that he could almost hear them. After the third round his lips parted, and he murmured the mystic words: "Open door! Open door! Let me come in." Then his head throbbed worse than ever with exertion and giddiness, and for two or three minutes more he was unconscious of anything.

When he opened his eyes again a very different sight displayed itself before him. Instantly he was aware that the age had gone back upon its steps ten thousand years, as the sun went back upon the dial of Ahaz; he stood face to face with a remote antiquity. Planes of existence faded; new sights floated over him; new worlds were penetrated; new ideas, yet very old, undulated centrically towards him from the universal flat of time and space and matter and motion. He was projected into another sphere and saw by fresh senses. Everything was changed, and he himself changed with it.

The blue light over the barrow now shone clear as day, though infinitely more mysterious. A passage lay open through the grassy slope into a rude stone corridor. Though his curiosity by this time was thoroughly aroused, Rudolph shrank with a terrible shrinking from his own impulse to enter this grim black hole, which led at once, by an oblique descent, into the bowels of the earth. But he couldn't help himself. For, O God! looking round him, he saw, to his infinite terror, alarm, and awe, a ghostly throng of naked and hideous savages. They were spirits, yet savages. Eagerly they jostled and hustled him, and crowded round him in wild groups, exactly as they had done to the spiritual sense a little earlier in the evening, when he couldn't see them. But now he saw them clearly with the outer eye; saw them as grinning and hateful barbarian shadows, neither black nor white, but tawny-skinned and low-browed; their tangled hair falling unkempt in matted locks about their receding foreheads; their jaws large and fierce; their eyebrows shaggy and protruding like a gorilla's; their loins just girt with a few scraps of torn skin; their whole mien inexpressibly repulsive and bloodthirsty.

They were savages, yet they were ghosts. The two most terrible and dreaded foes of civilized experience seemed combined at once in them. Rudolph Reeve crouched powerless in their intangible hands; for they seized him roughly with

incorporeal fingers, and pushed him bodily into the presence of their sleeping chieftain. As they did so they raised loud peals of discordant laughter. It was hollow, but it was piercing. In that hateful sound the triumphant whoop of the Red Indian and the weird mockery of the ghost were strangely mingled into some appalling harmony.

Rudolph allowed them to push him in; they were too many to resist; and the Soma had sucked all strength out of his muscles. The women were the worst: ghastly hags of eld, witches with pendent breasts and bloodshot eyes, they whirled round him in triumph, and shouted aloud in a tongue he had never before heard, though he understood it instinctively, "A victim! A victim! We hold him! We have him!"

Even in the agonized horror of that awful moment Rudolph knew why he understood those words, unheard till then. They were the first language of our race—the natural and instinctive mother-tongue of humanity.

They haled him forward by main force to the central chamber, with hands and arms and ghostly shreds of buffalo-hide. Their wrists compelled him as the magnet compels the iron bar. He entered the palace. A dim phosphorescent light, like the light of a churchyard or of decaying paganism, seemed to illumine it faintly. Things loomed dark before him; but his eyes almost instantly adapted themselves to the gloom, as the eyes of the dead on the first night in the grave adapt themselves by inner force to the strangeness of their surroundings. The royal hall was built up of cyclopean stones, each as big as the head of some colossal Sesostris. They were of ice-worn granite and a dusky-grey sandstone, rudely piled on one another, and carved in relief with representations of serpents, concentric lines, interlacing zigzags, and the mystic swastika. But all these things Rudolph only saw vaguely, if he saw them at all; his attention was too much concentrated on devouring fear and the horror of his situation.

In the very centre a skeleton sat crouching on the floor in some loose, huddled fashion. Its legs were doubled up, its hands clasped round its knees, its grinning teeth had long been blackened by time or by the indurated blood of human victims. The ghosts approached it with strange reverence, in impish postures.

"See! We bring you a slave, great king!" they cried in the same barbaric tongue—all clicks and gutturals. "For this is the holy night of your father, the Sun, when he turns him about on his yearly course through the stars and goes south to leave us. We bring you a slave to renew your youth. Rise! Drink his hot blood! Rise! Kill and eat him!"

The grinning skeleton turned its head and regarded Rudolph from its eyeless orbs with a vacant glance of hungry satisfaction. The sight of human meat seemed to create a soul beneath the ribs of death in some incredible fashion. Even as Rudolph, held fast by the immaterial hands of his ghastly captors, looked and trembled for his fate, too terrified to cry out or even to move and struggle, he beheld the hideous thing rise and assume a shadowy shape, all pallid blue light, like the shapes of his jailers. Bit by bit, as he gazed, the skeleton seemed to disappear, or rather to fade into some unsubstantial form, which was nevertheless more human, more corporeal, more horrible than the dry bones it had come from. Naked and yellow like the rest, it wore round its dim waist just an apron of dry grass, or, what seemed to be such, while over its shoulders hung the ghost of a bearskin mantle. As it rose, the other spectres knocked their foreheads low on the ground before it, and grovelled with their long locks in the ageless dust, and uttered elfin cries of inarticulate homage.

The great chief turned, grinning, to one of his spectral henchmen. "Give a knife!" he said curtly, for all that these strange shades uttered was snapped out in short, sharp sentences, and in a monosyllabic tongue, like the bark of jackals or the laugh of the striped hyena among the graves at midnight.

The attendant, bowing low once more, handed his liege a flint flake, very keen-edged, but jagged, a rude and horrible instrument of barbaric manufacture. But what terrified Rudolph most was the fact that this flake was no ghostly weapon, no immaterial shred, but a fragment of real stone, capable of inflicting a deadly gash or long torn wound. Hundreds of such fragments, indeed, lay loose on the concreted floor of the chamber, some of them roughly chipped, others ground and polished. Rudolph had seen such things in museums many times before; with a sudden rush of horror, he recognized now for the first time in his life with what object the savages of that far-off day had buried them with their dead in the chambered barrows.

With a violent effort he wetted his parched lips with his tongue, and cried out thrice in his agony the one word "Mercy!"

At that sound the savage king burst into a loud and fiendish laugh. It was a hideous laugh, halfway between a wild beast's and a murderous maniac's: it echoed through the long hall like the laughter of devils when they succeed in leading a fair woman's soul to eternal perdition. "What does he say?" the king cried, in the same transparently natural words, whose import Rudolph could understand at once. "How like birds they talk, these white-faced men, whom we get for our only victims since the years grew foolish! 'Mu-mu-mu-moo!' they say; 'Mu-mu-mu-moo!' more like frogs than men and women!"

Then it came over Rudolph instinctively, through the maze of his terror, that he could understand the lower tongue of these elfish visions because he and his ancestors had once passed through it; but they could not understand his, because it was too high and too deep for them.

He had little time for thought, however. Fear bounded his horizon. The ghosts crowded round him, gibbering louder than before. With wild cries and heathen screams they began to dance about their victim. Two advanced with measured steps and tied his hands and feet with a ghostly cord. It cut into the flesh like the stab of a great sorrow. They bound him to a stake which Rudolph felt conscious was no earthly and material wood, but a piece of intangible shadow; yet he could no more escape from it than from the iron chain of an earthly prison. On each side the stake two savage hags, long-haired, ill-favoured, inexpressibly cruel-looking, set two small plants of Enchanter's Nightshade. Then a fierce orgiastic shout went up to the low roof from all the assembled people. Rushing forward together, they covered his body with what seemed to be oil and butter; they hung grave-flowers round his neck; they quarrelled among themselves with clamorous cries for hairs and rags torn from his head and clothing. The women, in particular, whirled round him with frantic Bacchanalian gestures, crying aloud as they circled, "O great chief! O my king! we offer you this victim; we offer you new blood to prolong your life. Give us in return sound sleep, dry graves, sweet dreams, fair seasons!"

They cut themselves with flint knives. Ghostly ichor streamed copious.

The king meanwhile kept close guard over his victim, whom he watched with hungry eyes of hideous cannibal longing. Then, at a given signal, the crowd of ghosts stood suddenly still. There was an awesome pause. The men gathered outside, the women crouched low in a ring close up to him. Dimly at that moment Rudolph noticed almost without noticing it that each of them had a wound on the side of his own skull; and he understood why: they had themselves been sacrificed in the dim long ago to bear their king company to the world of spirits. Even as he thought that thought, the men and women with a loud whoop raised hands aloft in unison. Each grasped a sharp flake, which he brandished savagely. The king gave the signal by rushing at him with a jagged and saw-like knife. It descended on Rudolph's head. At the same moment, the others rushed forward, crying aloud in their own tongue, "Carve the flesh from his bones! Slay him! hack him to pieces!"

Rudolph bent his head to avoid the blows. He cowered in abject terror. Oh! what fear would any Christian ghost have inspired by the side of these incorporeal pagan savages! Ah! mercy! mercy! They would tear him limb from limb! They would rend him in pieces!

At that instant he raised his eyes, and, as by a miracle of fate, saw another shadowy form floating vague before him. It was the form of a man in sixteenth-century costume, very dim and uncertain. It might have been a ghost—it might have been a vision—but it raised its shadowy hand and pointed towards the door. Rudolph saw it was unguarded. The savages were now upon him, their ghostly breath blew chill on his cheek. "Show them iron!" cried the shadow in an English voice. Rudolph struck out with both elbows and made a fierce effort for freedom. It was with difficulty he roused himself, but at last he succeeded. He drew his pocket-knife and opened it. At sight of the cold steel, which no ghost or troll or imp can endure to behold, the savages fell back, muttering. But 'twas only for a moment. Next instant, with a howl of vengeance even louder than before, they crowded round him and tried to intercept him. He shook them off with wild energy, though they jostled and hustled him, and struck him again and again with their sharp flint edges. Blood was flowing freely now from his hands and arms—red blood of this world; but still he fought his way out by main force with his sharp steel blade towards the door and the moonlight. The nearer he got to the exit, the thicker and closer the ghosts pressed around, as if conscious that their power was bounded by their own threshold. They avoided the knife, meanwhile, with superstitious terror. Rudolph elbowed them fiercely aside, and lunging at them now and again, made his way to the door. With one supreme effort he tore himself madly out, and stood once more on the open heath, shivering like a greyhound. The ghosts gathered grinning by the open vestibule, their fierce teeth, like a wild beast's, confessing their impotent anger. But Rudolph started to run, all wearied as he was, and ran a few hundred yards before he fell and

fainted. He dropped on a clump of white heather by a sandy ridge, and lay there unconscious till well on into the morning.

V.

When the people from the Manor-house picked him up next day, he was hot and cold, terribly pale from fear, and mumbling incoherently. Dr. Porter had him put to bed without a moment's delay. "Poor fellow!" he said, leaning over him, "he's had a very narrow escape indeed of a bad brain fever. I oughtn't to have exhibited Cannabis in his excited condition; or, at any rate, if I did, I ought, at least, to have watched its effect more closely. He must be kept very quiet now, and on no account whatever, Nurse, must either Mrs. Bruce or Mrs. Bouverie-Barton to allowed to come near him."

But late in the afternoon Rudolph sent for Joyce.

The child came creeping in with an ashen face. "Well?" she murmured, soft and low, taking her seat by the bedside; "so the King of the Barrow very nearly had you!"

"Yes," Rudolph answered, relieved to find there was somebody to whom he could talk freely of his terrible adventure. "He nearly had me. But how did you come to know it?"

"About two by the clock," the child replied, with white lips of terror, "I saw the fires on the moor burn brighter and bluer: and then I remembered the words of a terrible old rhyme the gipsy woman taught me—

> "'Pallinghurst Barrow—Pallinghurst Barrow!
> Every year one heart thou'lt harrow!
> Pallinghurst Ring—Pallinghurst Ring!
> A bloody man is thy ghostly king.
> Men's bones he breaks, and sucks their marrow.
> In Pallinghurst Ring on Pallinghurst Barrow;'

and just as I thought it, I saw the lights burn terribly bright and clear for a second, and I shuddered for horror. Then they died down low at once, and there was moaning on the moor, cries of despair, as from a great crowd cheated, and at that I knew that you were not to be the Ghost-king's victim."

THE ABBÉ'S REPENTANCE.

Ivy Stanbury had never been in the South before. So everything burst full upon her with all the charm of novelty. As they reached Antibes Station, the sun was setting. A pink glow from his blood-red orb lit up the snowy ridge of the Maritime Alps with fairy splendour. It was a dream of delight to those eager young eyes, fresh from the fog and frost and brooding gloom of London. In front, the deep blue port, the long white mole, the picturesque lighthouse, the arcaded breakwater, the sea just flecked with russet lateen sails, the coasting craft that lay idle by the quays in the harbour. Further on, the mouldering grey town, enclosed in its mediæval walls, and topped by its two tall towers: the square bastions and angles of Vauban's great fort: the laughing coast towards Nice, dotted over with white villages perched high among dark hills: and beyond all, soaring up into the cloudless sky, the phantom peaks of those sun-smitten mountains. No lovelier sight can eye behold round the enchanted Mediterranean: what wonder Ivy Stanbury gazed at it that first night of her sojourn in the South with unfeigned admiration?

"It's beautiful," she broke forth, drawing a deep breath as she spoke, and gazing up at the clear-cut outlines of the Cime de Mercantourn. "More beautiful than anything I could have imagined, almost."

But Aunt Emma was busy looking after the luggage, registered through from London. "*Quatre colis*, all told, and then the rugs and the hold-all; Maria should have fastened those straps more securely. And where's the black bag? And the thing with the etna? And mind you take care of my canary, Ivy."

Ivy stood still and gazed. So like a vision did those dainty pink summits, all pencilled with dark glens, hang mystic in the air. To think about luggage at such a moment as this was, to her, sheer desecration. And how wine-coloured was the dark sea in the evening light: and how antique the grey Greek town: and how delicious the sunset! The snowiest peaks of all stood out now in the very hue of the pinky nacre that lines a shell: the shadows of the gorges that scored their smooth sides showed up in delicate tints of pale green and dark purple. Ivy drew a deep breath again, and clutched the bird-cage silently.

The long drive to the hotel across the olive-clad promontory, between bay and bay, was one continuous joy to her. Here and there, rocky inlets opened out for a moment to right or left, hemmed in by tiny crags, where the blue sea broke in milky foam upon weather-beaten skerries. Coquettish white villas gleamed rosy in the setting sun among tangled gardens of strange shrubs, whose very names Ivy knew not—date-palms, and fan-palms, and eucalyptus, and mimosa, and green Mediterranean pine, and tall flowering agavé. At last, the tired horses broke into a final canter, and drew up before the broad stairs of the hotel on the headland. A vista through the avenue revealed to Ivy's eyes a wide strip of sea, and beyond it again the jagged outline of the Estérel, most exquisitely shaped of earthly mountains, silhouetted in deep blue against the fiery red of a sky just fading from the afterglow into profound darkness.

She could hardly dress for dinner, for looking out of the window. Even in that dim evening light, the view across the bay was too exquisite to be neglected.

However, by dint of frequent admonitions from Aunt Emma, through the partition door, she managed at last to rummage out her little white evening dress—a soft nun's cloth, made full in the bodice—and scrambled through in the nick of time, as the dinner-bell was ringing.

Table d'hôte was fairly full. Most of the guests were ladies. But to Ivy's surprise, and perhaps even dismay, she found herself seated next a tall young man in the long black cassock of a Catholic priest, with a delicate pale face, very austere and clear-cut. This was disconcerting to Ivy, for, in the English way, she had a vague feeling in her mind that priests, after all, were not quite human.

The tall young man, however, turned to her after a minute's pause with a frank and pleasant smile, which seemed all at once to bespeak her sympathy. He had an even row of white teeth, Ivy observed, and thin, thoughtful lips, and a cultivated air, and the mien of a gentleman. Cardinal Manning must surely have looked like that when he was an Anglican curate. So austere was the young man's face, yet so gentle, so engaging.

"Mademoiselle has just arrived to-day?" he said interrogatively, in the pure, sweet French of the Faubourg St. Germain. Ivy could see at a glance he felt she was shy of him, and was trying to reassure her. "What a beautiful sunset we've had!

What light! What colour!"

His voice rang so soft that Ivy plucked up heart of grace to answer him boldly in her own pretty variation of the Ollendorffian dialect, "Yes, it was splendid, splendid. This is the first time I visit the Mediterranean, and coming from the cold North, its beauty takes my breath away."

"Mademoiselle is French, then?" the young priest asked, with the courtly flattery that sits so naturally on his countrymen. "No, English? Really! And nevertheless you speak with a charming accent. But all English ladies speak French to-day. Yes, this place is lovely: nothing lovelier on the coast. I went up this evening to the hill that forms the centre of our little promontory——"

"The hill with the lighthouse that we passed on our way?" Ivy asked, proud at heart that she could remember the word *phare* off-hand, without reference to the dictionary.

The Abbé bowed. "Yes, the hill with the lighthouse," he answered, hardly venturing to correct her by making *phare* masculine. "There is there a sanctuary of Our Lady—Notre-Dame de la Garoupe—and I mounted up to it by the Chemin do la Croix, to make my devotions. And after spending a little half-hour all alone in the oratory, I went out upon the platform, and sat at the foot of the cross, and looked before me upon the view. Oh, mademoiselle, how shall I say? it was divine! it was beautiful! The light from the setting sun touched up those spotless temples of the eternal snow with the rosy radiance of an angel's wing. It was a prayer in marble. One would think the white and common daylight, streaming through some dim cathedral window, made rich with figures, was falling in crimson palpitations on the clasped hands of some alabaster saint—so glorious was it, so beautiful!"

Ivy smiled at his enthusiasm: it was so like her own—and yet, oh, so different! But she admired the young Abbé, all the same, for not being ashamed of his faith. What English curate would have dared to board a stranger like that—with such a winning confidence that the stranger would share his own point of view of things? And then the touch of poetry that he threw into it all was so delicately mediæval. Ivy looked at him and smiled again. The priest had certainly begun by creating a favourable impression.

All through dinner, her new acquaintance talked to her uninterruptedly. Ivy was quite charmed to see how far her meagre French would carry her. And her neighbour was so polite, so grave, so attentive. He never seemed to notice her mistakes of gender, her little errors of tense or mood or syntax: he caught rapidly at what she meant when she paused for a word: he finished her sentences for her better than she could have done them herself: he never suggested, he never corrected, he never faltered, but he helped her out, as it were, unconsciously, without ever seeming to help her. In a word, he had the manners of a born gentleman, with the polish and the grace of good French society. And then, whatever he said was so interesting and so well put. A tinge of Celtic imagination lighted up all his talk. He was well read in his own literature, and in English and German too. Nothing could have been more unlike Ivy's preconceived idea of the French Catholic priest—the rotund and rubicund village curé. This man was tall, slim, pathetic, poetical looking, with piercing black eyes, and features of striking and statuesque beauty. But above all, Ivy felt now he was earnest, and human—intensely human.

Once only, when conversation rose loud across the table, the Abbé ventured to ask, with bated breath, in a candid tone of inquiry, "Mademoiselle is Catholic?"

Ivy looked down at her plate as she answered in a timid voice, "No, monsieur, Anglican." Then she added, half apologetically, with a deprecating smile, "'Tis the religion of my country, you know." For she feared she shocked him.

"Perfectly," the Abbé answered, with a sweet smile of resigned regret; and he murmured something half to himself in the Latin tongue, which Ivy didn't understand. It was a verse from the Vulgate, "Other sheep have I which are not of this fold: them also will I bring in." For he was a tolerant man, though devout, that Abbé, and Mademoiselle was charming. Had not even the Church itself held that Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, I know not how many more—and then, Mademoiselle, no doubt erred through ignorance of the Faith, and the teaching of her parents!

After dinner they strolled out into the great entrance hall. The Abbé, with a courtly bow, went off, half reluctant, in another direction. On a table close by, the letters that came by the evening post lay displayed in long rows for visitors to

claim their own. With true feminine curiosity, Ivy glanced over the names of her fellow guests. One struck her at once —"M. l'Abbé de Kermadec." "That must be our priest, Aunt Emma," she said, looking close at it. And the English barrister with the loud voice, who sat opposite her at table, made answer, somewhat bluffly, "Yes, that's the priest, M. Guy de Kermadec. You can see with half an eye, he's above the common ruck of 'em. Belongs to a very distinguished Breton family, so I'm told. Of late years, you know, there's been a reaction in France in favour of piety. It's the mode to be *dévot*. The Royalists think religion goes hand in hand with legitimacy. So several noble families send a younger son into the Church now again, as before the Revolution—make a decorative Abbé of him. It's quite the thing, as times go. The eldest son of the Kermadecs is a marquis, I believe—one of their trumpery marquee's—has a château in Morbihan —the second son's in a cavalry regiment, and serves La France; the third's in the Church, and saves the souls of the family. That's the way they do now. Division of labour, don't you see! Number one plays, number two fights, number three prays. Land, army, piety."

"Oh, indeed," Ivy answered, shrinking into her shell at once. She didn't know why, but it jarred upon her somehow to hear the English barrister with the loud bluff voice speak like that about her neighbour. M. Guy de Kermadec was of gentler mould, she felt sure, than the barrister's coarse red hands should handle.

They stayed there some weeks. Aunt Emma's lungs were endowed with a cavity. So Aunt Emma did little but sun herself on the terrace, and chirp to the canary, and look across at the Estérel. But Ivy was strong, her limbs were a tomboy's, and she wandered about by herself to her heart's content over that rocky peninsula. On her first morning at the Cape, indeed, she strolled out alone, following a footpath that led through a green strip of pine-wood, fragrant on either side with lentisk scrub and rosemary. It brought her out upon the sea, near the very end of the promontory, at a spot where white rocks, deeply honeycombed by the ceaseless spray of centuries, lay tossed in wild confusion, stack upon stack, rent and fissured. Low bushes, planed level by the wind, sloped gradually upward. A *douanier's* trail threaded the rugged maze. Ivy turned to the left and followed it on, well pleased, past huge tors and deep gulleys. Here and there, taking advantage of the tilt of the strata, the sea had worn itself great caves and blowholes. A slight breeze was rolling breakers up these miniature gorges. Ivy stood and watched them tumble in, the deep peacock blue of the outer sea changing at once into white foam as they curled over and shattered themselves on the green slimy reefs that blocked their progress.

By-and-by she reached a spot where a clump of tall aloes, with prickly points, grew close to the edge of the rocks in true African luxuriance. Just beyond them, on the brink, a man sat bareheaded, his legs dangling over a steep undermined cliff. The limestone was tilted up there at such an acute angle that the crag overhung the sea by a yard or two, and waves dashed themselves below into a thick rain of spray without wetting the top. Ivy had clambered half out to the edge before she saw who the man was. Then he turned his head at the sound of her footfall, and sprang to his feet hastily.

"Take care, mademoiselle," he said, holding his round hat in his left hand, and stretching out his right to steady her. "Such spots as these are hardly meant for skirts like yours—or mine. One false step, and over you go. I'm a pretty strong swimmer myself—our Breton sea did so much for me; but no swimmer on earth could live against the force of those crushing breakers. They'd catch a man on their crests, and pound him to a jelly on the jagged needles of rock. They'd hurl him on to the crumbling pinnacles, and then drag him back with their undertow, and crush him at last, as in a gigantic mortar, till every trait, every feature was indistinguishable."

"Thank you," Ivy answered, taking his proffered hand as innocently as she would have taken her father's curate's. "It's just beautiful out here, isn't it?" She seated herself on the ledge near the spot where he'd been sitting. "How grandly the waves roll in!" she cried, eyeing them with girlish delight. "Do you come here often, M. l'Abbé?"

The Abbé gazed at her, astonished. How strange are the ways of these English! He was a priest, to be sure, a celibate by profession; but he was young, he was handsome—he knew he was good-looking; and mademoiselle was unmarried! This chance meeting embarrassed him, to say the truth, far more than it did Ivy—though Ivy too was shy, and a little conscious blush that just tinged her soft cheek made her look, the Abbé noted, even prettier than ever. But still, if he was a priest, he was also a gentleman. So, after a moment's demur, he sat down, a little way off—further off, indeed, than the curate would have thought it necessary to sit from her—and answered very gravely, in that soft low voice of his, "Yes, I come here often, very often. It's my favourite seat. On these rocks one seems to lose sight of the world and the work of man's hand, and to stand face to face with the eternal and the infinite." He waved his arm, as he spoke, towards the horizon, vaguely.

“I like it for its wildness,” Ivy said simply. “These crags are so beautiful.”

“Yes,” the young priest answered, looking across at them pensively, “I like to think, for my part, that for thousands of years the waves have been dashing against them, day and night, night and day, in a ceaseless rhythm, since the morning of the creation. I like to think that before ever a Phocæan galley steered its virgin trip into the harbour of Antipolis, this honeycombing had begun; that when the Holy Maries of the Sea passed by our Cape on their miraculous voyage to the mouths of the Rhone, they saw this headland, precisely as we see it to-day, on their starboard bow, all weather-eaten and weather-beaten.”

Ivy lounged with her feet dangling over the edge, as the Abbé had done before. The Abbé sat and looked at her in fear and trembling. If mademoiselle were to slip, now. His heart came up in his mouth at the thought. He was a priest, to be sure; but at seven-and-twenty, mark you well, even priests are human. They, too, have hearts. Anatomically they resemble the rest of their kind; it is only the cassock that makes the outer difference.

But Ivy sat talking in her imperfect French, with very little sense of how much trouble she was causing him. She didn’t know that the Abbé, too, trembled on the very brink of a precipice. But his was a moral one. By-and-by she rose. The Abbé stretched out his hand, and lent it to her politely. He could do no less; yet the touch of her ungloved fingers thrilled him. What a pity so fair a lamb should stray so far from the true fold! Had Our Lady brought him this chance? Was it his duty to lead her, to guide her, to save her?

“Which is the way to the lighthouse hill?” Ivy asked him carelessly.

The words seemed to his full heart like a sacred omen. For on the lighthouse hill, as on all high places in Provence, stood also a lighthouse of the soul, a sanctuary of Our Lady, that Notre-Dame de la Garoupe whereof he had told her yesterday. And of her own accord she had asked the way now to Our Lady’s shrine. He would guide her like a beacon. This was the finger of Providence. Sure, Our Lady herself had put the thought into the heart of her.

“I go that way myself,” he said, rejoicing. “If mademoiselle will allow me, I will show her the path. Every day I go up there to make my devotions.”

As they walked by the seaward trail, and climbed the craggy little hill, the Abbé discoursed very pleasantly about many things. Not religion alone; he was a priest, but no bigot. An enthusiast for the sea, as becomes a Morbihan man, he loved it from every point of view, as swimmer, yachtsman, rower, landscape artist. His talk was of dangers confronted on stormy nights along the Ligurian coast; of voyages to Corsica, to the Channel Islands, to Bilbao; of great swims about Sark; of climbs among the bare summits over yonder by Turbia. And he was wide-minded too; for he spoke with real affection of a certain neighbour of theirs in Morbihan; he was proud of the great writer’s pure Breton blood, though he deprecated his opinions—“But he’s so kind and good after all, that dear big Renan!” Ivy started with surprise; not so had she heard the noblest living master of French prose discussed and described in their Warwickshire rectory. But every moment she saw yet clearer that anything more unlike her preconceived idea of a Catholic priest than this ardent young Celt could hardly be imagined. Fervent and fervid, he led the conversation like one who spoke with tongues. For herself she said little by the way; her French halted sadly; but she listened with real pleasure to the full flowing stream of the young man’s discourse. After all, she knew now, he was a young man at least—not human alone, but vivid and virile as well, in spite of his petticoats.

People forget too often that putting on a *soutane* doesn’t necessarily make a strong nature feminine.

At the top of the lighthouse hill Ivy paused, delighted. Worlds opened before her. To right and left, in rival beauty, spread a glorious panorama. She stood and gazed at it entranced. She had plenty of time indeed to drink in to the full those two blue bays, with their contrasted mountain barriers—snowy Alps to the east, purple Estérel to westward—for the Abbé had gone into the rustic chapel to make his devotions. When he came out again, curiosity tempted Ivy for a moment into that bare little whitewashed barn. It was a Provençal fisher shrine of the rudest antique type; its gaudy Madonna, tricked out with paper flowers, stood under a crude blue canopy, set with tinsel-gilt stars; the rough walls hung thick with ex-voto’s of coarse and naive execution. Here, sailors in peril emerged from a watery grave by the visible appearance of Our Lady issuing in palpable wood from a very solid cloud of golden glory; there, a gig going down hill was stopped forcibly from above with hands laid on the reins by Our Lady in person; and yonder, again, a

bursting gun did nobody any harm, for had not Our Lady caught the fragments in her own stiff fingers? Ivy gazed with a certain hushed awe at these nascent efforts of art; such a gulf seemed to yawn between that tawdry little oratory and the Abbé's own rich and cultivated nature. Yet he went to pray there!

For the next three weeks Ivy saw much of M. Guy de Kermadec. She taught him lawn-tennis, which he learned, indeed, with ease. At first, to be sure, the English in the hotel rather derided the idea of lawn-tennis in a cassock. But the Abbé was an adept at the *jeu de paume*, which had already educated his hand and eye, and he dropped into the new game so quickly, in spite of the *soutane*, which sadly impeded his running, that even the Cambridge undergraduate with the budding moustache was forced to acknowledge "the Frenchy" a formidable competitor. And then Ivy met him often in his strolls round the coast. He used to sit and sketch among the rocks, perched high on the most inaccessible pinnacles; and Ivy, it must be admitted, though she hardly knew why herself—so innocent is youth, so too dangerously innocent—went oftenest by the paths where she was likeliest to meet him. There she would watch the progress of his sketch, and criticize and admire; and in the end, when she rose to go, native politeness made it impossible for the Abbé to let her walk home unprotected, so he accompanied her back by the coast path to the hotel garden. Ivy hardly noticed that as he reached it he almost invariably lifted his round hat at once and dismissed her, unofficially as it were, to the society of her compatriots. But the Abbé, more used to the ways of the world and of France, knew well how unwise it was of him—a man of the Church—to walk with a young girl alone so often in the country. A priest should be circumspect.

Day after day, slowly, very slowly, the truth began to dawn by degrees upon the Abbé de Kermadec that he was in love with Ivy. At first, he fought the idea tooth and nail, like an evil vision. He belonged to the Church, the Bride of Heaven: what had such as he to do with mere carnal desires and earthly longings? But day by day, as Ivy met him, and talked with him more confidingly, her French growing more fluent by leaps and bounds under that able tutor, Love, whose face as yet she recognized not—nature began to prove too strong for the Abbé's resolution. He found her company sweet. The position was so strange, and to him so incomprehensible. If Ivy had been a French girl, of course he could never have seen so much of her: her mother or her maid would have mounted guard over her night and day. Only with a married woman could he have involved himself so deeply in France: and then, the sinfulness of their intercourse would have been clear from the very outset to both alike of them. But what charmed and attracted him most in Ivy was just her English innocence. She was so gentle, so guileless. This pure creature of God's never seemed to be aware she was doing grievously wrong. The man who had voluntarily resigned all hope or chance of chaste love was now irresistibly led on by the very force of the spell he had renounced for ever.

And yet—how hard it is for us to throw ourselves completely into somebody else's attitude! So French was he, so Catholic, that he couldn't quite understand the full depth of Ivy's innocence. This girl who could walk and talk so freely with a priest—surely she must be aware of what thing she was doing. She must know she was leading him and herself into a dangerous love, a love that could end in none but a guilty conclusion.

So thinking, and praying, and fighting against it, and despising himself, the young Abbé yet persisted half unawares on the path of destruction. His hot Celtic imagination proved too much for his self-control. All night long he lay awake, tossing and turning on his bed, alternately muttering fervent prayers to Our Lady, and building up for himself warm visions of his next meeting with Ivy. In the morning, he would rise up early, and go afoot to the shrine of Notre-Dame de la Garoupe, and cry aloud with fiery zeal for help, that he might be delivered from temptation:—and then he would turn along the coast, towards his accustomed seat, looking out eagerly for the rustle of Ivy's dress among the cistus-bushes. When at last he met her, a great wave passed over him like a blush. He thrilled from head to foot. He grew cold. He trembled inwardly.

Not for nothing had he lived near the monastery of St. Gildas de Rhuys. For such a Heloise as that, what priest would not gladly become a second Abelard?

One morning, he met her by his overhanging ledge. The sea was rough. The waves broke grandly.

Ivy came up to him, with that conscious blush of hers just mantling her fair cheek. She liked him very much. But she was only eighteen. At eighteen, a girl hardly knows when she's really in love. But she vaguely suspects it.

The Abbé held out his hand. Ivy took it with a frank smile. "Bonjour, M. de Kermadec!" she said lightly. She always addressed him so—not as M. l'Abbé, now. Was that intentional, he wondered? He took it to mean that she tried to forget

his ecclesiastical position. “La tante Emma” should guard her treasure in an earthen vessel more carefully. Why do these Protestants tempt us priests with their innocent girls? He led her to a seat, and gazed at her like a lover, his heart beating hard, and his knees trembling violently. He *must* speak to her to-day. Though *what* he knew not.

He meant her no harm. He was too passionate, too pure, too earnest for that. But he meant her no good either. He meant nothing, nothing. Before her face he was a bark driven rudderless by the breeze. He only knew he loved her: she *must* be his. His passion hallowed his act. And she too, she loved him.

Leaning one hand on the rock, he talked to her for a while, he hardly knew what. He saw she was tremulous. She looked down and blushed often. That intangible, incomprehensible, invisible something that makes lovers subtly conscious of one another’s mood had told her how he felt towards her. She tingled to the finger-tips. It was sweet to be there—oh, how sweet, yet, how hopeless.

Romance to her: to him, sin, death, infamy.

At last he leaned across to her. She had answered him back once more about some trifle, “Mais, oui, M. de Kermadec.” “Why this ‘monsieur’?” the priest asked boldly, gazing deep into her startled eyes. “Je m’appelle Guy, mademoiselle. Why not Guy then—Ivy?”

At the word her heart gave a bound. He had said it! He had said it! He loved her: oh, how delicious! She could have cried for joy at that implied avowal.

But she drew herself up for all that, like a pure-minded English girl that she was, and answered with a red flush, “Because—it would be wrong, monsieur. You know very well, as things are, I cannot.”

What a flush! what a halo! Madonna and vows were all forgotten now. The Abbé flung himself forward in one wild burst of passion. He gazed in her eyes, and all was lost. His hot Celtic soul poured itself forth in full flood. He loved her: he adored her: she should be his and his only. He had fought against it. But love—love had conquered. “Oh, Ivy,” he cried passionately, “you will not refuse me! You will be mine and mine only. You will love me as I love you!”

Ivy’s heart broke forth too. She looked at him and melted. “Guy,” she answered, first framing the truth to herself in that frank confession, “I love you in return. I have loved you since the very first moment I saw you.”

The Abbé seized her hand, and raised it rapturously to his lips. “My beloved,” he cried, rosy red, “you are mine, you are mine—and I am yours for ever.”

Ivy drew back a little, somewhat abashed and alarmed by his evident ardour. “I wonder if I’m doing wrong?” she cried, with the piteous uncertainty of early youth. “Your vows, you know! your vows! How will you ever get rid of them?”

The Abbé gazed at her astonished. What could this angel mean? She wondered if she was doing wrong! Get rid of his vows! He, a priest, to make love! What naïveté! What innocence!

But he was too hot to repent. “My vows!” he cried, flinging them from him with both hands into the sea. “Ivy, let them go! Let the waves bear them off! What are they to me now? I renounce them! I have done with them!”

Ivy looked at him, breathing deep. Why, he loved her indeed. For she knew how devoted he was, how earnest, how Catholic. “Then you’ll join our Church,” she said simply, “and give up your orders, and marry me!”

If a thunderbolt had fallen at the young priest’s feet, its effect could not have been more crushing, more instantaneous, more extraordinary. In a moment, he had come to himself again, cooled, astonished, horrified. Oh, what had he said? What had he done? What vile sin had he committed? Not against heaven, now, or the saints, for of that and his own soul he thought just then but little: but against that pure young girl whom he loved, that sweet creature of innocence! And how could he ever explain to her? How retract? How excuse himself? Even to attempt an explanation would be sheer treason to her purity. The thought in his mind was too unholy for her to hear. To tell her what he meant would be a crime, a sin, a *bassesse*!

He saw it in an instant, how the matter would envisage itself to her un-Catholic mind. She could never understand that to him, a single fall, a temporary backsliding, was but a subject for repentance, confession, absolution, pardon: while to renounce his orders, renounce his Church, contract a marriage that in his eyes would be no marriage at all, but a living lie, was to continue in open sin, to degrade and dishonour her. For her own sake, even, if saints and Madonna were not, Guy de Kermadec could never consent so to taint and to sully her. That pure soul was too dear to him. He had dreamed for a moment, indeed, of foul wrong, in the white heat of passion: all men may be misled for a moment of impulse by the strong demon within them: but to persevere in such wrong, to go on sinning openly, flagrantly, shamelessly—Guy de Kermadec drew back from the bare idea with disdain. As priest and as gentleman alike, he looked down upon it and contemned it.

The reaction was profound. For a minute or two he gazed into Ivy's face like one spellbound. He paused and hesitated. What way out of this maze? How on earth could he undeceive her? Then suddenly, with a loud cry, he sprang to his feet like one shot, and stood up by the edge of the rocks in his long black *soutane*. He held out his hands to raise her. "Mademoiselle," he groaned aloud from his heart, in a very broken tone, "I have done wrong—grievous wrong: I have sinned—against Heaven and against you, and am no more worthy to be called a priest." He raised his voice solemnly. It was the voice of a bruised and wounded creature. "Go back!" he cried once more, waving her away from him as from one polluted. "You can never forgive me. But at least, go back. I should have cut out my tongue rather than have spoken so to you. I am a leper—a wild beast. Ten thousand times over, I crave your pardon."

Ivy gazed at him, thunderstruck. In her innocence, she hardly knew what the man even meant. But she saw her romance had toppled over to its base, and shattered itself to nothing. Slowly she rose, and took his hand across the rocks to steady her. They reached the track in silence. As they gained it, the Abbé raised his hat for the last time, and turned away bitterly. He took the path to the right. Obedient to his gesture, Ivy went to the left. Back to the hotel she went, lingering, with a heart like a stone, locked herself up in her own room, and cried long and silently.

But as for Guy de Kermadec, all on fire with his remorse, he walked fast along the seashore, over the jagged rock path, toward the town of Antibes.

Through the narrow streets of the old city he made his way, like a blind man, to the house of a priest whom he knew. His heart was seething now with regret and shame and horror. What vile thing was this wherewith he, a priest of God, had ventured to affront the pure innocence of a maiden? What unchastity had he forced on the chaste eyes of girlhood? Ivy had struck him dumb by her very freedom from all guile. And it was she, the heretic, for whose soul he had wrestled in prayer with Our Lady, who had brought him back with a bound to the consciousness of sin, and the knowledge of purity, from the very brink of a precipice.

He knocked at the door of his friend's house like a moral leper.

His brother priest received him kindly. Guy de Kermadec was pale, but his manner was wild, like one mad with frenzy. "Mon père," he said straight out, "I have come to confess, *in articulo mortis*. I feel I shall die to-night. I have a warning from Our Lady. I ask you for absolution, a blessing, the holy sacrament, extreme unction. If you refuse them, I die. Give me God at your peril."

The elder priest hesitated. How could he give the host otherwise than to a person fasting? How administer extreme unction save to a dying man? But Guy de Kermadec, in his fiery haste, overbore all scrupulous ecclesiastical objections. He *was* a dying man, he cried: Our Lady's own warning was surely more certain than the guess or conjecture of a mere earthly doctor. The viaticum he demanded, and the viaticum he must have. He was to die that night. He knew it. He was sure of it.

He knelt down and confessed. He would brook no refusal. The country priest, all amazed, sat and listened to him, breathless. Once or twice he drew his sleek hand over his full fat face doubtfully. The strange things this hot Breton said to him were beyond his comprehension. They spoke different languages. How could he, good easy soul, with his cut-and-dried theology, fathom the fiery depths of that volcanic bosom? He nursed his chin in suspense, and marvelled. Other priests had gone astray. Why this wild fever of repentance? Other women had been tempted. Why this passionate tenderness for the sensibilities of a more English heretic? Other girls had sinned outright. Why this horror at the harm done to her in intention only?

But to Guy de Kermadec himself it was a crime of *lèse-majesté* against a young girl's purity. A crime whose very nature it would be criminal to explain to her. A crime that he could only atone with his life. Apology was impossible. Explanation was treason. Nothing remained for it now but the one resource of silence.

In an orgy of penitence, the young priest confessed, and received absolution: he took the viaticum, trembling: he obtained extreme unction. Then, with a terrible light in his eyes, he went into a stationer's shop, and in tremulous lines wrote a note, which he posted to Ivy.

> "Très chère dame," it said simply, "you will see me no more. This morning, I offered, half unawares, a very great wrong to you. Your own words, and Our Lady's intervention, brought me back to myself. Thank Heaven, it was in time. I might have wronged you more. My last prayers are for your pure soul. Pray for mine, and forgive me.
>
> "Adieu!
>
> "GUY DE KERMADEC."

After that, he strode out to the Cape once more. It was growing dark by that time, for he was long at Antibes. He walked with fiery eagerness to the edge of the cliff, where he had sat with joy that morning—where he had sat before so often. The brink of the rocks was wet with salt spray, very smooth and slippery. The Abbé stood up, and looked over at the black water. The Church makes suicide a sin, and he would obey the Church. But no canon prevents one from leaning over the edge of a cliff, to admire the dark waves. They rolled in with a thud, and broke in sheets of white spray against the honeycombed base of the rock, invisible beneath him.

"Si dextra tua tibi offenderit," they said, in their long slow chant—"si dextra tua tibi offenderit." If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off. And Ivy was dearer to him than his own right hand. Yet not for that, oh, Mary, Star of the Sea, not for that; nor yet for his own salvation;—let him burn, if need were, in nethermost hell, to atone this error—but for that pure maid's sake, and for the cruel wrong he had put upon her. "Oh, Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows," he cried, wringing his hands in his agony, "who wert a virgin thyself, help and succour this virgin in her own great sorrow. Thou knowest her innocence, her guilelessness, her simplicity, and the harm beyond healing that I wrought her unawares. Oh, blot it out of her pure white soul and bless her. Thou knowest that for her sake alone, and to undo this sin to her, I stand here to-night, on the brink of the precipice. Queen of the Waves, Our Lady of the Look-out, if the sacrifice please thee, take me thus to thine own bosom. Let thy billows rise up and blot out my black sin. Oh, Mary, hear me! *Stella maris, adesto!*"

He stood there for hours, growing colder and stiffer. It was quite dark now, and the sea was rising. Yet still he prayed on, and still the spray dashed upward. At last, as he prayed in the dim night, erect, with bare head, a great wave broke higher than ever over the rocks below him. With a fierce joy, Guy de Kermadec felt it thrill through the thickness of the cliff: then it rose in a head, and burst upon him with a roar like the noise of thunder. He lost his footing, and fell, clutching at the jagged pinnacles for support, into the deep trough below. There, the billows caught him up, and pounded him on the sharp crags. Thank Heaven for that mercy! Our Lady had heard his last prayer. Mary, full of grace, had been pleased to succour him. With a penance of blood, from torn hands and feet, was he expiating his sin against Heaven and against Ivy.

Next morning, the *douanier*, pacing the shore alone, saw a dead body entangled among the sharp rocks by the precipice. Climbing down on hands and knees, he fished it out with difficulty, and ran to fetch a gendarme. The face was beaten to a jelly, past all recognition, and the body was mangled in a hideous fashion. But it wore a rent *soutane*, all in ribbons on the rocks; and the left third finger bore a signet-ring with a coat of arms and the motto, "Foy d'un Kermadec."

Ivy is still unwed. No eye but hers has ever seen Guy de Kermadec's last letter.

CLAUDE TYACK'S ORDEAL.

I.

Claude Tyack was the tallest and handsomest man of my time at Harvard. And when I saw him walking one day with Elsie Marple through the college avenue, I felt really and truly jealous about Elsie.

Those were the dear old days before the war, and Professor Marple then taught Greek to freshmen and sophomores in Cambridge lecture-halls. Elsie was still the belle of Cambridge, and I was Elsie's favoured admirer. But that afternoon, when I met Elsie a little later, alone, by the old Law School, near the Agassiz Museum, I was half angry with her for talking to Tyack. She blushed as I came up, and I put the wrong interpretation on her blushes. "Elsie," I said, for I called her even then by her Christian name, "that fellow Claude's been here walking with you!"

She looked me full in the face with her big brown eyes, and answered softly, "He has, Walter, and I'm very sorry for him."

"Sorry for him!" I cried, somewhat hot in the face. "Why sorry? What's he been doing or saying that you should be sorry for?"

I spoke roughly, I suppose. I was young, and I was angry. Elsie turned her big brown eyes upon me once more and said only, "I'm *very* sorry for him. Poor, poor fellow! I'm very sorry."

"Elsie," I answered, "you've no right to speak so about any other fellow. Tyack's been making love to you. I'm sure of that. Why did you let him? You're mine now, and I claim the whole of you."

To my great surprise, Elsie suddenly burst into tears, and walked away without answering me anything. I was hot and uncomfortable, but I let her go. I didn't even try in any way to stop her or ask her why she should cry so strangely. I only knew, like a foolish boy as I was, that my heart was full of wrath and resentment against Tyack.

That evening I met him again in the dining-hall—the old hall on the college square that preceded the big memorial building we of the Harvard brigade set up long afterwards in honour of the Boys who fell in the great struggle.

I looked at him angrily and spoke angrily. After hall we went out together into the cool air. Tyack was flushed and still angrier than I. "You want to triumph over me," he said in a fierce way, as we reached the door. "That is mean and ungenerous. You might do better. In your place I would have more magnanimity."

I didn't know what on earth he meant, but my hot French blood boiled up at once—the Ponsards came over with the first Huguenot refugees in the *Evangile* to New England—and I answered hastily, "No man calls me mean for nothing. Blow follows word with men of my sort, Tyack. Insult me again, and you know what you'll get for it."

"You are a fool and a coward," he cried through his clenched teeth. "No gentleman would so treat a conquered rival. Isn't it enough that you have beaten me and crushed me? Need you dance upon me and kick my corpse afterwards?"

I don't know what I answered back. I failed to understand him still, but I saw he was furious, and I only felt the angrier for that; but I struck him in the face, and I told him if he wished it to be open war, war it should be with no quarter.

I could hardly believe my eyes when he drew himself up to his full height and without uttering a word stalked haughtily off, his face purple with suppressed wrath, and his lips quivering, but self-controlled and outwardly calm in his gait and movement. I thought he must be going to challenge me—in those days duelling was not yet utterly dead even in the North—and I waited for his note with some eagerness; but no challenge ever came. I never saw Claude Tyack again till I met him in the Second Connecticut regiment, just before the battle of Chattawauga.

Late that night I went round to the Marples', trembling with excitement, and after our easy American fashion asked at the door to see Miss Elsie. Elsie came down to me alone in the dining-room; her eyes were still a little swollen with crying, but she looked even lovelier and gentler than ever. I asked her what had passed between her and Tyack, and she told me

in simple words a story that, angry as I was, sent a thrill of regret and remorse through my inmost being. Tyack had come up to her that afternoon in the elm avenue, she said, and after gently leading up to it by half-hints, whose meaning she never perceived till afterwards, had surprised her at last by asking her outright to be his wife and make him happy for ever and ever. Elsie was so breathless at this unexpected declaration that she had not even presence of mind to tell him at once of our virtual engagement; and Tyack seeing her hesitate and temporize, went on begging her in the profoundest terms of love and affection, till her woman's heart was touched with pity. "He said he could never know another happy moment," she whispered, "unless I would have him, Walter; and as he said it I knew by his eyes he really meant it."

"And what did you answer?" I asked, in an agony of doubt, my heart misgiving me for my anger that evening.

"I said to him, 'Oh, Mr. Tyack, I know you mean it, and if it weren't that I love Walter Ponsard with all my soul, I think out of very pity I should have to marry you.'"

"You said that," I cried, the devil within me getting the better of me for a moment.

"Yes, Walter, I said that. And Mr. Tyack gave a sort of low, suppressed, sobbing cry, like a man whose heart is thrust through, I should think, and pressed his two hands hard upon his bosom and staggered away as if I had shot him."

"Elsie," I said, taking her white hand in mine in a fit of remorse, "I understand it all now. I hope to Heaven we haven't, between us, sent that man Tyack to blow his brains out, or jump into the river."

When I got back to my rooms at a little past midnight I found a note lying on my table. I took it up and read it eagerly. This is what it said—

"Walter Ponsard,

"You have treated me brutally. No honourable man would act as you have done. Yet, for her sake, I refrain from returning the blow you gave me. But whenever my own turn comes, without hurting her, trust me, you will find you have provoked a dangerous enemy.

"Claude Tyack."

I breathed freer. Then he would not kill himself. I didn't mind his threat of vengeance, but I should have been sorry to bear the guilt of his blood upon me.

Next morning, Tyack had gone from Cambridge, and nobody knew where he had betaken himself.

II.

Before Chattawauga, I was passing through camp, in my uniform as a sergeant in the Harvard battalion of the Third Massachusetts, when I saw an orderly coming from Holditch's regiment, with a note for the general from Colonel Holditch. He wore the grey stuff, with blue facing, of the Second Connecticut. We recognized each other at the first glance. It was Claude Tyack.

Everybody in the North volunteered in those days, and some of us who volunteered rose fast to be field officers, while others of us, equally well born and bred, remained in the ranks for months together. Tyack and I were among the residuum. He glanced at me curtly and passed on. I somehow felt, I don't know why, that the hour of his revenge could not be far distant.

I sat down in my tent that night and wrote to Elsie. It was Elsie who had wished me to volunteer. I wrote to her whenever an occasion offered. A mail was going that evening from the field. I told her all about the expected battle, but I said never a word about poor Tyack.

Just as we were turning in for the night, a United States mail was distributed to the detachment. I opened my letter from Elsie with trembling fingers. She wrote, as ever, full of fears and hopes. A little postscript ended the letter. "I hear," she said, "that poor Claude Tyack is with you in Burnside's division. I shall never cease to be sorry for him. If possible, try and make your quarrel up before the battle. I couldn't bear to think he might be killed, and you unforgiven."

I sat long with the letter in my hand. A battle is a very serious thing. If Tyack had been there in the tent that evening I think I should have taken Elsie's advice and made it all up with him. And then things would have been very different.

As I sat there musing, with the letter still in my fingers, the drum beat suddenly, and we heard the signal for forming battalion. It was the night surprise: Whelock and Bonséjour were upon us suddenly.

Everybody knows what Chattawauga was like. We fought hard, but the circumstances were against the Harvard battalion. Though Burnside held his own in the centre, to be sure, the right wing had a bad time of it; and seventy-two of us Harvard Boys were taken prisoners. I am not writing a history of the war—I leave that to *Harper's* and the *Century*—so I shall only say, without attempting to explain it, that we were marched off at once to Bonséjour's rear, and sent by train next day to Richmond. There we remained for five months, close prisoners, without one word from home, and, what to me was ten thousand times worse, without possibility of communicating with Elsie. Elsie, no doubt, would think I was dead. That thought alone was a perpetual torture to me. Would Tyack take advantage of my absence? Elsie was mine: I knew I could trust her.

At the end of five months the other men were released on parole. They offered me the same terms, but I refused to accept them. It seemed to me a question of principle. I had pledged my word already to fight to the death for my country, and I couldn't forswear myself by making terms with rebels. We of the old New England stock took a serious view of the war and its meaning: we didn't look upon it as a vast national armed picnic party. Even for Elsie's sake, I would not consent to purchase a useless freedom by what I regarded as a public treachery. I could not have loved Elsie so much, "loved I not honour more," as the poet of our common country phrases it.

I was left the only prisoner in the old barracks in Clay Street, Richmond, and of course I was accordingly but little guarded. A few weeks later an opportunity occurred for me to get away. A wounded soldier from the front, straggling in by himself from the entrenchments, fainted opposite the Clay Street Barracks, and was hastily brought in and put to bed there, the hospital accommodation in the city being already more than overcrowded. In the dusk of evening I conveyed his clothes to my own room, and next day I put them on, a tattered and bloodstained Confederate uniform. Then, having shaved off my beard with a piece of hoop-iron, well sharpened against a hone, I passed out boldly before the very eyes of the lounging sentry, and made my way across the streets of the half-beleaguered city. I waited till nightfall in the rotunda of the Exchange Hotel in Franklin Street, where men sat and smoked and discussed the news; and when the lamps began to be lighted around the State Capitol, I slank off along the riverside, so as to avoid being hailed and

challenged by the sentries, who held all the approaches from the direction of Washington.

In those days, I need hardly say, strong lines of earthworks were drawn around Richmond city on the north, east, and west, where Lee was defending it; and it was only along the river southward that any road was left fairly open into the country. I went by the river bank, therefore, onward and onward, till the city lights faded slowly one by one into the darkness behind me. I passed a few soldiers here and there on the road, but my Confederate uniform sufficiently protected me from any unfavourable notice. If any of them hailed me with a "Hullo, stranger! where are you off this time of evening?" my answer was easy, "Straight from the front. Sick leave. Just discharged from hospital in Lee's division." Southern chivalry nodded and passed on without further parley. I was going, in fact, in the wrong direction for many questions to be asked me in passing. Everybody from the South was hurrying up to the front: a wounded soldier, straggling homeward, attracted then but little attention.

I walked on and on, always along the bank of the dark river, till I had almost reached the point where the Appomatox falls into the James. I wanted to reach the Northern lines, and to get to them I must somehow cross the river. It was pitch dark now, a moonless night in early December, and even in Virginia the water at that season was almost ice-cold in the tidal estuary. But I knew I must swim it, sooner or later, and the sooner I tried it the better were my chances. I had eaten nothing since leaving the barracks, and I should probably get nothing to eat until I reached Burnside's army. To-night, therefore, I was comparatively strong: the longer I delayed, the weaker would my muscles grow with hunger. To lie out all night on the ground in the cold is not the best way of preparing one's self for swimming a mile's width of chilly river. Besides, I was almost certain to be observed in the daytime, and shot like a dog, by the one side as a spy, or by the other as a deserter. My only chance lay in trying it by night, so I plunged in boldly just as I found myself.

I shall never forget that awful swim in the dead of night across the tidal water of the James River. The stars were shining dimly overhead through the valley mist, and by the aid of the Great Bear (for I did not know the pole-star then) I swam roughly in what I took to be a general north-eastward direction towards the shore opposite. In a hundred yards or so the southern bank became quite invisible, and I could not hope to see the northern until I had come within about the same distance of it. All the rest of the way I swam by the aid of the stars alone, so far as guidance or compass went, and this compelled me to keep my eyes straining pretty steadily upward, and to hold my head in a most difficult and unnatural position on the surface of the water. The ice-cold stream chilled my frozen limbs, and the gloom and the silence overawed and appalled me.

I don't know how long I took swimming across; time in such circumstances cannot be measured by mere minutes. I only know it seemed to me then a whole eternity. Stroke after stroke, I swam mechanically on, each movement of my thighs coming harder and harder. My trousers impeded my movement terribly; and though I had thrown off my coat on the further bank, to leave the arms free, the boots which I had tied around my neck made swimming more difficult, and weighted my head from observing my star-guides. Still I went on and on in a dogged fashion, my limbs moving as if by clockwork. I must have been nearly three-quarters of the way across when I became aware of a new terror unexpectedly confronting me. My eyes had been fixed steadily upon the stars, so I had not noticed it before; and the noiseless working of the little screw had escaped my ears even in that ghastly silence. But, casting a hasty glance down the river sideways, I noticed all at once, with a thrill of horror, that a small steam-launch, making up-stream, was almost upon me. I knew immediately what she must be—the launch of the *Rapahannock*, Confederate ironclad, on her way up from Chesapeake Bay to the quays at Richmond.

I must live it out, to get back to Elsie. That was the one thought that made up my whole being, as I lay there motionless, floating on the still water, numbed with cold, and half dead with my exertions.

I dared not move lest the launch should see, by the dancing reflection of her light on the rippled waves I made, there was something astir ahead, and should give me chase and capture me as a deserter. I floated like a log on the silent surface, and waited with upturned face and closed eyes for the launch to pass by me—or run over me.

As I floated I heard her screw draw nearer and nearer. I wondered whether I lay direct in her course. If so, no help for it; she must run me down. It was safer so than to swim away and attract attention.

I turned my eyes sideways and opened them cautiously as the noise came close. By heavens, yes! She was heading straight for me!

At Harvard I had always been a good diver. I dived now, noiselessly and imperceptibly; it would almost be truer to say, I let myself go under without conscious movement. The water closed above my face at once. I seemed to feel something glide above me. I was dimly aware of the recoil from the screw. I shut my eyes once more, and held my breath in my full chest. Next instant I was whirled by the after-current back to the surface in the wake of the screw, and saw the white stars still shining above me.

"Something black on the water," shouted a voice behind. "Otter, I take it; or might be a nigger, contraband bound North. Whichever it is, I'll have a cock-shot at it, captain, anyway."

I dived again at the word, half dead with cold and fear; and even as I dived felt rather than heard the thud and hiss of a rifle bullet ricochetting on the water, just at the very point where my head had rested an instant earlier.

"Otter!" the voice said again as I reached the surface, numbed and breathless, more dead than alive, and afraid to let anything but my mouth and ears rise above the black level of the water. And the steam-launch moved steadily on her way without waiting to take any further notice of me.

The danger was past once more for the moment, but I was too exhausted to swim any further, deadened in my limbs with cold as I was, and cramped with my exertions. I could only float face upward on my back, and soon became almost senseless from exposure. Every now and again, indeed, consciousness seemed to return fitfully for a moment, and I struck out in blind energy with my legs, I knew not in what direction; but for the most part I merely floated like a log down-stream, allowing myself to be carried resistlessly before the sluggish current.

As day broke I revived a little. I must then have been at least three hours in the ice-cold water. I saw land within a hundred yards of me. With one despairing final effort, I know not how, I struck out with my legs like galvanized limbs, and made for it—for land and Elsie.

Would Federal pickets be guarding the shore? That was now my next anxiety. If so, my doom was sealed. They would challenge me at once, and, as I could not give the countersign, would shoot me down without a thought or a question as a spy from Richmond.

Fortunately the shore was here unguarded; below Mitchell's redoubt, indeed, attack from southward was always held impossible. I dragged myself on land, over the muddy tidal flat, and found myself in the midst of that terrible, desolate, swampy region known as the Wilderness, the scene of the chief early conflicts in the struggle for disruption, and of the battle-fields where Lee and Stonewall Jackson stood at bay like wounded tigers.

When I came to realize my actual plight I began to feel what a fool I had been to run away from Richmond. I sat there on the bank, frozen and wet, dripping from head to foot, my soaked boots hanging useless round my neck, my blood chilled, my limbs shivering, my heart almost dead, and yet with a terrible sense of fever in my cold lips, and a fierce throbbing in my aching head. I had no food, and no chance of getting any. Around me stretched that broken marshy country, alternating between pine barrens and swampy bottoms. Scouts and pickets held the chief points everywhere: to show myself before them in my wet and ragged Confederate uniform would be to draw fire at a moment's notice. What to do I had no conception: I merely sat there, my head in my hands, and waited, and waited, and waited still, till the sun was high up in the blank-blue heavens.

I won't describe the eight days of speechless agony that followed in the Wilderness. I wandered up and down through scrub and pine-woods, not daring at first to show myself openly; and then, when hunger and fatigue at last conquered my fear, not knowing where to look for the Federal outposts. Night after night I lay upon the bare ground, in the highest and driest part of the wild pine-barrens, and saw the cold stars shining above, and heard the whip-poor-will scream shrill overhead in the thick darkness. It was an awful time: I dare not trust myself even now to recall it too vividly. If it had not been for the wild persimmon trees, indeed, I might have starved in that terrible week. But luckily the persimmons were very plentiful; and though a man can't live on them for ever with absolute comfort, they will serve to keep body and soul together somehow for a longer time than any other wild berry or fruit I know of.

At last, on the eighth morning, as I lay asleep on the ground, wearied and feverish, I felt myself rudely shaken by a rough hand, and, opening my eyes with a start, saw to my joy the Northern uniform on the three men who stood around me.

“Spy!” the sergeant said briefly. “Tie his hands, O’Grady. Lift him up. March him before you.”

I told them at once I was a soldier in the Harvard battalion, escaped from Richmond; but of course they didn’t and couldn’t believe me. My Confederate uniform told too false a story. However, I was far too weak to march, and the men carried me, one of them going on to get me food and brandy; for, spy or no spy, one thing was clear past all doubting, that I was so faint and ill with hunger and exposure that to make me walk would have been sheer cruelty.

“Take him to head-quarters,” my captor or my rescuer said, in a short voice, as soon as I had eaten and drunk greedily the bread and meat and brandy the first man had brought up for me.

They carried me to head-quarters and brought me up before three officers. The officers questioned me closely and incredulously. They would hear nothing of my being a Federal prisoner. The uniform alone was enough to condemn me. “Take him away and search him,” they said peremptorily. The sergeant took me to a tent and searched me; and found nothing.

I knew then what would happen next. They would try me by a rude rough-and-ready court-martial, and hang me for a spy that very morning.

As I marched out from the sergeant’s tent again, absolutely despondent with fatigue and fever, an officer in a major’s uniform strolled casually towards us. Promotion was often quick in those days. The major, I saw at a glance, was Claude Tyack.

He stopped and gazed at me sternly for a moment. Not a muscle of his face stirred or quivered. “Sergeant,” he said, in a cold unconcerned tone, eyeing me from head to foot, “who’s your prisoner?”

“One of Lee’s spies,” the sergeant answered carelessly. “Took him this morning out on the Wilderness. Fourth we’ve taken this week, anyhow. The Rebs are getting kinder desperate, I reckon.”

I looked Claude Tyack back in the face. He knew me perfectly, but never for one instant quailed or faltered. “What will you do with him? Shoot him?” he inquired.

“String him up,” the sergeant replied, with a quiet grin.

I stood still and said nothing.

They took me back and held a short informal drum-head court-martial. It all occupied five minutes. A man’s life counts for so little in war time. I was half dead already, and never listened to it. The bitterness of death was past for me long ago. I stood bolt upright, my arms folded desperately in front, and faced Claude Tyack without ever flinching. Claude Tyack, who only looked on as a mere spectator, faced me in return, mute and white, in solemn expectation.

“Do you admit you are a spy?” the presiding officer asked me.

“No,” I replied, “I am a Federal prisoner from Richmond, late sergeant in the Massachusetts contingent.”

“Can you get any one to identify you?”

“In Burnside’s division—yes; hundreds.”

The presiding officer smiled grimly. “Burnside’s division is a long way off now,” he said calmly. “It moved a month ago. We can’t bring men all the way from Kentucky, you know, to look at you.”

I bowed my head. It mattered little. I was too wearied out to fight for life any longer. I only thought of Elsie’s misery.

Then I became aware that Claude Tyack had joined the ring a little closer, and was looking at me with fixed and rigid attention.

“Nobody nearer?” the officer asked.

I kept my eyes riveted on Tyack's. I could not appeal to him; not even for Elsie. He would not help me. I never knew till that moment I was a thought-reader; but in Tyack's face I read it all—all he was thinking as it passed through his mind: read it, and felt certain I read it correctly.

If he allowed me to be shot then and there, he would not only wipe out old scores, but would also in time marry Elsie.

I saw those very words passing rapidly through his angry mind—"If it weren't that I love Walter Ponsard with all my soul, I think, Mr. Tyack, for very pity I should have to marry you."

She would have to marry him! He would go back, certain of my death; he would tell her all, save this one episode; he would plead hard, as he had pleaded before; and then, for pity, Elsie would marry him!

Our eyes met still; I returned his stare: tall and pale he stood confronting me: he gloated over my misfortune: we spoke never a word to one another; and yet, we two men knew perfectly in our own hearts each what the other was thinking.

There was a deadly pause. The presiding officer waited patiently. The words seemed to stick in my throat. I moistened my lips with my tongue, and wetted my larynx by swallowing. Then I said slowly, "Nobody nearer."

The presiding officer waited again. Clearly he was loth himself to condemn a man so weak and ill as I was. At last he cleared his throat nervously, and turned to the court with an inquiring gesture.

Then Claude Tyack took three paces forward and stood before him. The man seemed taller and paler than ever. Great drops of sweat gathered on his brow. His lips and nostrils quivered with emotion. A frightful struggle was going on within him. The demon of revenge—just revenge, if revenge is ever just—for an undeserved insult—I recognized that—fought for mastery in his soul with right and mercy. "I need not identify him," he cried aloud, clasping his two hands one over the other, and talking as in a dream. "I am not called to give evidence. He has never asked me!"

"I will never ask you," I replied, with dogged despair. "You have found me, oh my enemy! I have wronged you bitterly. I know it, and regret it. I will ask your forgiveness, but never your mercy."

Claude Tyack held up his hands, like a child, to his face. He was a rugged man now, though still young and handsome; but the tears rolled slowly, very slowly, one after another, down his bronzed cheeks. "You shall have my mercy," he answered at last, with a groan, "because you do not ask it; but never, never, never, my forgiveness. For Elsie's sake, I cannot let her lover be shot for a traitor."

The presiding officer caught at it all as if by instinct. "You know this man, Major Tyack?" he asked quietly.

"I know him, Colonel Sibthorpe."

"Who is he?"

The words came as if from the depths of the grave. "Walter Ponsard, sergeant of the Harvard battalion Third Massachusetts infantry, Burnside's division. He was missing seven months ago, after Chattawauga."

"The name and description he gave himself. That is quite sufficient. The prisoner is discharged. Sergeant Ponsard, you shall be taken care of. Tyack, a word with you."

III.

When I next was conscious, I found myself lying in hospital at Washington. Elsie, in a nurse's dress, was leaning over my bed. She kissed me on the forehead. "How about Tyack?" I asked eagerly.

"Hush, hush!" she whispered, soothing my cheek with her hand. "You mustn't talk, darling. The fever has been terrible. We never thought your life would be spared for me."

"But Tyack!" I cried, "I *must* hear of him! He hasn't shot himself? His face was so terrible! I could never live if I thought I had killed him."

"He is there," Elsie whispered, pointing with her hand to the adjoining bed. "Wounded the very next day in the fight at Fredericksburg. I have nursed you both. Hush, now, hush, darling!"

I said no more, but cried silently. I was glad his blood was not on my head. If he died now, he died for his country, in the only just war ever waged on this world of ours. He had had his ordeal, and passed through it like a man and a soldier.

Late that night I heard a noise and bustle at my bedside. Somebody was talking low and earnestly. I turned round on my side and listened. Elsie was standing by Tyack's bed, and holding his hand tenderly in hers. I knew why, and was not surprised at her.

"Elsie, Elsie," he said in a tremulous tone, "press me tighter. It will not be long now. I feel it creeping over me. Is Ponsard conscious?"

I sat up in my bed with delirious strength, in spite of Elsie, and cried aloud in a clear voice, "Tyack, I hear you."

"Ponsard," he said, turning his eyes and, without moving his neck, looking across at me, "I said once I would never forgive you. I am sorry I said so. If there is anything to forgive, I forgive it freely.... Before I die, give me your hand, Walter!"

He had never called me Walter before. The hot tears rose fast in my eyes. Feeble and ill as I was, I sprang from my bed. Elsie clasped my left hand tight and flung the coarse coverlet loosely around me. I sat on the edge of Tyack's bed, and grasped his hand hard in my other. Elsie laid hers over both. She kissed me tenderly with her trembling lips; then she bent down and kissed the dying man too on his white forehead. His hand relaxed; his lips quivered: "Elsie, good-bye!" he said slowly; and all was over.

Elsie flung her arms wildly around my neck. "He saved your life, my darling," she cried. "Walter, I hoped I might have saved his for him."

"It is better so, Elsie," I answered, with an effort; and then I fell back fainting beside him.

TOM'S WIFE.

I.

Tom and Jake lived together most amicably in a rough log hut in one of the wildest wooded parts of that great frozen tract which we know as the Hudson Bay Company's territory. If they'd ever had surnames they'd almost forgotten those needless appendages themselves long since, and certainly nobody else on earth had ever heard of them. They were Tom and Jake to one another and all the world beside, that world in their case consisting of a few distant neighbours some fifty miles off on either side, and the Company's agent at Fort Nitchegouna, with whom they exchanged their skins and furs at long intervals for tobacco, salt, clothing, and other simple necessaries of life in a far northern clearing.

For Tom and Jake were trappers by trade—trappers born and bred in the Hudson Bay district, who had shouldered rifles almost as soon as they could walk a mile, and knew no other mode of life but that lonely existence in the wild woods, snaring beaver, and musquash, and silver fox, and wolverene. Forest and snow were all their scenery. They were men of action, not men of words. Their speech was infrequent, direct, and natural. When they had nothing to say to each other they held their tongues. And as their life afforded few occasions for philosophic reflections they seldom exchanged a sentence between themselves through the long, cold winter and the short, hot summer, except in so far as it was necessary to give or receive instructions about joint action against some particular four-footed enemy—generally a "bar" or a stray northward-wandering summer "painter." Save at these rare moments they were mostly mute, going about the two rooms of their bare log hut with their pipes between their lips, and very little else in their mouths or fancies.

Still, in their own way, those two were deeply attached to one another. They loved like brothers—undemonstratively, but none the less truly. When Tom came back from a long hunting expedition alone he held up his skins for a show in his hand, and said, "Hello, Jake!" and Jake held up his in return, and said, "Hello, Tom!" and both of them felt glad to see the other's face, with a profound consciousness that in that simple greeting they had fulfilled all the duties of backwoods' politeness, and satisfied the claims of eternal friendship.

Perhaps one reason why they liked one another so much was because each formed the other's entire environment. Though, to be sure, if you had told them so they would have smiled blankly and answered, "Sure!" in profound surprise that they should possess anything on earth that had so fine a name without even suspecting it. They had grown up together from the time they were boys, and no womankind had ever come in between to divide their allegiance one to the other. The only female society they ever saw, indeed, was when a party of wandering Indians passed that way to exchange their furs with the whites for spirits and gunpowder. On such occasions Tom and Jake had a rare old frolic with the youngest and prettiest squaws. They organized a moonlight entertainment on the cleared space in front of the hut, and danced to their heart's content for hours at a stretch with their dusky partners, while the Indian men sat by, smoking their pipes, and looked on impassive, wrapped in their blankets and in the true impenetrable Indian silence. At the end of it all, when Tom and Jake could dance no more, they stood glasses of grog to the tribe all round, and the Indians sang "He's a jolly good fellow!" to the familiar tune and in the Ojibway language. But with the trilling exceptions of these primitive orgies once in a twelvemonth Tom and Jake never saw a woman's face from year's end to year's end. They lived their own monotonous life alone among the trees and snows, contented to do so because they know and could conceive no other.

II.

At last, one day an unheard-of event took place by common consent in the little household. Tom went on a shopping expedition to Toronto.

For years the pair had been slowly accumulating a goodly stock of Canadian bank-notes, the surplus of their sales over their purchases from the Company's agent, and having nothing to do with them in the wild north they found these bank-notes had gathered head at last, till Tom and Jake began to feel it was a sin to lock up so much capital idle; and not being economists enough to have heard of investment, they decided between them that Tom, who was the best speaker, must set off to spend it, or part of it, at Toronto. There were things there, no doubt, in the stores they had heard tell of which would come in handy for the hut in snow-time. So off Tom set, in bright mid-winter, on his trusty snow-shoes, taking advantage of the easy travelling down, and meaning to bring back his purchases over the even road afforded by the snow on a hired sleigh from Barrie or Portage.

He might have gone to Ottawa, to be sure, which was a good deal nearer, but they had been told Toronto was the larger town, and if once Tom quitted his native wilds to see the world it was agreed between them he ought to see it with its modern civilization at its highest and best in the streets of a great commercial city.

Seven weeks Tom was gone, and when he came back again he sat and talked for seven hours with Jake, as Jake could never have conceived his old friend and chum capable of talking. Contact with the world had given Tom fresh eloquence; he described all the wonders of the crowded town with strange ease of diction—the railway, the street-cars, the electric light, the telephone, the gigantic hotel, where his room had been number 580, till Jake began to think in his simple soul the travelled man was trying to cram him. Finally, Tom paused in a shamefaced way, and then said with a burst, "And Jake, I'm thinkin' of gettin' married."

Then Jake knew he was really cramming him, and answered nothing, but merely sat with his head on one side, puffing away doubtfully at one of the big cigars which Tom had brought back among his purchases from Toronto as a new and fashionable form of tobacco.

However, when Tom saw he was silent he went on with such evident sincerity to speak of the girl he had chosen for his future wife that bit by bit Jake's incredulity relaxed, and he began to discover to his profound surprise Tom was really in earnest. At last, when he could doubt the startling news no longer, he turned round to Tom and exclaimed in astonishment, "Why, Tom, man, how could ye ever make bold enough to ask her?"

For though Jake had hardly so much as seen a white woman's face in all his life, an innate chivalry and masculine modesty within him made him realize at once the full terror and difficulty of that awful ordeal.

Tom looked at the fire and at the new couch—it had run to a couch with horsehair covering—and answered slowly, "It *was* a pull, Jake, but I managed it, somever; I spoke up and managed it."

Jake felt in his soul a deeper admiration for Tom's abilities than he had ever felt in his life before. To think that that silent, untutored man could have spoken up to a woman's heart, and induced her in only five weeks' clear time to promise to marry him!

III

All through the rest of that winter Tom and Jake were busy with plans for this great revolution in their domestic arrangements—Jake, no less than Tom, and almost even more so—and as soon as spring set in they put them into execution, working together in concert with a rare good will at them. They had cut down logs to build a new room for their expected guest, while the snow was on the ground; and after the first thaw they piled them all up and plastered them well into a neat and commodious bridal chamber. Jake felt the necessity for "a little more style about the house now we're goin' to have a lady of our own to take care of us;" and he went so far as to send a trusty Indian, unbeknown to Tom, down to the store at Portage, on the Canadian frontier, to buy a wall-paper for the living-room, which he insisted henceforth upon describing as "the parlour." He would have called it a drawing room, probably, if it were not for Tom, so deep was his respect for a white woman's dignity. He even talked about building a kitchen, distinct from the parlour, as being more appropriate for the lady's use, had not Tom dissuaded him by saying that Lucy—he actually dared to describe her by her Christian name alone as Lucy—would only find it an extra fire to light and tend, for of course they must have a fire in the living-room, anyway. Wood, to be sure, wasn't dear; they could have that for the cutting, but he didn't want to give Lucy any extra trouble. Jake smiled grimly to himself at that. Extra trouble, indeed! Before the white lady should dream of lighting the fires herself he'd be up and about—but there, no matter. It would be easier for her, perhaps, to keep things tidy in three rooms than in four; and ladies do love to keep things tidy.

At last the preparations were all complete; the little log hut was swept and garnished; the paper on the wall was further adorned by a couple of old *London News* chromo-lithographs; and Tom set out once more, and once more alone, to make his wedding trip to and from Toronto.

On the day he was due to return Jake was all in a flutter of bashful fear and blissful expectation. Had he made everything right as it ought to be for a lady? Was the bouquet of wild flowers in the mug on the mantelpiece strictly appropriate? Were the pots and pans all brightly scoured enough to meet the exacting eye of a female critic? Would Tom's wife be very contemptuous and very hard on a rough trapper fellow? Was she really as young and pretty as Tom had pretended? Or was Tom only trying to magnify his own prowess—as he sometimes did with the game he just missed—by making out he had attacked and captured a real young white woman of surpassing beauty? All these questions Jake asked himself time and again, in delightful doubt, as he sat there waiting in his clean flannel shirt and store coat by the smudge fire for the advent of the happy pair on their honeymoon.

The last seventy miles or so were to be performed on horseback (borrowed, of course) along the Toronto trail or path through the woods; and at last the sound of horses' hoofs on the forest soil made Jake start, and blush, and look at himself furtively, with a tremor of shame, in the looking-glass that now graced the "parlour" mantelpiece.

In two minutes more they were at the door, and Tom was wringing his friend's hand hard, and Jake, looking up, all red-faced confusion, beheld before him, in a neat brown dress, a thing of beauty such as he had never before either seen or dreamed of.

He could only look, and cry out, "Oh, Tom!" and bow before the lady with awkward politeness. The pretty speech he had carefully composed and learnt by heart for the occasion, "It give me much pleasure, ma'am, to welcome my friend Tom's wife to our humble cottage," stuck in his throat and refused to deliver itself. All he knew as he stood there bowing, and painfully conscious of the conduct of his hands, was that Tom's wife was a vision of glory—a beam of sunlight descended straight upon their house in some happy hour from the seventh heavens.

And, indeed, as a matter of fact, she was a pretty, graceful Canadian girl—a farmer's daughter—one of those delicate girls, with small hands and feet and *mignonne* features, whom the Anglo-Saxon race in its Western decadence seems to produce by hundreds (before the stock dies out) out of the commonest lines, yet with a type of beauty which in England itself belongs only to the extreme aristocratic society. Jake was ready to fall down and worship at her feet, and when the lady held out her small, white hand and said to him graciously, with a pretty smile, "I'm glad to see you; Tom's told me a great deal about you already," he felt as though he could sink into the ground with shame for his own inability to answer her fitly.

IV.

The lady's advent made a wonderful difference to the little log hut; for Jake that lonely tenement was filled now with grace and poetry. Tom, for his part, secure in his possession of the priceless treasure, didn't seem after the first few months to make so much of her. But to Jake, who could but worship from afar, she was simply a goddess on earth, a fairy descended to lighten and sweeten the gloom of the forest. Her presence made everything purer and more beautiful. He couldn't imagine how Tom, with the easy carelessness of the quite married man, could allow that angel to cook and wash for them; for himself, he was always trying to save her trouble, to split her firewood and draw her water, to make up for the lack of society in that trackless forest, to find conversation even, as soon as his first awe of the lady wore slowly away and gave place to the sublime and delightful consciousness of secure friendship. For Mrs. Tom, as he always called her, was gracious enough to admit him to the honours of her confidence, and to talk with him on terms of perfect equality. The trapper's heart bounded within him whenever she gave him a kind word—the only white woman, save his own mother, he had ever known to be really friendly with.

Month after month those three lived on together in their strange household, seldom or never seeing any one from outside; and month after month Jake's admiration and devotion towards the dainty white lady grew more and more profound, chivalrous, and tender. As for Tom, he seemed to think less and less of her—or so Jake fancied—as time went on; to be unworthy of this treasure he had won so easily. He was rough but kind, Lucy said sometimes, whereas Jake, as he knew in his own heart, and confessed to himself sheepishly, was kind and not rough, never rough to Lucy. He worshipped the very ground on which she trod—he, whose adoration had never been spoilt by the too great familiarity of accomplished possession.

Winter came on, and with it that terrible time of privation for a lone woman in the cold, cold north. Lucy was snowed up all day in the hut, which Jake tried to make still bright and pleasant for her. He brought in boughs of green spruce-fir to decorate the mantelpiece, and red berries of bitter-sweet to put in the vases that now flanked the mirror. But do all he could, Lucy's spirits faltered terribly in that long, close time. The colour began to fade from her cheeks, and the drudgery and isolation of that awful life began to tell upon her health, both bodily and mental.

"Tom hadn't ought ever to have married her," Jake thought. "She's worlds too good for the likes of us poor hardy trappers."

But Tom considered her just good enough, and not one scrap more than that, and accounted her life about as happy apparently as most other women's.

Winter wore on, and strange things again happened in the hut. It was soon to have yet another inmate.

Against that foreseen contingency it was Jake who travelled on snow-shoes all the way to Portage, and on his own hired sleigh brought back in his train a country doctor. It was Jake who laid in a stock of condensed milk for the little one's use, and who held and washed and first dressed the baby. "Our baby," Jake called it always with proprietary pride—the finest infant, he was willing to wager a score of skins, in all the square miles of the Hudson Bay Company's territory.

But the more the baby lived and thrived and the more Jake worshipped and admired its mother, the less and less did Tom seem to think of them. Jake was beginning to get angry with Tom in his heart of hearts for his want of kindliness and respect to Lucy. If only she had been *his*—but there, Jake never permitted himself to think like that—or if he did he read a bit of a chapter in Lucy's book that she'd brought with her, for he knew how to read, and that soon made him come round again with a rush to better and saner views of the matter.

V.

Summer came and went, and winter returned again, and with it Lucy's ill-health became more pronounced. She was fading, Jake sometimes thought, under stress of that hard life, like a summer flower before the frosts of October. But Tom didn't see it; he was often positively harsh and cruel to her now; it made Jake's heart bleed sometimes to hear how angrily and unkindly he spoke to her.

One morning in January, a cold sunlit morning, when the thermometer (if they'd had one) would have stood some fifty degrees below zero, Jake rose from his bed, all fiery in soul, and went out to his work to trap the ermines in their winter livery. He was ill at ease. Things grew worse and worse for Lucy. He had heard voices in the night from Mrs. Tom's room—Tom and his wife had been having words, he knew. That wretch to dare to talk so to that angel!

Slowly the change had been working in his heart. It had worked itself out fully now. He had loved Tom once, and then that morning, for Lucy's sake, he knew he hated him.

He went about his work with a sluggish soul. It was a bitter cold day, even for the far north, and the snow glittered icily in the clear frosty sunshine. He longed every minute to be back with Lucy. To think she was unhappy alone in the hut there, that pure fair girl, nursing her grief, with none to comfort her! Do what he would he couldn't help recurring to it. At last the impulse was too strong for him to resist. He left his traps half baited in the snow, and trudged wearily home across the frozen forest to comfort Lucy.

At the door the sound of angry voices met his ear once more. His heart throbbed hard, and then stood still within him. He knew a great crisis in his life had come. With trembling fingers he lifted the latch: then he strode, black as night, into the desolate little parlour.

By the table Lucy was sitting, her face in her hands, with the baby in her lap, sobbing violently. Opposite where he stood Tom had just risen, and was speaking in harsh tones to that poor quivering woman. As Jake raised the latch he caught just one word. It was a word that made the blood boil in his veins. Tom—the Tom he had once loved so well—had flung a hateful oath at the woman Jake would have died to save from one pang of trouble.

Jake was a choleric man, and he could stand it no more. The man had spoken his own condemnation. Advancing with a firm stride into the middle of the room, he looked full in Tom's face, one fierce wild look, and cried out aloud in a terrible voice, "Coward!" Then without pausing a second, in the white heat of his righteous indignation, he pulled out his revolver from the belt at his side, and taking aim steadily, with a tremulous hand, sent a bullet through the heart of Lucy's husband.

Tom turned just once towards his murderer as he clasped his hand to his bleeding breast. Then he staggered and fell at full length on the floor, with his lifeless head close by the legs of the plain wooden table.

VI.

At that terrible sound Lucy leapt from her place, and, laying down the baby, flung herself in an agony of terror and amazement on the lifeless body of her murdered husband. It was all so ghastly, so sudden, so incomprehensible! She flung herself upon it in one wild burst of despair; and the awful cry that went up from her lips to heaven above brought Jake at once with a rush to a blinding consciousness of his crime, and of the insoluble riddle which it so sternly imposed upon him.

Quick as lightning, as he paused there, revolver in hand, with the body of his friend bleeding fast before his eyes, the whole impassable deadlock to which he had brought things by that irrevocable act flashed across his fevered brain like wildfire. It was impossible, he said to himself in his agony, that Lucy should pass one night alone under that desecrated roof with her husband's murderer. It was impossible that she should accept that murderer's escort to see her safe through the frozen forest to the nearest place of refuge from his blood-stained presence. It was impossible that he should let her tramp alone with her baby in mid-winter through the pathless woods, surrounded by the manifold terrors of savage wild beasts and wilder Indians. It was impossible that he should leave her in the hut by herself with her dead husband, to suffer who knows what agonies of fear and sorrow, while he made his way alone through the snow-clad land to deliver himself up to offended justice. Whatever way he looked at it he saw no door of escape—no door but one, and from that one door, all murderer as he was, he shrank back like a woman. But there was no time to think. He must nerve himself to act. Tenderly and remorsefully he raised that deadly weapon again in his hand, pointed it straight, and fired unflinchingly. Another report, another loud cry, and another thick cloud of white smoke in the little parlour.

When it cleared away Lucy lay lifeless on Tom's warm corpse, and Jake stood alone in the hut with the baby.

She was shot quite dead through the heart from the back. Jake's practised hand had never taken a surer aim. He had nerved himself to the task to save her needless pangs of mind or body. He had dared to solve the insoluble problem in the one awful way that still remained open to him.

VII.

As soon as he had sufficiently recovered from the first sickening horror of that terrible scene Jake took the two bodies up reverently from the ground in his arms, and laid them side by side on the bed in their own bedroom. Then he knelt down like a child beside the bed and prayed. Words came to him in his need. He prayed long, and fervently, and earnestly.

But he didn't pray for mercy or forgiveness for himself. It was not of himself or his own selfish fears for this world or the next that Jake was thinking. He prayed for the souls of Tom and Lucy. He wasn't theologian enough to know in his simple mind that in the particular Church of which he reckoned himself to be an outlying member prayers for the dead are discountenanced and discouraged. He followed the dictates of his own innermost instinct. He prayed that Tom and Lucy might henceforth have rest, and might forgive him this wicked wrong he had done them. He prayed that the baby—Lucy's baby—might be spared to live as its mother would have wished it, and grow up to a happier life than ever hers had been. He prayed with great beads of dew standing on his cold brow in the agony of his repentant remorse and contrition. Last of all he humbly prayed a merciful Heaven, in simple but heartfelt words, to be pleased to lay upon him such condign punishment as the magnitude of the great crime he had just committed most duly merited.

Then, conscious of a deep and abiding guilt that made him unworthy to kneel any longer beside the corpse of that pure and beautiful woman whom he had loved and murdered, he rose once more, with staggering steps went out into the snow alone with his crime, and dug a deep hole with a pick in the frozen drift to receive those two piteous bleeding bodies. He couldn't bury them, to be sure, for the ground was too hard; but he could lay them up there safe in the preserving snow, and pour water to freeze above their temporary grave, so that they might lie there in safety from the wolves and the foxes till the thaw set in, when men from the fort could come over and take them to Nitchegouna cemetery. There Lucy should lie in holy earth till the Day of Judgment.

When the grave was dug he carried out those two tenderly once more in his arms, and laid them side by side with their faces turned towards one another in the trench he had thus made to receive them. Over the top of the trench he poured buckets of water, and in half an hour so intense was the cold on that bitter, glittering January day, the whole mass was frozen stiff and solid together as a granite column.

After that Jake took Lucy's little book from her leather desk, and slowly and solemnly, in spite of many stumbling efforts, read over the grave, with blinding tears and choking voice, the Church of England burial service. At times his tongue failed him and his lips quivered, but still he went on alone in the clearing. Come what might, Lucy should not be buried without Christian burial. As he finished he flung himself passionately on the grave, and cried out aloud from his very heart in a broken voice, "Tom, Tom, I was your friend, and I killed you! I killed you!" But he didn't dare to say a last farewell to Lucy. Murderer that he was, he was unworthy to speak to her.

From the grave Jake turned once more, awful in his loneliness, into the bare hut, where the baby lay crying and stretching out its nine months' arms for its dead mother. Jake took it up in his fatherly hands and kissed it, as he had kissed it many times before, and mixed it some food with broken biscuit and condensed milk, and fed it with a spoon till it smiled and was happy.

Then he wrapped the baby in a thick warm skin, rolled in her dress all their remaining bank-notes, strapped his knapsack on his back, full of condensed milk, fastened the snow-shoes on his weary feet, and set out through the snow with the baby in his arms, pressed close to his breast, in a paroxysm of remorse, to give himself up for the double murder to the authorities at Ottawa.

I.

It was a woodland slope behind St. Pierre-les-Bains. Basil Hume was walking alone on the edge of the hillside. Everybody knows St. Pierre, that dream of peace among the Vosges mountains—a nestling town, high perched in a nook above a deep blue lake, amid a shadowy land of spreading pine forest, grey granite hills, and great ice-worn boulders. Basil had finished his day's work among the dappled lights of the upland, and was strolling along now, with his sketch-book hanging idly in one hand by his side, taking mental notes as he went of evening effects between the branches of the forest. His head, as he strolled on, was crammed full of Marcella. He called her "Marcella" to himself, in his happy day dreams, though to her face, of course, like all the rest of the world, he spoke of her always as "Mrs. Griswold." She had filled a large place in the painter's mind those last six weeks: the Vosges was to Basil one long idyll of Marcella.

Suddenly—unexpectedly—at a sharp turn in the footpath, he heard, close by, the delicate rustling of a woman's gown against the hard glittering rock, into which a way had been worn deep for future traffic by countless naked or *sabot*-clad feet of mountain peasants. He started at the sound. His heart beat quicker. Next moment he looked up: Marcella stood before him.

She was dressed as usual in her simple English morning costume; tailor-made, all neatness. In her left hand she held carelessly a little sketch-book; her right grasped a freshly gathered spray of pale white butterfly orchid. Its ghostly thin flowers, with their long pale streamers and their faint tinge of green, seemed to suit most strangely with her soft childlike beauty. To cover the embarrassment of the sudden meeting, she held up the pallid witch-blossoms before Basil's eyes.

"What do you say to *that*, Mr. Hume?" she asked the admiring painter, with one of her sunny smiles. "Now, aren't they just beautiful?"

Basil took the spray, trembling, from her gloveless fingers. "They *are* beautiful," he answered, looking timidly into her eyes and then back again at the flowers. "I know them well of old. They seem just the fit flowers for such country as this, with their transparent whitey-green, and their floating pennons of petals. And how strangely thin! Their colour reminds one, somehow, almost of the mistletoe berry."

He ceased, and looked hard at her. There was a moment's pause. Marcella was accustomed to having men look hard at her. Yet this was one of those pauses that seem to call for language. Basil gazed at the sky. Then, after a minute's delay, he recovered himself with a start, and brought his eyes back with a bound once more from infinity to Marcella.

"I'm lucky to find you alone," he said. "I—I wanted to speak with you."

"I'm generally alone," Marcella said simply, leaning for a moment as she spoke against a great granite boulder.

Basil looked at her with keen eyes. "Your husband's still in Paris?" he asked.

Marcella nodded assent. "Yes, as usual, in Paris," she answered. "He cares for nothing else on earth but that—and Vichy, and Monte Carlo, and Trouville, and Homburg."

"And you stop here still?" the young man ventured to put in.

Marcella gazed up at him. Never before in his life, he thought, had he seen that baby-face so bewitchingly, so provokingly, so enticingly beautiful. Her rich red lips looked for all the world like a pressing invitation to break outright the most brittle of the commandments.

"Yes, I stay here still," she answered, with a half-muttered sigh. "I shall stay here all summer now, I suppose, till Alvan is graciously pleased to take me to the Riviera. It's a very good place to shelve a person in, when you want to get rid of them. And indeed," she added, letting her eyelids drop and her eyes fall gracefully on the glimpses of blue lake and white town far below them, "a prettier place, or a sweeter, one would hardly want to be shelved in."

Basil hardly knew how to answer her. It was an open secret, to be sure, with all the world of St. Pierre, on what terms she lived with Alvan Griswold; everybody knew it, and everybody talked of it. But Basil had never before heard Marcella herself allude so plainly to her relations with her husband. He was sorry to hear her now. Her frankness gave him an uneasy feeling of boyish awkwardness. To break the silence, he glanced down at the little sketch-book she held idly in her hand.

"You've been drawing, I see," he said ingenuously. "May I look at what you've been doing?"

Marcella held the book out half-apologetically towards him, with one finger between the leaves. "But you'll think nothing of it," she murmured, with a faint blush on that peach-like cheek. "I can't bear to show my work to professional artists. One does one's little best, and then they who know think such very small things of it."

Basil took the sketch-book shyly from her half-resisting fingers. "I'm sure," he said, in a serious tone, "I could never think small things of anything on earth *you* did, Mrs. Griswold."

And indeed he spoke the truth. Had they been the veriest daubs ever splashed upon paper, he would have found them beautiful—for Marcella had painted them.

He opened the sketch-book at random and turned over a page or two. He had no need for indulgence. The sketches, though amateurish of course, betrayed in every touch a native eye for form and colour.

"But these are the real stuff," he said, looking into them carefully. "Nothing could be more graceful, now, than the branches of that pine; and then the spots of light on the russet patches of moss—how true, how natural!"

"You really like them?" Marcella cried, leaning eagerly forward. She was a child in her eagerness. "You think they're not quite hopeless—not quite silly for a beginner?"

Basil held the book in front of him, a little on one side, and eyed the sketches askance, with the searching gaze of a critic. "On the contrary," he answered slowly, with transparent truth in the very ring of his honest voice, "I should say they display unusual native bent; the light and shade in particular are very neatly handled, and your sense of colour—well, is far above the average. You ought to take lessons." Then he added, after a short pause, "If some artist friend, now, could give you a hint or two—myself, for example—would you mind my coming round to help you finish off occasionally?"

"Oh, how good of you!" Marcella cried, and looked up at him with that timidly confiding glance which was one of the chief charms of her almost child-like beauty. "It would be so awfully kind of you. I can't say how grateful your help would make me."

Basil struck while the iron was hot. "There's nothing like working at a sketch while it's fresh in your mind," he said eagerly. "You've been engaged on these pine trees, with the flowers in the foreground, this afternoon, I see. May I come round to your hotel to-night, and volunteer just a hint or two as to technical points in your management of your tree forms?"

Marcella shrank back, a little alarmed and abashed. "Oh no! not to-night," she said quickly. "I—I have an engagement this evening. Some friends from the Belle-Vue are coming round to see me. But any other night when you happen to be free, I should be so awfully obliged to you. It must be the evening, I suppose? daylight at present is too precious to encroach upon."

"We'll make it Wednesday, then," Basil cried, overjoyed, and hardly able to contain himself. It was a great thing for him to be permitted so to call upon Marcella.

He was just going to move on in the direction of the town, from the moss-clad boulder against which they had been leaning their backs during this brief little colloquy, when, round the same corner where Marcella had surprised him, a handsome man, in knickerbockers, with a soft slouch hat, broke in unexpectedly upon their *tête-à-tête* with a sudden short whistle. Basil had seen him in the town more than once before, and taken a hand at *écarté* with him in the rural Casino. He was a handsome young Frenchman, Guy de Marigny by name, and a soldier by profession.

“Ah, te voilà, Marcella!” the new-comer cried in French, blurting out her Christian name before he perceived the stranger. “I’ve been looking for you up and down for the last twenty minutes.” Then he gave a hasty start, and turned more stiffly to Basil, raising his big slouch hat as he spoke. “Monsieur, je vous salue,” he said. “I did not at first perceive that madame was accompanied.”

“So it seems,” Basil replied drily, half sorry that he should have caught the unguarded word, and still more unguarded *tutoiement*. “I was returning from my day’s work, high up among the hills, and at a bend of the path here I came suddenly upon madame.”

De Marigny smiled and nodded, trying to look unconcerned. Like a well-bred Frenchman, he put the best face upon it.

Marcella turned to him with one of her bewitching smiles. “Mr. Hume has been so kind,” she said; “oh, mais si aimable! mais si aimable! He has promised to come round and help me with my sketches. He’s going to give me lessons in the evening, do you know, beginning immediately.”

“Not to-night?” De Marigny interposed, with an anxious air.

“Oh no, not to-night!” Marcella answered, darting a quick glance at him from under her hat. “I was just explaining that to him.”

“For to-night,” De Marigny went on, turning once more to Basil, “madame is engaged to come to my sister-in-law’s, who holds a reception.”

Basil noted the discrepancy, but was too polite, of course, to call attention to it overtly. Two’s company; three’s none. He had seen enough now to tell him very plainly that Marcella and De Marigny were on those terms of intimacy where a third person is wholly superfluous to the conversation. With some slight excuse for taking a short cut down the hillside, he raised his hat and left them abruptly. But he went down the hill somewhat heavy in heart. Your husband in Paris he accepted, of course, as a necessary element of the situation—all married women have a husband somewhere—but De Marigny, he saw at once, was a far more dangerous rival.

II.

All next day, to relieve his soul, Basil worked hard at his picture, high up on the hillside. He started betimes in the early morning, and didn't return to his hotel in the town till dinner-time. Even then, as is the wont of artists, he was late for *table d'hôte*. He came down, hastily dressed, at the end of the fish course, to find his neighbours on either side busily discussing the latest new sensation in the form of a *crime passionel*. He paid little heed to them. His head was equally divided now between Marcella and his painting; so he took small note of the gossip and twaddle which interests the *table d'hôte* order of intellect. He merely gathered vaguely from side hints which the others let drop, that somebody somewhere—an American, as he judged—had come home unexpectedly, from the sky or elsewhere, to find his wife and her lover in *flagrante delicto*, and had shot his rival dead before the very eyes of the unhappy woman. For some minutes Basil said nothing as to how such an appalling act impressed him; but the general truculent satisfaction of the good moral folk at the table by his side, over this vindication, as they considered it, of the ethical proprieties, roused him at last, by pure force of iteration, to something very like indignant horror. He turned to the British matron who sat close at his left.

"What an atrocious crime!" he exclaimed, bridling up. "For my part, I hope the French jury won't go in, after its kind, for extenuating circumstances."

Mrs. Paul—that was his neighbour's name—stared back at him blankly. "As far as I'm concerned," she answered, in a sharp little treble, "I only wish, myself, he'd shot the woman also."

Basil started back, aghast. Such bloodthirsty frankness appalled him. He was a clergyman's son, and had been brought up in the seemingly effete idea that human life possesses a special sanctity. "You can't surely mean that!" he cried, all trembling with sudden horror. "You can't mean to say you approve of deliberate murder?"

"I don't call that *murder*," the lady answered quietly. "I think, under the circumstances, the husband had a perfect right to shoot both of them."

"Everybody thinks so, of course," a bland, bald-headed old gentleman on the other side of the table interposed with a genial smile. "Most general sympathy has been expressed ... for the husband."

"For the husband?" Basil exclaimed, taken aback. "Oh no! You can't mean that! For the murderer, not for the victim!"

"What *very* hard words you use!" the bland old gentleman retorted mildly.

"I call a murder a murder," Basil answered, growing hot.

"But every man must surely defend his honour," Mrs. Paul put in, with a tart little smile of truly Britannic virtue.

Basil looked back at her, astonished. He couldn't even fathom these people's point of view. It was far too barbaric, too primitive, too fierce for him. "That may be public opinion," he said slowly, with genuine earnestness, endeavouring to take it in; "but it's *not* Christianity, and it's *not* civilization."

Mrs. Paul sidled away from him with an offended air. It was clear she didn't even like to sit too close to a man who professed such shockingly humane sentiments.

Basil's interest in the murder was now fully aroused. "But tell me," he said eagerly, "who *are* these people? Where did it all happen? Of course, in Paris?"

"In Paris? Oh dear no," the bald-headed old gentleman responded with a pitying smile, "Here, here in St. Pierre! Last night, as ever was! The whole town's ringing with it!"

Basil's head swam round. He clutched his fork convulsively. "In St. Pierre?" he cried, appalled. "Who—who was the murderer?"

“The *gentleman* who did it,” Mrs. Paul said sharply, with a very marked emphasis on the corrective phrase, “was Mr. Alvan Griswold, the husband of that pretty little doll who was always at the Casino; and the man he shot was Monsieur Guy de Marigny.”

The *salle-à-manger* swam round in a tumultuous whirl about Basil as a pivot. His heart rose into his mouth; he could hardly realize it. Then the man who had done this wicked thing was—Marcella’s husband; and the man he had shot was—Marcella’s friend of last night’s adventure!

He paused and let it sink in. He could only grasp it slowly. It was Marcella herself, then, Mrs. Paul so wished Alvan Griswold had shot! Cruel and wicked as he had thought her words before, their cruelty and wickedness came back to him now with ten thousand-fold more force. That wretched gambler, who neglected his wife for the houris of Monte Carlo and the painted Jezebels of Paris, to take vengeance like this upon Marcella and her lover! The bare idea of it appalled him. And what added point to it all in Basil Hume’s mind was that deeper thought he couldn’t conceal from himself even in the first shock of discovery—mere circumstance had prevented him from being himself in De Marigny’s position. They would as easily have condoned the murder of the one man as the murder of the other. Basil raised his eyes from the table. In letters of blood across the blank white wall of the *salle-à-manger* he seemed to see those five words staring him hard in the face, “Thou shalt do no murder.” He rose from the table abruptly. He could stop there no longer. In some mechanical way he bowed to right and left. His soul was filled with that one absorbing thought.

“For myself,” he said stiffly, as he rose from his chair, “I believe in God’s law. I can neither commit nor condone a murder.”

III.

For the next four or five days nothing was talked of at St. Pierre but the Griswold tragedy. Wherever he went, Basil heard it discussed from every point of view; and, what struck him as odd, while there was plenty of sympathy everywhere for the murderer and his crime, there seemed to be little or none for the victim and his family, or for poor Marcella. Everybody spoke of Alvan Griswold, caught red-handed in his vulgar revenge, as they might speak of a hero. The newspapers chronicled his smallest doings; telegrams carried news of his state of health and of his last remark every day of the week to every corner of Europe. It was sickening—sickening! At first, to be sure, Basil talked much of the matter to all and sundry; but he got so cold a reception for his simple view as to the wrongfulness of bloodshed, that he learnt at last to hold his tongue about it. Every one to whom he spoke seemed to hold the same opinion, that Griswold had done the one thing possible for "a man of honour," under the circumstances. By slow degrees Basil worked himself up to a state of fiery indignation against this unchristian and uncivilized idea of honour. He could hardly believe that the whole community regarded the crime as St. Pierre regarded it. "It's infamous," he said once, "simply cruel and infamous! From the way you all talk, one would think a wife was a man's absolute chattel, and a chattel so personal, so sacred, so much his own, that the least encroachment upon it justified the possessor in taking without trial the life of his assailant."

The world shrugged its shoulders and answered nothing. The man was an enthusiast. Basil ceased to reason with it. When he did, it talked much to him of the necessity for a man defending his honour—words which answered to no possible idea or reality in Basil's scheme of the universe. To say the truth, he was a civilized man, and he was only just beginning to discover the great gulf fixed between his own moral ideas and those of the semi-barbaric, semi-feudal world by which he was surrounded.

Marcella herself he never saw. Immediately after the murder she had hurried away in shame and disgrace from St. Pierre, and taken refuge at La Roche, the *chef-lieu* of the department, where she underwent the interrogatories of the *Juge d'Instruction*. As for Alvan Griswold, whom Basil had never yet seen, he brazened it all out with true American bravado. A Californian born, with the rough-and-ready ideas of the Pacific coast for his sole known code of morals and honour, he regarded the whole affair as a passing episode, and awaited his trial with stolid indifference. The weeks wore on slowly. Basil learnt from the papers how day by day Marcella was tortured and cross-questioned for details. French procedure, which in some respects received a faint modern tinge from the Revolution and the *Code Napoléon*, remains yet in other respects even crueller and more dilatory than that mass of barbaric, mediæval, or half-savage survivals, the law of England.

It was nearly six weeks before Griswold was tried. All that time Marcella waited in despair at her hotel at La Roche, and all that time Basil stayed on at St. Pierre in breathless expectation. He couldn't paint. He couldn't read or write. He couldn't even think. He could do nothing but revolve in his own mind that terrible crime, and the callous insensibility of those around him with regard to it. At last the day fixed for the trial arrived. Basil went up to La Roche, and with trembling heart and quivering footsteps ascended the great staircase of the Palais de Justice.

He never before seen a French court in action. All was new and strange to him—the judge in his curious, old-world costume; the barristers in their quaintly-shaped caps and gowns; the *huissier* in his place; the officials of the court in their unfamiliar uniform. Not less so the procedure. Alvan Griswold was brought into court between two military-looking gendarmes. For the first time in his life Basil set eyes upon the man whose act for so many days had monopolized and concentrated his whole brain and attention. Griswold was tall and thick-set—a very powerful man; low-browed, dark-haired, with a bull-dog look of iron determination on his unamiable features. Even the scrupulous dress of a gentleman and the cultivated accent he had acquired unawares in European society, didn't entirely disguise in him the original element of western ruffiandom. That large hard chin, those cold black eyes, that square bullet head, marked him out at once as the true descendant of the men who first scrambled in a desperate struggle for life over the possession of the goldfields. He was just the sort of man one would shrink instinctively from meeting on a dark night in the country. Rich, well-groomed, well-barbered, with a dainty flower in his buttonhole and a big gem on his middle finger, he still looked and moved every inch a prize-fighter. Basil could understand better now the view such a man would almost necessarily take of his wife and his honour, and the means he would hold to be lawful and just for

defending and upholding his proprietary rights in her.

From the very first start the young Englishman was surprised at the evident want of reality and earnestness that characterized the proceedings. The Judge, the counsel, the very *Procureur de la République* himself, seemed to go through their task with pure perfunctory diligence. Nobody, he noticed, appeared to regard the matter as in any way serious. It was a formal trial. The official prosecutor, to begin with, in a very mild speech set forth in brief the main facts of the case—how the prisoner, an American citizen, had married on such a date an English lady, Miss Marcella Pocock; how, during his absence in Paris, his wife had formed an attachment of the usual sort in these cases for Monsieur Guy de Marigny, a well-known visitor at St. Pierre-les-Bains, on leave from his regiment; how, returning unexpectedly on such and such a day from the capital to the hotel, where he had left his wife during the summer season, the accused discovered her closeted in her room with a supposed lover; how, by the aid of the hotel servants, he had broken in the door, and shot his victim dead then and there with his revolver. The weapon itself—with a little nod towards the table in front—was offered the court as one of the material evidences. The *Procureur de la République* made it all quite clear as far as he went; yet he spoke, Basil observed, with a certain strange hesitation. There was none of the denunciatory eloquence, the fiery zeal so common in French official treatment of a prisoner; none of those violent apostrophes, those rhetorical questions, those sudden point-blank descents upon the accused with an inconvenient dilemma or an awkward alternative. When the *Procureur* sat down, a little hum of relief went round the court. Everybody looked at his neighbour, and everybody seemed to say, "There, you see; I told you so."

What it all could mean Basil hardly imagined, he only saw that, for some strange reason, the court didn't intend to convict Alvan Griswold. The evidence of the witnesses was taken in the selfsame listless and perfunctory fashion. The hotel waiters swore positively to this and that; the guardian of the peace, called in to observe the disposition of the room, was just equally explicit. Monsieur le Président opined that we need not in this matter take the evidence of madame. Her deposition, as obtained before the *Juge d'Instruction*, and now read over to the court, would amply suffice, he thought, for her share in the incident. Basil was glad of that. He turned one glance towards Marcella, who, deeply veiled and in profound mourning, sat aside in the court at a place assigned to her. She lifted her eyes through her veil for a moment and met his. Her look was full of mute gratitude for his unspoken sympathy.

The case for the prosecution closed. The court and the spectators gave a sigh of relief. Alvan Griswold, glancing around him defiantly on all sides, took stock of the judge, the bar, the spectators. Then his counsel rose. It was Maître Legrange, the silver-tongued, the irresistible. In a few short words the great barrister met the purely formal case, as he said, which *M. le Procureur de la République* had brought against his client. Their plea was, of course, a plea of justification. After the evidence tendered on the prosecuting side, it would hardly be necessary for him to show at further length the nature of the relations which unhappily subsisted between Madame Griswold and *feu* Monsieur de Marigny. Those relations, the prosecution itself, he remarked, had amply, and more than amply, already admitted. For justification, he need hardly say, he relied entirely on Article 324 of the Penal Code, which reads as follows:—

"Dans le cas d'adultère prévu par l'article 336, le meurtre commis par l'époux sur son épouse ainsi que sur le complice, à l'instant où il les surprend en flagrant délit dans la maison conjugale, est excusable."

Maître Legrange paused long with forensic skill before he began his reading of that exculpatory article. Basil Hume felt in his heart that something quite important, quite unexpected, was coming. The great barrister adjusted the *pince-nez* on his nose as he held up the heavy volume of the Penal Code with great dignity in front of him. Then, in his ringing, sonorous voice, and with his impressive manner, he uttered the terrible words of that terrible provision. Deep silence reigned in the court. All the Frenchmen present were of course well aware of the nature of their own law; but this trial had attracted many English and Americans, to whom that atrocious provision—the most barbaric, surely, in any civilized code—came home with all the force of a surprising and startling novelty. To none of them, however, did it appear so startling, so surprising, so utterly confounding, as to Basil Hume. It burst upon him like a thunderbolt. Then, not only in the opinions of irresponsible men and women at hotel dining-tables, but by the deliberate law of the French Republic, such a murder as that was no murder at all, not even a crime, but an excusable outburst of natural feeling!

Basil felt his cheeks at once grow fiery red with shame and indignation. The inner fire that consumed him burnt brighter than ever within his marrow now. His mouth was hot and dry; his head was swimming. He looked across at Marcella with infinite compassion. Then he looked at Alvan Griswold with a mingled look of horror, dismay, and infinite loathing.

As for the Californian, he stood there still in the dock unmoved, his arms crossed boldly across his burly breast, and a faint smile playing lightly around that cruel mouth and those jaws of iron.

Maître Legrange, hardly pausing, went on with effect to argue in detail that the drama of the Hotel des Vosges, as everybody now called it, fell under the case so distinctly provided for by Article 324 in its second paragraph. The only question, he said, was as to the doubtful point whether the phrase "*dans la maison conjugale*" could be construed so as to include the rooms in the hotel where Madame Griswold, at the time of the occurrence, was lodging. Maître Legrange maintained learnedly that they might be so construed; for "*la maison conjugale*" means not necessarily an entire house, but a domestic residence. For example, no husband could be deprived of the benefit of this humane exception on the purely accidental and casual ground that he happened to occupy, let us say, a flat in a house in Paris. By the words "maison conjugale," the law clearly intended to designate the home or habitual *logis* of the family. Now, M. Griswold had taken these rooms in the spring for himself and madame; he had resided in them together with her before his departure from St. Pierre for Paris; and he returned to them unexpectedly on the evening in question with the obvious intention of once more taking up his abode with his wife in them. Clearly, then, under such circumstances, the apartments must be regarded as the family residence. And Maître Legrange confidently expected that the jury, directed to that effect (as he hoped) by Monsieur le Président, would take this more lenient and reasonable view of the circumstances under consideration, and would acquit the accused of the very serious charge now brought against him.

To Basil it all sounded just horrible, horrible. But Monsieur le Président, after some further formal evidence had been taken, as to tenancy of apartments, previous occupation, and so forth, summed up with judicial clearness in the prisoner's favour. He ruled on the point of law that the jury must regard the rooms in the hotel as the family residence. If, therefore, they were convinced that Monsieur Griswold shot the betrayer of his wife and of his domestic happiness at the moment when he surprised her *en flagrant délit* with her accomplice, the law was plain—it left them no option but to return at once a verdict of acquittal.

The jury retired in form to consider their finding. They were absent but for a moment. Next minute they trooped back again, with their answer ready.

"What verdict do you find?" Monsieur le Président inquired languidly.

And the foreman answered, clearing his throat, "We find, in accordance with Article 324 of the Penal Code, that M. Alvan Griswold shot the deceased, Guy de Marigny, at the moment when he surprised him in open adultery with madame his wife, in the apartment at the Hotel des Vosges, which was then and there the conjugal residence; and therefore we return a verdict of Not Guilty."

Alvan Griswold unwound his arms. He bowed politely to the jury. "Je vous remercie, messieurs," he said with a smile, in very perfect French. Then he bowed to the Judge. "Et vous aussi, Monsieur le Président," he added, in a tone of most utter indifference.

But Basil Hume looked up. Across the white wall of the Palais de Justice, behind the President's chair, he saw once more with his mind's eye, in great letters of blood, those five damning words, "Thou shalt do no murder."

IV.

On the Escalier d'Honneur of the Palais de Justice a busy little throng of sympathizing Americans crowded close round Alvan Griswold, shaking his hand and congratulating him. By a side door at the other end of the court, deeply veiled as before, and in her profound mourning, Marcella slipped stealthily out and drove off to the station to take the train to Paris, and home to her mother's in England. But Basil Hume remained behind, and followed his man at a speaking distance. He saw him walk down the street and up to the door of the principal hotel in La Roche, where rooms had been retained for him. Alvan Griswold was rich, and could afford to buy whatever this world offered. So friends crowded round him. But to Basil Hume's eyes, as he walked, footprints of blood marked the man's steps on the flagstones behind him. And the front of the hotel, as he passed beneath its portal, bore in blood-red letters, still in his mental vision, that accusing law, "Thou shalt do no murder."

The more he thought of it all, the more wicked and preposterous did the sentence seem to him. The French jury, set to try this man, had tried him neither according to the laws of God nor the moral sense of civilized man, but according to the dictates of their own barbaric jurisprudence, the national outcome of a false and dying system. Hour after hour, as he pondered it in his own soul, their conduct seemed to him to grow worse and worse. These citizens who were placed there on purpose to speak with the united and embodied voice of humanity the verdict of even justice, had failed, to a man, of their duty in the hour of need, and had condoned a crime which to Basil's moral sense seemed absolutely revolting. A woman was not, he felt sure, any man's chattel and property that he might taboo her to himself, and make her his own without hope of appeal, and defend with sword or revolver every attempt against his mastery. All night long he lay awake, growing more and more fiercely indignant. The crime itself had seemed terrible enough to him, in all conscience, but this its public justification was ten times more terrible. That a man should do murder for private revenge was a very awful thing; but that a civilized community, in its corporate capacity, and by the organized voice of its legal exponents, should give him the right to do it, and should let him go scot-free afterwards, seemed to Basil, in his fervour of moral horror and his fever of moral eagerness, an unspeakable calamity.

He lay awake and thought it out. Early next morning, Alvan Griswold took the train to St. Pierre-les-Bains. Marcella had slipped off, it is true, to Paris and Warwickshire, but the family effects were still in the *maison conjugale* at the Hotel des Vosges; and after his long confinement, Griswold needed the country air and change and quiet before returning once more to the feverish dissipations of his beloved capital. For the next few days, accordingly, Basil met him frequently; but they never spoke. They didn't know one another. Basil preferred it should be so. He was anxious even to hold his tongue now on the moral point, lest Griswold should suspect himself in presence of an enemy. To say the truth, he seemed to be the only one. Society at St. Pierre swallowed Griswold entire. He was *fêted* like one who has performed, for all the world, some public-spirited action. Yet all these days and nights Basil brooded still on this miscarriage of justice and the events that had led to it. The more he looked at it, the plainer did that central principle of all come out to him. The man was a murderer, and deserving of punishment. He had had a trial before an unjust law, an unjust judge, and a misdirected jury. The law, indeed, had absolved him, but the crime remained as great and as unexpiated as ever. Slowly in Basil's mind a terrible idea, an infatuated idea, arose and shaped itself. If twelve men could be found so to shirk their duty, one man must be found to take it upon him in their stead, and perform it fearlessly. If the laws of man refused to convict this red-handed homicide, then surely the laws of God should try him and punish him.

At a shop in the Grand Rue he bought a revolver. For a day or two he walked aimlessly through the town and among the paths on the hills, meeting Griswold now and again, but always in company. He might have shot him then and there, to be sure, for it wasn't detection he shirked; he went to work with his eyes open, taking his life in his hands, and regarding himself merely as a chosen minister of divine vengeance. But he wanted not merely to punish his man in the dark; he must explain to him first the good ground and reasons of his justly-inflicted punishment. To do that as it ought to be done, he must see Griswold alone; and to see Griswold alone now was no easy matter. The murderer, haunted perhaps by the ghosts of his own accusing conscience, seldom appeared in public without a posse of friends. He walked about in a crowd; he was boisterous and excited. He seemed to keep himself from the gnawing pangs of remorse by living in a constant whirl of feverish dissipation. Day after day Basil waited and watched, but his chance never came; the man always eluded him. His fiery indignation couldn't cool for a moment; but the opportunity for carrying out the desperate plan he had at heart grew more and more remote with every day he remained there.

At last, one afternoon, as the weeks wore on, Basil went up again into the hills behind the gay little town. It was a beautiful autumn day, calm, clear, and sunny. The trees were now beginning to drape themselves in their later livery of crimson and gold. An air, as of deep peace, pervaded the whole world. It reacted upon Basil. He felt more calm and resigned than he had felt for many weeks. The very aspect of nature seemed to cool his fevered brain. He even took out his sketch book and began to draw. He must do something; he was tired of waiting; he would return for a while at last to his accustomed vocations.

As he sat there and sketched, by some strange chance of the crowned Caprice that governs this universe, Alvan Griswold came suddenly upon him round the selfsame corner where he had seen first Marcella and then De Marigny emerge, on the very evening of the murder. The Californian was alone, walking fast through the woods, and deeply preoccupied. Quick as lightning Basil perceived that his opportunity had come. Without one tremor of his hand, without one word of warning, he drew the revolver in haste from the breast-pocket of his coat, and, pointing it low at the man's legs, discharged two chambers rapidly.

At sound of the sudden shots, Alvan Griswold started, surprised. Next moment a pang of pain shot fiercely through and through him. He sat down on the bank in an utter collapse. Strong man as he was, he almost fainted at once with pain and loss of blood from the two wounds, for both bullets had taken effect. Basil saw at a glance that he was seriously injured. Blood flowed from either leg; in point of fact, one ball had buried itself in his left shin bone, the other had passed clean through his right calf, which now bled profusely.

The American was too much accustomed to the use of firearms to be entirely surprised by this unexpected attack under such seemingly unprovoked circumstances. After a moment's delay he looked up at his assailant, and burst forth with all the coolness and *sangfroid* of his western countrymen.

"Well, say now, I want to know: what the devil did you shoot for?"

Basil had meant to disable him. He saw his man was disabled. He wouldn't shoot him outright, indeed, because he felt he had first a message from God and man to deliver to him.

With a stern face of retributive justice he held the revolver still pointed, without a quiver, full at the man's heart. "Alvan Griswold," he said calmly, with the supernatural calm of one who holds his own life as dust in the balance, by comparison with the work he has set upon him to accomplish, "I am going to shoot you. I shot low at first, because I wanted to maim you and to make you listen to me. When I have delivered my judgment I will shoot you dead, for the murder of De Marigny. I hardly knew him; I only saw him once or twice. It is not *him* I desire to avenge, but offended justice. I learnt as a child one great law, 'Thou shalt do no murder.' When I heard of this man you killed in cold blood, in a private quarrel at the Hotel des Vosges, I fully expected that even this world's law would rise up and punish you. Deliberately, and of set purpose, you laid a trap for that man and that woman. Deliberately, and of set purpose, you returned that night from Paris to surprise and discover them. Deliberately, and of set purpose, you took your savage vengeance—the vengeance of the red Indian—upon the man who, as you no doubt would choose to put it, had attacked your honour. The law of France and a jury of Frenchmen were entrusted by God and man with the task of appraising and punishing your crime. They failed in their duty. An odious exception in their Penal Code gave you the seeming right to exercise, unpunished, the barbaric revenge which you chose to wreak upon your defenceless enemy. But I fail to see in their uncivilized statute-book any provision which says that if your wife had surprised you at some hell in Paris with one of the women of your choice, the law would have justified her in executing a like vengeance upon you and your paramour. So unequal and unfair a law as that deserves no respect at all from any human being. But the law of God, which tells me, in plain words, 'Thou shalt do no murder,' still remains to be vindicated, if not by the constituted authority of the land, then by the private act of every well-disposed citizen. It is nothing to me that if I shoot you here to-day, I shall pay in the end myself with my own useless life for it. I have come here simply and solely to perform the duty which the French court left unperformed at La Roche that morning.... Alvan Griswold, in the name of God and humanity, I try you; I find you guilty; I condemn you to death. And in accordance with that verdict I shall proceed to shoot you. Have you anything to say that may show just cause why the sentence of this court should not at once, here and now, be executed upon you?"

While he spoke, the man Griswold, pale as a ghost with pain and loss of blood and terror, gazed up at him vacantly. His heavy lower jaw dropped by degrees on his breast. Those keen dark eyes stared in front of him glassily. He heard every

word Basil Hume had to say. In a vague kind of fashion he took it all in, and thoroughly understood it; but he was stunned by the suddenness and unexpectedness of the attack. He cowered before the actual face of death as though he himself had never been a successful bully. While Basil still spoke, he sat still, chained to the bank, as it were, by his wounded legs. When Basil finished, he staggered up, flung his arms wildly in the air, and raised one loud mad shriek, "Help! help! Murder! murder!"

Basil held the revolver point-blank at him.

"No, *not* murder," he said quietly: "execution—justice. If you have nothing else to say against the sentence of the court, and can only call out like a coward for aid against the just fate imposed by divine law upon you—then I shall wait no longer. Alvan Griswold, I shoot you!"

The revolver rang out clear, once, twice, and thrice. Griswold clapped one white hand to his breast in horror, and fell back with a low moan. Basil Hume dropped the pistol on the path by his side and gazed at his man listlessly. Not a motion of his body; not a tremor of his limbs. Surely justice had been done on him! Then he sat down in a careless attitude on the granite rock by the dead man's feet, and waited till the gendarmes, aroused by the firing, should come up from St. Pierre to the hills to arrest him.

THE MISSING LINK.

Richard Hawkins was the Dimthorpe doctor. You've heard of Dimthorpe, no doubt—that stranded little village on the low Suffolk coast, bounded on the north by a salt-marsh, on the south by a sand-bank, on the right by a spreading East Anglian broad, and on the left by the wild waves of the German Ocean. As you tack along that flat shore, in a lumbering lugger, you see a faint streak of land and a squat church tower on your weather bow; and if you ask the Southwold skipper who navigates your boat what place that is, he'll answer you offhand, "Yon's the hill at Dimthope." He says it's a hill, you know, because it rises full eight feet high above sea-level at spring tides. Anywhere else in the world but in the Suffolk marshes, you'd laugh at the notion of calling that a hill. In Suffolk the wise man accepts elevations at the native estimate.

All the doctors who ever came to Dimthorpe before Richard Hawkins, had taken to drink; except one, his predecessor, and *he* took to opium-eating. There was nothing else for an educated man to do in the place, people said. Perhaps it was the lowness and dampness of that marshy islet, and the depressing climate. But anyhow, in the marshes, men begin with quinine, for their first six weeks, to ward off fever and ague; take next, after twelve months, to brandy or gin; and end, after a year or two, with injections of morphia. That's the regular round, if a man lives long enough; but most of them die off before they reach the opiate stage.

Richard Hawkins, however, was a religious man: a secretary of Young Men's Christian Associations and Bible Society Auxiliaries: so he took instead to the pursuit of science. He had taken to it, indeed, long before he bought the retiring opium-eater's practice at Dimthorpe. The Christian Young Men have a taste for magic lanterns and for the wonders of creation. They like to glance curiously at a creature under the microscope, and to say, as they pass on, with an unctuous air, "The handicraft of God is very marvellous." Early in life, therefore, Richard Hawkins undertook to supply that felt want of the Christian Young Men by Wednesday evening lectures. As a student, he had paid particular attention to botany, comparative anatomy, geology; as a full-fledged medical man, he managed to find time still in the intervals of his practice, for these favourite studies. He had an adamantine constitution, which enabled him to go his rounds all day in his dog-cart or on his short-legged cob, and to be up again, fossil-hunting in the crag pits by the river, at five o'clock next morning. A clean-shaven man, stubborn, pig-headed, conscientious, honest; the father of a family, blest with many twins, and ruling his own house well; one of those solid, stolid cast-iron Britons who know they're in the right, and will go to the stake gladly for their dearest prejudices rather than swerve an inch to the right or to the left from the path of truth as their eyes envisage it.

At Dimthorpe, Richard Hawkins gained universal respect. A doctor who didn't drink was indeed a novelty there. A doctor who served his turn in due time as churchwarden: a doctor who had means of his own, and paid his bills weekly: a doctor who lectured on the errors of Darwinism to the budding East Anglian grocer's assistant: a doctor who buttressed the tottering fabric of orthodoxy with magic-lantern slides, and combated the growing scepticism of this Erastian age with the two-edged sword of the Bible and Science—that was a rare treasure. The vicar congratulated himself on so useful an ally, though with an undercurrent of terror lest Dr. Hawkins should suggest more doubts than he laid, and should rouse by his apologies more questions than he answered, in the candid minds of the young ladies of Dimthorpe. For the young should be shielded from the very shadow of error.

But these are, alas! unbelieving days. Now, Dimthorpe was cursed with a very bad man—"a blaspheming cobbler," the mild-eyed curate called him—one Job Whittingham by name, a shrunken little creature, who took the *National Reformer* and the *Secularist* for his intellectual diet, and who had read wicked books by Colenso, Huxley, Spencer, and Tyndall. Nourishing his spare soul on these indigestible morsels, the cobbler in time waxed fat and kicked, intellectually speaking: for corporally, he was as lean and miserable as a scarecrow. He was a fearful radical too, folks thought, that cobbler: he feared neither squire nor parson, God nor devil. And therefore, at one of Richard Hawkins's Wednesday Evenings for the People—the Reverend the Vicar in the Chair as usual—he rose in his seat when all was done, and, humming and hawing somewhat in his native modesty, yet with much vehement oratory, as is the fashion of the British working-man when he speaks in public, he ventured, he said, 'umbly to call in question some of our learned lecturer's most 'ardy conclusions.

Richard Hawkins smiled. With that ample consciousness of intellectual superiority which the right use of the aspirate always gives to an educated man, face to face with the objections of an uneducated opponent, he leaned with both hands on the little table before him, and ejaculated blandly in a very soft voice, "Which ones, pray? Which ones?"

“With Dr. ’Awkins’s permission, sir,” the cobbler answered sturdily, addressing himself with a fine sense of propriety to the vicar in the chair, “I would like to offer an observation or two on his cumalative argament against the hanimal origin of the ’uman species.”

The vicar frowned faintly. This was just as he feared. When once you begin to reason about matters of faith, you open the floodgates of unbelief, and there’s no knowing in what abysses of doubt you may be finally landed. (The vicar’s metaphors were always rather exuberant than strictly consistent.) Besides, to give a common cobbler a chance of airing his infidel opinions at a public meeting was a thing not to be dreamed of. “I think, Whittingham,” the vicar said coldly—it was a matter of principle with the vicar to keep the lower orders in that station in life to which,—and so forth; so he carefully abstained from addressing an unbelieving cobbler as *Mister* Whittingham: “I think any public discussion on these delicate questions is out of order at our meetings. If there are points on which you’d like Dr. Hawkins to instruct you further”—with a very marked stress upon the good word *instruct*—“you’d better inquire about them privately of him in the vestry—I mean, in his study—afterwards.” For the vicar wasn’t one to encourage brawling, nor did he think it seemly that an unwashen cobbler should be heard in the assembly before the faces of his superiors.

Richard Hawkins, however, was made of other mould. Unlike the vicar, he had no sneaking undercurrent of terror in his inmost soul lest the religion of his fathers might be worsted and laid low in a hand-to-hand encounter with a journeyman shoemaker. A good man and true, he trusted his own cause, and he leapt into the fray as a knight armed at all points might leap upon the defenceless body of his Paynim assailant. He loved fair play; he loved free speech; he loved to see every man have a right to his opinion. And besides, he knew well he could crush that cobbler to earth in a second with the dead weight of his knowledge, his learning, his logical faculty.

“I think, Mr. Chairman,” he interposed, still bland, still smiling his condescending smile, and fingering his smooth chin, “if Mr. Whittingham will state his objections to my views outright, I may be able here and now to dispel his difficulties.”

The vicar’s face was black. The vicar’s eye was glassy. He shuffled uneasily in his chair of office. “As you will, Dr. Hawkins,” he answered, without attempting to conceal his grave disapproval. In the doctor’s own house, even the priest of the parish could hardly prevent the doctor from letting his guests have their say if they would. But it was certainly unseemly that he, a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England, should be presiding over a meeting where an unbelieving cobbler was allowed to vent his vulgar infidelity unchecked before the faces of his betters. Still, politeness too has its laws. *Noblesse oblige.* Against his better judgment, the vicar bowed to his host’s decision.

Then the cobbler, still swaying there awkwardly in his Sunday clothes, and waiting in some anxiety for the chairman’s leave, with his head craned forward, and his little black eyes screwed up inquiringly under his projecting eyebrows,—the cobbler, I say, fell to with a will upon his destructive argument. He orated, of course—the British workman is nothing if not oratorical; his one idea of a speech is to declaim, full-mouthed; rhetoric is to him the soul of debate; he warms up as he goes, and launches forth, fiercely vehement. Dust pours from the slapped thighs of his Sunday trousers. But still, for all that, the cobbler pressed his professional opponent hard in argument. He combatted the doctrine, he said, of any distinct creation of the ’uman species. He believed, with ’Erbert Spencer, in the principles of evvolootion and gradual development. He saw no necessary limits imposed by nature on the action of them laws. They were eternal, all-pervading, inevitable, self-hacting. Warming up with his subject as he went, he proceeded to quote from memory in very long screeds what ’Uxley had said of man’s place in nature. He appealed to Darwin, he appealed to ’Ackel, he appealed even to the partially adverse opinions of Mr. Awlfred Russel Wallace. He showed how shallow and sophistical, how devoid of solid basis, were the argaments advanced by Dr. ’Awkins against them. He demolished Dr. ’Awkins, indeed, with anatomy and physiology, with phylogeny and embryology, with the gorilla and the chimpanzee, with *ar priory* reasoning and *ar posteriory* facts. It was a triumphant vindication. The cobbler waxed warm over it, and mopped his bald forehead more than once by the way with the corner of his best red silk pocket-handkerchief.

But the audience—well, the audience just stared and tittered. In their well-bred ignorance—for most of them belonged to the local gentry and professional classes of the mud-bank islet—they felt the genial tolerance of superiority for the cobbler’s facts and the cobbler’s theories. It was nothing to them that Job Whittingham knew ten thousand times more about the question at issue than any one of themselves did. It was nothing to them that his logic was acute and his reasons convincing; nothing that his knowledge, though second-hand, was really in its way both wide and accurate. The man dropped his h’s; that was quite enough for Dimthorpe. What science can you expect from the lips of a man who misplaces the very letters of the English alphabet? As Job grew warmer, and mopped his face more vigorously, the

audience tittered louder at each absentee aspirate. As he finished, the chartered wag of Dimthorpe turned round to the vicar's second daughter with a broad smile on his face, and suggested in an audible aside that to judge from the speaker's words the Missing Link of 'umanity was the letter 'H.'

Then Richard Hawkins, never heeding these rude allusions, but with the sweet smile of superiority on his smug clean-shaven face, rose once more from his seat, and expanding his white shirt-front with obtrusive respectability, addressed himself in the calm and courteous tone of the experienced lecturer to the Reverend the Chairman. That was a crushing answer. As the cobbler afterwards described it in a conversation with a friend, 'Awkins pounced down upon him like an 'awk; he was simply scarified. Not that the doctor could really reply to any one of his unlearned opponent's cogent arguments; but the doctor's aspirates were as firm as a rock, and the doctor's delivery was after the manner of a man who demonstrates to a beginner well-ascertained certainties. "I ain't a-arguin' with you," said a public-house orator one day to a foolish objector; "I'm only a-tellin' of you." And Richard Hawkins didn't argue either; he only told Job Whittingham where and how he was in error. Against Huxley and Darwin, the lecturer quoted with impressive effect (raising his voice as he spoke) that great and venerated anatomist, Sir Richard Owen; and the audience, thrilling to the title, as in duty bound, felt instinctively that just as a member of the Royal College of Physicians is a better authority on science than a common cobbler, so a professor who had received the dignity of knighthood at the hands of most sacred majesty itself, must be a better authority on comparative anatomy than a brace of plain misters. It stood to reason, of course, that the Queen must know best on a question of abstruse scientific opinion.

In short, Richard Hawkins beat down his cobbler antagonist by sheer dint of authority and of social position. It was white-tie and swallow-tail against Sunday suit; it was academical English against sound common sense and quaint homespun rhetoric, with no h's to boast of.

As soon as the doctor had wagged his forefinger for the last time at a demonstrative period, the chairman, still wriggling uneasily in his chair, but with a pleasing consciousness that orthodoxy had now been amply vindicated, dissolved the meeting at once without waiting for Job Whittingham. The right of final reply, he said, rested always with the lecturer. That was a rule of debate. Dr. Hawkins had replied. We would now adjourn, and meet again in this place on Wednesday fortnight: subject, The Evidences supplied by the Geological Record as to the Authenticity and Truth of Holy Scripture.

And for the next three days nobody talked of anything at the tea-tables of Dimthorpe, except the cheek of the cobbler, and the way Dr. Hawkins had banged the breath out of his body. He hadn't a leg to stand upon, the mild-eyed curate opined —not a leg to stand upon; he was simply extinguished.

But Job Whittingham went away, scratching what hair remained on his shock-headed poll, and feeling vaguely conscious that in spite of the doctor's long words—his crushing allusions to the *hippocampus major* and the *flexor pollicis longus*—Darwin and Huxley were right after all, and Richard Hawkins was but a shallow middle-class sciolist. It was his ample shirt-front that had carried the day. "A working-man ain't got no chance," Job remarked to himself, with philosophic resignation, "agin the respectability and the social presteedge of the black-coated classes. That's just where it is, don't you see? He ain't got no chance agin 'em."

It was on Saturday of that week that Richard Hawkins, going his rounds on foot in the poor part of the town, saw one of Job Whittingham's eight starveling youngsters sitting on the doorstep of the cobbler's house; for though the radical philosopher was in theory a stalwart Malthusian, in practice his quiver was very full of them. The boy was sucking a bone, which immediately attracted the doctor's trained attention. It wasn't a fresh bone, and it had no trace of meat on it. But the thing that made Richard Hawkins give a start of surprise at sight of it was the fact that—not to mince matters too fine—the bone was human. His anatomical eye told him that in a moment. The second or middle joint of a human forefinger!

He drew back, astonished. Not that there was here any faint flavour of romantic cannibalism. The bone, though human, was old and long buried. His interest in it was antiquarian and scientific, not living and medical. No suspicion of murder about this strange relic; No case of infanticide and back-garden interment. With facts like those, Richard Hawkins was only too familiar. He knew the ways of the poor and the evils of illegitimacy. But this bone was dry, very antique, thoroughly mineralized. He took it from the boy sharply, and looked hard at it awhile with the naked eye. Ha! what was this? Why, traces of crag on the sides and knuckle! Now, crag is the loose red Pliocene deposit of the hill at Dimthorpe; and as every geologist or antiquary knows, it antedates by many, many thousands of years the supposed first appearance

of man on our planet. If the bone really came from a layer of the crag—Richard Hawkins drew back in unspeakable horror. He didn't even dare to formulate to himself his instinctive conclusions.

If the bone really came from the crag, then the age of man on the earth must be pushed back a couple of million years at least, to the Pliocene time—and Heaven only knows what might be the remote consequences to the cause of orthodoxy.

"Where did you get this finger, boy?" he asked the lad sharply.

And little Ted, looking up, made answer with a jerk of his thumb over his right side, "Down yon: by Wood's crag-pit."

"Dug it out?" the doctor asked in a very short voice.

And the boy nodded assent. "Dug it out there," he answered.

The doctor put the bone in his pocket hurriedly, gave the boy a ha'penny—for he was a saving man—and walked away to the next patient's house, much perturbed and preoccupied. He could hardly attend to the symptoms in the case—a mere ordinary development of acute brain-fever, in the stage of collapse—so interested and excited was he by that momentous question. What did it matter, in fact, whether one more poor old woman lived or died, when the whole fabric of theology, the whole future hopes of the human race, trembled tottering in the balance?

As soon as he decently could, he got away from his patients, home by himself, and, locking the door of the consulting-room, as often happened when people had to be examined, he took out his little platyscopic lens, and gazed long and anxiously at that tell-tale forefinger. Fragments of crag were embedded on it all round. It was to some extent mineralized by removal of bony particles and their replacement through filtration of iron compounds. Richard Hawkins peered at it in blank dismay. If this were indeed a bone of Pliocene date—then the whole fabric of his philosophy must topple over, helter-skelter, in one awful collapse, from base to copingstone.

But no! Impossible! Incredible! The thing couldn't be. By sure and certain warranty of Holy Scripture, he knew it wasn't so; he knew it; he *knew* it. Man was fashioned direct, in the shape that we see him, by the finger of the Creator (whatever that may mean), without any Missing Link or other intermediate developmental form between himself and the soulless anthropoids. The bone must have been buried by accident in the crag, or deliberately interred there in ancient British times, and must have got mineralized in a comparatively short period by the action of water. To-morrow morning he would go and examine the crag-pit. Till then, he'd put the bone back safe in his waistcoat pocket.

But he felt uneasy about it, all the same, for the rest of the day; that uncanny fragment! how annoying of it to come in with its disturbing implications, to upset the snug edifice of his cut-and-dried system! Bones shouldn't be allowed to get craggy like that! They should be kept in their place; they should be retained on the surface; they should be confined entirely to their proper strata. As the vicar with Job Whittingham, so the doctor with that digital.

That evening the vicar called round for an amiable chat with Dr. Hawkins in his private study. The twins never came there, and he could see his friend quietly. They had a cigar together, and discussed the last lecture. The doctor was more positive that night than ever. He gazed at the illustrative casts of mammalian skulls in the cabinet opposite—man's, the gorilla's, the chimpanzee's, the gibbon's—and remarked complacently that for his part he pinned his faith on Specific Distinctions. If ever the affiliation of Man on the Anthropoid Apes became a Proved Fact, then he didn't see how they could any longer resist the plain conclusion: on the special creation of man rested the Immortal Soul; and with the Immortal Soul went the whole complex system of orthodox theology.

The vicar, on the other hand, holding his coffee half sipped, was far more cautious and far less dogmatic. It didn't do, the vicar thought, for Christian men to base their faith too much upon any particular scientific or mere human opinion. Facts might be too strong for them in the end, any day, and they might have to reconsider their ideas and eat their own words, if they spoke too positively. "Remember how we stuck at first to the six literal days of creation," the vicar said softly, twirling two fat thumbs upon his ample knee. "And we had to give them up after all. We had to go back upon it. Geology taught us they were only six epochs. For my part, Hawkins, if I were you, I wouldn't lay so much stress upon any one mode of interpreting scripture—especially Genesis. Genesis is a *vary* hard nut to crack. While insisting strongly on the general close correspondence between the book of God and the book of nature, I wouldn't tie myself down to any special theory as to the *mode* of the coincidence between them—wouldn't nail a particular little flag to my mast, and

pledge myself before the world to stand or fall by it." For the parson was one of those prudent men who believe in the saving grace of hedging. The vicarage of Bray would exactly have suited him. He took his stand, of course, on the Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture: but he insisted that no one individual fragment of it had any necessary connection with the stability of the entire structure.

Richard Hawkins, however, with his scientific ideas, and his logical intellect, would hear of no such paltering with eternal and immutable Truth. More orthodox than the parson, he hated these latitudinarian views. "No, no," he said with warmth, fingering the bone in his pocket uneasily as he spoke: "I can't admit that. I won't play fast and loose with the plain words of the Book. If God made man in His own image, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life on the Sixth Day of Creation, then I can understand all the rest: the Immortal Soul; Free Will; the Plan of Salvation; the difference that marks us off from the lower animals; the existence within us of a divinely-sent conscience. But if ever it can be shown conclusively, shown beyond the shadow of a doubt, we're descended from an ape, then I give up all. We can be nothing more than the beasts that perish. For at what point in the series of evolving monkeys can the Immortal Soul first come in? How can we ever say where the ape leaves off, and the man begins? Once admit the existence of a continuous chain of life, and you abandon the citadel. Either man is created in the image of God, or else he is a direct descendant of the monkey, the lizard, the ascidian, the jelly-fish. What is true of them is true also of him. The soul, the conscience, eternal life, depend entirely on direct creation."

The vicar knocked off his ash pensively, and perused his boots. Logically, he had nothing to answer to the doctor's argument; but practically, he knew in his own soul that if evolutionism were to prove man's animal origin beyond the shadow of a doubt to-morrow morning, he'd stick to the vicarage of Dimthorpe still, and debate as hotly as ever at the diocesan synod over apostolic succession and the eastward position. So he held his peace, like a wise man, and stared hard at the fireplace.

All that night long, Richard Hawkins hardly slept a wink. The bone was indeed a bone of contention to him. Early in the morning, he rose up betimes, and betook himself in the grey dawn to the crag-pit by the river. Mrs. Hawkins, the mother of many twins, was little surprised at his eccentric movements. A doctor's wife is accustomed to night alarms. She took it for granted he was called up to attend some patient.

Sunday morning though it was—no fit day for fossilizing—Richard Hawkins began to peer about in the pit, to see if he could find any trace of the owner of the forefinger. He wasn't long in discovering it. It was easy enough to find. His heart stood still within him as he gazed at the spot. A hand half protruded from the face of the cutting, where the workmen had left it exposed without ever discovering it. Or perhaps Ted Whittingham had grubbed it out after they went away from their work for the evening. The doctor's practised eye took in the facts at once. A significant glance at the lie of the strata told him this was indeed no ancient British interment. All the beds were undisturbed. The skeleton, if there was one, lay there *in situ*.

A few minutes' work succeeded in convincing him there was a skeleton. Egging away with his knife at the soft stone, he gradually unearthed a palm and fore-arm. He started afresh at the sight. Human, no doubt; yes, distinctly human! But how curiously proportioned, too! How unusually shaped! How strangely ape-like!

As he looked, a vague horror came over him suddenly. Why, this was an accursed thing, a work of the devil! He saw what it all meant already, and shrank from it with a deadly shrinking, an unspeakable repugnance. His first impulse, indeed, was to cover it all up, and rush away from the spot, and let the unclean thing remain buried for ever. But what use would that be? In a day or two's time, the workmen would reach it as they dug, and all England would ring with the hateful discovery. Second thoughts told him better. This was the Lord's doing. How lucky it was Sunday! Thank Heaven, in England, we remember the sabbath day to keep it holy still! The workmen wouldn't come to dig it out to-day. And how lucky it was a Christian who had first discovered it! In an agony of haste, he wrenched the fore-arm and wrist from the crag with a jerk, and wrapped them up with care in his white silk pocket-handkerchief. Then he turned and fled from that unhallowed pit. All the devils in hell hooted after him in derision.

That morning, Richard Hawkins didn't go to church. He was in no humour for prayer. He locked himself up in his own study, and sat examining those hateful bones with minute anatomical care. The more he looked at them, the less he liked them. Gratiolet's plates lay open by his side. He compared the things with the normal skeleton in his cabinet—much to their disadvantage. Human; yes, human; undoubtedly human; but oh, how ape-like in effect, how intermediate in

character! They were ghastly in their reminiscence of the great anthropoids. No Hottentot or Bushman was one twentieth so simian.

How he got through the day, he hardly knew. Dinner time came, and he ate his food mechanically. But horrible thoughts surged and seethed in his soul. The universe was tottering to its centre that day. The cosmos stood tremulous on the brink of an abyss. God himself was being weighed in the balance, and perhaps found wanting The existence of order, creation, a deity, depended upon the undisclosed remainder of that hateful skeleton. If the rest was as monkey-like as the fragment he had unearthed, then the Bible was a lie; the Creator was a dream; religion was a figment; the universe rolled black down the ages to hell: there never was, there never had been, a God its ruler.

So Richard Hawkins thought. Perhaps he thought right. Perhaps he thought wrong. But at any rate, he thought so. Too logical to palter with petty reconciliations, he stood by his guns manfully in this last extremity. He had erected for himself early in life a well-rounded philosophy, a system of things; and on that system he had based himself through all the years of his manhood. On the Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture he had taken his stand. Now a moral earthquake shook and assailed that Rock. It trembled before his very eyes. If it staggered and fell, the solid ground would have failed beneath him. He had no place left in which to lay his head. Hell yawned open beside him. He must plunge into it and be satisfied.

Yet, born man of science that he was for all that, he could never be untrue to the Facts, could never ignore Evidence. Though that skeleton were to overthrow his God and his philosophy at once, he must unearth it still: he must find out the Truth: let it cost what it might, he must stand even with Realities. At nine o'clock he rose, and took out his lantern. His wife looked astonished. "Where are you going, Richard?" she asked. And for the first time in his life, that perturbed and troubled soul told her guiltily a deliberate lie. "A midwifery case," he answered, shuffling. "Poor woman out Ness way. I mayn't be back till morning."

And he went out by himself towards the crag-pit by the river.

It rained hard that night, but for hours he stood there in the cold and wet, digging away with all his might, digging feverishly, madly. At all hazards, he must dig out that accursed thing. Never should it affront an innocent world with its godless face. Never should it laugh its mute laugh at purity and goodness. No workman should unearth it, and exhibit it in a glass case at the British Museum. If it was all that he feared, no human eye but his own should ever behold the atheistical grin on its mocking skull. He alone should pass through that fiery furnace. He alone should know by positive proof his Bible a lie and his God a delusion.

Two million years ago, some black and hairy creature, shambling along half erect on crouching knees through the woodland, had been suddenly carried away by a wild rush of water from a bursting tree-dam, and, after one hideous yell of rage and despair, had been drowned and buried in sand on the spot that is now the Hill at Dimthorpe. Alone among his kind, his skeleton was thus preserved, by the pure accident of geology, for our age to look upon. Richard Hawkins had discovered the one surviving specimen of the ancestor of man, as he roamed the dense woods of a Pliocene Britain.

Bit by bit he uncovered the thing—head, foot, trunk, shoulders. In the dark and under the rain, by the dim light of his lantern, he could hardly form any just anatomical opinion upon its form and affinities. But he saw quite enough even so to know his worst fears were hideously confirmed. With the energy of despair—the energy of a man who works body and soul against fearful odds to save the community from some unknown cataclysm, Richard Hawkins dug on, all heedless of rain and cold and darkness. His one terror was now lest any man should come up before dawn and interrupt him. That *he* should have learned that ghastly secret of the rocks was bad enough in all conscience: but that all the world should know it, and sink into the hopeless slough of infidelity and vice,—that was more than Richard Hawkins could bear to contemplate.

At last he finished his task. Every bone of the entire skeleton was there, unbroken. He thrust the precious fossils carefully into his sack, extinguished his lantern, and trudged wearily home through the rain, a disillusioned unbeliever.

Any other discoverer with half Richard Hawkins's scientific knowledge would have gone home rejoicing that he had found the most wonderful geological relic ever unearthed on the surface of our planet. But to Richard Hawkins, the whole episode envisaged itself quite otherwise. The iron of the Young Men's Christian Association had entered into his

soul. For years he had preached, with all the solid, stolid, square-headed logic of his British middle-class mind, that morality, decency, the well-being of our race depended absolutely upon the religious life, and that the religious life depended absolutely upon implicit acceptance of the Bible story as he himself interpreted it:—and was he going now to turn back upon the creed of a lifetime, merely because he found the facts of the world had gone against him? Never, never, never! Nobly consistent in his way, Richard Hawkins admitted himself fairly beaten. The book of nature and the book of God, contrary to all belief, were plainly at variance. There *was* no God; there *was* no Immortal Soul: infidelity and vice had things all their own way: one moral shone clear from that evening's bad work—Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die! Let us wallow, if we would be logical, in the foul sty of licentiousness!

He had preached it so long, he had reiterated it so often, that he firmly believed it himself. If only the world knew what he carried in his bag, the world would in twenty-four hours from that time be a seething mass of sin like Sodom and Gomorrah.

With such thoughts surging fiercely in his feverish brain, he reached his home at last, let himself in with his latch-key, and deposited the sack in his own study. It was three in the morning, and he was wet to the skin. But the internal heat of a great disillusion kept him fiery hot in spite of it. Most men would have grown cold with it: Richard Hawkins went feverish. He took out the bones and examined them one by one. That skull—oh, how horrible! how loathsome! how disgusting! Human, human; vaguely, prophetically human: room for large hemispheres in it, a thinking brain; but what a low-browed scowl, what huge bony ridges over the deep-set eyes, what a massive lower jaw, what savage and snarling canines! The creature that owned that head-piece was a man in intelligence—of the lowest and most degraded Digger Indian type—but a brute in moral sense, in fiendish cruelty, in fierce fighting instincts, in ungovernable passions. Richard Hawkins reconstructed the fellow mentally for himself at a single glance—a peering, scowling, hairy-browed, heavy-jawed, shambling, scurrying, long-limbed savage—a bully all fists and tusks and brutal battles with his kind—a transmitter of the ape into the veins of what we had fondly hoped was rather the archangel ruined.

Richard Hawkins hid his face in his hands, not sobbing, but mute and horror-struck. Then he was an ape himself, and if he did as he ought to do on his own frequent showing, he should go straight upstairs, garden hatchet in hand, and dash out the brains of Mary and the children. Must he stultify himself before the faces of the Christian Young Men? Must he go back on his own oft-repeated philosophy?

Slowly he rose, after a long pause for thought, and lighted a huge fire in the study grate. His mind was made up now. He knew just what to do. Duty shone clear as a lamp before him. It was destroying the Evidence, to be sure. Well, never mind for that! There *was* no God. There *was* no Immortal Soul. But Heaven forbid the world should ever find it out through him. The words of Holy Scripture rang still in his ears—the words of that divine, that delusive Book on which he had pinned his life-long faith in vain—"It were better for that man that a millstone were fastened round his neck and he were cast into the sea." Let the universe roll on down its godless course; let fortuitous atoms clash and clang for ever in unholy strife; but he at least, Richard Hawkins, would be guiltless of disclosing the loathsome secret. Not on *his* head would the blood of humanity rest. He would save society still from the demon of Atheism.

There *was* no God: but what of that? what of that? The world, the world could never get along without Him. We must believe in Him still, even though He be not. Why, he himself, Richard Hawkins, one solitary man, was left wholly rudderless before the blast by that accidental discovery. And how could the whole race survive the disillusion? Should he let loose rapine and uncleanness and massacre upon the earth, to go about like raging lions, seeking whom they might devour, by telling the hideous truth to babes and sucklings? Perish the thought! Far sooner than that, he would go down quick into the pit himself, and let the conscious earth close over him in silence.

One by one, he thrust the dry bones of the only specimen of Pliocene man into the fire, remorselessly. He stirred them with the poker, like the devils in some mediæval Italian hell. He watched them crumble. He gloated over their destruction. Those atheistical fossils, doubly damned, had destroyed his peace of mind, and would have destroyed the world's, but for his own active and prompt intervention. In that burning fiery furnace, heated seven times hot, they mouldered away to ashes. As the last of them disappeared, he drew a deep breath. Religion was saved! The Bible might still be accounted true. Infidelity couldn't stalk triumphant through the land. Our wives and daughters might yet live pure and good. He had deserved well of the State. He had rescued humanity.

It was all a vast Lie, a triumph of priest-craft. But they would believe it still. They wouldn't stand out in the dark and

cold as he did. Dark! why, the universe rolled black as pitch before him! Cold! why, not a ray of sunshine from heaven came to warm up anywhere its chilly expanse. He shuddered to realize it. There *was* no God; and the world was a vile cock-pit of jarring elements.

Well, well; he had done his duty to his kind, and after that he could go. "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." Ah me, the irony of it! His eyes had beheld, not salvation, but the downfall of all hope, all faith, all charity. Profoundly religious to the core, as he understood religion, Richard Hawkins couldn't consent to live any longer in a godless and polluted world. He had found it all out. Henceforth it was no fit home for him. Born an heir of the Kingdom, he couldn't endure to abjure his birthright and dwell now for a brief space in the tents of iniquity.

But he had one more duty to perform before he went hence. The cobbler! Job Whittingham! For duty was still the pole-star of that wrecked and sinking bark. Like an honest man that he was, and a sincere Christian, Richard Hawkins must allow when he was fairly beaten. As soon as day broke, he rose once more from his chair, let himself silently out, and walked along the cold grey streets to the cobbler's doorstep.

There, he knocked and waited. The cobbler, half-dressed, let him in, and yawned. Richard Hawkins's face was as white as a sheet. "Good Lord, sir, what's the matter?" the cobbler asked, half terrified.

"Matter enough," Richard Hawkins answered in a hollow voice, sinking heavily into a seat. His coat was still damp, and his eyes were haggard. "Whittingham, I argued against you the other day at my lecture, that man couldn't possibly be descended from an ape-like ancestor. Well, since then, I've had positive proof that's not the truth. Man *is* descended after all from a monkey—a hideous, grinning, leering, horrible monkey. I know it. I've seen it. With my own very eyes I've found it all out.... You were right.... I was wrong.... As a Christian man, I've come to-day to acknowledge it."

The cobbler stared hard at him. Was Dr. 'Awkins mad? "Wy, wot's made yer change yer mind?" he asked at last, much wondering.

"No matter," Richard Hawkins answered, with lips like death. "I've had reason to change. That's enough for us two. Whittingham, this morning I stand before you, an atheist like yourself. But not a contented one. I can't live so, for long. It's impossible, unhuman. I know now there's no God. To-night in the long watches I've found God out. But I can't do without Him. For in Him, as the apostle truly says, we live and move and have our being."

The cobbler stared still harder. What strange mixture of faith and unbelief was this? His working-man mind couldn't fathom it at all. The despair of a wrecked system was too deep for his plummet to sound. "I don't see what you're a-drivin' at," he blurted out bluntly.

Richard Hawkins drew his hand across his brow like one stunned. "I dare say not, my friend," he answered, in the voice of a man who speaks in a dream. "I dare say not. But I mean it for all that. I mean it, every word of it. I couldn't bear to die without coming to acknowledge my change of view to you. I feel I wronged you. And I ought to have recanted as openly as I spoke. I ought to have made you a public restitution. If I wrong any man in ought, I would wish, like Zacchæus, to repay him twofold. But I can't, I can't. For the sake of a groping world, of all those good innocent Christian souls who still believe, as I did, I haven't the heart to do it. I haven't the heart to disillusion them. And I ask you yet one thing, my friend. For God's sake—though there *is* no God—but, there! one says it instinctively—for God's sake, speak not a word of this episode to anybody. Whittingham, you don't know what it costs me to make such a confession—to deny my God: to proclaim myself an atheist. Lock it up in your own soul! Say no syllable to any one."

The cobbler, screwing up his small face, and peering eagerly out at him, took in by degrees the fact that his visitor's heart was stirred to the profoundest depths,—and had pity upon him. "I will say not a word, sir," he answered, after a moment's hesitation.

Richard Hawkins grasped his hand, rose in solemn silence, and staggered out once more. At the door he paused again. "No God! No God!" he cried, nodding his head twice or thrice and half turning a second time to the astonished cobbler. Then he went out into the street, his hat in his hand, and walked hurriedly homeward. After all, why debate? All was well at home. Mary was provided for: the children wouldn't want. Of what use was he now in the world—that godless world? He couldn't bear the weight of such a secret for years and years. Any day he might blab. And ten drops of

Prussic acid would end all so easily!

In his own study, he knelt down and prayed earnestly, fervently, to the God that never was, that never had been. You can't conquer in a day the habits of a lifetime. Then he unlocked his medicine chest, and took from it a phial.

The jury brought it in "temporary insanity," of course. People said, much learning had made him mad, like Paul. He had worked too hard at once at science and his profession.

THE GREAT RUBY ROBBERY.

A DETECTIVE STORY.

I.

Persis Remanet was an American heiress. As she justly remarked, this was a commonplace profession for a young woman nowadays; for almost everybody of late years has been an American and an heiress. A poor Californian, indeed, would be a charming novelty in London society. But London society, so far, has had to go without one.

Persis Remanet was on her way back from the Wilcoxes' ball. She was stopping, of course, with Sir Everard and Lady Maclure at their house at Hampstead. I say "of course" advisedly; because if you or I go to see New York, we have to put up at our own expense (five dollars a day, without wine or extras) at the Windsor or the Fifth Avenue; but when the pretty American comes to London (and every American girl is *ex officio* pretty, in Europe at least; I suppose they keep their ugly ones at home for domestic consumption) she is invariably the guest either of a dowager duchess or of a Royal Academician, like Sir Everard, of the first distinction. Yankees visit Europe, in fact, to see, among other things, our art and our old nobility; and by dint of native persistence they get into places that you and I could never succeed in penetrating, unless we devoted all the energies of a long and blameless life to securing an invitation.

Persis hadn't been to the Wilcoxes with Lady Maclure, however. The Maclures were too really great to know such people as the Wilcoxes, who were something tremendous in the City, but didn't buy pictures; and Academicians, you know, don't care to cultivate City people—unless they're customers. ("Patrons," the Academicians more usually call them; but I prefer the simple business word myself, as being a deal less patronizing.) So Persis had accepted an invitation from Mrs. Duncan Harrison, the wife of the well-known member for the Hackness Division of Elmetshire, to take a seat in her carriage to and from the Wilcoxes. Mrs. Harrison knew the habits and manners of American heiresses too well to offer to chaperon Persis; and indeed, Persis, as a free-born American citizen, was quite as well able to take care of herself, the wide world over, as any three ordinary married Englishwomen.

Now, Mrs. Harrison had a brother, an Irish baronet, Sir Justin O'Byrne, late of the Eighth Hussars, who had been with them to the Wilcoxes, and who accompanied them home to Hampstead on the back seat of the carriage. Sir Justin was one of those charming, ineffective, elusive Irishmen whom everybody likes and everybody disapproves of. He had been everywhere, and done everything—except to earn an honest livelihood. The total absence of rents during the sixties and seventies had never prevented his father, old Sir Terence O'Byrne, who sat so long for Connemara in the unreformed Parliament, from sending his son Justin in state to Eton, and afterwards to a fashionable college at Oxford. "He gave me the education of a gentleman," Sir Justin was wont regretfully to observe; "but he omitted to give me also the income to keep it up with."

Nevertheless, society felt O'Byrne was the sort of man who must be kept afloat somehow; and it kept him afloat accordingly in those mysterious ways that only society understands, and that you and I, who are not society, could never get to the bottom of if we tried for a century. Sir Justin himself had essayed Parliament, too, where he sat for a while behind the great Parnell without for a moment forfeiting society's regard even in those earlier days when it was held as a prime article of faith by the world that no gentleman could possibly call himself a Home-Ruler. 'Twas only one of O'Byrne's wild Irish tricks, society said, complacently, with that singular indulgence it always extends to special favourites, and which is, in fact, the correlative of that unsparing cruelty it shows in turn to those who happen to offend against its unwritten precepts. If Sir Justin had blown up a Czar or two in a fit of political exuberance, society would only have regarded the escapade as "one of O'Byrne's eccentricities." He had also held a commission for a while in a cavalry regiment, which he left, it was understood, owing to a difference of opinion about a lady with the colonel; and he was now a gentleman-at-large on London society, supposed by those who know more about every one than one knows about one's self, to be on the look-out for a nice girl with a little money.

Sir Justin had paid Persis a great deal of attention that particular evening; in point of fact, he had paid her a great deal of attention from the very first, whenever he met her; and on the way home from the dance he had kept his eyes fixed on Persis's face to an extent that was almost embarrassing. The pretty Californian leaned back in her place in the carriage and surveyed him languidly. She was looking her level best that night, in her pale-pink dress, with the famous Remanet rubies in a cascade of red light setting off that snowy neck of hers. 'Twas a neck for a painter. Sir Justin let his eyes fall regretfully more than once on the glittering rubies. He liked and admired Persis, oh! quite immensely. Your society man

who has been through seven or eight London seasons could hardly be expected to go quite so far as falling in love with any woman; his habit is rather to look about him critically among all the nice girls trotted out by their mammas for his lordly inspection, and to reflect with a faint smile that this, that, or the other one might perhaps really suit him—if it were not for—and there comes in the inevitable *But* of all human commendation. Still, Sir Justin admitted with a sigh to himself that he liked Persis ever so much; she was so fresh and original! and she talked so cleverly! As for Persis, she would have given her eyes (like every other American girl) to be made "my lady"; and she had seen no man yet, with that auxiliary title in his gift, whom she liked half so well as this delightful wild Irishman.

At the Maclures' door the carriage stopped. Sir Justin jumped out and gave his hand to Persis. You know the house well, of course; Sir Everard Maclure's; it's one of those large new artistic mansions, in red brick and old oak, on the top of the hill; and it stands a little way back from the road, discreetly retired, with a big wooden porch, very convenient for leave-taking. Sir Justin ran up the steps with Persis to ring the bell for her; he had too much of the irrepressible Irish blood in his veins to leave that pleasant task to his sister's footman. But he didn't ring it at once; at the risk of keeping Mrs. Harrison waiting outside for nothing, he stopped and talked a minute or so with the pretty American. "You looked charming to-night, Miss Remanet," he said, as she threw back her light opera wrap for a moment in the porch and displayed a single flash of that snowy neck with the famous rubies; "those stones become you so."

Persis looked at him and smiled. "You think so?" she said, a little tremulous, for even your American heiress, after all, is a woman. "Well, I'm glad you do. But it's good-bye to-night, Sir Austin, for I go next week to Paris."

Even in the gloom of the porch, just lighted by an artistic red and blue lantern in wrought iron, she could see a shade of disappointment pass quickly over his handsome face as he answered, with a little gulp, "No! you don't mean that? Oh, Miss Remanet, I'm so sorry!" Then he paused and drew back: "And yet ... after all," he continued, "perhaps——," and there he checked himself.

Persis looked up at him hastily. "Yet, after all, what?" she asked, with evident interest.

The young man drew an almost inaudible sigh. "Yet, after all—nothing," he answered, evasively.

"That might do for an Englishwoman," Persis put in, with American frankness, "but it won't do for me. You must tell me what you mean by it." For she reflected sagely that the happiness of two lives might depend upon those two minutes; and how foolish to throw away the chance of a man you really like (with a my-ladyship to boot), all for the sake of a pure convention!

Sir Justin leaned against the woodwork of that retiring porch. She was a beautiful girl. He had hot Irish blood. ... Well, yes; just for once—he would say the plain truth to her.

"Miss Remanet," he began, leaning forward, and bringing his face close to hers, "Miss Remanet—Persis—shall I tell you the reason why? Because I like you so much. I almost think I love you!"

Persis felt the blood quiver in her tingling cheeks. How handsome he was—and a baronet!

"And yet you're not altogether sorry," she said, reproachfully, "that I'm going to Paris!"

"No, not altogether sorry," he answered, sticking to it; "and I'll tell you why, too, Miss Remanet. I like you very much, and I think you like me. For a week or two, I've been saying to myself, 'I really believe I *must* ask her to marry me.' The temptation's been so strong I could hardly resist it."

"And why do you want to resist it?" Persis asked, all tremulous.

Sir Justin hesitated a second; then with a perfectly natural and instinctive movement (though only a gentleman would have ventured to make it) he lifted his hand and just touched with the tips of his fingers the ruby pendants on her necklet. "*This* is why," he answered simply, and with manly frankness. "Persis, you're so rich! I never dare ask you."

"Perhaps you don't know what my answer would be," Persis murmured very low, just to preserve her own dignity.

“Oh yes, I think I do,” the young man replied, gazing deeply into her dark eyes. “It isn’t that; if it were only that, I wouldn’t so much mind it. But I think you’d take me.” There was moisture in her eye. He went on more boldly: “I know you’d take me, Persis, and that’s why I don’t ask you. “You’re a great deal too rich, and *these* make it impossible.”

“Sir Justin,” Persis answered, removing his hand gently, but with the moisture growing thicker, for she really liked him, “it’s most unkind of you to say so; either you oughtn’t to have told me at all, or else—if you did——” She stopped short. Womanly shame overcame her.

The man leaned forward and spoke earnestly. “Oh, don’t say that!” he cried, from his heart. “I couldn’t bear to offend you. But I couldn’t bear, either, to let you go away—well—without having ever told you. In that case you might have thought I didn’t care at all for you, and was only flirting with you. But, Persis, I’ve cared a great deal for you—a great, great deal—and had hard work many times to prevent myself from asking you. And I’ll tell you the plain reason why I haven’t asked you. I’m a man about town, not much good, I’m afraid, for anybody or anything; and everybody says I’m on the look-out for an heiress—which happens not to be true; and if I married you, everybody’d say, ‘Ah, there! I told you so!’ Now, I wouldn’t mind that for myself; I’m a man, and I could snap my fingers at them; but I’d mind it for *you*, Persis, for I’m enough in love with you to be very, very jealous, indeed, for your honour. I couldn’t bear to think people should say, ‘There’s that pretty American girl, Persis Remanet that was, you know; she’s thrown herself away upon that good-for-nothing Irishman, Justin O’Byrne, a regular fortune-hunter, who’s married her for her money.’ So for your sake, Persis, I’d rather not ask you; I’d rather leave you for some better man to marry.”

“But *I* wouldn’t,” Persis cried aloud. “Oh, Sir Justin, you must believe me. You must remember——”

At that precise point, Mrs. Harrison put her head out of the carriage window and called out rather loudly—

“Why, Justin, what’s keeping you? The horses’ll catch their deaths of cold; and they were clipped this morning. Come back at once, my dear boy. Besides, you know, *les convenances*!”

“All right, Nora,” her brother answered; “I won’t be a minute. We can’t get them to answer this precious bell. I believe it don’t ring! But I’ll try again, anyhow.” And half forgetting that his own words weren’t strictly true, for he hadn’t yet tried, he pressed the knob with a vengeance.

“Is that your room with the light burning, Miss Remanet?” he went on, in a fairly loud official voice, as the servant came to answer. “The one with the balcony, I mean? Quite Venetian, isn’t it? Reminds one of Romeo and Juliet. But most convenient for a burglary, too! Such nice low rails! Mind you take good care of the Remanet rubies!”

“I don’t want to take care of them,” Persis answered, wiping her dim eyes hastily with her lace pocket-handkerchief, “if they make you feel as you say, Sir Justin. I don’t mind if they go. Let the burglar take them!”

And even as she spoke, the Maclure footman, immutable, sphinx-like, opened the door for her.

II.

Persis sat long in her own room that night before she began undressing. Her head was full of Sir Justin and those mysterious hints of his. At last, however, she took her rubies off, and her pretty silk bodice. "I don't care for them at all," she thought, with a gulp, "if they keep from me the love of the man I'd like to marry."

It was late before she fell asleep; and when she did, her rest was troubled. She dreamt a great deal; in her dreams, Sir Justin, and dance music, and the rubies, and burglars were incongruously mingled. To make up for it, she slept late next morning; and Lady Maclure let her sleep on, thinking she was probably wearied out with much dancing the previous evening—as though any amount of excitement could ever weary a pretty American! About ten o'clock she woke with a start. A vague feeling oppressed her that somebody had come in during the night and stolen her rubies. She rose hastily and went to her dressing-table to look for them. The case was there all right; she opened it and looked at it. Oh, prophetic soul! the rubies were gone, and the box was empty!

Now, Persis had honestly said the night before the burglar might take her rubies if he chose, and she wouldn't mind the loss of them. But that was last night, and the rubies hadn't then as yet been taken. This morning, somehow, things seemed quite different. It would be rough on us all (especially on politicians) if we must always be bound by what we said yesterday. Persis was an American, and no American is insensible to the charms of precious stones; 'tis a savage taste which the European immigrants seem to have inherited obliquely from their Red Indian predecessors. She rushed over to the bell and rang it with feminine violence. Lady Maclure's maid answered the summons, as usual. She was a clever, demure-looking girl, this maid of Lady Maclure's; and when Persis cried to her wildly, "Send for the police at once, and tell Sir Everard my jewels are stolen!" she answered, "Yes, miss," with such sober acquiescence that Persis, who was American, and therefore a bundle of nerves, turned round and stared at her as an incomprehensible mystery. No Mahatma could have been more unmoved. She seemed quite to expect those rubies would be stolen, and to take no more notice of the incident than if Persis had told her she wanted hot water.

Lady Maclure, indeed, greatly prided herself on this cultivated imperturbability of Bertha's; she regarded it as the fine flower of English domestic service. But Persis was American, and saw things otherwise; to her, the calm repose with which Bertha answered, "Yes, miss; certainly, miss; I'll go and tell Sir Everard," seemed nothing short of exasperating.

Bertha went off with the news, closing the door quite softly; and a few minutes later Lady Maclure herself appeared in the Californian's room, to console her visitor under this severe domestic affliction. She found Persis sitting up in bed, in her pretty French dressing-jacket (pale blue with *revers* of fawn colour), reading a book of verses. "Why, my dear!" Lady Maclure exclaimed, "then you've found them again, I suppose? Bertha told us you'd lost your lovely rubies!"

"So I have, dear Lady Maclure," Persis answered, wiping her eyes; "they're gone. They've been stolen. I forgot to lock my door when I came home last night, and the window was open; somebody must have come in, this way or that, and taken them. But whenever I'm in trouble, I try a dose of Browning. He's splendid for the nerves. He's so consoling, you know; he brings one to anchor."

She breakfasted in bed; she wouldn't leave the room, she declared, till the police arrived. After breakfast she rose and put on her dainty Parisian morning wrap—Americans have always such pretty bedroom things for these informal receptions—and sat up in state to await the police officer. Sir Everard himself, much disturbed that such a mishap should have happened in his house, went round in person to fetch the official. While he was gone, Lady Maclure made a thorough search of the room, but couldn't find a trace of the missing rubies.

"Are you sure you put them in the case, dear?" she asked, for the honour of the household.

And Persis answered: "Quite confident, Lady Maclure; I always put them there the moment I take them off; and when I came to look for them this morning, the case was empty."

"They were *very* valuable, I believe?" Lady Maclure said, inquiringly.

“Six thousand pounds was the figure in your money, I guess,” Persis answered, ruefully. “I don’t know if you call that a lot of money in England, but we do in America.”

There was a moment’s pause, and then Persis spoke again—

“Lady Maclure,” she said abruptly, “do you consider that maid of yours a Christian woman?”

Lady Maclure was startled. That was hardly the light in which she was accustomed to regard the lower classes.

“Well, I don’t know about that,” she said slowly; “that’s a great deal, you know, dear, to assert about *anybody*, especially one’s maid. But I should think she was honest, quite decidedly honest.”

“Well, that’s the same thing, about, isn’t it?” Persis answered, much relieved. “I’m glad you think that’s so; for I was almost half afraid of her. She’s too quiet for my taste, somehow; so silent, you know, and inscrutable.”

“Oh, my dear,” her hostess cried, “don’t blame her for silence; that’s just what I like about her. It’s exactly what I chose her for. Such a nice, noiseless girl; moves about the room like a cat on tiptoe; knows her proper place, and never dreams of speaking unless she’s spoken to.”

“Well, you may like them that way in Europe,” Persis responded frankly; “but in America, we prefer them a little bit human.”

Twenty minutes later the police officer arrived. He wasn’t in uniform. The inspector, feeling at once the gravity of the case, and recognizing that this was a Big Thing, in which there was glory to be won, and perhaps promotion, sent a detective at once, and advised that if possible nothing should be said to the household on the subject for the present, till the detective had taken a good look round the premises. That was useless, Sir Everard feared, for the lady’s-maid knew; and the lady’s-maid would be sure to go down, all agog with the news, to the servants’ hall immediately. However, they might try; no harm in trying; and the sooner the detective got round to the house, of course, the better.

The detective accompanied him back—a keen-faced, close-shaven, irreproachable-looking man, like a vulgarized copy of Mr. John Morley. He was curt and business-like. His first question was, “Have the servants been told of this?”

Lady Maclure looked inquiringly across at Bertha. She herself had been sitting all the time with the bereaved Persis, to console her (with Browning) under this heavy affliction.

“No, my lady,” Bertha answered, ever calm (invaluable servant, Bertha!), “I didn’t mention it to anybody downstairs on purpose, thinking perhaps it might be decided to search the servants’ boxes.”

The detective pricked up his ears. He was engaged already in glancing casually round the room. He moved about it now, like a conjurer, with quiet steps and slow. “He doesn’t get on one’s nerves,” Persis remarked approvingly, in an undertone to her friend; then she added, aloud: “What’s your name, please, Mr. Officer?”

The detective was lifting a lace handkerchief on the dressing-table at the side. He turned round softly. “Gregory, madam,” he answered, hardly glancing at the girl, and going on with his occupation.

“The same as the powders!” Persis interposed, with a shudder. “I used to take them when I was a child. I never could bear them.”

“We’re useful, as remedies,” the detective replied, with a quiet smile; “but nobody likes us.” And he relapsed contentedly into his work once more, searching round the apartment.

“The first thing we have to do,” he said, with a calm air of superiority, standing now by the window, with one hand in his pocket, “is to satisfy ourselves whether or not there has really, at all, been a robbery. We must look through the room well, and see you haven’t left the rubies lying about loose somewhere. Such things often happen. We’re constantly called in to investigate a case, when it’s only a matter of a lady’s carelessness.”

At that Persis flared up. A daughter of the great republic isn't accustomed to be doubted like a mere European woman. "I'm quite sure I took them off," she said, "and put them back in the jewel case. Of that I'm just confident. There isn't a doubt possible."

Mr. Gregory redoubled his search in all likely and unlikely places. "I should say that settles the matter," he answered blandly. "Our experience is that whenever a lady's perfectly certain, beyond the possibility of doubt, she put a thing away safely, it's absolutely sure to turn up where she says she didn't put it."

Persis answered him never a word. Her manners had not that repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere; so, to prevent an outbreak, she took refuge in Browning.

Mr. Gregory, nothing abashed, searched the room thoroughly, up and down, without the faintest regard to Persis's feelings; he was a detective, he said, and his business was first of all to unmask crime, irrespective of circumstances. Lady Maclure stood by, meanwhile, with the imperturbable Bertha. Mr. Gregory investigated every hole and cranny, like a man who wishes to let the world see for itself he performs a disagreeable duty with unflinching thoroughness. When he had finished, he turned to Lady Maclure. "And now, if you please," he said blandly, "we'll proceed to investigate the servants' boxes."

Lady Maclure looked at her maid. "Bertha," she said, "go downstairs, and see that none of the other servants come up, meanwhile, to their bedrooms." Lady Maclure was not quite to the manner born, and had never acquired the hateful aristocratic habit of calling women-servants by their surnames only.

But the detective interposed. "No, no," he said sharply. "This young woman had better stop here with Miss Remanet—strictly under her eye—till I've searched the boxes. For if I find nothing there, it may perhaps be my disagreeable duty, by-and-by, to call in a female detective to search her."

It was Lady Maclure's turn to flare up now. "Why, this is my own maid," she said, in a chilly tone, "and I've every confidence in her."

"Very sorry for that, my lady," Mr. Gregory responded, in a most official voice; "but our experience teaches us that if there's a person in the case whom nobody ever dreams of suspecting, that person's the one who has committed the robbery."

"Why, you'll be suspecting myself next!" Lady Maclure cried, with some disgust.

"Your ladyship's just the last person in the world I should think of suspecting," the detective answered, with a deferential bow—which, after his previous speech, was to say the least of it equivocal.

Persis began to get annoyed. She didn't half like the look of that girl Bertha, herself; but still, she was there as Lady Maclure's guest, and she couldn't expose her hostess to discomfort on her account.

"The girl shall *not* be searched," she put in, growing hot. "I don't care a cent whether I lose the wretched stones or not. Compared to human dignity, what are they worth? Not five minutes' consideration."

"They're worth just seven years," Mr. Gregory answered, with professional definiteness. "And as to searching, why, that's out of your hands now. This is a criminal case. I'm here to discharge a public duty."

"I don't in the least mind being searched," Bertha put in obligingly, with an air of indifference. "You can search me if you like—when you've got a warrant for it."

The detective looked up sharply; so also did Persis. This ready acquaintance with the liberty of the subject in criminal cases impressed her unfavourably. "Ah! we'll see about that," Mr. Gregory answered, with a cool smile. "Meanwhile, Lady Maclure, I'll have a look at the boxes."

III.

The search (strictly illegal) brought out nothing. Mr. Gregory returned to Persis's bedroom, disconsolate. "You can leave the room," he said to Bertha; and Bertha glided out. "I've set another man outside to keep a constant eye on her," he added in explanation.

By this time Persis had almost made her mind up as to who was the culprit; but she said nothing overt, for Lady Maclure's sake, to the detective. As for that immovable official, he began asking questions—some of them, Persis thought, almost bordering on the personal. Where had she been last night? Was she sure she had really worn the rubies? How did she come home? Was she certain she took them off? Did the maid help her undress? Who came back with her in the carriage?

To all these questions, rapidly fired off with cross-examining acuteness, Persis answered in the direct American fashion. She was sure she had the rubies on when she came home to Hampstead, because Sir Justin O'Byrne, who came back with her in his sister's carriage, had noticed them the last thing, and had told her to take care of them.

At mention of that name the detective smiled meaningly. (A meaning smile is stock-in-trade to a detective.) "Oh, Sir Justin O'Byrne!" he repeated, with quiet self-constraint. "*He* came back with you in the carriage, then? And did he sit the same side with you?"

Lady Maclure grew indignant (that was Mr. Gregory's cue). "Really, sir," she said angrily, "if you're going to suspect gentlemen in Sir Justin's position, we shall none of us be safe from you."

"The law," Mr. Gregory replied, with an air of profound deference, "is no respecter of persons."

"But it ought to be of characters," Lady Maclure cried warmly. "What's the good of having a blameless character, I should like to know, if—if——"

"If it doesn't allow you to commit a robbery with impunity?" the detective interposed, finishing her sentence his own way. "Well, well, that's true. That's per-fectly true—but Sir Justin's character, you see, can hardly be called blameless."

"He's a gentleman," Persis cried, with flashing eyes, turning round upon the officer; "and he's quite incapable of such a mean and despicable crime as you dare to suspect him of."

"Oh, I see," the officer answered, like one to whom a welcome ray of light breaks suddenly through a great darkness. "Sir Justin's a friend of yours! Did he come into the porch with you?"

"He did," Persis answered, flushing crimson; "and if you have the insolence to bring a charge against him——"

"Calm yourself, madam," the detective replied coolly. "I do nothing of the sort—at this stage of the proceedings. It's possible there may have been no robbery in the case at all. We must keep our minds open for the present to every possible alternative. It's—it's a delicate matter to hint at; but before we go any further—do you think, perhaps, Sir Justin may have carried the rubies away by mistake, entangled in his clothes?—say, for example, his coat-sleeve?"

It was a loophole of escape; but Persis didn't jump at it.

"He had never the opportunity," she answered, with a flash. "And I know quite well they were there on my neck when he left me, for the last thing he said to me was, looking up at this very window: 'That balcony's awfully convenient for a burglary. Mind you take good care of the Remanet rubies.' And I remembered what he'd said when I took them off last night; and that's what makes me so sure I really had them."

"*And* you slept with the window open!" the detective went on, still smiling to himself. "Well, here we have all the

materials, to be sure, for a first-class mystery!”

IV.

For some days more, nothing further turned up of importance about the Great Ruby Robbery. It got into the papers, of course, as everything does nowadays, and all London was talking of it. Persis found herself quite famous as the American lady who had lost her jewels. People pointed her out in the park; people stared at her hard through their opera-glasses at the theatre. Indeed, the possession of the celebrated Remanet rubies had never made her half so conspicuous in the world as the loss of them made her. It was almost worth while losing them, Persis thought, to be so much made of as she was in society in consequence. All the world knows a young lady must be somebody when she can offer a reward of five hundred pounds for the recovery of gewgaws valued at six thousand.

Sir Justin met her in the Row one day. "Then you don't go to Paris for awhile yet—until you get them back?" he inquired very low.

And Persis answered, blushing, "No, Sir Justin; not yet; and—I'm almost glad of it."

"No, you don't mean that!" the young man cried, with perfect boyish ardour. "Well, I confess, Miss Remanet, the first thing I thought myself when I read it in *The Times* was just the very same: 'Then, after all, she won't go yet to Paris!'"

Persis looked up at him from her pony with American frankness. "And I," she said, quivering, "I found anchor in Browning. For what do you think I read?

> 'And learn to rate a true man's heart
> Far above rubies.'

The book opened at the very place; and *there* I found anchor!"

But when Sir Justin went round to his rooms that same evening his servant said to him, "A gentleman was inquiring for you here this afternoon, sir. A close-shaven gentleman. Not very prepossessin'. And it seemed to me somehow, sir, as if he was trying to pump me."

Sir Justin's face was grave. He went to his bedroom at once. He knew what that man wanted; and he turned straight to his wardrobe, looking hard at the dress coat he had worn on the eventful evening. Things may cling to a sleeve, don't you know—or be entangled in a cuff—or get casually into a pocket! Or some one may put them there.

V.

For the next ten days or so Mr. Gregory was busy, constantly busy. Without doubt, he was the most active and energetic of detectives. He carried out so fully his own official principle of suspecting everybody, from China to Peru, that at last poor Persis got fairly mazed with his web of possibilities. Nobody was safe from his cultivated and highly-trained suspicion—not Sir Everard in his studio, nor Lady Maclure in her boudoir, nor the butler in his pantry, nor Sir Justin O'Byrne in his rooms in St. James's. Mr. Gregory kept an open mind against everybody and everything. He even doubted the parrot, and had views as to the intervention of rats and terriers. Persis got rather tired at last of his perverse ingenuity; especially as she had a very shrewd idea herself who had stolen the rubies. When he suggested various doubts, however, which seemed remotely to implicate Sir Justin's honesty, the sensitive American girl "felt it go on her nerves," and refused to listen to him, though Mr. Gregory never ceased to enforce upon her, by precept and example, his own pet doctrine that the last person on earth one would be likely to suspect is always the one who turns out to have done it.

A morning or two later, Persis looked out of her window as she was dressing her hair. She dressed it herself now, though she was an American heiress, and, therefore, of course, the laziest of her kind; for she had taken an unaccountable dislike, somehow, to that quiet girl Bertha. On this particular morning, however, when Persis looked out, she saw Bertha engaged in close, and apparently very intimate, conversation with the Hampstead postman. This sight disturbed the unstable equilibrium of her equanimity not a little. Why should Bertha go to the door to the postman at all? Surely it was no part of the duty of Lady Maclure's maid to take in the letters! And why should she want to go prying into the question of who wrote to Miss Remanet? For Persis, intensely conscious herself that a note from Sir Justin lay on top of the postman's bundle—she recognized it at once, even at that distance below, by the peculiar shape of the broad rough envelope—jumped to the natural feminine conclusion that Bertha must needs be influenced by some abstruse motive of which she herself, Persis, was, to say the very least, a component element. 'Tis a human fallacy. We're all of us prone to see everything from a personal standpoint; indeed, the one quality which makes a man or woman into a possible novelist, good, bad, or indifferent, is just that special power of throwing himself or herself into a great many people's personalities alternately. And this is a power possessed on an average by not one in a thousand men or not one in ten thousand women.

Persis rang the bell violently. Bertha came up, all smiles: "Did you want anything, miss?" Persis could have choked her. "Yes," she answered plainly, taking the bull by the horns; "I want to know what you were doing down there, prying into other people's letters with the postman?"

Bertha looked up at her, ever bland; she answered at once, without a second's hesitation: "The postman's my young man, miss; and we hope before very long now to get married."

"Odious thing!" Persis thought. "A glib lie always ready on the tip of her tongue for every emergency."

But Bertha's full heart was beating violently. Beating with love and hope and deferred anxiety.

A little later in the day Persis mentioned the incident casually to Lady Maclure—mainly in order to satisfy herself that the girl had been lying. Lady Maclure, however, gave a qualified assent:—

"I *believe* she's engaged to the postman," she said. "I *think* I've heard so; though I make it a rule, you see, my dear, to know as little as I can of these people's love affairs. They're so very uninteresting. But Bertha certainly told me she wouldn't leave me to get married for an indefinite period. That was only ten days ago. She said her young man wasn't just yet in a position to make a home for her."

"Perhaps," Persis suggested grimly, "something has occurred meanwhile to better her position. Such strange things crop up. She may have come into a fortune!"

"Perhaps so," Lady Maclure replied languidly. The subject bored her. "Though, if so, it must really have been very

sudden; for I think it was the morning before you lost your jewels she told me so."

Persis thought that odd, but she made no comment.

Before dinner that evening she burst suddenly into Lady Maclure's room for a minute. Bertha was dressing her lady's hair. Friends were coming to dine—among them Sir Justin. "How do these pearls go with my complexion, Lady Maclure?" Persis asked rather anxiously; for she specially wished to look her best that evening, for one of the party.

"Oh, charming!" her hostess answered, with her society smile. "Never saw anything suit you better, Persis."

"Except my poor rubies!" Persis cried rather ruefully, for coloured gewgaws are dear to the savage and the woman. "I wish I could get them back! I wonder that man Gregory hasn't succeeded in finding them."

"Oh! my dear," Lady Maclure drawled out, "you may be sure by this time they're safe at Amsterdam. That's the only place in Europe now to look for them."

"Why to Amsterdam, my lady?" Bertha interposed suddenly, with a quick side-glance at Persis.

Lady Maclure threw her head back in surprise at so unwonted an intrusion. "What do you want to know that for, child?" she asked, somewhat curtly. "Why, to be cut, of course. All the diamond-cutters in the world are concentrated in Amsterdam; and the first thing a thief does when he steals big jewels is to send them across, and have them cut in new shapes so that they can't be identified."

"I shouldn't have thought," Bertha put in, calmly, "they'd have known who to send them to."

Lady Maclure turned to her sharply. "Why, these things," she said, with a calm air of knowledge, "are always done by experienced thieves, who know the ropes well, and are in league with receivers the whole world over. But Gregory has his eye on Amsterdam, I'm sure, and we'll soon hear something."

"Yes, my lady," Bertha answered, in her acquiescent tone, and relapsed into silence.

VI.

Four days later, about nine at night, that hard-worked man, the posty on the beat, stood loitering outside Sir Everard Maclure's house, openly defying the rules of the department, in close conference with Bertha.

"Well, any news?" Bertha asked, trembling over with excitement, for she was a very different person outside with her lover from the demure and imperturbable model maid who waited on my lady.

"Why, yes," the posty answered, with a low laugh of triumph. "A letter from Amsterdam! And I think we've fixed it!"

Bertha almost flung herself upon him. "Oh, Harry!" she cried, all eagerness, "this is too good to be true! Then in just one other month we can really get married!"

There was a minute's pause, inarticulately filled up by sounds unrepresentable through the art of the typefounder. Then Harry spoke again. "It's an awful lot of money!" he said, musing. "A regular fortune! And what's more, Bertha, if it hadn't been for your cleverness we never should have got it!"

Bertha pressed his hand affectionately. Even ladies'-maids are human.

"Well, if I hadn't been so much in love with you," she answered frankly, "I don't think I could ever have had the wit to manage it. But, oh! Harry, love makes one do or try anything!"

If Persis had heard those singular words, she would have felt no doubt was any longer possible.

VII.

Next morning, at ten o'clock, a policeman came round, post haste, to Sir Everard's. He asked to see Miss Remanet. When Persis came down, in her morning wrap, he had but a brief message from head-quarters to give her: "Your jewels are found, miss. Will you step round and identify them?"

Persis drove back with him, all trembling. Lady Maclure accompanied her. At the police-station they left their cab, and entered the ante-room.

A little group had assembled there. The first person Persis distinctly made out in it was Sir Justin. A great terror seized her. Gregory had so poisoned her mind by this time with suspicion of everybody and everything she came across, that she was afraid of her own shadow. But next moment she saw clearly he wasn't there as prisoner, or even as witness; merely as spectator. She acknowledged him with a hasty bow, and cast her eye round again. The next person she definitely distinguished was Bertha, as calm and cool as ever, but in the very centre of the group, occupying as it were the place of honour which naturally belongs to the prisoner on all similar occasions. Persis was not surprised at that; she had known it all along; she glanced meaningly at Gregory, who stood a little behind, looking by no means triumphant. Persis found his dejection odd; but he was a proud detective, and perhaps some one else had effected the capture!

"These are your jewels, I believe," the inspector said, holding them up; and Persis admitted it.

"This is a painful case," the inspector went on. "A very painful case. We grieve to have discovered such a clue against one of our own men; but as he owns to it himself, and intends to throw himself on the mercy of the Court, it's no use talking about it. He won't attempt to defend it; indeed, with such evidence, I think he's doing what's best and wisest."

Persis stood there, all dazed. "I—I don't understand," she cried, with a swimming brain. "Who on earth are you talking about?"

The inspector pointed mutely with one hand at Gregory; and then for the first time Persis saw he was guarded. She clapped her hand to her head. In a moment it all broke in upon her. When she had called in the police, the rubies had never been stolen at all. It was Gregory who stole them!

She understood it now, at once. The real facts came back to her. She had taken her necklet off at night, laid it carelessly down on the dressing-table (too full of Sir Justin), covered it accidentally with her lace pocket-handkerchief, and straightway forgotten all about it. Next day she missed it, and jumped at conclusions. When Gregory came, he spied the rubies askance under the corner of the handkerchief—of course, being a woman, she had naturally looked everywhere except in the place where she had laid them—and knowing it was a safe case he had quietly pocketed them before her very eyes, all unsuspected. He felt sure nobody could accuse him of a robbery which was committed before he came, and which he had himself been called in to investigate.

"The worst of it is," the inspector went on, "he had woven a very ingenious case against Sir Justin O'Byrne, whom we were on the very point of arresting to-day, if this young woman hadn't come in at the eleventh hour, in the very nick of time, and earned the reward by giving us the clue that led to the discovery and recovery of the jewels. They were brought over this morning by an Amsterdam detective."

Persis looked hard at Bertha. Bertha answered her look. "My young man was the postman, miss," she explained, quite simply; "and after what my lady said, I put him up to watch Mr. Gregory's delivery for a letter from Amsterdam. I'd suspected him from the very first; and when the letter came, we had him arrested at once, and found out from it who were the people at Amsterdam who had the rubies."

Persis gasped with astonishment. Her brain was reeling. But Gregory in the background put in one last word—

"Well, I was right, after all," he said, with professional pride. "I told you the very last person you'd dream of suspecting was sure to be the one that actually did it."

Lady O'Byrne's rubies were very much admired at Monte Carlo last season. Mr. Gregory has found permanent employment for the next seven years at Her Majesty's quarries on the Isle of Portland. Bertha and her postman have retired to Canada with five hundred pounds to buy a farm. And everybody says Sir Justin O'Byrne has beaten the record, after all, even for Irish baronets, by making a marriage at once of money and affection.

THE CONSCIENTIOUS BURGLAR.

Guy Lethbridge had got into debt. That was reprehensible, of course; but when we were *very* young, most of us did the same thing; and in Guy's case, at least, there were extenuating circumstances. When a fellow's twenty-four, and has been brought up like a gentleman, he's apt to fall into the familiar fallacy that "we *must* live;" and if he has nothing to live upon, why then he lives upon other people. Now, Guy Lethbridge was a painter, without visible means of support except his art; and he glided into debt by a natural and easy transition which even that sternest of censors, the judge of the Bankruptcy Court, might well have condoned as next door to inevitable.

The facts of the case were these. Guy had gone over to Germany with a knapsack on his back, an easel in his hands, and a pipe and a few pounds in his trousers pocket. He had no friends to speak of in those days, for his father was dead, and his mother, good lady, in her lodgings in Bayswater, could no more have sent her son a five-pound note from her slender pension, than she could have sent him the Koh-i-noor or the Order of the White Elephant. But Guy went abroad, none the less, with the reckless faith of the Salvationist or the impecunious artist. He meant to stay on the Rhine as long as his money lasted; "and then, you know, my dear fellow, I can smuggle myself across anyhow, in a cattle boat or something; and arrive with a sixpence and an immortal work at St. Catherine's Docks some fine summer day, at six o'clock in the morning." What a blessed thing it is, to be sure, to be born into this world with the easy-going, happy-go-lucky, artistic temperament!

So Guy went to Königswinter, with a glimpse by the way at Brussels, Aix, and Cologne, and settled himself down, pipe, easel, and all, to summer quarters at the bright and sunny Berliner-Hof. There, he worked really hard, for he was no saunterer by nature; his impecuniosity arose, strange to say, neither from want of industry nor want of talent, but from pure force of circumstances. There's no sillier blunder on earth, indeed, than to believe that if a man doesn't succeed in life he must needs be either an idler or a bungler. Only fools imagine that industry and ability can command success; wise men know well that opportunity and luck count at least as equally important. Guy Lethbridge's time had not yet come. He painted all summer up and down the Rhine, making Königswinter his headquarters, and dropping down by boat or rail from day to day to various points on either bank that took his fancy. As for black and white, his quiver was full of them. The Drachenfels from the North, the Drachenfels from the South; the Rheinstein from above, the Rheinstein from below, the Rheinstein from St. Clement's—he sketched them all till he was well nigh tired of them. Meanwhile, he worked steadily at his grand Academy picture of "The Seven Mountains from the Summit of the Petersberg." His plan of campaign, in short, was own brother to every other struggling young artist's. He meant to do "a lot of little pot-boilers for the illustrated magazines, don't you know, or the weekly papers," and to live upon those while he devoted his energies to the real Work of Art which was to raise him with a bound to the front rank of living painters. Wyllie had done it, you see, with his great Thames picture, so why shouldn't Guy Lethbridge? The Chantrey Bequest was meant on purpose for the encouragement of such works as the "Seven Mountains from the Summit of the Petersberg." The trustees were bound to buy it as soon as they saw it hung on the line at the Academy; for they are men of taste, and men of knowledge, and men of experience; and if they don't know a good thing when they see it, what's the use of an Academy, anyway, I ask you?

Incredible as it may seem, however, the pot-boilers failed to boil the pot. Guy sent his sketches, with elucidatory remarks, to the editors of nearly every illustrated paper in Great Britain and Ireland or the adjacent islands; who declined them with thanks, and with surprising unanimity. There were the same sketches, to be sure, which ran afterwards through eight numbers of a leading art review, and were then reproduced as an illustrated gift-book, which our most authoritative critic pronounced in *The Bystander* to be "the gem of the season." But *that* was *after* Guy Lethbridge became famous. At the time, those busy editors didn't look at the drawings at all, or, if they looked at them, observed with the weary sigh peculiar to the overworked editorial organism, "Ah, the Rhine again! Overdone, decidedly. The public won't stand any more Rhine at any price." For those were the days when there was a run on the Thames and our domestic scenery; and everybody who was anybody lodged his easel in a houseboat.

Thus it gradually happened that while the Great Work progressed, the pipe got smoked out, and the pounds evaporated. Guy had lived sparingly at the Berliner-Hof—very sparingly indeed. He had breakfasted early on his roll and coffee; bought a penn'orth of bread and a bunch or two of grapes for his frugal lunch on the hills where he painted; and dined *à la carte*, when daylight failed, off the cheapest and most sustaining of the land-lord's dishes. His drink was Bavarian beer, or more latterly, water; yet in spite of economy the marks slipped away with surprising nimbleness; and by the end

of September, Guy woke up one morning without even the talisman of that proverbial sixpence which was to land him in safety at the Port of London.

He had delayed things too long; hoping against hope, he had believed to the last that the *Porte-Crayon* or the *Studio* must surely accept his graceful and easy Rhenish sketches. He knew they were clever; he knew they had qualities; and he couldn't believe in his innocent soul all the art-editors of his country were an amalgamated pack of Banded Duffers. Somebody must surely see merit at last in his "Royal Stolzenfels"; somebody must surely descry in the end the fantastic exuberance of his "Hundred-towered Andernach." So he waited and waited on, expecting every day some change in his fortunes, till the fatal moment at length arrived when he paid his last mark for his lunch in the mountains, and found himself face to face with an empty exchequer, and nothing on earth to get back to England with.

It was a Wednesday when the fact of his utter penury forced itself finally upon him. He paid his bill by the week, and he had still till Monday next before he would stand in urgent need of money. Monday was pay-day, and his time would be up; it would then be either stump up or go; on Monday he must confront the last abyss of poverty.

To that extent only, Guy had got into debt. So I think you will admit with me his offence was a venial one. On Thursday he went to work on the Petersberg as usual. He was outwardly calm—but he ate no luncheon. In point of fact, he hadn't a pfennig to get one with. He might have asked for something at the hotel, and taken it with him to the hilltop; but that would have been a deviation from his ordinary routine; the "arrangement" at the Berliner-Hof included only the early coffee and a simple late dinner; and Guy felt that to ask for anything more in his present impecunious condition of pocket would be nothing short of robbing the landlord. He was robbing him as it was, to be sure; but then, that was inevitable: he didn't like to add by any unusual demand to the weight of his probably insoluble indebtedness.

On Friday morning he woke up ravenous. What was a roll and coffee to a vigorous young man like him, with yesterday's unappeased hunger still keenly whetting the edge of his appetite? Unsatisfied and despondent, he toiled up the Petersberg once more—not for such as him the aristocratic joys of the cog-wheel railway; and in the eye of the sun he painted all day with unabated ardour at his "Seven Mountains." He painted with wild energy, impelled by want of food and internal craving. It suited his theme. He got lights upon the Löwenburg that he never could have got after a hearty dinner; he touched in some autumn tints among the woods on the Drachenfels too poetical for a man who has eaten and drunk of German sausage and foaming Pilsener. At the same time, Guy was conscious to himself that hunger was rapidly turning him into a rabid Socialist. Hitherto, as becomes an artist, he had believed on the whole in our existing social and political institutions—baronial castles, lords and ladies gay in exquisite paintable silks and satins, the agreeable variety imparted to life by pleasing distinctions of rank and wealth, the picturesque rags and sweet tumble-down cottages of a contented peasantry. But now, when the unequal distribution of wealth began to affect him personally, he felt where the shoe pinched, and realized with a sudden revulsion of feeling that there was something rotten in the state of our Denmark. He said to himself more than once he wasn't one of your vile Radicals who want to upset everything—the Church, the throne, the peerage, the cathedrals, art, literature, and science, at one fell blow; but he certainly *would* like to see a fresh deal of the money.

Tourists strolled up, jingling the nickels in their pockets; they sat down at the terrace of the hotel on the hilltop—the inevitable "restauration" of every German point of view—and ordered beefsteaks and Rhine wine with a lordly carelessness which to Guy, in his present straits, seemed positively inhuman. Why should these pampered creatures thus flaunt their wealth before the eyes of more deserving though less successful fellow beings? To be sure, in the days of his own opulence, when he still had a five-pound note of his own in his pocket, Guy had often done the same sort of thing himself, and thought no ill of it. But hunger is a great teacher of advanced political economy to men. As he painted and starved, with the vision of Monday's bill floating ever before his eyes, Guy Lethbridge felt he was sinking by rapid and uncontrollable stages into abysses of pure unadulterated Communism.

Friday's dinner served only to make him feel more conscious than ever on Saturday of an aching void. He was tired as well as hungry when he reached the hilltop; his hand was far from being steady enough for purposes of painting. Nevertheless, he worked on, those autumn tints glowing brighter than ever as the afternoon wore away. About four o'clock, an Englishman, whom he had seen more than once at the Berliner-Hof, strolled casually up to him. Guy disliked that Englishman; he was tall and blustering, and had an ineffable air of wealthy insolence, which in Guy's present mood seemed peculiarly offensive to him. He was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every night off roast pheasant and Heidsieck's dry monopole. But this afternoon he came up with his hands in his pockets, and inspected

Guy's picture with the air of a connoisseur. "Jolly good light on the Thingumbob-berg" he said, shutting one eye and surveying it critically. "You've caught the colour well. If you go on like that, in the course of a century or so you ought, I should say, to make a painter."

Guy was annoyed at the man for this complacent speech; for in his own opinion, though he was by no means conceited, he was a painter already. So he drew himself up, and answered stiffly, "I'm glad you like the light; I've spent some pains on it."

"Pains!" the stranger echoed. "I should think you just had. It surprises me, the trouble you fellows will take over the corner of a picture. It's the right way, of course; that's how pictures are made; you can't make 'em any other way; but *I* couldn't do it, bless you—I'm such a jolly lazy beggar—fiddling and faddling for a week at a time over a tree or a trinket. I never did a stroke of work in my life, myself, and I admire you fellows who can; you must have such a precious reserve of energy." And he took out a first-rate cigar from his case as he spoke, and proceeded, with elaborate dawdling, to light it. To Guy, whose poor pipe had been stopped for three weeks, the mere smell of that cigar was positive purgatory.

The stranger, however, was in no hurry to go. He sat down on a rock, and began conversing about Art, of which, indeed, Guy was forced somewhat grudgingly to admit he wasn't wholly ignorant. Little by little, after a while, the talk glided off into other channels. True, Guy's part in it was mainly monosyllabic; but the stranger, who had been put into conversational cue by a bottle of good wine at the restauration hard by, made up for all deficiencies on his neighbour's part by a very frank garrulousness. In the course of conversation, it gradually came out that the stranger was a landed proprietor of means, in the horsey interest. His talk was of races. He wondered fellows could spend such a lot of time doing a really good picture like that for a miserable hundred or so—how it made Guy's mouth water!—when he himself had won twenty ponies last week, over a special tip for the Leger, as easy as look at it. He went on to talk of so many winnings and so few losings, that Guy's newly-kindled democratic fire blazed up fiercer than ever.

That evening, at the Berliner-Hof, Guy watched the stranger from his modest table in the corner, hobnobbing over a couple of bottles of sparkling Moselle, with two German officers, whose acquaintance he had picked up quite casually in the restaurant. He was talking German fluently at the top of his voice, laughing loudly between whiles, and offering to bet everybody a hundred marks even, on whatever turned up, with hilarious inconsequence. A hundred marks would have relieved poor Guy from all his embarrassments. He was almost tempted to take the man on spec. more than once, and pocket it if he won, or owe it, if he lost, to him. But that would be mean—nay, more, would be robbery.

Not such the stuff of which to make a successful burglar.

As Guy went upstairs to his room that night, he paused to ask the landlord the rich stranger's name. German as he was, the landlord gave it with the bated breath of an Englishman: "Sir Richard Lavers," he answered, in a most deferential tone. A man who can drink champagne like that, of course, secures the respect of every right-minded landlord.

Guy sat up late in his room, full of mingled perplexities. He couldn't go to bed; but about half-past ten the moonlight on the river was so exquisitely beautiful that he stole down to the balcony on the first floor to admire it. He stood there long, making notes for future pictures. The balcony runs along the whole south side of the Berliner-Hof, looking out on the Rhine and the Seven Mountains. Guy paced it to the end about half-past eleven. The last window towards the west stood open down to the balcony; Guy glanced in as he passed, and heard loud, stertorous breathing. He recognized that stout snore. It was the English baronet's.

Some nameless curiosity made him peer into the bedroom. The moonlight was flooding it, so that he could see everything almost as well as if it had been day. In the corner stood the bed, and the stranger's clothes were flung carelessly on a chair; but on the table close by Guy observed, at a glance, his watch, a purse, a few tumbled papers.

That purse contained, no doubt, what remained of those ponies he had won on the St. Leger. It contained the ill-gotten wealth of those nights at the club, of whose baccarat he had spoken that afternoon with such unholy gusto. A loan of a fiver would just then be of incalculable benefit to Guy. When he sold the Seven Mountains for that paltry two hundred, as the baronet called it—though fifty pounds would have exceeded Guy's utmost expectations—he could repay the unwilling loan with twenty per cent. interest. To borrow in dire distress from a man who confesses he never did a stroke

of honest work in his life, and who lives like a canker on the earnings of the community, was surely no crime. It would do this fellow good to be stinted in his drink for three days in a week. Just a hundred marks! And he would never miss them!

The artistic temperament must not be judged too severely by the stern moralist. It acts upon impulse, and repents at leisure. Next moment, Guy found himself six paces in the room, his hand on the purse, his heart beating high, then standing still within him.

He meant to open it and take out a hundred marks. He would pay his bill next day, set out for Cologne, and send Sir Richard a written acknowledgment of the sum abstracted. The fellow, though blustering, was good-humoured enough. He would understand this move; nay, sympathize with its boldness, its slight tinge of the adventurous.

Just as he thought this, the stertorous breathing grew suddenly less regular. Something turned heavily in the bed in the corner. It was now or never—and the purse wouldn't open! It had one of these nasty new-fangled clasps. Why do people always try to make life more complex for us? Do what he would, he couldn't open it. More rustling in the bed; Guy grew nervous and ashamed. Great heavens! What was this? The man would awake, and take him for a burglar!

And a burglar he was, in truth and deed! As he realized that idea he recoiled with horror.

Before he could collect himself, however; before he could drawback from this half-uncompleted crime; before he could let conscience get the better of impulse—why, the man in the bed gave another sharp turn, and, scarcely knowing what he did, Guy, instead of dropping the incriminating purse, clutched it tight in his hand, and darted back on to the balcony. Thence, maddened by the wild sense of some one unseen pursuing him, he dashed away to the passage door, along the dim, dark corridor, stumbled up the great stairs, and groped his way, in an agony of horror, into his own bedroom.

Once arrived there, he locked and double-locked the door, flung that hateful purse on the table in the dark, and sank on to the sofa in a tumult of remorse, alarm, and terror. If he hadn't been an artist, indeed, he would never have dreamt in the first instance of taking it. It was that impulsive artistic nature that misled him into translating his new political theories from the domain of abstract hypothesis to the solid region punishable by the Revised Criminal Code of Germany. For many minutes he sat there, wondering, doubting, fearing: had the man in the bed perceived him? had he recognized who it was? would he raise the whole house against the amateur burglar? And, oh, whatever came of it, let consequences alone, what hateful thing was this he had been so hastily led into? He held his brow in his hands and looked blankly into the dark. He felt himself a thief! He despised his own act with all the contempt and loathing of which his nature was capable.

At last he summoned up courage to light the candle, and in a mechanical sort of way, out of pure curiosity, began to examine the contents of the purse he had stolen. Worse and worse! This was horrible! German gold, English bank-notes, letters of credit, foreign bills of exchange, bankers' cheques—untold wealth in every form and variety of currency. The man must have carried some seven or eight hundred pounds about his person. And that wasn't all, either. There were letters in the purse, too—letters which, of course, Guy couldn't dream of looking at; for he was a gentleman still, even though he was a criminal. Letters and memoranda, and little knick-knacks and trinkets, and—what touched Guy to the heart like the thrust of a sharp knife—one lock of a child's light hair, half-protruding from a paper. Stung with worse remorse than before, the conscience-stricken burglar bundled them back into the purse, feeling hot in the face at this unwarrantable intrusion on another man's privacy. To effect an involuntary loan upon a sleeping fellow-citizen, overburdened with too much wealth, and unduly surfeited with more than his share of our unearned increment, seemed to Guy in his present communistic mood a very small matter; but to go prying into another man's letters, his documents, his keepsakes, his most sacred deposits—that was unpardonable crime, which his very soul shrank from.

It was impossible for him, then, to keep Sir Richard's belongings. He began to reflect with deep regret on the inconvenience it would cause any man to be suddenly deprived, at a single swoop, of eight hundred pounds, his passport, and his visiting cards. For it was a big, fat purse, of most capacious dimensions; and it contained almost everything of a mercantile or identificatory nature which Sir Richard took about with him. Besides, there were the letters, the lock of hair, the knick-knacks. To hit a fellow in the purse is all very well in its way, but to hit him in the affections is unjustifiable meanness. Come what might, Guy felt there was but one thing now left for it. He must go straight downstairs again, in spite of shame or exposure, and restore that purse, ill-gotten gains and all, to that blood-sucker of an evil and

inequitable social system, its lawful owner.

He opened the door once more, and peered out grimly into the passage. With head on one side, he strained his ear and listened. Not a sound in the house; not a creature stirring anywhere. With the purse in one hand, while he held his beating heart to keep it still in the other, Guy crept along the dark passage, and stole stealthily down the stairs, that creaked as he went with those pistol-shot creaks peculiar to stairs in the night when you're trying to tread softly. In the corridor below he could see his way better, for the moonlight from the open window at the end of it guided him. He stepped out on to the balcony, and walked with a throbbing breast to Sir Richard's window. Oh, mercy! it was closed. No chance of restitution. He tried it with his hand; it was fastened from within. The sleeper must have risen, roused by his flight, and shut it.

For a minute or two Guy hesitated. Should he rap at the panes, and try to attract the man's attention? But no; to do that would be to expose himself unnecessarily to assault and battery; and if purses are sacred, our persons are surely a great deal sacreder. After a brief debate on the balcony in the cold, Guy came to the conclusion that it would be wisest now to return to his own room and wait for the morning before making restitution.

He didn't undress that night; he flung himself on the bed, and tossed and turned in a fever of doubt till morning. Very early he rose up, and washed and dressed himself. Then, as soon as he thought there was any chance of Sir Richard being about, he walked boldly down the stairs, and, with trembling steps, made for the man's bedroom.

He knocked at the door twice, rather loudly. No answer. Was the fellow asleep still, then? Hadn't he dozed off the effects of that sparkling Moselle yet? Guy knocked a third time, still louder than before, and got no response. He turned the handle slightly, and peeped into the room. The bed was empty. Sir Richard must be up, and must have missed his money.

With heart on fire, the unhappy young burglar hurried down the front stairs, expecting to find the police already on his track. The man must have missed his purse, and risen early in search of it! As he went, a jovial voice sounded loud in the office. "It's my own fault, of course," the voice was saying, good-humouredly, in very bluff English. "I don't blame anybody else for it. I'm afraid I got a little too much of that jolly good Moselle of yours on board last night, Herr Landlord; and the German officers and I took to bally-ragging in the billiard-room; and by the time I went to bed, I don't deny I was a trifle top-heavy. But I wanted to pay my bill and go off this morning, for I have a serious appointment on Monday in London. It's awkward, very."

The landlord was profuse in his protestations and apologies. Such a thing had never happened in his house before. He couldn't understand it. He would communicate with the police, and do everything in his power to have the purse recovered. Furthermore, if Sir Richard wished to go to London, the landlord (rubbing his hands) had known him so long and so well, it would give him the greatest pleasure on earth to let the bill stand over, and to lend him twenty pounds till the cash was restored and the thief was punished.

"I don't say there's any thief, though, mind you," the jovial voice responded most candidly. "I expect it was all my own stupid carelessness. I'm such an ass of a fellow always for leaving money about; and as likely as not I pulled the thing out with my handkerchief in the billiard-room. I don't doubt it'll turn up, sooner or later some day, when you're cleaning the house up. If it don't"—the jovial voice sank for a moment to a lower key—"it's not so much the money itself I mind—that's only a few hundred pounds, and some circular notes which can't be negotiated—it's the letters and papers and private mementos. There were things in that purse"—and the voice still sank lower to an unexpected softness "that I wouldn't have lost—well, not for a good many thousands."

Guy's heart smote him at those words with poignant remorse. He thought of the child's hair, and blushed crimson with shame. Erect and solemn he strode into the office. "Sir Richard Lavers," he said slowly, "I want to speak with you alone one moment in the salon."

"Eh?" Sir Richard said sharply, turning round. "Oh, it's you. Why, certainly." And he followed the painter into the room with a somewhat sheepish air, like a detected felon.

Guy shut the door tight. Then he laid down that cursed thing with a shudder on the table. "There's your purse," he said

curtly, without one word of explanation.

Sir Richard looked at it with distinct pleasure. “You picked it up,” he said, smiling.

“No,” Guy answered, disdaining to tell a lie; “I stole it.”

Sir Richard sat down on a chair, with his hands on his knees, and stared at him curiously for ninety seconds. Then he burst into a loud laugh, and exclaimed, much amused, “Well, anyhow, there’s no reason to pull such a long face about it.”

Guy dropped into a seat opposite him, and told him all his tale, extenuating nothing, in frank self-accusation. Sir Richard listened intent, with a smile on his mouth and a twinkle in his eyes of good-natured acquiescence.

“Then it was you who woke me up,” he said, “when I went to shut the window. Well, you’re a deuced brave chap, that’s all I’ve got to say, to come this morning and tell me the truth about it. Why didn’t you say you picked it up in the passage? I led up to it straight. That’s what beats me utterly!”

“Because it would have been a lie,” Guy answered frankly. “And I’d rather own up than tell you a lie about it.”

Sir Richard opened the purse and turned the things over carefully. “Why, it’s all here right enough,” he said, in a tone of bland surprise. “You haven’t taken anything out of it!”

“No, of course not,” Guy replied, almost smiling, in spite of himself, at the man’s perfect naïveté.

Sir Richard eyed him hard with a curiously amused glance. “But, I say, look here, you know,” he remonstrated quietly; “you are a precious inefficient sort of burglar, aren’t you? You won’t have anything now to pay your bill with on Monday.” For Guy had not concealed from him the plain reason for his onslaught upon the sacred rights of property.

“No, I must do without as best I can,” Guy answered, somewhat glum. For he stood still face to face with that original problem.

Sir Richard stared at him once more with that same curious expression. “Tell me,” he said, after a short pause, “did you look at any of the letters or things in this pocket-book?”

“Not one,” Guy answered honestly, with the ring of truth in his voice. “I saw they were private, and I abstained from touching them. Only,” he added, after a second’s hesitation, “I couldn’t help seeing there was a lock of light hair in a paper in one place. And of that, I felt sure, it would be wicked to deprive you.”

The baronet said nothing. He only gazed at his man fixedly. A suspicion of moisture lurked in his blue eyes. “Well, as long as I’ve got the papers,” he murmured at last, after a long pause, “I don’t mind about the tin. That was really a secondary consideration.”

“And now,” Guy said sturdily, “if you’ll send for the police and tell the landlord, I’ll give myself into custody on the charge of robbery.”

Sir Richard rose and fronted him. For one moment he was serious. “Now, look here, young man,” he said, with an air of paternal wisdom, “don’t you go and be a something-or-other fool. Don’t say one word of this to the landlord or anybody. You are a deuced clever fellow, and you can paint like one o’clock. That’s a precious good thing of yours, that view of the ramshackled old Schloss on the Drachenfels. You’re sure to rise in the end; you’ve the right cut of the jib for it. Now, you take my advice, and keep this thing quiet. If *you* don’t peach of it, *I* won’t—word of honour of a gentleman. And if you’ll allow me, I’ll lend you fifty pounds. You can pay me back right enough when you’re elected to the Academy.”

Guy Lethbridge’s face grew red as fire. That the man should forgive him was bad enough in all conscience, but that he should offer him a loan was really dreadful. It’s all very well for a virtuous citizen to relieve the overweening aristocrat of his superfluous wealth with the high hand of confiscation; but to take it as a gift from him—for a gift it would practically mean—and that at the very moment when one had to acknowledge an attempted crime, revolted every sentiment of Guy Lethbridge’s nature.

He drew back with a stammered "No, thank you. It's very kind of you, but—of course, I couldn't." And then there arose between them the most comic episode of expostulation and persuasion that the rooms of the Berliner-Hof had ever yet witnessed. The baronet almost lost his temper over the young man's obstinacy. It was ridiculous, he urged, for any gentleman not to accept a loan of fifty pounds from a well-disposed person in a moment of emergency. A fellow who could paint like *that* could never want long; and as for the passing impulse which had led Guy to take charge of the purse for an hour or two—why, the upshot showed it was *only* a passing impulse; and we all make mistakes in moments of effusion, late at night, after dining. Besides, a man in Guy's position must be really hard up, and no mistake, before he thinks of relieving other people of their purses. And when a fellow's hard up, well, hang it all, my dear sir, you can't blame him for deviating into eccentric action. As for the fifty pounds, if Guy didn't take it, it'd go upon a horse, no doubt, or a supper at the Gaiety, or something equally foolish. Let him be sensible and pocket it; no harm in a loan; and to be quite frank, Sir Richard said, he thought better of him for owning up to his fault so manfully, than he'd have thought of him if he'd never yielded at all to temptation.

Guy stood firm, however, and refused to the bitter end.

Sir Richard consulted his watch.

"Hullo," he said, starting, "I can't stand here squabbling over fifty pounds with you all the morning. I've got to catch the 9·25 to Cologne; my things are all packed; I must have my coffee. Now, before I go, for the last time, will you or won't you accept that little loan from me? Mind, you're a conscientious kind of chap, and your bill's due on Monday. You've got no right to defraud your landlord when a friend's prepared to help you tide over this temporary difficulty."

That was a hard home-thrust. Guy admitted the logic of it. But he stood by his guns still, and shook his head firmly. All sense of sullenness and defiance was gone from him now. The man's genuine kind-heartedness and sympathy had conquered him. "Sir," he cried, wringing his new friend's hand with unaffected warmth, "you're a brick; and you make me ashamed of myself. But *please* don't press it upon me. I *couldn't* take it now. Your kindness has broken me." And he burst into tears with a sudden impulse as he rushed to the window to hide his emotion.

Sir Richard hummed an air and left the salon abruptly. Guy went up to his own room, locked himself in all alone, and had a bad half-hour of it with his own conscience. He was roused from his reverie at the end of that time by a double knock at the door. It was the German waiter. "Wit' Sir Richard's compliments," he said, handing a letter to Guy. The painter tore the envelope open. It contained—fifty pounds in English bank notes, and accompanying them this surprising letter:—

"Dear Mr. Lethbridge,

"You *must* accept enclosed few notes as a loan for the present. You see, the fact is, I'm not a baronet at all, but a bookmaker and bank swindler. The letters you didn't examine in my purse would have put the police on my track; and I therefore regard this trifling little sum as really due to you. You need have no compunction about taking it, for it isn't mine, and you can't possibly return it to its proper owner. Take it without a scruple, and settle your bill—you can repay me whenever you next meet me. You're a long sight a better man than I am, anyhow.

"Yours faithfully,
"Richard Lavers."

Guy crumpled it up in his hand with an impatient gesture. Take a swindler's money! Inconceivable! Impossible! He seized his hat in his haste, and rushed down to the office.

"Where's he gone?" he cried to the landlord.

And the landlord, taking his sense, answered promptly—

"To the station."

Guy tore down the road, and rushed into the building just as the Cologne train was steaming out from the platform. He

ran along its side, disregarding the vehement expostulations of portly, red-banded German officialdom. Soon he spied the dubious baronet alone in a first-class compartment. Crumpling the notes into a pellet, he flung them back at him fiercely.

"How could you?" he cried, all on fire. "More than ever, now, when I know who you are, I can't touch those notes—I can't look at your money!"

In another second that jovial face leaned, all smiles, out of the window.

"You confounded fool!" the loud voice burst forth merrily, "you're the hardest chap to befriend I ever yet came across. Do you think, if what I said in that letter was true, I'd be ass enough to confess it—and in writing too—to a casual acquaintance? Take your tennis-ball back again!" and the pellet hit Guy hard on the cheek at the words. "Settle your bill like a man; and if ever you want to pay me back in return, you can find my address any day in Debrett or Foster."

By this time even Sir Richard's stentorian voice was almost past bawling-point. There was nothing left for it now but to pick up the notes and return to the Berliner-Hof. Though whether he should use them or not to pay his bill was a point of casuistry he had still to debate upon.

Next morning's post, however, brought him a note from Cologne, which placed the whole question in an unexpected light for him:—

"Dear Mr. Lethbridge,

"We've both been fools. My ruse was a silly one. How extraordinary the right way out of this little difficulty didn't at once occur to me! I was awfully taken by your picture of the ramshackled old Schloss; in fact, I thought when I could look up its price in the Academy catalogue I'd probably buy it, if it wasn't too dear for me. But the heat of the moment put this idea altogether out of my head. Shall we say £200 as the price of the picture? The balance to be paid on delivery in London. Now think no more of the rest, and remain well assured that if ever this little episode gets abroad in the world it will *not* be through the instrumentality of—

"Yours very sincerely,
"Richard Lavers."

Sir Richard has settled down now as a respectable county member; and, except when occasionally exhilarated with champagne, is really a most useful pillar of society. He's very proud of a picture in his dining-room of Sorrento from the Castellammare-road—a companion-piece to that exquisite autumnal view of the ruin on the Drachenfels and the Seven Mountains. Both are from the brush of that rising young Associate, Mr. Guy Lethbridge, whom Sir Richard discovered and introduced to the great world; but the frame of the Sorrento bears a neat little inscription:—"For Sir Richard Lavers, from his ever grateful and affectionate friend, the painter." The owner has been offered five hundred down for the Drachenfels more than once—and has refused the offer.

THE POT-BOILER.

Ernest Grey was an inspired painter. Therefore he was employed to paint portraits of insipid little girls in black-silk stockings, and to produce uninteresting domestic groups, of which a fat and smiling baby of British respectability formed the central figure.

He didn't like it, of course. Pegasus never does like being harnessed to the paternal go-cart. But being a philosopher in his way, and having a wife and child to keep, he dragged it none the less, with as good a grace as could reasonably be expected from such celestial mettle. The wife, in fact, formed the familiar model for the British mother in his Academy pictures, while little Joan (with bare legs) sat placidly for the perennial and annual baby. Each year, as observant critics might have noticed, that baby grew steadily a twelvemonth older. But there were no observant critics for Ernest Grey's pictures: the craft were all too busy inspecting the canvas of made reputations to find time on hand for spying out merit in the struggling work of unknown beginners. It's an exploded fallacy of the past to suppose that insight and initiative are the true critic's hallmark. Why go out of your way to see good points in unknown men, when you can earn your three guineas so much more surely and simply by sticking to the good points that everybody recognizes? The way to gain a reputation for critical power nowadays is, to say in charming and pellucid language what everybody regards as the proper thing to say about established favourites. You voice the popular taste in the very best English.

But Ernest Grey had ideals, for all that. How poor a creature the artist must be who doesn't teem with unrealized and unrealizable ideals! All the while that he painted the insipid little girls in the impeccable stockings, very neatly gartered, he was feeding his soul with a tacit undercurrent of divine fancy. He had another world than this of ours, in which he lived by turns—a strange world of pure art, where all was profound, mysterious, magical, beautiful. Idyls of Celtic fancy floated visible on the air before his mind's eye. Great palaces reared themselves like exhalations on the waste ground by Bedford Park. Fair white maidens moved slow, with measured tread, across his imagined canvas. What pictures he might paint—if only somebody would pay him for painting them! He revelled in designing these impossible works. His scenery should all lie in the Lost Land of Lyonesse. A spell as of Merlin should brood, half-seen, over his dreamy cloisters. The carved capitals of his pilasters should point to something deeper than mere handicraftsman's workmanship; his brocades and his fringes should breathe and live; his arabesques and his fretwork, his tracery and his moulding, should be instinct with soul and with indefinite yearning. The light that never was on sea or land should flood his landscape. In the pictures he had never painted, perhaps never would paint, ornament and decoration were lavished in abundance; design ran riot; onyx and lapis lazuli, chrysolite and chalcedony, beryl and jacinth, studded his jewelled bowls and his quaintly-wrought scabbards; but all to enrich and enforce one fair central idea, to add noble attire and noble array to that which was itself already noble and beautiful. No frippery should intrude. All this wealth of detail should be subservient in due place to some glorious thought, some ray of that divine sadness that touches nearest the deep heart of man.

So he said to himself in his day-dreams. But life is not day-dream. Life, alas! is very solid reality. While Ernest Grey nourished his secret soul with such visions of beauty, he employed his deft fingers in painting spindle legs, ever fresh in number, yet ever the same in kind, and unanimously clad in immaculate spun-silk stockings. No hosier was better up in all the varieties of spun silk than that inspired painter. 'Tis the way of the world, you know—our industrial world of supply and demand—to harness its blood-horses to London hansoms.

After all, he was working for Baby Joan and Bertha. (Bertha was the sort of name most specially in vogue when his wife was a girl; it had got to Joan and Joyce by the date of the baby.) They lived together in a very small house at Bedford Park—so small, Bertha said, that when a visitor dropped in they bulged out at the windows.

But Ernest Grey had a friend better off than himself—a man whose future was already assured him—a long-haired proprietor who wrote minor verse which the world was one day to wake up and find famous. He was tall and thin, and loosely knit, and looked as if he'd been run up by contract. His name was Bernard Hume; he claimed indirect descent from the philosopher who demolished everything. Unlike his collateral ancestor, however, Bernard Hume had faith, a great deal of faith—first of all in himself, and after that in every one else who shared the honour of his acquaintance. This was an amiable trait on Bernard's part, for, as a rule, men who believe in themselves complete their simple creed with that solitary article. With Bernard Hume, on the contrary, egotism took a more expanded and expansive form—it spread itself thin over the entire *entourage*. He thought there was always a great deal in any one who happened to

inspire him with a personal fancy. “I like this man,” he said to himself virtually, “therefore he must be a very superior soul, else how could he have succeeded in attracting the attention of so sound a critic and judge of human nature?”

Of all Bernard Hume’s friends, however, there was not one in whom he believed more profoundly than the inspired painter. “Ernest Grey,” he used to say, “if only he’d retire from the stocking-trade and give free play to his fancy, would bring the sweat, I tell you, into that brow of Burne-Jones’s. (You think the phrase vulgar? Settle the question by all means, then, with Browning, who invented it!) He’s a born idealist, is Grey—a direct descendant of Lippi and Botticelli, pitchforked, by circumstances over which he has no control, into the modern hosiery business. If only he could *paint* those lovely things he draws so beautifully! Why, he showed me some sketches the other day for unrealized pictures, first studies for dreams of pure form and colour—fair virgins that flit, white-armed, through spacious halls—plaintive, melancholy, passionate, mystical. One of them was superb. An Arthurian uncertainty enveloped the scene. The touch of a wizard had made all things in it suffer a beautiful change. It was life with the halo on—life as the boy in Wordsworth’s “Ode on Immortality” must surely have seen it—life in the glow of a poet’s day-dream. A world of pure phantasy, lighted up from above with glancing colour. A world whose exact date is *once upon a time*. A world whose precise place is in the left-hand corner of the land of fairy-tales. If only Ernest Grey would paint like that, he might fail for to-day; he might fail for to-morrow; his wife and child might starve and die; he might fall himself exhausted in the gutter—but his place hereafter would be among the immortals.”

Ernest heard him talk so at times—and went on with the detail of the left stocking. It’s easy enough to let some other divine genius’s wife and child starve to death for the sake of posterity; but when it comes to your own, *pardi!* it’s by no means so simple. Posterity then becomes a very small affair, bar one component member. But Bernard Hume was a bachelor.

One afternoon Ernest was smoking his meditative pipe in the bare, small studio—he allowed himself a pipe; ’twas his one slight luxury—when Bernard Hume, all fiery-eyed, strolled in unexpectedly. Bernard Hume was a frequent and a welcome visitor. ’Tis not in human nature not to like deft flattery, especially on the points you believe to be your strongest. You may be ever so modest a man in the abstract, and under normal conditions of opposition and failure; but when a friend begins to praise your work to your face, and to find in it the qualities you like the best yourself, why, hang it all! you stand back a bit, and gaze at it with your head just a trifle on one side, and say to your own soul in an unuttered aside, “Well, after all, I’m a diffident sort of a fellow, and I distrust my own products, but it’s quite true what he says—there *is* a deal of fine feeling and fine painting in the reflection of those nude limbs in that limpid water; and what could be more exquisite, though I did it myself, than the gracious curl of those lithe festoons of living honeysuckle?”

So Bernard was a favourite at the little house in Bedford Park. Even Bertha liked him, and was proud of his opinion of Ernest’s genius, though she wished he didn’t try to distract dear Ernest so much from serious work to mere speculative fancies.

On this particular afternoon, however, Bernard had dropped in of malice prepense, and in pursuance of a deep-laid scheme against Bertha’s happiness. The fact is, he had been reading Browning’s “Andrea del Sarto” the night before, and, much impressed by that vigorous diatribe against all forms of pot-boiling, he had come round to put out poor Bertha’s smouldering kitchen-fire for ever. He knew the moment had now arrived when Ernest should be goaded on into letting his wife and child starve for the benefit of humanity; and he felt like a missionary sent out on purpose, by some Society for the Propagation of the Æsthetic Gospel, to convert the poor benighted pot-boiler from the whole base cult of the scullery pipkin.

He came, indeed, at a propitious moment. Ernest had just dismissed the model who sat for the elder daughter in his new Academy picture of “Papa’s Return,” and was then engaged in adding a few leisurely touches haphazard to little Joan’s arms as the crowing baby. (Papa himself stood outside the frame; not even the worship of the simmering saucepan itself could induce Ernest Grey to include in his canvas the jocund figure of the regressive stockbroker.) Bernard Hume sat down, and after the usual interchange of meteorological opinion, drew forth from his pocket a small brown-covered volume. Bertha trembled in her chair; she knew well what was in store for them: ’twas the “Selections from Browning,”—homœopathic dose for the general public. *Habitués* absorb him whole in fifteen volumes.

“I was reading a piece of Browning’s last night,” Bernard began tentatively; “his ‘Andrea del Sarto’—do you know it, Mrs. Grey?—it impresses me immensely. I was so struck with it, indeed, that I wanted to come round and read it over to

Ernest this afternoon. I thought it might be—well, suggestive to him in his work, don't you know." And he glanced askance at that hostile Bertha. So very unreasonable of a genius's wife not to wish to starve, with her baby in her arms, for the sake of high art, and her husband, and posterity!

Bertha nodded a grudging assent; and Bernard, drawing breath, settled down in a chair and began to read that famous poem, which was to act, he hoped, as a goad to Ernest Grey's seared artistic conscience.

Once or twice, to be sure, Bernard winced not a little at the words he had to read—they were so *very* personal:—

> "Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged,
> 'God and the glory: never care for gain!
> The present by the future, what is that?
> Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
> Rafael is waiting: up to God all three!'
> I might have done it for you. So it seems.
> Perhaps not. All is as God overrules.
> Besides, incentives come from the soul's self;
> The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
> What wife had Rafael or has Agnolo?
> In this world, who can do a thing will not;
> And who would do it cannot, I perceive."

That was tolerably plain—almost rude, he felt, now he came to read it with Bertha actually by his side. Yet still he persisted through all that magnificent special pleading of the case for posterity and high art against wife and children—persisted to the bitter end, in spite of everything. He never flinched one moment. He read it all out—all, all—every word of it—"We might have risen to Rafael, you and I," and all the rest of it. His voice quivered a little—only a little—as he poured forth those last few lines:—

> "Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
> Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
> For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo, and me
> To cover—the three first without a wife,
> While I have mine. So—still they overcome,
> Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose."

But he read it out for all that, with eyes glancing askance (at the commas) on Bertha's fiery face, and lips that trembled with the solemnity of the occasion.

The pot-boiler's heart was touched. For, mind you, it's easy to touch every artist's artistic conscience. You only ask him to do the thing he best loves doing.

When Bernard Hume ceased there was a pause for a few minutes—a terrible pause. Then Bertha rose slowly, and went over to her husband. In spite of Bernard's presence, she kissed him twice on the forehead. Then she burst into tears, and rushed from the room wildly.

All that night she hardly slept. Next morning she rose, determined, whatever she did, never for one moment to interfere with Ernest's individuality.

Throughout the day she avoided the studio studiously. At eleven the model who sat for the elder sister in "Papa's Return" came in as usual. She was very much surprised to find Ernest Grey engaged on a large drawing which had been lying about the studio for months unfinished. It represented, as she remarked to herself, among a crowd of other figures, a male model in armour pushing his way through a dense wood towards a floating female model in insufficient drapery. But Ernest himself called it "The Quest of the Ideal."

She stood for a minute irresolute. Ernest Grey meanwhile surveyed her critically. Yes, he thought so—she would do. No more the elder sister in "Papa's Return," but the Elusive herself in "The Quest of the Ideal."

The model looked at him in surprise. She was a beautiful girl, with a face of refined and spiritual beauty. “Why, Mr. Grey,” she cried, taken aback, “you don’t mean to say you’re not goin’ on with your Academy picture?”

“This *is* my Academy picture,” Ernest Grey answered gravely. “I’ve discarded the other one. It never was really mine. I’m giving up the hosiery business.”

The model looked aghast. “And it *was* so lovely!” she cried, all regrets. “That dear, sweet baby! and her so pleased, too, at her pa coming ’ome again!”

Ernest answered only by bringing out a piece of thin, creamy-white drapery. “I shall want you to wear this,” he said; “just so, as in the sketch. I think you’ll do admirably for the central figure.”

The model demurred a little—the undress was rather more than she had yet been used to. She sat for head and shoulders or draped figure only. “I think,” she said with decision, “you’d better get another lady.”

But Ernest insisted. He was hot for high art now; and after a short hesitation, the model consented. It was no more, he pointed out, than evening-dress permits the most modest maiden. All on fire with his new departure, Ernest began a study of her head and shoulders then and there—the head and shoulders of the Eternal Elusive.

He wrought at it with a will. He was inspired and eager. To be sure, it was an awkward moment to begin an experiment, with the rent just due and no cash in hand to pay it, while the baker was clamouring hard for his last month’s money. “But things like that, you know, must be *Before* a famous victory!” Nothing venture, nothing have. There would still be just time to complete the study, at least, before Sending-in Day; and if somebody took a fancy to his very first attempt at a serious picture, why—farewell for ever to the spun-silk stocking trade!

For a week he worked away by himself in the studio. Bertha never came near the room, though she shuddered to herself to think what Ernest was doing. But she had made up her mind, once for all, after hearing Bernard Hume read Browning’s “Andrea,” never again to interfere with her husband’s individuality. As for the model, her grief was simple and unaffected. She couldn’t think how Mr. Grey, and him so clever, too, could ever desert that dear, sweet baby in “Papa’s Return” for all them dreadful gashly men and un’olesome women. He was making such a fright of her for his figger of the Eloosive as she’d be ashamed to acknowledge to any of her friends it was her that sat to him for it. A pretty girl don’t like to be painted into a fright like that, with her ’air all streamin’ loose like a patient at Colney ’Atch, and her clothes fallin’ off, quite casual-like, be’ind her!

About Friday Bernard Hume called in. The model expected him to disapprove most violently. But when he saw the drawing, and still more the study, as far as it had gone—for Ernest, knowing exactly what effect he meant to produce, had worked at the head and arms with surprising rapidity—he was in visible raptures. He stood long and gazed at it. “Why, Grey,” he cried, standing back a little, and shading his eyes with his hand, “it’s simply and solely the incarnate spirit of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century in its higher and purer avatar; deep-questioning, mystic, uncertain, rudderless. Faith gone; humanity left; heaven lost; earth realized as man’s true home and sole hope for the future! Those sad eyes of your wan maidens gaze forth straight upon the infinite. Those bronzed faces of your mailed knights have confronted strange doubts and closed hard with nameless terrors. There’s a pathos in it all—a—what shall I call it?—a something inexpressible; a pessimism, a meliorism, an obstinate questioning of invisible things, that no age but this age of ours could possibly have compassed. Who, save you, could have put so much intense spirituality into the broidery of a robe, could have touched with such sacred and indefinable sadness the frayed fringe of a knightly doublet?”

As he spoke, Ernest gazed at his own work, in love with it. The criticism charmed him. It was just the very thing he’d have said of it himself, if it had been somebody else’s; only he couldn’t have put it in such glowing language. It’s delightful to hear your work so justly appraised by a sympathetic soul; it makes a modest man think a great deal better than he could ever otherwise think of his own poor little performances. But most modest men, alas! have no Bernard Hume at hand to applaud their efforts. The Bernard Humes of this world are all busily engaged in booming the noisy, successful self-advertisers.

The model looked up with a dissatisfied air. “I don’t like it,” she said, grumbling internally. “It makes me look as if I

wanted a blue-pill. It ain't 'arf so pretty as 'Papa's Return,' and it's my belief it ain't 'arf so sellin' either."

"Pretty!" Bernard Hume responded with profound contempt. "Well, the sole object of art is not, I should say, to be merely pretty. And as for selling—well, no, I dare say it won't *sell*. But what does that matter? It's a beautiful work, and it does full justice to Mr. Grey's imaginative faculty. There's not another man in England to-day who could possibly paint it."

The model said nothing, but she thought the more. She thought, among other things, that to her it *did* matter; for, in the first place, a painter who doesn't sell isn't likely to be able to pay his models; and, in the second place, no self-respecting girl cares to sit very long for unsaleable pictures. It interferes, of course, with her market value. Who's going to employ an unsuccessful man's model?

For a week Ernest toiled on almost without stopping, but it was easy toil compared to the stocking trade. The study grew apace under his eager fingers; the model declared confidentially to her family he was ruining her prospects. "I'm as yellow as a guinea," she said; "and as for expression, why, you'd think I was goin' to die in about three weeks in a gallopin' consumption." Not such the elder sister in "Papa's Return"—that rosy-cheeked, round-faced, English middle-class girl whom Ernest had elaborated by his Protean art out of the features and form of the self-same model.

At the end of the week he was working hard in his studio one evening to save the last ray of departing sunlight, when Bertha burst in suddenly with a very scared face. "Oh, Ernest!" she cried, "do come up and look at Joan. She seems so ill. I can't think what's the matter with her."

Ernest flung down his brush, and forgot in a moment, as a father will, all about the Elusive. It eluded him instantly. He followed Bertha to the little room at the top of the house that served as nursery. ("Keep your child always," he used to say, "as near as you can to heaven.") Little Joan, just three years old at that time, lay listless and glassy-eyed in the nurse's arms. Ernest looked at her with a vague foreboding of evil. He saw at once she was very ill. "This is serious," he said in a low voice. "I must go for the doctor."

When the doctor came, discreetly uncertain, he shook his head and looked wise, and declined to commit himself. He was rather of opinion, though, it might turn out to be scarlet fever.

Scarlet fever! Bertha's heart stood still in her bosom, and so did Ernest's. For the next ten days the model had holiday; the Elusive was permitted to elude unchased; the studio was forsaken day and night for the nursery. It was a very bad case, and they fought it all along the line, inch by inch, unflinchingly. Poor little Joan was very ill indeed. It made Ernest's heart bleed to see her chubby small face grow so thin and yet so fiery. Night after night they sat up and watched. What did Ernest care now for art or the ideal? That one little atomy of solid round flesh was more to him than all the greatest pictures in Christendom. "Rafael did this, Andrea painted that!" Ah, God! what did it matter, with little Joan's life hanging poised in the balance between life and death, and little Joan's unseeing eyes turned upward, white between the eyelids, toward the great blank ceiling? If Joan were to die, what would be art or posterity? The sun in the heavens might shine on as before, but the sun in Ernest and Bertha's life would have faded out utterly.

At last the crisis came. "If she gets through to-night," the doctor said in his calm way, as though he were talking of somebody else's baby, "the danger's practically over. All my patients in the present epidemic who've passed this stage have recovered without difficulty."

They watched and waited through that livelong night in breathless suspense and terror and agony. You who are parents know well what it means. Why try to tell others? *They* could never understand; and if they could, why, heaven forbid we should harrow them as we ourselves have been harrowed.

At last, towards morning, little Joan dropped asleep. A sweet, deep sleep. Her breathing was regular. Father and mother fell mute into one another's arms. Their tears mingled. They dared not utter one word, but they cried long and silently.

From that moment, as the doctor had predicted, little Joan grew rapidly stronger and better. In a week she was able to go out for a drive—in a hansom, of course—no carriages for the struggling! Exchequer, much depleted by expenses of illness, felt even that hansom a distinct strain upon it.

Next morning Ernest had heart enough to begin work again. He sent word round accordingly to the model.

In the course of the day Bernard Hume dropped in. He was anxious to see how the Ideal and the Elusive got on after the crisis. He surprised Ernest at his easel. "Hullo!" he cried with a little start, straightening his long spine, "what does all this mean, Grey? You don't mean to say you're back at 'Papa's Return'? Have you yielded once more to Gath and Askelon?"

"No," Ernest answered firmly, looking him back in the face, "I've yielded to Duty. You can go now, Miss Baker. I've done about as much as I'm good for to-day. My hand's too shaky. And now, Hume, I'll speak out to you. All these days and nights while little Joan's been ill I've thought it all over and realized to myself which is the truest heroism. It's very specious and very fine to talk in deep bass about the talents that God has bestowed upon one in trust for humanity. I can talk all that stuff any day with the best of you. But I've married Bertha, and I've helped to put little Joan into the world, and I'm responsible to them for their daily bread, their life and happiness. It may be heroic to despise comfort and fame and wealth and security for the sake of high art and the best that's in one. I dare say it is; but I'm sure it's a long way more heroic still to do work one doesn't want to do for wife and children. It's easy enough to follow one's own natural bent: I was perfectly happy—serenely happy—those seven days I painted away at the Elusive. But it's very hard indeed to give all that up for the sake of duty. What you came to preach to me was only a peculiarly seductive form of self-indulgence—the indulgence of one's highest and truest self, but still self-indulgence. If I'd followed you, everybody would have praised and admired my single-hearted devotion to the cause of art; but Joan and Bertha would have paid for it. No man can make a public for anything new and personal in any art whatever without waiting and educating his public for years. If he's rich, he can afford to wait and educate it, as your own friend Browning did. If he's a bachelor, rich or poor, he can still afford to do it, because nobody but himself need suffer for it with him. But if he's poor and married—ah, then it's quite different. He has given hostages to fortune; he has no right to think first of anything at all but the claims of his wife and children upon him. I call it more heroic, then, to work at any such honest craft as will ensure their livelihood, than to go astray after the Ashtaroth of specious ideals such as you set before me."

Bernard Hume's lip curled. This was what the Church knows as Invincible Ignorance. He had done his best for the man, and the old Adam had conquered. "And what are you going to do," he asked with a contemptuous smile, "about 'The Quest of the Ideal'?"

Ernest laid down his palette, and thrust his hand silently into his trousers pocket. He drew forth a knife, and opened it deliberately. Then, without a single word, he walked across the floor to the Study of the Elusive. With one ruthless cut he slashed the canvas across from corner to corner. Then he slashed the two cut pieces again transversely. After that he took down the drawing of the design from the smaller easel, and solemnly thrust it into the studio fire. It burnt by slow degrees, for the cardboard was thick. His heart beat hard. As long as it smouldered he watched it intently. As the last of the mailed knights disappeared in white smoke up the studio chimney he drew a long breath. "Good-bye," he said in a choking voice; "Good-bye to the Ideal."

"And good-bye to *you*," Bernard Hume made answer, "for I call it desecration."

Bernard Hume is now of opinion that he used once vastly to overrate Ernest Grey's capabilities. The man had talent, perhaps—some grain of mere talent—but never genius. As for Ernest, he has toiled on ever since, more or less contentedly (probably less), at the hosiery business, and makes quite a decent living now out of his portraits of children and his domestic figure-pieces. The model considers them all really charming.

It's everybody's case, of course; but still—it's a tragedy.

MELISSA'S TOUR.

Lucy looked across the table at me with a face of blank horror. "Oh, Vernon," she cried, "what are we *ever* to do? And an American at that! This is just *too* ghastly!" It's a habit of Lucy's, I may remark, to talk italics.

I laid down my coffee-cup, and glanced back at her in surprise. "Why, what's up?" I exclaimed, scanning the envelope close. "A letter from Oxford, surely. Mrs. Wade, of Christ Church—I thought I knew the hand. And *she's* not an American."

"Well, look for yourself!" Lucy cried, and tossed the note to me, pouting. I took it and read. I'm aware that I have the misfortune to be only a man, but it really didn't strike me as quite so terrible.

"Dear Mrs. Hancock,

"George has just heard that your husband and you are going for a trip to New York this summer. *Could* you manage to do us a *very great* kindness? I hope you won't mind it. We have an American friend—a Miss Easterbrook, of Kansas City—niece of Professor Asa P. Easterbrook, the well-known Yale geologist, who very much wishes to find an escort across the Atlantic. If you would be so good as to take charge of her, and deliver her safely to Dr. Horace Easterbrook, of Hoboken, on your arrival in the States, you would do a good turn to her, and, at the same time, confer an eternal favour on

"Yours very truly,
Emily Wade."

Lucy folded her hands in melodramatic despair. "Kansas City!" she exclaimed, with a shudder of horror. "And Asa P. Easterbrook! A geologist, indeed! That horrid Mrs. Wade! She just did it on purpose!"

"It seems to me," I put in, regarding the letter close, "she did it merely because she was asked to find a chaperon for the girl; and she wrote the very shortest possible note, in a perfunctory way, to the very first acquaintance she chanced to hear of who was going to America."

"Vernon!" my wife exclaimed, with a very decided air, "you men are such simpletons! You credit everybody always with the best and purest motives. But you're utterly wrong. I can see through that woman. The hateful, hateful wretch! She did it to spite me! Oh, my poor, poor boy; my dear, guileless Bernard!"

Bernard, I may mention, is our eldest son, aged just twenty-four, and a Cambridge graduate. He's a tutor at King's, and though he's a dear good fellow, and a splendid long-stop, I couldn't myself conscientiously say I regard guilelessness as quite his most marked characteristic.

"What are you doing?" I asked, as Lucy sat down with a resolutely determined air at her writing-table in the corner.

"Doing!" my wife replied, with some asperity in her tone. "Why, answering that hateful, detestable woman!"

I glanced over her shoulder, and followed her pen as she wrote—

"My Dear Mrs. Wade,

"It was *indeed* a delight to us to see your neat little handwriting again. *Nothing* would give us greater pleasure, I'm sure, than to take charge of your friend, who, I'm confident, we shall find a most charming companion. Bernard will be with us, so she won't feel it dull, I trust. We hope to have a very delightful trip, and your happy thought in providing us with a travelling companion will add, no doubt, to all our enjoyment—especially Bernard's. We both join in very kindest regards to Mr. Wade and yourself, and I am ever

"Yours most cordially,

LUCY B. HANCOCK."

My wife fastened down the envelope with a very crushing air. "There, *that* ought to do for her," she said, glancing up at me triumphantly. "I should think she could see from that, if she's not as blind as an owl, I've observed her atrocious designs upon Bernard, and mean to checkmate them. If, after such a letter, she has the cheek to send us her Yankee girl to chaperon, I shall consider her lost to all sense of shame and all notions of decency. But she won't, of course. She'll withdraw her unobtrusively." And Lucy flung the peccant sheet that had roused all this wrath on to the back of the fireplace with offended dignity.

She was wrong, however. By next evening's post a second letter arrived, more discomposing, if possible, to her nerves than the first one.

"Mrs. Lucy B. Hancock, London.

"DEAR MADAM,

"I learn from my friend Mrs. Wade, of Oxford College, that you are going to be kind enough to take charge of me across the ocean. I thank you for your courtesy, and will gladly accept your friendly offer. If you will let me know by what steamer you start, I will register my passage right away in Liverpool. Also, if you will be good enough to tell me from what *depôt* you leave London, and by what train, I will go along with you in the cars. I'm unused to travel alone.

"Respectfully,
MELISSA P. EASTERBROOK."

Lucy gazed at it in despair. "A creature like that!" she cried, all horror-struck. "Oh, my poor dear Bernard! The ocean, she says! Go along with you in the cars! Melissa P. Easterbrook!"

"Perhaps," I said tentatively, "she may be better than her name. And, at any rate, Bernard's not *bound* to marry her!"

Lucy darted at me profound volumes of mute feminine contempt. "The girl's pretty," she said at last, after a long, deep pause, during which I had been made to realize to the full my own utter moral and intellectual nothingness. "You may be sure she's pretty. Mrs. Wade wouldn't have foisted her upon us if she wasn't pretty, but unspeakable. It's a vile plot on her part to destroy my peace of mind. You won't believe it, Vernon; but I *know* that woman. And what does the girl mean by signing herself 'Respectfully,' I wonder?"

"It's the American way," I ventured gently to interpose.

"So I gather," my wife answered with a profound accent of contempt. To her, anything that isn't done in the purest English way stands, *ipso facto*, self-condemned immediately.

A day or two later a second letter arrived from Miss Easterbrook, in reply to one of Lucy's, suggesting a rendezvous. I confess it drew up in my mind a somewhat painful picture. I began to believe my wife's fears were in some ways well grounded.

"Mrs. Lucy B. Hancock, London" (as before).

"DEAR MADAM,

"I thank you for yours, and will meet you on the day and hour you mention at St. Pancras *depôt*. You will know me when you see me, because I shall wear a dove-coloured dress, with bonnet to match, and a pair of grey spectacles.

"Respectfully,
MELISSA P. EASTERBROOK."

I laid it down and sighed. “A New England schoolmarm!” I exclaimed with a groan. “It sounds rather terrible. A dove-coloured dress, and a pair of grey spectacles! I fancy I can picture her to myself—a tall and bony person of a certain age, with corkscrew curls, who reads improving books, and has views of her own about the fulfilment of prophecy.”

But as my spirits went down, so Lucy’s went up, like the old man and woman in the cottage weather-glass. “That looks more promising,” she said. “The spectacles are good. Perhaps after all dear Bernard may escape. I don’t think he’s at all the sort of person to be taken with a dove-coloured bonnet.”

For some days after Bernard came home from Cambridge we chaffed a good deal among ourselves about Miss Melissa Easterbrook. Bernard took quite my view about the spectacles and dress. He even drew on an envelope a fancy portrait of Miss Easterbrook, as he said himself, “from documentary evidence.” It represented a typical schoolmarm of the most virulent order, and was calculated to strike terror into the receptive mind of ingenuous youth on simple inspection.

At last the day came when we were to go to Liverpool. We arrived at St. Pancras in very good time, and looked about on the platform for a tall and hard-faced person of Transatlantic aspect, arrayed in a dove-coloured dress and a pair of grey spectacles. But we looked in vain: nobody about seemed to answer to the description. At last Bernard turned to my wife with a curious smile. “I think I’ve spotted her, mother,” he said, waving his hand vaguely to the right. “That lady over yonder—by the door of the refreshment-room. Don’t you see? That must be Melissa.” For we knew her only as Melissa already among ourselves: it had been raised to the mild rank of a family witticism.

I looked in the direction he suggested, and paused for certainty. There, irresolute by the door and gazing about her timidly with inquiring eyes, stood the prettiest, tiniest, most shrinking little Western girl you ever saw in your life—attired, as she said, in a dove-coloured dress, with bonnet to match, and a pair of grey spectacles. But oh, what a dove-coloured dress! Walter Crane might have designed it—one of those perfect travelling costumes of which the American girl seems to possess a monopoly; and the spectacles—well, the spectacles, though undoubtedly real, added just a touch of piquancy to an otherwise almost painfully timid and retiring little figure. The moment I set eyes on Melissa Easterbrook, I will candidly admit, I was her captive at once; and even Lucy, as she looked at her, relaxed her face involuntarily into a sympathetic smile. As a rule, Lucy might pose as a perfect model of the British matron in her ampler and maturer years—“calmly terrible,” as an American observer once described the genus: but at sight of Melissa she melted without a struggle. “Poor wee little thing, how pretty she is!” she exclaimed with a start. You will readily admit that was a great deal, from Lucy.

Melissa came forward tentatively, a dainty blush half rising on her rather pale and delicate little cheek. “Mrs. Hancock?” she said in an inquiring tone, with just the faintest suspicion of an American accent in her musical small voice. Lucy took her hand cordially. “I was sure it was you, ma’am,” Melissa went on with pretty confidence, looking up into her face, “because Mrs. Wade told me you’d be as kind to me as a mother; and the moment I saw you I just said to myself, ‘That *must* be Mrs. Hancock: she’s so sweetly motherly.’ How good of you to burden yourself with a stranger like me! I hope indeed I won’t be too much trouble.”

That was the beginning. I may as well say, first as last, we were all of us taken by storm “right away” by Melissa. Lucy herself struck her flag unconditionally before a single shot was fired, and Bernard and I, hard hit at all points, surrendered at discretion. She was the most charming little girl the human mind can conceive. Our cold English language fails, in its roughness, to describe her. She was *petite*, *mignonne*, graceful, fairy-like, yet with a touch of Yankee quaintness and a delicious *espièglerie* that made her absolutely unique in my experience of women. We had utterly lost our hearts to her before ever we reached Liverpool; and, strange to say, I believe the one of us whose heart was most completely gone was, if only you’ll believe it, that calmly terrible Lucy.

Melissa’s most winning characteristic, however, as it seemed to me, was her perfect frankness. As we whirled along on our way across England, she told us everything about herself, her family, her friends, her neighbours, and the population of Kansas City in general. Not obtrusively or egotistically—of egotism Melissa would be wholly incapable—but in a certain timid, confiding, half-childlike way, as of the lost little girl, that was absolutely captivating. “Oh no, ma’am,” she said, in answer to one of Lucy’s earliest questions, “I didn’t come over alone. I think I’d be afraid to. I came with a whole squad of us who were doing Europe. A prominent lady in Kansas City took charge of the square lot. And I got as far as Rome with them, through Germany and Switzerland, and then my money wouldn’t run to it any further: so I had to go back. Travelling comes high in Europe, what with hotels and fees and having to pay to get your baggage checked. And

that's how I came to want an escort."

Bernard smiled good-naturedly. "Then you had only a fixed sum," he asked, "to make your European tour with?"

"That's so, sir," Melissa answered, looking up at him quizzically through those pretty grey spectacles. "I'd put away quite a little sum of my own to make this trip upon. It was my only chance of seeing Europe and improving myself a piece. I knew when I started I couldn't go all the round trip with the rest of my party: but I thought I'd set out with them, any way, and go ahead as long as my funds held out; and then when I was through I'd turn about and come home again."

"But you put away the money yourself?" Lucy asked, with a little start of admiring surprise.

"Yes, ma'am," Melissa answered sagely. "I know it. I saved it."

"From your allowance?" Lucy suggested, from the restricted horizon of her English point of view.

Melissa laughed a merry little laugh of amusement. "Oh no," she said; "from my salary."

"From your salary!" Bernard put in, looking down at her with an inquiring glance.

"Yes, sir; that's it," Melissa answered, all unabashed. "You see, for four years I was a clerk in the Post Office." She pronounced it "clurk," but that's a detail.

"Oh, indeed!" Bernard echoed. He was burning to know how, I could see, but politeness forbade him to press Melissa on so delicate a point any further.

Melissa, however, herself supplied at once the missing information. "My father was postmaster in our city," she said simply, "under the last administration—President Blanco's, you know—and he made me one of his clerks, of course, when he'd gotten the place; and as long as the fun went on, I saved all my salary for a tour in Europe."

"And at the end of four years?" Lucy said.

"Our party went out," Melissa put in, confidentially. "So, when the trouble began, my father was dismissed, and I had just enough left to take me as far as Rome, as I told you."

I was obliged to explain parenthetically, to allay Lucy's wonderment, that in America the whole *personnel* of every local Government office changes almost completely with each incoming President.

"That's so, sir," Melissa assented, with a wise little nod. "And as I didn't think it likely our folks would get in again in a hurry—the country's had enough of us—I just thought I'd make the best of my money when I'd got it."

"And you used it all up in giving yourself a holiday in Europe?" Lucy exclaimed, half reproachfully. To her economic British mind such an expenditure of capital seemed horribly wasteful.

"Yes, ma'am," Melissa answered, all unconscious of the faint disapproval implied in Lucy's tone. "You see, I'd never been anywhere much away from Kansas City before; and I thought this was a special opportunity to go abroad, and visit the picture-galleries and cathedrals of Europe, and enlarge my mind, and get a little culture. To us, a glimpse of Europe's an intellectual necessary."

"Oh, then, you regarded your visit as largely educational?" Bernard put in, with increasing interest. Though he's a fellow and tutor of King's, I will readily admit that Bernard's personal tastes lie rather in the direction of rowing and football than of general culture; but still, the American girl's point of view decidedly attracted him by its novelty in a woman.

"That's so, sir," Melissa answered once more, in her accustomed affirmative. "I took it as a sort of university trip. I graduated in Europe. In America, of course, wherever you go, all you can see's everywhere just the same, purely new and American. The language, the manners, the type don't vary: in Europe, you cross a frontier or a ribbon of sea, and everything's different. Now, on this trip of ours, we went first to Chester, to glimpse a typical old English town—those

Rows, oh! how lovely!—and then to Leamington, for Warwick Castle and Kenilworth. Kenilworth's just glorious, isn't it?—with its mouldering red walls and its dark green ivy, and the ghost of Amy Robsart walking up and down upon the close-shaven English grass-plots."

"I've heard it's very beautiful," Bernard admitted gravely.

"What! you live so close, and you've never *been* there!" Melissa exclaimed, in frank surprise.

Bernard allowed with a smile he had been so culpably negligent.

"And Stratford-on-Avon, too!" Melissa went on, enthusiastically, her black eyes beaming. "Isn't Stratford just charming! I don't care for the interminable Shakespeare nuisance, you know—that's all too new and made up; we could raise a Shakespeare house like that in Kansas City any day; but the church, and the elms, and the swans, and the river! I made such a sweet little sketch of them all, so soft and peaceful. At least, the place itself was as sweet as a corner of heaven, and I tried as well as I could in my way to sketch it."

"I suppose it *is* very pretty," Bernard replied, in a meditative tone.

Melissa started visibly. "What! have you never been there, either?" she exclaimed, taken aback. "Well, that *is* odd, now! You live in England, and have never run over to Stratford-on-Avon! Why, you do surprise me! But, there! I suppose you English live in the midst of culture, as it were, and can get to it all right away at any time; so, perhaps, you don't think quite as much of it as we do, who have to save up our money, perhaps for years, to get, for once in our lives, just a single passing glimpse of it. You live at Cambridge, you see; you must be steeped in culture, right down to the finger-ends."

Bernard modestly responded, twirling his manly moustache, that the river and the running-ground, he feared, were more in his way than art or architecture.

"And where else did you go besides England?" Lucy asked, really interested.

"Well, ma'am, from London we went across by Ostend to Bruges, where I studied the Memlings, and made a few little copies from them," Melissa answered, with her sunny smile. "It's such a quaint old place, Bruges. Life seems to flow as stagnant as its own canals. Have you ever been there?"

"Oh, charming!" Lucy answered; "most delightful and quiet. But—er—who are the Memlings? I don't quite recollect them."

Melissa gazed at her, open-eyed. "The Memlings?" she said slowly; "why, you've just missed the best thing at Bruges if you haven't seen them. They've such a naïve charm of their own, so innocent and sympathetic. They're in the Hôpital de St. Jean, you know, where Memling put them. And it's so delightful to see great pictures like those—though they're tiny little things to look at—in their native surroundings, exactly as they were first painted—the Chasse de Ste. Ursule, and all those other lovely things, so infantile in their simplicity, and yet so exquisitely graceful, and pure, and beautiful. I don't know as I saw anything in Europe to equal them for pathos in their own way—except, of course, the Fra Angelicos at San Marco in Florence."

"I don't think I've seen them," Lucy murmured, with an uncomfortable air. I could see it was just dawning upon her, in spite of her patronizing, that this Yankee girl, with her imperfect command of the English tongue, knew a vast deal more about some things worth notice than she herself did. "And where did you go then, dear?"

"Oh, from Bruges we went on to Ghent," Melissa answered, leaning back, and looking as pretty as a picture herself in her sweet little travelling-dress, "to see the great Van Eyck, the 'Adoration of the Lamb,' you know—that magnificent panel-picture. And then we went to Brussels, where we had Dierick Bouts and all the later Flemings; and to Antwerp, for Rubens and Vandyck and Quintin Matsys; and the Hague after that, for Rembrandt and Paul Potter; and Amsterdam in the end, for Van der Helst and Gerard Dow, and the late Dutch painters. So, you see, we had quite an artistic tour—we followed up the development of Netherlandish art, from beginning to end, in historical order. It was just delightful."

"I went to Antwerp once," Bernard put in, somewhat sheepishly, still twirling his moustache; "but it was on my way to

Switzerland; and I didn't see much, as far as I can recollect, except the cathedral and the quay and the hotel I was stopping at."

"Ah, that's all very well for *you*," Melissa answered, with a rather envious air. "You can see these things any day. But for us, the chance comes only once in a lifetime, and we must make the most of it."

Well, in such converse as this we reached Liverpool in due time, and went next morning on board our steamer. We had a lovely passage out, and all the way, the more we saw of Melissa, the more we liked her. To be sure, Lucy received a terrible shock the third day out, when she asked Melissa what she meant to do when she returned to Kansas City. "You won't go into the Post Office again, I suppose, dear?" she said kindly, for we had got by that time on most friendly terms with our little Melissa.

"I guess not," Melissa answered. "No such luck any more. I'll have to go back again to the store as usual."

"The store!" Lucy repeated, bewildered. "I—I don't quite understand you."

"Well, the shop, I presume you'd call it," Melissa answered, smiling. "My father's gotten a book-store in Kansas City; and before I went into the Post Office I helped him at the counter. In fact, I was his saleswoman."

"I assure you, Vernon," Lucy remarked in our berth that night, "if an Englishwoman had said it to me, I'd have been obliged to apologize to her for having forced her to confess it, and I don't know what way I should ever have looked to hide my face while she was talking about it. But with Melissa it's all so different, somehow. She spoke as if it was the most natural thing on earth for her father to keep a shop, and she didn't seem the least little bit in the world ashamed of it either."

"Why should she?" I answered, with my masculine bluntness. But that was perhaps a trifle too advanced for Lucy. Melissa was exercising a widening influence on my wife's point of view with astonishing rapidity: but still, a perfect lady must always draw a line somewhere.

All the way across, indeed, Melissa's lively talk was a constant delight and pleasure to every one of us. She was so taking, that girl, so confidential, so friendly. We really loved her. Then her quaint little Americanisms were as pretty as herself—not only her "Yes, sirs," and her "No, ma'ams," her "I guess" and "That's so," but her fresh Western ideas and her infinite play of fancy in the Queen's English. She turned it as a potter turns his clay. In Britain, our mother tongue has crystallized long since into set forms and phrases. In America, it has still the plasticity of youth; it is fertile in novelty—nay, even in surprises. And Melissa knew how to twist it deftly into unexpected quips and incongruous conjunctions. Her talk ran on like a limpid brook, with a musical ripple playing ever on the surface. As for Bernard, he helped her about the ship like a brother, as she moved lightly around with her sylphlike little form among the ropes and capstans. Melissa liked to be helped, she said: she didn't believe one bit in woman's rights; no, indeed—she was a great deal too fond of being taken care of for that. And who wouldn't take care of her, that delicate little thing, like some choice small masterpiece of cunning workmanship? Why, she almost looked as if she were made of Venetian glass, and a fall on deck would shatter her into a thousand fragments.

And her talk all the way was of the joys of Europe—the castles and abbeys she was leaving behind, the pictures and statues she had seen and admired, the pictures and statues she had left unvisited. "Somebody told me in Paris," she said to me one day, as she hung on my arm on deck and looked up into my face confidingly with that childlike smile of hers, "the only happy time in an American woman's life is the period when she's just got over the first poignant regret at having left Europe, and hasn't yet reached the point when she makes up her mind that, come what will, she really *must* go back again. And I thought, for my part, then my happiness was fairly spoilt for life, for I shall never be able again to afford the journey."

"Melissa, my child," I said, looking down at those ripe rich lips, "in this world one never knows what may turn up next. I've observed on my way down the path of life that when fruit hangs rosy-red on the tree by the wall, some passer-by or other is pretty sure in the end to pluck it."

But that was too much for Melissa's American modesty. She looked down and blushed like a rose herself. But she answered me nothing.

A night or two before we reached New York I was standing in the gloom, half hidden by a boat on the davits amidships, enjoying my vespertinal cigar in the cool of evening; and between the puffs I caught from time to time stray snatches of a conversation going on softly in the twilight between Bernard and Melissa. I had noticed of late, indeed, that Bernard and Melissa walked much on deck in the evening together; but this particular evening they walked long and late, and their conversation seemed to me (if I might judge by fragments) particularly confidential. The bits of it I caught were mostly, it is true, on Melissa's part (when Bernard said anything, he said it lower). She was talking enthusiastically of Venice, Florence, Pisa, Rome, with occasional flying excursions into Switzerland and the Tyrol. Once as she passed I heard something murmured low about Botticelli's "Primavera;" when next she went by, it was the Alps from Mürren; a third time, again, it was the mosaics at St. Mark's, and Titian's "Assumption," and the Doge's Palace. What so innocent as art, in the moonlight, on the ocean?

At last Bernard paused just opposite where I stood (for they didn't perceive me), and said very earnestly, "Look here, Melissa,"—he had called her Melissa almost from the first moment, and she seemed to prefer it, it seemed so natural —"Look here, Melissa. Do you know, when you talk about things like that, you make me feel so dreadfully ashamed of myself."

"Why so, Mr. Hancock?" Melissa asked innocently.

"Well, when I think what opportunities I've had, and how little I've used them," Bernard exclaimed with vehemence, "and then reflect how few you've got, and how splendidly you've made the best of them, I just blush, I tell you, Melissa, for my own laziness."

"Perhaps," Melissa interposed with a grave little air, "if one had always been brought up among it all, one wouldn't think quite so much of it. It's the novelty of antiquity that makes it so charming to people from my country. I suppose it seems quite natural, now, to you that your parish church should be six hundred years old, and have tombs in the chancel with Elizabethan ruffs or its floor inlaid with Plantagenet brasses. To us, all that seems mysterious and in a certain sort of way one might almost say magical. Nobody can love Europe quite so well, I'm sure, who has lived in it from a child. *You* grew up to many things that burst fresh upon us at last with all the intense delight of a new sensation."

They stood still as they spoke and looked hard at one another. There was a minute's pause. Then Bernard began again. "Melissa," he faltered out, in a rather tremulous voice, "are you sorry to go home again?"

"I just hate it!" Melissa answered, with a vehement burst. Then she added after a second, "But I've enjoyed the voyage."

"You'd like to live in Europe?" Bernard asked.

"I should love it!" Melissa replied. "I'm fond of my folks, of course, and I should be sorry to leave them; but I just love Europe. I shall never go again, though. I shall come right away back to Kansas City now, and keep store for father for the rest of my natural existence."

"It seems hard," Bernard went on, musing, "that anybody like you, Melissa, with such a natural love of art and of all beautiful things—anybody who can draw such sweet dreams of delight as those heads you showed us after Filippo Lippi —anybody who can appreciate Florence and Venice and Rome as you do, should have to live all her life in a Far Western town, and meet with so little sympathy as you're likely to find there."

"That's the rub," Melissa replied, looking up into his face with such a confiding look (if any pretty girl had looked up at *me* like that, I should have known what to do with her; but Bernard was twenty-four, and young men are modest). "That's the rub, Mr. Hancock. I like—well, European society so very much better. Our men are nice enough in their own way, don't you know; but they somehow lack polish—at least, out West, I mean—in Kansas City. Europeans mayn't be very much better when you get right at them, perhaps; but on the outside, any way, to *me*, they're more attractive somehow."

There was another long pause, during which I felt as guilty as every eavesdropper before me. Yet I was glued to the spot. I could hardly escape. At last Bernard spoke again. "I should like to have gone round with you on your tour, Melissa," he said; "I don't know Italy. I don't suppose by myself I could even appreciate it. But if *you* were by my side, you'd have taught me what it all meant; and then I think I might perhaps understand it."

Melissa drew a deep breath. “I wish I could take it all over again,” she answered, half sighing. “And I didn’t see Naples, either. That was a great disappointment. I should like to have seen Naples, I must confess, so as to know I could at least in the end die happy.”

“Why do you go back?” Bernard asked, suddenly, with a bounce, looking down at that wee hand that trembled upon the taffrail.

“Because I can’t help myself,” Melissa answered, in a quivering voice. “I should like—I should like to live always in England.”

“Have you any special preference for any particular town?” Bernard asked, moving closer to her—though, to be sure, he was very, very near already.

“N—no; n—none in particular,” Melissa stammered out faintly, half sidling away from him.

“Not Cambridge, for example?” Bernard asked, with a deep gulp and an audible effort.

I felt it would be unpardonable for me to hear any more. I had heard already many things not intended for me. I sneaked off, unperceived, and left those two alone to complete that conversation.

Half an hour later—it was a calm moonlight night—Bernard rushed down eagerly into the saloon to find us. “Father and mother,” he said, with a burst, “I want you up on deck for just ten minutes. There’s something up there I should like so much to show you.”

“Not whales?” I asked hypocritically, suppressing a smile.

“No, not whales,” he replied; “something much more interesting.”

We followed him blindly, Lucy much in doubt what the thing might be, and I much in wonder, after Mrs. Wade’s letter, how Lucy might take it.

At the top of the companion-ladder Melissa stood waiting for us, demure but subdued, with a still timider look than ever upon that sweet shrinking small face of hers. Her heart beat hard, I could see by the movement of her bodice, and her breath came and went; but she stood there like a dove, in her dove-coloured travelling-dress.

“Mother,” Bernard began, “Melissa’s obliged to come back to America, don’t you know, without having ever seen Naples. It seems a horrid shame she should miss seeing it. She hadn’t money enough left, you recollect, to take her there.”

Lucy gazed at him, unsuspicious. “It does seem a pity,” she answered sympathetically. “She’d enjoy it so much. I’m sorry she hasn’t been able to carry out all her programme.”

“And, mother,” Bernard went on, his eyes fixed hard on hers, “how awfully she’d be thrown away on Kansas City! I can’t bear to think of her going back to ‘keep store’ there.”

“For my part, I think it positively wicked,” Lucy answered with a smile, “and I can’t think what—well, people in England—are about to allow her to do it.”

I opened my eyes wide. Did Lucy know what she was saying? Or had Melissa, then, fascinated her—the arch little witch!—as she had fascinated the rest of us?

But Bernard, emboldened by this excellent opening, took Melissa by the hand, as if in due form to present her. “Mother,” he said tenderly, leading the wee thing forward, “and father, too; *this* is what I wanted to show you—the girl I’m engaged to!”

I paused and trembled. I waited for the thunderbolt. But no thunderbolt fell. On the contrary, Lucy stepped forward, and,

under cover of the mast, caught Melissa in her arms and kissed her twice over. “My dear child,” she cried, pressing her hard, “my dear little daughter, I don’t know which of you two I ought most to congratulate.”

“But I do,” Bernard murmured low. And, his father though I am, I murmured to myself, “And so do I, also.”

“Then you’re not ashamed of me, mother dear,” Melissa whispered, burying her dainty little head on Lucy’s shoulder, “because I kept store in Kansas City?”

Lucy rose above herself, in the excitement of the moment. “My darling wee daughter,” she answered, kissing her tenderly again, “it’s Kansas City alone that ought to be ashamed of itself for putting *you* to keep store—such a sweet little gem as you are!”

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THE Bishop laid down the telegram on the table with the air of a man who has made his mind up, and will hear no further nonsense from anybody about it.

"No, my dear," he said to his wife decisively. "He's been acquitted, and that is so far satisfactory—to a certain extent, I grant you, satisfactory: humanly speaking, it was almost impossible that he could be acquitted. The evidence didn't suffice to convince the court-martial. I'm glad of it, very glad of it, of course, for poor Iris's sake; but upon my word, Charlotte, I can't imagine how on earth they can ever have found it in their consciences to acquit him. In my opinion—humanly speaking once more—it's morally certain that Captain Burbury himself embezzled every penny of all that money."

Mrs. Brandreth turned the telegram over nervously, with two big tears standing ready to fall in the corners of her dear motherly old eyes, and then asked in a timid voice, "So you've quite decided, have you, Arthur, that it must be all broken off between him and poor Iris?"

The Bishop played with his paper-knife, half stuck through the *Guardian* in his testy fashion. "My dear," he answered, with the natural impatience of a just man unduly provoked by female persistence, "how is it possible, I put it to you, that we could ever dream of letting her marry him? I don't wish to judge him harshly—far be it from me to judge any man: I hope I understand my duty as a Christian better: but still, Charlotte, it's one of our duties, you know,—an unpleasant duty, but none the less a duty on that account—not to shut our eyes against plain facts. We are entrusted with the safe-keeping of our daughter's happiness, and I say we oughtn't to allow her to imperil it by throwing herself away upon a man whom we strongly suspect—upon just grounds—to be quite unworthy of her. I'm sorry that we must give Iris so much pain; but our duty, Charlotte, our duty, I say, lies clear before us. The young man himself sees it. What more would you wish, I wonder?"

Mrs. Brandreth sighed quietly, and let the two tears roll unperceived down her placid, gentle, fair old face. "The court-martial has taken a more lenient view of the case, Arthur," she suggested tentatively, after a pause of a few minutes.

The Bishop looked up from the table of contents of the *Guardian* with a forcedly benign glance of Christian forbearance. Women *will* be women, of course, and *will* sympathize with daughters and so forth in all their foolish matrimonial entanglements. "My dear," he explained, with his practised episcopal smile of gentle condescension to the lower intelligence of women and of the inferior clergy, "you must recollect that the court-martial had to judge of legal proof and legal certainty. Moral proof and moral certainty are, of course, quite another matter. I might hesitate, on the evidence given, to imprison this young man or even to deprive him of his commission in the army; and yet I might hesitate on the very same grounds to let him take my daughter in marriage. He has been acquitted, it is true, on the charge; but a suspicion, Charlotte, a certain vague shadow of formal suspicion must always, in future, hang over him like a cloud. Cæsar's wife—you remember the Roman dictator said, Cæsar's wife must be above suspicion. Surely, if even a heathen thought that, we, Charlotte, with all our privileges, ought to be very careful on what sort of man we bestow Iris."

And having thus summarily dismissed the matter, the Bishop turned with profound interest to the discussion on the evil consequences of the Burials Bill and the spread of dissent in the West of England.

To a mind deeply engrossed with these abstruse and important subjects, the question about poor Iris's relations with Captain Burbury, of the Hundred and Fiftieth, was, of course, a relatively small one. Iris, indeed, had never been engaged to him; that was a great comfort in all this ugly, unpleasant business. The young man had only buzzed a little around the episcopal palace at Whitchester, danced with her, talked to her, and arrived at a slight private understanding which didn't exactly amount to a regular engagement, and which had never been officially communicated to the parental ear. That, at least, was a great comfort; the Bishop considered it almost providential. Since this awkward question about the deficiency in the adjutant's accounts had first arisen, to be sure, the Bishop had learned from Mrs. Brandreth that this young man (he always spoke of Harry Burbury in that oblique fashion) had succeeded in making a passing impression upon poor Iris's unbestowed affections. But then girls, you see, are always fancying themselves in love with some young man or other, and are always profoundly convinced for the time being that they can never conceivably be happy without him. We, my dear Mr. Dean or my dear Sir William, who are men of the world—I mean, who are persons of maturer

years and more solid understanding—we know very well that in six months or so girls forget all about that nice Mr. Blank or that dear Captain Somebody in their last passing fancy for young So-and-so, who will in due time be equally forgotten, in favour of some more really desirable and eligible person. And as in this case there would be no public withdrawal, no open breach of an announced engagement, Dr. Brandreth turned complacently to the discussion on the Burials Bill, and in ten minutes had completely dismissed from his profound episcopal mind the whole subject of Captain Burbury's unfortunate court-martial.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Brandreth, who was not philosophical, like the Bishop, but who felt herself most imprudently sympathetic with all dear Iris's little girlish feelings—quite wickedly so, she was almost afraid—Mrs. Brandreth, I say, had stolen away quietly to her daughter's room, and was sitting on the little couch at the foot of the bed, with Iris's hand held fast in hers, and Iris's soft crimson cheek laid tenderly on her motherly shoulder. "There, there, darling," she was saying with tears in her eyes, as she soothed her daughter's hand gently with her own; "don't cry, Iris, don't cry, my pet. Yes, do cry; it'll do you good, darling. Perhaps by-and-by, when things blow over a little, your papa will think rather differently about it."

Iris took up the telegram for the fiftieth time with a fresh flood of tears: "From Captain Burbury, Aldershot, to Miss Brandreth, Eaton Place, London. The court-martial has acquitted me on all the charges. But I can never, never see you again."

"Oh, mamma," she cried through her sobs and tears, "how cruel of him to say such a thing as that, and at such a moment!"

"No, no, dearest," her mother said. "He was quite right to say it. He feels the horrible suspicion rests upon him still, and he can't bear to face you while it's hanging over him. No good and true man could do otherwise.... But," she added after a moment's pause, "I think, Iris, ... I think, darling, in spite of what he says, you'll probably see him here this very evening."

Iris gave a sudden start of surprise and pleasure. "This evening, mamma! This very evening?" she cried excitedly. "Oh no, not after sending me such a telegram as that, dear, surely!"

Mrs. Brandreth had not the slightest idea in the world that she was a practical psychologist—probably she could not have pronounced the word even if you had asked her—yet she answered quite readily, "Why, you know, Iris, he must have come straight out from the court-martial and sent off that telegram in the heat of the moment, just to let you know at once he had been at any rate acquitted. Of course he couldn't help adding the despairing tag about his never, never seeing you. But when he goes back to his own quarters and thinks it over a little, he'll make up his mind—I know young men, my dear—he'll make up his mind that he must just run up to town and speak with you once more before he breaks it all off for ever. And if he sees you, Iris—but, after all, why *should* he break it off? He has nothing to be ashamed of. For, indeed, I'm quite sure, darling, he never, never, never, never could have taken that dreadful money."

"Of course not, mamma," Iris answered simply, with profound confidence. What a blessed thing it is to be a trustful woman! The Bishop's moral certainty was really nothing at all compared to his pretty, weeping daughter's unshaken conviction.

"Charlotte," the Bishop said, putting his head in at the door for a second, with his episcopal hat suspended loosely in his right hand, "I've ordered the carriage, and I'm going down now to the Athenæum; from the Athenæum I shall drive on to the House of Lords; from the House of Lords, after dinner, I shall go into the Commons and hear what those dissenting Glamorgan people have got to say about this distressing Welsh disestablishment business. Very probably the debate may be late. I shall send the carriage home, in case you want it, and I shall cab it back or take the Metropolitan. Don't sit up for me. Have you got a latch-key?"

Mrs. Brandreth gave an involuntary start. The notion of the Bishop demanding a latch-key was really and truly too ridiculous. The fact was, the Brandreths had only just taken their furnished house in Eaton Place for the season that very week, and the Bishop himself had arrived alone from the Palace, Whitchester, that identical morning. A man oppressed by the spiritual burdens of an entire diocese cannot, of course, be reasonably expected to go house-hunting. It was irrational and unscriptural, Dr. Brandreth held, to suppose that he should leave the work of his see to serve tables. So Mrs. Brandreth and Iris had come to town and secured the episcopal lodgings beforehand; and as soon as everything was

put fully straight, the Bishop himself came up for the session to "his own hired house" (like St. Paul) and entered into the enjoyment of a neatly ordered and well-arranged study. This, he explained, left his mind perfectly free for the wearing and harassing duties of the episcopate, combined, as they were under our existing circumstances, with the arduous work of a Lord Spiritual in the Upper House.

Yes, Mrs. Brandreth *had* a latch-key; and the Bishop, still absorbed in soul by the effects of the Burials Bill and the aggressive conduct of the Glamorganshire Dissenters, kissed his wife and daughter mechanically, and went off ruminating to the Athenæum. "Iris has been crying," he said to himself with a pensive smile, as John turned the handle of the carriage-door respectfully behind him. "Girls will make a fuss about these foolish love affairs. But in a little while she's sure to get over it. Indeed, for my part, what she can possibly see to admire in this young man in the Hundred and Fiftieth rather than in poor dear good Canon Robinson, who would make such an admirable husband for her—though, to be sure, there *is* a certain disparity in age—fairly passes my comprehension."

And yet, when young Mr. Brandreth of Christ Church had wooed and won Charlotte Vandeleur, he was himself a handsome young curate.

The afternoon wore away slowly in Eaton Place, but dinner-time came at last, and just as Mrs. Brandreth and Iris were rising up disconsolately from a pitiable pretence of dinner, "for the sake of the servants," there came a very military knock at the front door, which made poor Iris jump and start with a sudden flush of vivid colour on her pale cheek.

"I told you so, darling," Mrs. Brandreth half whispered in a pleased undertone. "It's Captain Burbury."

And so it was. The mother's psychology (or instinct if you will) had told her correctly. Mrs. Brandreth rose to go into the drawing-room as soon as the card was duly laid before her. "I oughtn't to leave them alone by themselves," she thought to herself silently. "If I did, under the circumstances, Arthur would be justifiably angry." And, so thinking, she drew her daughter's arm in hers, murmured softly, "Iris dear, I really feel I oughtn't to leave you," and—walked off quietly without another word into her own boudoir.

Iris, her heart beating fast and high, opened the door and stepped alone into the front drawing-room.

As she entered, Harry Burbury, that penitent and shamefaced man, walked up to her with hands outstretched, ... seemed for a moment as if he would bow merely, ... then made as though he would shake hands with her ... and finally, carried away for a moment from his set purpose, caught her up ardently in both his arms, kissed her face half a dozen times over, and pressed her tight against his heaving bosom.

He had never kissed her so before, but Iris somehow felt to herself that the action just then really required no apology.

Next minute, Harry Burbury stepped back again a few paces and surveyed her sadly, with his face burning a fiery crimson. "Oh, Iris," he cried, "I mean Miss Brandreth—no, Iris. I made up my mind as I came along in the train from Aldershot that I should never, never again call you Iris."

"But, Harry, you made up your mind, too, you would never see me!"

"I did, Iris, but I thought—I thought, when I came to think it over, that perhaps I had better come and tell you, before I left England, why I felt it must be all closed for ever between us."

"Left England, Harry! All closed between us!"

"Yes, Iris; yes, darling!" And here Harry so far forgot his resolution once more that he again kissed her. "I shall resign my commission and go away somewhere to the Colonies."

"Harry!"

It was a cry of distress, and it rang terribly in the young man's ears; but with an effort he steeled himself. He didn't even kiss her. "Iris," he began once more, "it isn't any use my trying to call you Miss Brandreth, and I won't do it. Iris, I feel that, after this, I have no right to come near you in future. I have no right to blight your life with that horrid, terrible,

undeserved suspicion."

"But, Harry, you are innocent! You didn't take it! And the court-martial acquitted you."

"Yes, darling, they acquitted me of the charge, but not of the suspicion. If I *had* taken it, Iris—if a man had taken it, I mean, he might perhaps have kept his place, on the strength of the acquittal, and tried to live it down and brazen it out in spite of everything. But, as I didn't take it, and as I can't bear the shadow of that horrible suspicion, I won't live on any longer in England, and I certainly won't burden you, dearest, with such a terrible, unspeakable shame."

"Harry," Iris cried, looking up at him suddenly, "I know you didn't do it. I love you. I trust you. Why should we ever mind the other people?"

Harry faltered. "But the Bishop?" he asked. "How about your father, Iris? No, no, darling, I can never marry you while the shadow of this hideous, unworthy doubt rests over me still."

Iris took his hand in hers with a gesture of tenderness which robbed the act of all suspicion of unwomanly forwardness. Then she began to speak to him in a low, soft voice, to comfort him, to soothe him, to tell him that nobody would ever believe it about him, till Harry Burbury himself began half to fancy that his sensitive nature had exaggerated the evil. How long they sat there whispering together it would be hard to say: when lovers once take to whispering, the conversation may readily prolong itself for an indefinite period. So at least Mrs. Brandreth appeared to think, for at the end of a quiet hour or so her sense of propriety overcame her sympathy with Iris, and she went down to join the young couple in the front drawing-room. It gives me great pain to add, however, that she stood for a moment and rustled about a few magazines and papers on the landing-table, very prudently, before actually turning the handle of the drawing-room door. This is a precaution too frequently neglected in such cases by the matter-of-fact and the unwary, but one whose breach I have often known to produce considerable inconvenience to the persons concerned.

When Mrs. Brandreth at last entered, she found Iris, as girls are usually found on similar occasions, seated by herself bolt upright on a very stiff-backed chair at the far end of the room, while Harry Burbury was playing nervously with the end of his moustache on the opposite side of the centre ottoman. Such phenomenal distance spoke more eloquently to Mrs. Brandreth's psychological acumen than any degree of propinquity could possibly have done. "They must have been very confidential with one another," Mrs. Brandreth thought to herself wisely. "I've no doubt they've settled the matter by themselves offhand, without even thinking the least in the world about dear Arthur."

"Mamma," Iris said timidly, but quite simply, as her mother stood half hesitating beside her, "Harry and I have been talking this matter over, and at first Harry wanted to leave England; but I've been saying to him that somebody must have taken the money, and the best thing he can do is to stop here and try to find out who really took it. And he's going to do so. And, for the present," Iris emphasized the words very markedly, "we're not to be engaged at all to one another; but, by-and-by, when Harry has cleared his reputation——" and here Iris broke off suddenly, a becoming blush doing duty admirably for the principal verb in the unfinished sentence. (This figure of speech is known to grammarians as an aposiopesis. The name is for the most part unknown to young ladies, but the figure itself is largely employed by them with great effect in ordinary conversation.)

Mrs. Brandreth smiled a faint and placid smile. "My dear Iris," she said, "what would your papa say if he only heard you talk like that?" And feeling now quite compromised as one of the wicked conspirators, the good lady sat down and heard it all out, the house thereupon immediately resolving itself into a committee of ways and means.

It was very late, indeed, when Mrs. Brandreth, looking at her watch, exclaimed in some surprise that she really wondered dear Arthur hadn't come home ages ago.

At this unexpected mention of the Bishop, Harry Burbury, who had run up to town honestly intending to see him and renounce his daughter, but had allowed himself to be diverted by circumstances into another channel, rose abruptly to take his departure. It occurred to him at once that two o'clock in the morning is not perhaps the best possible time at which to face a very irate and right reverend father. Besides, how on earth could he satisfactorily explain his presence in the Bishop's own hired house at that peculiarly unseasonable hour?

As for Mrs. Brandreth, now fairly embarked on that terrible downward path of the committed conspirator, she whispered

to Iris, as William fastened the big front door behind Captain Burbury, “Perhaps, dear, it might be quite as well not to mention just at present to your papa that Harry”—yes, she actually called him Harry!—“has been to see you here this evening. And if we were to go to bed at once, you know, and got our lights out quickly, before your papa comes home from the House, it might, perhaps, be all the better!”

To such depths of frightful duplicity does the downward path, once embarked in, rapidly conduct even an originally right-minded clerical lady!

Meanwhile the Bishop, sitting with several of his episcopal brethren in the Peers’ gallery at the House of Commons, forgot all about the lapse of time in his burning indignation at the nefarious proposals of the honourable gentlemen from that revolutionary Glamorganshire. It was a field-night for the disestablishers and disendowers, and there seemed no chance, humanly speaking, that the debate would be terminated within any reasonable or moderate period. At last, about a quarter to two, the Bishop took his watch casually from his pocket. “Bless my soul!” he cried in surprise to his right reverend companion, “I must really be going. I hadn’t the least idea the time had gone so fast. Mrs. Brandreth will positively be wondering what has become of me.”

There were several cabs outside the House, but it was a fair, clear, star-lit night, and the Bishop on the whole, being chilly with horror, preferred walking. It would stretch his episcopal legs a little, after such a long spell of sitting, to walk from Whitehall down to Eaton Place. So he walked on along the silent streets till he came to the corner of St. Peter’s Church.

Then an awful thought suddenly flashed across his bewildered mind. Which house did he actually live in?

Yes, yes. It was too true. He had forgotten to notice or to ask the number!

If the Bishop had been a little more a man of the world, he would, no doubt, have walked off to the nearest hotel, or returned to the House and thrown himself upon the hospitality of the first met among his spiritual compeers. But he doubted whether it would be quite professional to knock up the night-porter of the Grosvenor at two in the morning, and demand a bed without luggage or introduction; while, as to his episcopal brethren, he would hardly like to ask them for shelter under such unpleasant and humiliating circumstances. The Bishop hesitated; and the bishop who hesitates is lost. Nothing but an unfaltering confidence in all his own opinions and actions can ever carry a bishop through the snares and pitfalls of modern life. He felt in his pocket for the unused latch-key. Yes, there it was, safe enough; but what door was it meant to open? The Bishop remembered nothing on earth about it. Mrs. Brandreth had met him at Paddington that morning with his own carriage, and he recollected distinctly that she had given John merely the usual laconic direction, “Home!” When he came out that afternoon, absorbed as he was by the proceedings of the Glamorganshire Dissenters, and distracted somewhat by side reflections about Iris’s love affairs, he hadn’t even had time to notice at which end of the street his own hired house happened to be situated. There was clearly only one way out of the difficulty: he must try all the doors, one after another, and see which one that particular latch-key was intended to open.

Walking up cautiously to the corner house, the Bishop tried to stick that unfortunate key boldly into the keyhole. It was too large. “*Non possumus*,” the Bishop murmured, with a placid smile—it is professional to smile under trying circumstances—and with his slow and stately tread descended the steps to try the next one.

The next one succeeded a trifle better, it is true, but not completely. The keyhole was quite big enough, to be sure, but the wards stubbornly refused to yield to the gentle and dexterous episcopal pressure. In vain did the Bishop deftly return to the charge (just as if it were a visitation); in vain did he coax and twist and turn and wheedle; those stiff-necked wards obstructed his passage as rudely and stoutly as though they had been uncompromising Glamorganshire Dissenters. Baffled, but not disheartened, the Bishop turned tentatively to the third door. Oh, joy! The key fits! it moves! it withdraws the bolt readily from the clencher! The Bishop pushed the door gently. Disappointment once more! The door was evidently locked and fastened. “This situation begins to grow ridiculous,” thought the Bishop. “One can almost enter faintly, by proxy, into the personal feelings of our misguided brother, the enterprising burglar!”

On the Bishop went, trying door after door down the whole south side of Eaton Place, till he had almost reached the very end. It was certainly absurd, and, what was more, it was painfully monotonous. It made a man feel like a thief in the night. The Bishop couldn’t help glancing furtively around him, and wondering what any of his diocesans would say if

only they could see their right reverend superior in this humiliating and undignified position. His hand positively trembled as he tried the last door but five; and when it proved but one more failure to add to the long list of his misfortunes, he took a sidelong look to right and left, and seeing a light still burning feebly within the hall, he applied for a second his own keen episcopal eye with great reluctance to the big keyhole.

Next moment he felt a heavy hand clapped forcibly upon his right shoulder, and turning round he saw the burly figure of an elderly policeman, with inquisitive bull's-eye turned full upon him in the most orthodox fashion.

"Now then, my man," the policeman said, glancing with scant regard at his hat and gaiters, "you've got to come along with me, I take it. I've been watchin' you all the way down the street, and I know what you're up to. You're loiterin' about with intent to commit a felony, that's just about the size of what you're doin'."

Dr. Brandreth drew himself up to his full height, and answered in his severest tone, "My good fellow, you are quite mistaken. I am the Bishop of Whitchester. I don't remember the exact number of my own door, and I've been trying the latch-key, on my return from the House of Lords, to see which keyhole it happened to open."

Tho policeman smiled a professional smile of waggish incredulity. "Bishop, indeed!" he echoed contemptuously. "House of Lords! Exact number! Gammon and spinach! Very well got up, indeed, 'specially the leggin's. But it won't go down. It's been tried on afore. Bishops is played out, my man, I tell you. I 'spose, now, you've just been dinin' with the Prince of Wales, and havin' a little private conversation at Lambeth Palace with the Archbishop of Canterbury!" And the policeman winked the wink of a knowing one at his own pleasantries with immense satisfaction.

"Constable," the Bishop said sternly, "this levity is out of place. If you do not believe me to be what my dress proclaims me, then you should at least take me into custody as a suspicious person without insulting my character and dignity. Go down with me to the Houses of Parliament in a cab, and I will soon prove to you that you are quite mistaken."

The policeman put his finger rudely to the side of his nose. "Character and dignity," he replied with unbecoming amusement—"character and dignity, indeed! Why, my good man, I know you well enough, don't you trouble yourself. My mates and me, we've been lookin' for you here this three months. Think I don't remember you? Oh, but I do, though. Why, you're the party as got into a private house in Pimlico last year, a-representing yourself to be a doctor, an' cribbed a gold watch and a 'ole lot of real silver from the unsuspectin' family. Come along with me, Bishop, I'm a-goin' to take your reverence right off down to the station."

The poor Bishop temporized and expostulated, but all to no purpose. He even ventured, sorely against his conscience, to try the effect of a silver key in unlocking the hard heart of the mistaken constable; but that virtuous officer with much spirit indignantly repudiated any such insidious assaults upon his professional incorruptibility. The Bishop inwardly groaned and followed him. "How easily," he thought to himself with a sigh, "even the most innocent and respectable of men may fall unawares under a disgraceful suspicion." For it is only in a limited and technical sense that Bishops regard themselves as miserable sinners.

Even as the thought flashed across his mind, he saw standing under a neighbouring doorway a person who was evidently endeavouring to escape notice, and in whom his quick eye immediately detected the bodily presence of Captain Burbury.

The Bishop drew a sigh of relief. This was clearly quite providential. Under any other circumstance he would, perhaps, have been curious to know how Captain Burbury came to be lingering so close beside his own hired house at that unseemly hour. He would have suspected an audacious attempt to communicate with Iris, contrary to the presumed wishes and desires of her affectionate parents. But, just as things then stood, the Bishop was inclined to hail with delight the presence of anybody whatsoever who could personally identify him. He was in a lenient mood as to unproved suspicions. To his horror, however, Captain Burbury, casting a rapid glance sideways at his episcopal costume, silhouetted out strikingly against the light from the policeman's bull's-eye, turned his back upon the pair with evident disinclination then and there to meet him, and began to walk rapidly away in the opposite direction.

There was no time to be lost. It was a moment for action. Captain Burbury must be made to recognize him. Half-breaking away from the burly policeman, who still, however, kept his solid hand firmly gripped around the episcopal forearm, the Bishop positively ran at the top of his speed towards the somewhat slinking and retreating captain, closely followed by

the angry constable, who dragged him back with all his force, at the same time springing his rattle violently.

"Captain Burbury, Captain Burbury?" gasped the breathless Bishop, as he managed at last to come within earshot of the retiring figure. "Stop a minute, I beg of you. Please come here and explain to the constable."

Captain Burbury turned slowly round and faced his two pursuers with obvious reluctance. For a second he seemed hardly to recognize the Bishop: then he bowed a little stiffly, and observed in a somewhat constrained voice, "The Bishop. How singular! Good evening. I suppose ... this officer ... is showing you the way home to your new quarters."

The policeman's sharp eye lost none of these small touches. "Doesn't want to get lagged hisself," he thought silently. "Didn't half like the other follow letting me see he was a pal of his after I'd copped him!"

"Captain Burbury," the Bishop said, panting, "I have most unfortunately forgotten the number of my new house. I was rather imprudently trying to open the doors all along the street with the latch-key which Mrs. Brandreth gave me on my leaving home for the House of Lords this morning, in order to see which lock it fitted, when this constable quite properly observed, and, I am sorry to say, misinterpreted my action. He believes I am loitering about to commit a felony. Have the goodness, please, to tell him who I am."

"This is the Bishop of Whitchester," Harry Burbury answered, very red, and with a growing sense of painful discomfort, expecting every moment that the Bishop would turn round upon him and ask him how he came to be there.

"Ho, ho, ho!" the constable thought to himself merrily. "Bishop and Captain! Captain and Bishop! That's a good one, that is! They're a gang, they are. Very well got up, too, the blooming pair of 'em. But they're a couple of strong 'uns, that's what I call 'em. I won't let on that I twig 'em for the present. Two able-bodied burglars at once on one's hands is no joke, even for the youngest and activest members of the force. I'll just wait till Q 94 answers my rattle. Meanwhile, as they says at the theayter, I will dissemble."

And he dissembled for the moment with such admirable effect that the Bishop fairly thought the incident settled, and began to congratulate himself in his own mind on this truly providential nocturnal meeting with Captain Burbury.

"An' what's his Lordship's exact number?" the constable asked, with a scarcely suppressed ironical emphasis on the title of honour.

"Two hundred and seventy," Harry Burbury answered, trembling.

"Two hundred and seventy!" the guardian of the peace repeated slowly. "Two hundred and seventy! So that's it, is it? Why, bless my soul, that's the very door that the military gent was a-lurkin' and a-skulkin' on! Perhaps you've got a latch-key about you somewhere for that one too, eh, Captain?"

Before the Bishop could indignantly repel this last shameful insinuation, Q 94, summoned hastily by his neighbour's rattle from the next beat, came running up in eager expectation.

"All right, Simson," the Bishop's original captor exclaimed joyfully, now throwing off the mask and ceasing to dissemble. "This is a good job, this lot. This here reverend gentleman's the Bishop of Whitchester, an' his Lordship's been a-loiterin' round in Eaton Place with intent to commit a felony. I ketched him at it a-tryin' the latch-keys. This other military gent's his friend the Captain, as can answer confidential for his perfect respectability. Ho, ho, ho! Security ain't good enough. The Captain was a-skulkin' and a-loungin' round the aireys hisself, an' didn't want at first to recognize his Lordship. But the Bishop, he very properly insisted on it. It's a gang this is; that's what it is; the Bishop's been wanted this three months to my certain knowledge as the medical gent what cribbed the silver. I'll take along his Lordship, Simson; you just ketch a hold of the Captain, will you?"

Harry Burbury saw at once that remonstrance and explanation would be quite ineffectual. He gave himself up quietly to go to the station; and the Bishop, fretting and fuming with speechless indignation, followed behind as fast as his gaitered legs would carry him.

Arrived at the station, the Bishop, to his great surprise, found his protestations of innocence and references to character

disregarded with a lordly indifference which quite astounded him. He was treated with more obvious disrespect, in fact, than the merest curate in a country parish. He turned to Harry Burbury for sympathy. But Harry only smiled a soured smile, and observed bitterly, "It is so easy to condemn anybody, you know, upon mere suspicion."

The Bishop felt a twinge of conscience. It was somewhat increased when the inspector in charge quietly remarked, "I feel a moral certainty that my officers are right; but still, in consideration of the dress you wear—a very clever disguise, certainly—I'll send one of them to make inquiries at the address you mention. Meanwhile, Thompson, lock 'em up separately in the general lock-up. We're very full to-night, Bishop. I'm sorry we can't accommodate you with a private cell. It's irregular, I know, but we're terribly overcrowded. You'll have to go in along with a couple of other prisoners."

Moral certainty! The Bishop started visibly at the phrase. It's hard to condemn a man unheard upon a moral certainty!

There was no help for it, so the Bishop allowed himself to be quietly thrust into a large cell already occupied by two other amiable-looking prisoners. One of them, to judge by the fashion in which he wore his hair, had very lately completed his term of residence in one of her Majesty's houses of detention; the other looked rather as though he were at present merely a candidate for the same distinction in the near future.

Both the men looked at the new-comer with deep interest; but as he withdrew at once into the far corner, and seated himself suspiciously upon the bed, without displaying any desire to engage in conversation, common politeness prevented them from remarking upon the singularity of his costume in such a position. So they went on with their own confabulation quite unconcernedly after a moment, taking no further notice in any way of their distinguished clerical companion.

"Then that's not the business you're lagged upon?" one of them said coolly to the other. "It isn't the adjutant's accounts, you think? It's the other matter, is it?"

"Oh yes," the second man answered quietly. "If it had been the adjutant's accounts, you see, I'd have rounded, of course, on Billy the Growler. I never did like that fellow, the Growler, you know; an' I don't see why I should have my five years for it, when he's had the best part of the swag, look 'ee. I had no hand in it, confound it. It was all the Growler. I didn't even get nothink out of it. That ain't fair now, is it, I put it to you?"

"No, it ain't," the first man answered, the close-cropped one. "But there'll be some sort of inquiry about it now, in course, for—worse luck for the Growler—I heard this evenin' the court-martial's acquitted that there Captain Somebody. They'll look about soon for some one else, I take it, to put the blame upon."

The other man laughed. "Not that," he put in carelessly. "The court-martial's acquitted him, but nobody don't believe he didn't take it. Nobody ain't going to suspect the Growler. Every one says it's a moral certainty that that Captain Thingummy there he took the money."

The Bishop drew a long breath. After all, this whole incident had been truly providential. No names were mentioned, to be sure; but from the circumstances of the case the Bishop felt convinced the person referred to was Harry Burbury. Could he have been placed in this truly ludicrous position for a wise reason—on purpose to help in extricating an innocent person from an undeserved calumny? The Bishop, with all his little failings, was at bottom a right-minded and tender-hearted man. He would not have grudged even that awkward hour of disagreeable detention in a common lock-up if he could be of any service, through his unjust incarceration, to one of his dear but wrongfully suspected brethren.

The men soon relapsed into silence, and threw themselves upon the bed and the bunk, which they assumed as by right, being the first comers. The Bishop, never speaking a word to either, but ruminating strangely in his own mind, took his own seat in silence on the solitary chair over in the corner.

The minutes wore away slowly, and the Bishop nodded now and then in a quiet doze, till the clock of the nearest church had struck four. Then, the door of the big cell was opened suddenly, and the inspector, with consternation and horror depicted legibly upon every fibre of his speaking countenance, entered the cell with a deferential bow.

"My Lord," he cried in his politest tone to the delighted Bishop, "your carriage is waiting at the door, and your coachman and footman have come here to identify you—a formality which I am sure will hardly be needful. I must

apologize most sincerely for the very unfortunate——"

The Bishop held up his finger warningly. Both the other occupants of the cell were fast asleep. "Don't wake them," the Bishop whispered in an anxious tone. "I naturally don't wish this story to get about."

The inspector bowed again. Nothing could better have suited his wishes. His constables had made a foolish mistake, and the laugh would have been against them in the force itself, far more than against the right reverend gentleman. "Who arrested the Bishop?" would soon have become the joke of the day among the street Arabs. Besides, had he not, under stress of circumstances, been committing the irregularity of putting as many as three prisoners in a single cell?

"As you wish, my Lord," he answered submissively, and bowed the Bishop with profound respect into the outer room.

There John and the footman were waiting formally to recognize him, and the carriage stood ostentatiously at the door to carry him home again.

"Inspector," the Bishop said quietly, "you need not apologize further. But I don't want this most unfortunate affair to get publicly spoken about. You will easily perceive that it might be regarded by—ahem!—some irreverent persons in a ludicrous light. I shall be glad if you will request your constables to say nothing about it to one another or to anybody else."

"My Lord," the inspector said, with a feeling of the most profound relief, "you may rely upon it that not a single soul except the parties concerned shall ever hear a word of the matter."

"And my companion in misfortune?" the Bishop asked, smiling.

The inspector, in his fluster of anxiety about the great prelate, had clean forgotten poor Harry Burbury. He went off at once to release the young man and make him a further nicely graduated apology.

"Captain Burbury," the Bishop said, "can I drive you anywhere? Where are you stopping?"

Harry's face reddened a little. "Nowhere, in fact," he answered awkwardly. "The truth is, I have only just run up from Aldershot, and had meant to put up at the Charing Cross Hotel."

Companionship in misfortune *emollit mores*. The Bishop relaxed his features and smiled graciously. "It's too late to go there now," he said with unwonted kindliness. "You had better come round to Eaton Place with me, and Mrs. Brandreth will try to find a comfortable bed for you."

Harry, hardly knowing what he did, followed the Bishop timidly out to the carriage.

As soon as they had seated themselves on the well-padded cushions of the comfortable episcopal brougham, the Bishop suddenly turned round and asked his companion, "Captain Burbury, do you happen to know anybody anywhere who is called—excuse the nickname—the Growler?"

Captain Burbury started in surprise. "The Growler!" he cried. "Why, yes, certainly. He's the adjutant's orderly in my own regiment."

The Bishop laid his hand kindly on the young man's arm. "My dear Captain Burbury," he said softly, "I believe I can do you a slight service. I have found a clue to the man who really embezzled the regimental money."

The carriage swam around before Harry Burbury's eyes, and he clutched the arm-rest by the window tightly with his hand. After all, then, the Bishop at any rate did not wholly suspect and mistrust him! Perhaps in the end he might marry Iris!

"My dear," the Bishop said to his wife, on the morning when the adjutant's orderly was first examined at Aldershot on

the charge of embezzlement, “this strongly enforces the casual remark I happened to make to you the other day about the difference between moral and legal certainty.”

“And as soon as this wretched man is really convicted,” Mrs. Brandreth observed timidly, “there can be no reason why we shouldn’t announce that Iris is engaged to Captain Burbury.”

When you have once rendered a man a signal service, you always retain a friendly feeling for him. The Bishop looked up benevolently from his paper. “Well, Charlotte,” he said, “he seems a very proper, well-conducted young man, and though I should certainly myself have preferred Canon Robinson, I don’t see any good reason why he and Iris, if they like one another, shouldn’t be married as soon as convenient to you.”

THE CHINESE PLAY AT THE HAYMARKET.

"I DON'T know how it is, Meenie," said the manager gloomily, "but this theatre don't seem to pay at all. It's a complete failure, that's what it is. We must strike out something new and original, with a total change of scenery, properties, and costume."

It was the last night of the season at the Crown Prince's Theatre, Mayfair. The manager was an amiable young man, just beginning his career as a licensed purveyor of dramatic condiments; and though he had peppered and spiced his performances with every known form of legitimate or illegitimate stimulant, the public somehow didn't seem to see it. So here he was left at the end of the last night, surveying the darkened house from the footlights, and moodily summing up in his mind the grand total of the season's losses. Meenie, better known to the critical world as Miss Amina Fitz-Adilbert, was his first young lady, a lively little Irish girl, with just the faintest *soupçon* of a brogue; and if the Crown Prince's had turned out a success under his energetic management, Jack Roberts had fully made up his mind that she should share with him in future the honours of his name, at least in private life. She was an unaffected, simple little thing, with no actress's manners when off the stage; and as she had but one relative in the world, a certain brother Pat, who had run away to foreign parts unknown after the last Fenian business, she exactly suited Jack, who often expressed his noble determination of marrying "a lone orphan." But as things stood at present, he saw little chance of affording himself the luxury of matrimony, on a magnificent balance-sheet in which expenditure invariably managed to out-run revenue. So he stood disconsolate on the pasteboard wreck of the royal mail steamship which collided nightly in his fifth act; and looked like a sort of theatrical Marius about to immolate himself amid the ruins of a scene-painter's Carthage.

"We've tried everything, Meenie," he went on disconsolately, "but it doesn't seem to pay for all that. First of all we went in for sensational dramas. We put "Wicked London" on the stage: we drove a real hansom cab with a live horse in it across Waterloo Bridge; we had three murders and a desperate suicide: *you* nearly broke your neck leaping out of the fourth-floor window from the fire, when Jenkins forgot to put enough tow in the sheet to break your fall; and *I* singed my face dreadfully as the heroic fireman going to the rescue. We had more railway accidents, powdered coachmen, live supernumeraries, and real water in that piece than in any piece that was ever put on the London boards; and what did the *Daily Irritator* say about it, Meenie, I ask you that? Eh?"

"They said," Meenie answered regretfully, "that the play lacked incident, and that the dulness of its general mediocrity was scarcely relieved by a few occasional episodes which hardly deserved the epithet of sensational."

"Well, then we went in for æsthetics and high art, and brought out Theophrastus Massinger Villon Snook's 'Ninon de l'Enclos.' We draped the auditorium in sage-green hangings, decorated the proscenium with peacock patterns by Whistler, got Alma-Tadema to design the costumes for the classical masque, and Millais to supply us with hints on Renaissance properties, and finally half ruined ourselves over the architecture of that château with the unpronounceable name that everybody laughed at. You got yourself up so that your own mother wouldn't have known you from Ellen Terry, and I made my legs look as thin as spindles, so that I exactly resembled an eminent tragedian in the character of Hamlet: and what came of it all? What did the *Evening Stinger* remark about that play, I should like to know?"

"They observed," said Meenie, in a lone of settled gloom, "that the decorations were washy and tasteless; that the piece itself was insipid and weakly rendered; and that no amount of compression or silk leggings would ever reduce your calves to a truly tragic diameter."

"Exactly so," said the despondent manager. "And then we went in for scenic spectacle. We produced 'The Wide World: a Panorama in Five Tableaux.' We laid our first act in Europe, our second in Asia, our third in Africa, our fourth in America, and our fifth in the islands of the Pacific Ocean. We hired five full-grown elephants from Wombwell's menagerie, and procured living coconut palms at an enormous expense from the Royal Gardens, Kew. We got three real Indian princes to appear on the stage in their ancestral paste diamonds; and we hired Farini's Zulus to perform their complete toilette before the eyes of the spectators, as an elevating moral illustration of the manners and customs of the South Sea Islanders. We had views, taken on the spot, of England's latest acquisition, the Rock of Raratonga. Finally, we wrecked this steamer here in a collision with a Russian ironclad, supposed to be symbolical of the frightful results of Mr. Gladstone's or Lord Beaconsfield's foreign policy—I'm sure I forget which: and what was the consequence? Why, the gods wanted to sing the National Anthem, and the stalls put on their squash hats and left the theatre in a fit of the

sulks."

"The fact is," said Meenie, "English plays and English actors are at a discount. People are tired of them. They don't care for sensation any longer, nor for æsthetics, nor for spectacle: upon my word, their taste has become so debased and degraded that I don't believe they even care for legs. The whole world's gone mad on foreign actors and actresses. They've got Sarah Bernhardt and the Comédie Française, and they go wild with ecstasies over her; as if I couldn't make myself just as thin by a judicious course of Dr. Tanner."

"No, you couldn't," said Jack, looking at her plump little face with a momentary relaxation of his brow. "Your fresh little Irish cheeks could never fall away to Sarah's pattern." And to say the truth, Meenie was a comely little body enough, with just as much tendency to adipose deposit as at one-and-twenty makes a face look temptingly like a peach. She blushed visibly through her powder, which shows that she had no more of it than the custom of the stage imperatively demands, and went on with her parable unrestrained.

"Then there are the Yankees, with the Danites and Colonel Sellers, talking tragedy through their noses, and applauded to the echo by people who would turn up their own at them in a transpontine melodrama. But that's the way of English people now, just because they're imported direct. That comes of free-trade, you know. For my part, I'm a decided protectionist. I'd put a prohibitory tariff upon the importation of foreign livestock, or compel them to be slaughtered at the port of entry. That's what I'd do."

Jack merely sighed.

"Well, then there are the Dutch, again, going through their performances like wooden dolls. 'Exquisite self-restraint,' the newspapers say. Exquisite fiddlesticks! Do you suppose *we* couldn't restrain ourselves if we chose to walk through Hamlet like mutes at a funeral? Do you suppose *we* couldn't show 'suppressed feeling' if we acted Macbeth in a couple of easy-chairs? Stuff and nonsense, all of it. People go because they want other people to think they understand Dutch, which they don't, and understand acting, which they can't see there. If we want to get on, we must go in for being Norwegians, or Russians, or Sandwich Islanders, or something of that sort; we really must."

Jack looked up slowly and meditatively. "Look here, Meenie," he said seriously; "suppose we get up a Chinese play?"

"Why, Jack, we're not Chinamen and Chinawomen. We don't look in the least like it."

"I don't know about that," said Jack, quietly; "your eyes are not quite the thing perhaps, but your nose is fairly well up to pattern."

"Now, sir," said Meenie, pouting, and turning up the somewhat *retroussé* feature in question, "you're getting rude. My nose is a very excellent nose, as noses go. But you could never make yours into a Chinaman's. It's at least three inches too long."

"Well, you know, Meenie, there's a man who advertises a nose-machine for pushing the cartilage, or whatever you call it, into a proper shape. Suppose we get this fellow to make us nose-machines for distorting it into a Chinese pattern. You'll do well enough as you stand, with a little walnut-juice, all except the eyes; but your warmest admirer couldn't pretend that your eyes are oblique. We must find out some dodge to manage that, and then we shall be all right. We can easily hire a few real Chinamen as supernumeraries—engage Tom Fat, or get 'em over from New York, or San Francisco, or somewhere; and as for the leading characters, nobody'll ever expect them to be very Chinese-looking. Upon my word, the idea has points about it. I'll turn it over in my mind and see what we can make of it, We may start afresh next season, after all."

The next six or eight weeks were a period of prodigious exertion on the part of Jack Roberts. At first, the notion was a mere joke; but the more he looked at it, the better he liked it. An eminent distorter of the human countenance not only showed him how to twist his nose into Mongoloid breadth and flatness, but also invented an invisible eyelid for producing the genuine Turanian almond effect, and rose with success to the further flight of gumming on a pair of undiscoverable high cheek-bones. In a few days, the whole company were so transformed that their own prompter wouldn't have known them, some allowance in the matter of noses and cheek-bones being naturally made in the case of the leading ladies, though all alike underwent a judicious course of copious walnut-juice. Jack telegraphed wildly to all

parts of the globe for stray Chinamen; and when at last he picked up half a dozen from vessels in the Thames, it was unanimously decided that they looked far less genuinely celestial than the European members of the company. As for the play, Jack settled that very easily. "We shall give them George Barnwell," he said, with wicked audacity; "only we shall leave out all the consonants except *n* and *g*, and call it 'Hang Chow, the Apprentice of Fa Kiang.' It'll be easy enough to study our parts, as all we've got to do is to know our cues, and talk hocus-pocus in between as long as necessary." Very wicked and unprincipled, no doubt, but very natural under the circumstances.

In a few weeks Jack was able to announce that the celebrated Celestial Troupe of the Mirror of Truth, specially decorated by his Majesty the Emperor of China and Brother of the Sun with the order of the Vermilion Pencil-case, would appear in London during the coming season in an original Chinese melodrama, for a limited number of nights only. Enthusiasm knew no bounds. The advent of the Chinese actors was the talk of society, of the clubs, of private life, and of the boys at the street corners. The *Daily Irritator* had a learned article next morning on the origin, progress, and present condition of the Chinese stage, obviously produced upon the same principle as the famous essays on the metaphysics of the Celestial Empire which attracted so much attention in the columns of the *Eatanswill Gazette*. The *Hebdomadal Vaticinator* ventured to predict for its readers an intellectual treat such as they had not enjoyed since the appearance of Mr. Jefferson in "Rip van Winkle"—evidently the only play at the performance of which the editor of that thoughtful and prophetic journal had ever assisted. Eminent Oriental travellers wrote to the society weeklies that they had seen the leading actress, Mee-Nee-Shang, in various well-known Chinese dramas at Pekin, Nagasaki, Bangkok, and even Candahar. All of them spoke with rapture of her personal beauty, her exquisite singing, and her charmingly natural histrionic powers; and though there were some slight discrepancies as to the question of her height, her age, the colour of her hair, and the soprano or contralto quality of her voice, yet these were minor matters which faded into insignificance beside their general agreement as to the admirable faculties of the coming *prima donna*.

Applications for stalls, boxes, and seats in the dress circle poured in by the thousand. Very soon Jack became convinced that the Crown Prince's would never hold the crowds which threatened to besiege his doors, and he made a hasty arrangement for taking over the Haymarket. "Hang Chow, the Apprentice of Fa Kiang," was duly announced, and the play was put in rehearsal with vigour and effect.

At the beginning of the season, Jack opened the theatre with a tremendous success. Such a first night was never known in London. Duchesses intrigued for boxes, and peers called personally upon Jack to beg the favour of a chair behind the dress circle, as all the stalls were secured beforehand for a month ahead. The free list was *really* suspended, and the pit and gallery were all transformed into reserved places at five shillings a head. Jack even thought it desirable to ensure proper ventilation by turning on a stream of pure oxygen from a patent generator in the cellars below. It was the grandest sensation of modern times. Sarah Bernhardt was nowhere, Mr. Raymond took a through ticket for California, and the Dutch players went and hanged themselves in an agony of disgrace.

The curtain lifted upon a beautiful piece of willow-plate pattern scenery in blue china. Azure trees floated airily above a cerulean cottage, while a blue pagoda stood out in the background against the sky, with all the charming disregard of perspective and the law of gravitation which so strikingly distinguishes Chinese art. The front of the stage was occupied by a blue shop, in which a youth, likewise dressed in the prevailing colour with a dash of white, was serving out blue tea in blue packages to blue supernumeraries, the genuine Chinamen of the Thames vessels. A blue lime-light played gracefully over the whole scene, and diffused a general sense of celestiality over the picture in its completeness. Applause was unbounded. Æsthetic ladies in sage-green hats tore them from their heads, lest the distressful contrast of hue should mar the pleasure of their refined fellow-spectators; and a well-known Pre-Raphaelite poet, holding three daffodils in his hand, fainted outright, as he afterwards expressed it, with a spasmodic excess of intensity, due to the rapturous but too swift satisfaction of a subtle life-hunger.

The youth in blue, by name Hang Chow, appeared, from the expressive acting of the celestial troupe, to be the apprentice of his aged and respectable uncle, Wang Seh, proprietor of a suburban grocery in a genteel neighbourhood of Pekin. At first impressively and obviously guided by the highest moral feelings, as might be observed from the elevated nature of his gestures, and the extreme accuracy with which he weighed his tea or counted out change to his customers, his whole character underwent a visible deterioration from the moment of his becoming acquainted with Mee-Nee-Shang, the beautiful but wicked heroine of the piece. Not only did he become less careful as to the plaiting of his pigtail, but he also paid less attention to the correct counting out of his change, which led to frequent and expressive recriminations on the part of the flat-faced supernumeraries. At length, acting upon the suggestions of his evil angel, with whom he appeared

about to contract a clandestine marriage, George Barn—I mean, Hang Chow—actually robbed the till of seventeen strings of cash, represented by real Chinese coins of the realm, specially imported (from Birmingham) among the properties designed for the illustration of this great moral drama. Of course he was hunted down through the instrumentality of the Chinese police, admirably dressed in their national costume; and after an interesting trial before a Mandarin with four buttons and the Exalted Order of the Peacock's Feather, he was found guilty of larceny to the value of twenty shillings, and sentenced to death by the bastinado, the sentence being carried out, contrary to all Western precedent, *coram populo*. Meenie, whose admirable acting had drawn down floods of tears from the most callous spectators, including even the directors of a fraudulent bank, finally repented in the last scene, flung herself upon the body of her lover, and died with him, from the effect of the blows administered by one of the supernumeraries with a genuine piece of Oriental bamboo.

The curtain had risen to applause, it fell to thunders. Meenie and half the company came forward for an ovation, and were almost smothered under two cartloads of bouquets. The dramatic critic of the *Daily Irritator* loudly declared that he had never till that night known what acting was. The poet with the daffodils asked to be permitted to present three golden blossoms with an unworthy holder of the same material to a lady who had at one sweep blotted out from his heart the memory of all European maidens. Five sculptors announced their intention of contributing busts of the Celestial Venus to the next Academy. And society generally observed that such an artistic and intellectual treat came like a delightful oasis amid the monotonous desert of English plays and English acting.

That night, as soon as the house was cleared, Jack caught Meenie in his arms, kissed her rapturously upon both cheeks, and vowed that they should be married that day fortnight. Meenie observed that she might if she liked at that moment take her pick of the unmarried peerage of England, but that on the whole she thought she preferred Jack. And so they went away well pleased with the success of their first night's attempt at heartlessly and unjustifiably gulling the susceptible British public.

Next day, both Jack and Meenie looked anxiously in the papers to see the verdict of the able and impartial critics upon their Chinese drama. All the fraternity were unanimous to a man. "The play itself," said the *Irritator*, "was perfect in its naïve yet touching moral sentiment, and in its profound knowledge of the throbbing human heart, always the same under all disguises, whether it be the frock-coat of Christendom or the graceful tunic of the Ming dynasty, in whose time the action is supposed to take place. As for the charming acting of Mee-Nee-Shang, the 'Pearl of Dazzling Light'—so an eminent Sinaist translates the lady's name for us—we have seen nothing so truthful for many years on the Western stage. It was more than Siddons, it was grander than Rachel. And yet the graceful and amiable actress 'holds up the looking-glass to nature,' to borrow the well-known phrase of Confucius, and really acts so that her acting is but another name for life itself. When she died in the last scene, medical authorities present imagined for the moment that the breath had really departed from her body; and Sir John McPhysic himself was seen visibly to sigh with relief when the little lady tripped before the curtain from the sides as gaily and brightly as though nothing had occurred to break the even tenor of her happy thought. It was a pleasure which we shall not often experience upon British boards."

As for the *Hebdomadal Vaticinator*, its language was so ecstatic as to defy transcription. "It was not a play," said the concluding words of the notice, "it was not even a magnificent sermon: it was a grand and imperishable moral revelation, burnt into the very core of our nature by the searching fire of man's eloquence and woman's innocent beauty. To have heard it was better than to have read all the philosophers from Aristotle to Herbert Spencer: it was the underlying ethical principle of the universe working itself out under our eyes to the infallible detection of all shams and impostures whatsoever, with unerring truth and vividness."

Jack and Meenie winced at that last sentence a little; but they managed to swallow it, and were happy enough in spite of the moral principle which, it seemed, was working out their ultimate confusion unperceived.

For ten nights "Hang Chow, the Apprentice of Fa Kiang," continued to run with unexampled and unabated success. Mee-Nee-Shang was the talk of the clubs and the *salons* of London, and her portrait appeared in all the shop windows, as well as in the next number of the *Mayfair Gazette*. Professional beauties of Aryan type discovered themselves suddenly at a discount; while a snub-nosed, almond-eyed little countess, hitherto disregarded by devotees of the reigning belles, woke up one morning and found herself famous. On the eleventh night, Jack's pride was at its zenith. Royalty had been graciously pleased to signify its intention of occupying its state box, and the whole house was ablaze, from the moment of opening the doors, with a perfect flood of diamonds and rubies. Meenie peeped with delight from behind the curtain, and

saw even the stalls filled to overflowing ten minutes before the orchestra struck up its exquisite symphony for bells and triangle, entitled, "The Echoes of Nankin."

But just at the last moment, as the curtain was on the point of rising, Jack rushed excitedly to her dressing-room, and pushing open the door without even a knock, exclaimed, in a tone of tragic distress, "Meenie, we are lost."

"Goodness gracious! Jack! what on earth do you mean?"

"Why, who do you suppose is in the next box to the Prince?—the Chinese Ambassador with all his suite! We shall be exposed and ruined before the eyes of all London, and His Royal Highness as well."

Meenie burst away to the stage, with one half of her face as yet unpowdered, and took another peep from behind the curtain at the auditorium. True enough, it was just as Jack had said. There, in a private box, with smiling face and neat pigtail, sat His Excellency the Marquis Tseng in person, surrounded by half a dozen unquestionable Mongolians. Her first impulse was to shriek aloud, go into violent hysterics, and conclude with a fainting fit. But on second thoughts she decided to brazen it out. "Leave it to me, Jack," she said, with as much assurance as she could command. "We'll go through the first act as well as we can, and then see what the Ambassador thinks of it."

It was anxious work for Meenie, that evening's performance; but she pulled through with it somehow. She had no eyes for the audience, nor even for His Royal Highness; she played simply and solely to the Ambassador's box. Everybody in the theatre noticed the touching patriotism which made the popular actress pay far more attention to the mere diplomatic representative of her own beloved sovereign than to the heir-apparent of the British throne. "You know, these Chinese," said the Marchioness of Monopoly, "are so tenderly and sentimentally attached to the paternal rule of their amiable Emperors. They still retain that pleasing feudal devotion which has unfortunately died out in Europe through the foolish influence of misguided agrarian agitators." At any rate, Meenie hardly took her eyes off the Ambassador's face. But that impassive oriental sat through the five acts without a sign or a movement. Once he ate an ice *à la Napolitaine*, and once he addressed a few remarks to an *attaché*; but from beginning to end he watched the performance with a uniformly smiling face, unmoved to tears by the great bastinado scene, and utterly impervious even to the touching incidents of the love-making in the third act.

When the curtain fell at last, Meenie was fevered, excited, trembling from head to foot, but not hopeless. Calls of "Mee-Nee-Shang" resounded loudly from the whole house, and even dukes stood up enthusiastically to join in the clamour. When she went forward she noticed an ominous fact. The Ambassador was still in his place, beaming as before, but the interpreter had quitted his seat and was moving in the direction of the manager's room.

Meenie curtseyed and kow-towed in a sort of haze or swoon, and managed to reel off the stage somehow with her burden of bouquets. She rushed eagerly to Jack's room, and as she reached the door she saw that her worst fears were realized. A celestial in pig-tail and tunic was standing at the door, engaged in low conversation with the manager.

Meenie entered with a swimming brain and sank into a chair. The interpreter shut the door softly, poured out a glass of sherry from Jack's decanter on the table, and held it gently to her lips. "Whisht," he said, beneath his breath, in the purest and most idiomatic Hibernian, "make yourself perfectly aisy, me dear, but don't spake too loud, if you plase, for fear ye should ruin us botht."

There was something very familiar to Meenie in the voice, which made her start suddenly. She looked up in amazement. "What!" she cried, regardless of his warning, "it isn't you, Pat!"

"Indade an' it is, me darlin'," Pat answered in a low tone; "but kape it dark, if ye don't want us all to be found out togither."

"Not your long-lost brother?" said Jack, in hesitation. "You're not going to perform Box and Cox in private life before my very eyes, are you?"

"The precise thing, me boy," Pat replied, unabashed. "Her brother that was in trouble for the last Faynian business, and run away to Calcutta. There I got a passage to China, and took up at first with the Jesuit missionaries. But marrying a nate little Chinese girl, I thought I might as well turn Mandarin, so I passed their examinations, and was appointed interpreter

to the embassy. An' now I'm in London I'm in deadly fear that Mike Flaherty, who's one of the chief detectives at Scotland Yard, will find me out and recognize me, the same as they recognized that poor cricketer fellow at Leicester."

A few minutes sufficed to clear up the business. Pat's features lent themselves as readily as Meenie's to the Chinese disguise; and he had cleverly intimated to the Ambassador that an additional interpreter in the national costume would prove more ornamental and effective than a recognized European like Dr. Macartney. Accordingly, he had assumed the style and title of the Mandarin Hwen Thsang, and had successfully passed himself off in London as a genuine Chinaman. Moreover, being gifted with Meenie's theatrical ability, he had learned to speak a certain broken English without the slightest Irish accent; and it was only in moments of emotion, like the present, that he burst out into his native dialect. He had recognized Meenie on the stage, partly by her voice and manner, but still more by some fragments of Irish nursery rhymes, which they had both learned as children, and which Meenie had boldly interpolated into the text of the *Fantaisies de Canton*. So he had devoted all his energies to keeping up the hoax and deluding the Ambassador.

"And how did you manage to do it?" asked Jack.

"Sure I tould him," Pat answered quietly, "that though ye were all Chinamen, ye were acting the play in English to suit your audience. And the ould haythen was perfectly contint to belave it."

"But suppose he says anything about it to anybody?"

"Divil a word can he spake to anybody, except through me. Make yourselves aisy about it; the Ambassador thinks it's all as right as tinpence. The thing's a magnificent success. Ye'll jest coin money, and nobody'll ever find ye out. Sure there's nobody in London understands Chinese except us at the embassy, and I'll make it all sthraight for ye there."

Meenie rushed into his arms, and then into Jack's. "Pat," she said, with emotion, "allow me to present you my future husband."

"It's proud I am to make his acquaintance," Pat answered promptly; "and if he could lend me a tinpound note for a day or two, it 'ud be a convanience."

Three days later, Meenie became Mrs. Jack Roberts; and it was privately whispered in well-informed circles that the manager of the Chinese play had married the popular actress Mee-Nee-Shang. At least, it was known that a member of the embassy had been present at a private meeting in a Roman Catholic Chapel in Finsbury, where a priest was seen to enter, and Jack and Meenie to emerge shortly afterwards.

Of course the hoax oozed out in time, and all London was in a state of rage and despair. But Jack coolly snapped his fingers at the metropolis, for he had made a small fortune over his season's entertainment, and had accepted an offer to undertake the management of a theatre at Chicago, where he is now doing remarkably well. Of course, too, his hoax was a most wicked and unprincipled adventure, which it has given the present writer deep moral pain to be compelled to chronicle. But then, if people *will* make such fools of themselves, what is a well-meaning but weak-minded theatrical purveyor to do?

MY CIRCULAR TOUR.

HER name was Melissa Fitch, and I always call her the Siren of Niagara. I took that phrase from a stray remark of Epaminondas A. Coeyman's. Not a very poetical name for a siren, you will say; but the interest of historical truth must prevail with the faithful annalist above every other consideration.

My own name is Douglas Preston. I am a landscape painter by trade; and in the summer of 1878, being then in my twenty-first year, I took a three-months' circular ticket for an American tour. After knocking about a little among the White Mountains and along the St. Lawrence bank, I settled down quietly at last for steady work at Niagara. There I began my immortal view of the Horse-shoe Fall, which you must have noticed in this year's Academy, beautifully stuck against the ceiling sky-line in the dark right-hand corner of the fifth room.

When I first got to the Falls I put up at that vast palace-caravanserai, the Cataract House. But I soon found four dollars a day and a regal fare a little too expensive for my humble purse; and old Judge Decatur, of the New York State Supreme Court, to whom I had a letter of introduction, promised to find me board and lodging with some respectable family in the neighbourhood. The Judge himself lived in a large white wooden frame-house, beset with painted Doric columns and capped with a bright tin cupola—a sort of compromise between a Grecian temple, an Italian cathedral, and a square pine-wood cottage; and, with true American hospitality, he would have taken me in as his guest himself, if I would have consented to such an arrangement. Failing that, he handed me over to the maternal care of Mrs. Fitch, widow of a late deceased local surgeon and mother of the siren in question.

"She's a most refined woman, and keeps a piano," said the Judge meditatively. "Besides, she has two real nice girls, specially one of them. Most elegant manners, I assure you. I take a deal of interest in that girl, sir. You'll find her *European* quite."

So I arranged to go to Mrs. Fitch's, board and lodging found, for some ten pounds a month, and there to paint away to my heart's content. I was to be treated strictly as one of the family, and I took the expression in its most literal sense.

The young ladies of elegant manners were two twins of nineteen, by name Lavinia and Melissa. Lavinia was a severe-looking and highly intellectual personage, in green spectacles, who had graduated Senior Classic and Moral Philosophy Prize-woman at the Poughkeepsie Female University and Woman's Suffrage Association. Melissa was slighter and very pretty, but, as her sister said, poor girl, she had merely an everyday kind of intellect. "She could never manage her Herodotus," Lavinia used to remark with pity; "and as for the differential calculus, she has no more notion of it than I have of making buckwheat pancakes. She can never rise, Mr. Preston, to the abstract appreciation of the Infinite, the Absolute, or the Unknowable."

I confess I was rather vague myself as to the precise qualities of the Unknowable; but I thought it best to conceal my ignorance and condole sympathetically with Lavinia on her sister's unexpansive soullessness.

I had comfortable quarters enough at Mrs. Fitch's. A pleasant white little cottage, with bright green venetians, and a verandah overgrown with Virginia creeper, and looking out on the white foam of the American Fall, is not a bad sort of place for a young artist to spend a stray summer in. Every morning after breakfast I walked across the bridge which spans the Rapids to Goat Island, and there, at the corner near the rock once crowned by the Terrapin Tower, I planted the easel for my *magnum opus*. Before me stretched the vast ceaseless emerald-green tumbling sheet of the Horse-shoe Fall, spanned by a perpetual rainbow, and glistening day after day in the unbroken radiance of an American sun. Above me the pines and maples spread their canopy of green and let through the mellow August light to fleck my canvas—sometimes a little too provokingly from a painter's practical point of view. It never rained (how Watts and McPalet, my old fellow-students, must have envied me at Bettws-y-Coed!); and Lavinia or Melissa, singly or together, generally volunteered to bring me out my luncheon, so as to save me the trouble of leaving my work at a critical moment—a distraction which no genuine artist can endure. The girls often brought their own lunch as well, and we picnicked together on the rocks by the water's edge, mixing our claret-cup with a jugful of pure crystal caught upon the very brink of the great Fall. In England our antiquated petty proprieties would have interfered to impose upon us that most awful of human inflictions, a chaperon; but in the happier innocence of the State of New York, I am glad to say, they do not treat every marriageable young woman on the same principle as if she were a convicted felon under the strictest police surveillance.

Walking across, one morning, near the end of the bridge, with Melissa to help me in carrying my *impedimenta*—she was a good-natured, humorous little thing, was Melissa, with dancing black eyes as full of fun as a Chipmonk squirrel's—we met a tall, lanky, and distinctly red-haired young gentleman, whom Melissa introduced to me with much mock consequence as Mr. Epaminondas A. Coeyman, of Big Squash Hollow.

"Well, Pam," she said, after he had acknowledged the introduction with the usual highflown circumlocution of American courtesy, "how's the farm?"

"Thank you, Liss, the farm's salubrious, I reckon. Fall wheat shows up well for the time of year, and turnips are amazing forward, considering the weather. I suppose Mr. Preston's the new lodger? An artist, sir, I understand?"

I signified assent.

"Going to take the Falls in a picture, sir?"

"Yes," I answered, "I'm working at the Horse-shoe Fall, seen from Goat Island."

"And might it be a commission from Queen Victoria, now?" said Mr. Coeyman, interrogatively.

I laughed outright. "Well, not exactly that," I said; "but I expect to hang it at the Royal Academy."

"Just so," said the tall young man, with an air of superior wisdom. "I thought anyhow, as you hailed from across the water, that you'd be under monarchical patronage one way or another."

We crossed the bridge together, and Mr. Coeyman waited awhile to see me throw in a bit of spray in the corner. He deigned to approve of my performance with lordly condescension, and then took his leave. Melissa stopped out with me during the whole morning. She was a handy little thing, with a decided taste for art (about which, however, she was frankly ignorant), and she had a capital eye for local colour, which I utilized by installing her as my mixer. It was amusing to see the interest she took in my work, and to hear her naïve comments on my handicraft. "That's real fine, that branch," she would say, posing herself a yard off with the knowing air of a Piccadilly critic; "and it dips into the water just like nature. But it wants a little more gloss on the upper side—right there; see: don't you notice you haven't caught the sunshine exactly, somehow?" Her criticisms were generally correct, and I began to perceive that, though she didn't know the difference between perspective and *chiaroscuro*, she had the making of a born artist in her none the less.

At one o'clock Lavinia came out with lunch. "I hope Melissa hasn't been hindering you in your work, Mr. Preston," she said. "I'm afraid she has not a due sense of the sanctity of your noble profession."

"Well, I don't know about that, Vinny," said Melissa, sharply. "I fancy I like pictures as well as anybody."

"Your sister has been extremely useful to me," I put in. "She has helped me immensely, both with her mixing and her criticism."

Lavinia threw herself down on a rock beside us. "It's a great privilege to be permitted to meet with persons of artistic cultivation, and I always like to improve such opportunities as may fall in my way," she said. "Now, what do you think, Mr. Preston, of Michael Angelo?"

"I think," I answered, "that he was most probably of Italian extraction. Melissa, how about this spray here? Have I got the green deep enough?"

"Oh, perfect!" Lavinia put in hastily, with a look of ecstatic admiration.

"Well," said Melissa, "I don't know; I think I should touch it up with just a trifle more of that pinky-green stuff with the hard name." And she pointed to a spot or two which would certainly have been improved by a dash of richer colouring.

"Right, as usual," I answered her; and I put in a point or so at the places she had indicated.

“But let us return to Michael Angelo, Mr. Preston,” said Lavinia, darting a rapturous glance at me through her green spectacles. “Surely you must immensely admire his gigantic intellect?”

“Gigantic!” I answered. “Oh yes, very much so, indeed. Perfectly American in its vastness, I assure you. Have you ever seen any of his works?”

“None,” Lavinia replied, with gentle resignation. “What can we expect to see, secluded as we are from the high-pulsing heart of European capitals in the rural solitude of Jefferson County?”

“Well,” said I, “I have seen his pictures, walked round his statues, climbed to the top of St. Peter’s, and read as many of his sonnets as I could swallow without choking; and, if you ask me for a candid opinion, I should say that no man could ever have spent so large a fortune on raw marble, oil-colours, blank canvas, and white foolscap.”

“Now,” said Melissa, “I think we’d better leave these Michael Angelos, and Correggios, and other outlandish people, and take our lunch at once, before the ice melts in the claret-cup; for I’ve got to go home and make the apple-float for dinner; while Vinny can stop with you if she likes and get seraphic over high art.”

Vinny did stop all the afternoon, and bored me exceedingly by invariably asking me whether I did not consider Cimabue as the father of modern painting, or what I thought of Giotto’s drapery, at the precise moment when I wished to catch the passing effect of a sunbeam on some leaf in the foreground or some rock in the midst of the whirling eddy. Considering that her whole knowledge of Cimabue and of Giotto was solely derived from the perusal of the “Treasury of Knowledge,” you will probably admit with me that her conduct was slightly provoking.

Day after day one or other of the girls fell into the habit of accompanying me pretty regularly. The more I saw of Melissa the more I liked her. She was a winsome little thing, fresh as a New England mayflower, and full of natural cleverness, which had only failed fully to develop itself because she had obstinately refused to trim the wings of her originality so as to fit the Procrustean mould of the Poughkeepsie Female University. To say the truth, I felt myself falling in love with Melissa, though the symptoms at first betokened the mildest form of that serious disease. As for Lavinia, on the other hand, her attentions were positively overpowering. Anxious, as she said, never to miss any opportunity for self-culture, she compelled me to assist her in that thankless act of husbandry to an extent which was absolutely a nuisance to a busy student. All day long, and every day, she kept pestering me with the most beautifully worded criticisms on the early Italian painters, till at length I began to wish that the “Treasury of Knowledge” had been decently buried at the bottom of the whirlpool. But as for any real love of art, she had about as much as a well-trained butler.

“Melissa,” I said one morning, towards the close of my two months, when she had helped and amused me more than usual, “how would you like to go to Europe?”

“I should love it above everything,” she answered unaffectedly. “I should like to see all these palaces and pictures you talk about. Do you know, before you came to the Falls, I never knew I cared about these things; but since I’ve watched you painting this picture, and since you’ve helped me so fine with my sketching—I used to hate sketching at Poughkeepsie—I begin to think I’m real fond of art, and no mistake.”

“But you know, Melissa,” I ventured to suggest, “you do *not* speak the Queen’s English, and you’ve got a most decided New Yorker accent.”

“Not so bad as Vinny’s,” said Melissa, with a charmingly malicious smile.

“Well, not quite so bad as Vinny’s,” I admitted cautiously, “but still quite bad enough, you know, for any practical purpose. I can’t imagine what my mother would say to a daughter-in-law who talked about being ‘real fond of art’ if I were to marry you, Melissa.”

“‘Nobody axed you, sir, she said,’” sang Melissa, gaily, to the well-known tune.

“That at least,” I said, “is good old English, Melissa. And indeed I think, if you were to spend a year in Europe first, you might probably be made quite presentable. What do you think of it?”

“Well,” said Melissa, quietly, “I don’t suppose a young artist like you can be in any hurry to set up a house, now.”

“Ah,” I cried, “for the matter of that, I have a little income of my own from my father; and if I get hung at next Academy I dare say this Horse-shoe Fall may set me up in business as a painter. If you think we could hit it off together, and that you could manage to spend a year in Europe beforehand, just to wear the edge off your Yankeedom, suppose we consider ourselves fairly engaged?”

“Why,” said Melissa, simply, “if it comes to that, you know, old Judge Decatur is our godfather, and a kind of roundabout uncle somehow. He likes you; and I reckon, if either of us were going to marry you, he wouldn’t think much of the trip to Europe. So I don’t mind considering it a bargain.”

“In that case,” I suggested, “unaccustomed as I am to matrimonial engagements, I feel spontaneously convinced that we ought to kiss one another at once and settle the question.”

The same conviction having apparently occurred to Melissa’s mind with the like priority to all experience, I will venture to draw a veil, in the interests of European propriety, over the remainder of that day’s proceedings. It is astonishing what a difference it makes to one’s feelings merely to have interchanged ratifications to a simple contract in such an informal manner. Before evening I had fully discovered that we were very seriously in love with one another, and the symptoms had progressed in such an alarming manner as to have fairly reached the critical stage.

Walking home alone an hour before dinner—Melissa had preceded me, to let the wind blow the tell-tale blushes out of her cheek—I met old Judge Decatur trudging quietly towards his Doric temple. In the fulness of my heart I opened my secret to him, and told him that I had proposed to and been accepted by one of his god-daughters. The old gentleman was overjoyed. He seized me warmly by the hand, which he gripped and shook till I thought it would have come off. He told me that the widow had hinted to him some suspicion of my affections, and that he had been heartily anxious to find her anticipations realized. “You’re a nice young fellow, Preston,” he said to me in his fatherly fashion; “you’re an excellent young fellow, and you’ve got the makings of a Benjamin West in you.” (Benjamin West was the old gentleman’s ideal of a great artist.) “We shall see you famous yet. And that girl, sir, is a jewel. She’s worthy of you! She’s worthy of anybody! As to this little matter of sending her to Europe to pick up your horrid European drawl, I suppose, and bring her back with an affected English accent, that can be easily managed, if you insist upon it. I’ll tell you what I mean to do for that paragon of a woman, sir: I mean to pay her down twenty thousand dollars on her wedding-day. I always meant to do it if she married anybody except that red-haired chap Epaminondas; and now she’s going to marry you, sir, I’m proud to do it for both your sakes.”

Four thousand pounds down, though not exactly a fortune, is still a comfortable addition to a young man’s income; so I thanked the old gentleman to the best of my ability and returned to the cottage to share the good news with Melissa. There was much innocent rejoicing between us in the house of Fitch on that eventful evening.

Next morning I went to work as usual, without much expectation of progressing largely with my picture. Melissa promised to follow me about twelve o’clock and give me the benefit of her advice as to that difficult bit of water-moss in the lower right hand corner of my canvas. At about ten o’clock, however, I was suddenly startled by the somewhat unexpected appearance on the scene of Mr. Epaminondas A. Coeyman, with his red hair distinctly dishevelled and his crimson necktie flowing wildly to the winds in “admired disorder.” Epaminondas had been a frequent visitor at the Fitches’, but I had never before seen him in so poetical a state of disarray. On the contrary, his ruddy locks were usually conspicuous for a reckless expenditure of the best scented hair-oil, and his crimson tie was invariably noticeable for the scrupulous stiffness of its starched arrangement.

“Sir,” said Epaminondas, throwing himself fiercely into an attitude expressive of despair, not unmingled with the contempt due to a detected traitor, “sir, I know the truth—I have learnt it from the lips of a grey-haired Justice of the Supreme Court in the State of New York. I come to you as Nathan the Prophet came to reproach the Hebrew monarch for the figurative theft of a ewe lamb. You, sir, you have stolen *my* ewe lamb. I regard you as a British Don Juan who has ventured with unblushing brow to desecrate the happy shores of our beloved Columbia. I consider you, sir, in the despicable light of an incarnate Class Outrage.”

“A Class Outrage?” I said, hesitating, so as to gain a little time. “I hardly see your meaning, Mr. Coeyman.”

"Yes, sir," repeated Epaminondas, flinging his arms wildly round his head, "I repeat it—you are a Class Outrage. I have loved and won that angelic being. I have long since offered her my heart, and she has honoured me by cordially accepting the palpitating gift. You come across the Atlantic, sir, like Paris to the palace of Menelaus, with your seductive manners, refined and polished by constant intercourse with a cultivated aristocracy and a splendid court. You come to her with a halo of art thrown around your head by the royal patronage which you enjoy. You steal away her heart from the natural focus towards which it should ever turn"—he struck his own breast-pocket with unnecessary violence —"the bosom of a faithful countryman and forgotten lover. I may be your equal or even your superior in intelligence. I am a graduate, sir, of the Michigan Central University. I can offer her a happy home in Big Squash Hollow; but I cannot, and I will not, cope with you in the miserable arts by which a corrupt and vicious aristocracy seeks to deprave the natural and sacred instincts of our spotless Columbian maidens."

"But," I said, "Mr. Coeyman, indeed you are mistaken. I am not a marquis, or an earl, or even a baronet. I am only a landscape-painter, with a very modest income; while you, I take it, are a landed proprietor. I am perfectly willing to allow my inferiority in intellect to yourself, but I really cannot help it if Miss Fitch prefers my advances to your own. Be reasonable for a moment, and let us talk the question over quietly."

Epaminondas sat down distractedly upon a rock and nursed his leg in his arms, as though it were the last monument of his faithless love. "I have worshipped that girl," he said, "for four years, and every year she has promised to be mine. I ask you fairly, how would you like it yourself? If you had been courting a girl for four years, how would you like a stranger to come across the Atlantic, dazzling her eyes with high art and Cimabue and Giotto? Ain't I the sort of man she ought naturally to marry? and ain't you an interloper who have no business whatsoever poking around these diggings?" And here he assumed an attitude strikingly suggestive of his desire to settle the difficulty by a literal appeal to arms.

I couldn't help feeling there was a good deal of truth in his way of putting it. In the ordinary course of nature Melissa ought certainly to have married a well-to-do New York farmer, her own equal in station and culture. If what he said was true, she had treated him most shabbily. So I soothed him down as well as I was able; and after I had reduced him to a more reasonable demeanour I promised to think and talk the matter over with her, and let him know the result of my cogitations. "Miss Fitch did not even mention her engagement with you to me," I said; "and I shall certainly speak to her upon the subject."

"Never mentioned it!" he cried. "The faithless girl! Then it is she, and not you, who are to blame. Sir, she is the Siren of Niagara, sitting upon the edge of the Horse-shoe Fall and luring men over to their destruction in the boiling whirlpool beneath. I have noticed her growing coldness and her fondness for lingering near you, but I hardly suspected her of this." And he left, with a bitterly sardonic smile upon his face, promising to see me later in the morning and hear the result of our interview.

When Melissa came up at twelve o'clock and took her usual place by my side beneath the maples, I began to broach the subject as delicately as I was able.

"Don't you think, Melissa," I said, "that one ought to be very careful, in making an engagement, to be quite sure that you have fixed upon the right person?"

"It's rather early for you," said Melissa, pouting, "to think of reconsidering that question already."

"Ah, no; not that," I answered quickly. "Supposing you had ever formed an attachment, as you naturally might, for some young farmer of the neighbourhood——"

"Just like Pam Coeyman," Melissa interrupted me, with the tears starting to her eyes. "I never could abide the whole race of them. Well, then, I suppose you think I ought to have married him and let you off your hasty bargain at once? Oh, you cruel, wicked man!" And here Melissa burst at a moment's notice into uncontrollable floods of tears.

Now, if you have ever been at Niagara, you will readily agree with me that the corner of Goat Island by the Horse-shoe Fall is not exactly the ideal place to settle a lovers' quarrel. You are never safe from intrusion on the part of the ubiquitous tourist for five minutes together; and I had snatched my first kiss the day before with an uncomfortable sense that we might at that moment be contributing an amusing incident to the foreground of the picture in the camera obscura

on the opposite Canadian shore. So I hastily dried Melissa's tears, gave her half a dozen expiatory kisses, and sent her home by the long road round the island, so as to hide her red eyes, with a promise of a full explanation when I returned to luncheon, a little later.

Some minutes before that event Epaminondas Coeyman made his appearance once more in the midst of a dark clump of pines, a little to the left, in an attitude expressive of his determination to hurl himself into the abyss below if he learnt that his perfidious lover still remained untouched. "Well," he cried, beckoning to me theatrically with his hand, "and what did Lavinia answer?"

"*Lavinia!*" I exclaimed in astonishment. "Why, it's *Melissa* that I'm engaged to."

"Melissa!" he shrieked, rushing towards me frantically; "that insignificant, empty-headed, silly little noodle! The Judge told me you were going to marry that adorable ornament of her sex, Lavinia!"

"Lavinia!" I echoed. "What! a straight-haired, pretentious he-woman, with a pair of green goggles straddling across her nose! Why, I should as soon think of marrying the President of the Royal Society."

After which mutual insults to our respective future wives, instead of squaring up for a hand-to-hand combat—as no doubt any two right-minded persons would have done—we seized each other's outstretched palms with the utmost fervour, and shook them cordially with every sign of the most fraternal affection.

"Well, in all my days I never heard anything like it," said Epaminondas, as soon as the first ardour of our reconciliation had passed away. "We all thought you were after Lavinia. She is such a remarkably superior person, we imagined she could not fail to attract the attention of a man of artistic tastes and intellectual culture like yourself. Mrs. Fitch, she mentioned it to the Judge; and the Judge mentioned it to me—he don't like me, the judge; you see, he's so dead on that girl marrying a person of intellectual distinction. He told me how you would take Lavinia to Europe and introduce her to Mr. Tennyson and Mr. Browning and the cultivated nobility of your acquaintance—'which,' says he, 'would be her natural environment.' And there's no denying it would be so, Mr. Preston."

"Unfortunately," said I, "I have not the pleasure of knowing either Mr. Tennyson or Mr. Browning; and I think you vastly overrate the importance of my humble circle."

"Well, now, that's curious," answered Epaminondas, "seeing that you live in London, the centre of all your fashionable world."

In the afternoon I went to call on the Judge and explain to him how the mistake had arisen. The old gentleman was manifestly grieved and puzzled. "This is a bad business, Preston, my boy," said he. "I should like to stick to my arrangement, you know, but I don't quite see how to do it. You understand I took it for granted that you were going to marry Lavinia. Why, nobody ever thinks anything of that other insignificant little thing. She's pretty enough, I grant you; but then Lavinia's what I call a real live woman. Now, I'd always made up my mind to settle that twenty thousand on that girl; and last night, as soon as you had spoken to me, I sent her off a note telling her I heard she was going to be married, and promised her the money unconditionally on her wedding-day. Confound it all!" added the Judge, looking serious, "she'll have told that fellow Epaminondas all about it by this time; so there's no crying off *that* bargain. Otherwise I'd have shared it between the girls; for I like you, my boy, even though you are going to marry the wrong woman. But I'm not rich enough to fork over two little lump sums of twenty thousand; and yet, you see, I kind o' don't like to disappoint you. Come, now, mightn't we settle the case by arbitration out of court? Couldn't you manage anyhow to make an exchange with Epaminondas? Lavinia and you are just suited for one another; while he and Melissa ought to pair naturally, I take it."

I shook my head firmly. "With every respect for your judicial opinion, Judge," I said, "I must reluctantly decline the honour of Lavinia's hand. As for the money, it has been all a misconception. I would have taken Melissa without it; and, since we have misunderstood one another, I shall take her all the same."

"Well," said the Judge reflectively, "I can't give her twenty thousand dollars, but I think I can put as much or more into your pocket another way. Suppose I were to get you the contract for supplying frescoes—I think you call them—to the New State Capitol, at Albany? That job ought to be worth about thirty or forty thousand dollars."

“Frescoes!” I cried in horror. “Why, I’m a landscape painter. I never tried figures from life in all my days.”

“It wouldn’t be from life,” said the Judge calmly. “They’re all dead. The sort of thing we want in our country is the American Eagle with all his feathers up, ‘Columbus concluding a treaty of peace with the Indians,’ or ‘General Jackson proclaiming the Monroe Doctrine before a terrified assembly of European sovereigns.’ As to figure-painting, well, I suppose Raphael never tried his hand at frescoes afore he began his cartoons at Hampton Court, or St. Peter’s, or wherever it is. You never voted the Republican ticket, did you?”

“Certainly not,” I answered promptly.

“Then I suppose you’re a good Democrat?”

“Well, I hardly know,” I replied. “I believe I’m a Conservative in England. That’s the opposite of a Republican or a Democrat, isn’t it?”

“Bless the boy for his European ignorance!” said the Judge forcibly (whose vague views on the nature of cartoons I had just so charitably passed over). “Democrats and Republicans ain’t the same thing. They’re the exact contraries of one another. It’s plain you don’t know much about politics. However, that don’t matter a cent. Will you solemnly promise, if I get you this contract, always to support the Democratic platform?”

“Certainly,” I answered, “if you think me strong enough.”

“Why, what on earth do you take a platform to be?” said the Judge in amazement. “I mean, will you paint pictures inculcating sound Democratic principles, with a group of leading Democratic statesmen in the centre of every foreground, and the Democratic colours introduced wherever convenient in the drapery and fixings?”

“I will try my best,” I answered, “to meet the wishes of any generous patron who chooses to employ me.”

“Well, then,” said the Judge triumphantly, “that’s the sort of art required by an enlightened Legislature in the State of New York. Never mind whether you can do frescoes or not. Stick ’em in Clay and Jackson and Calhoun in commanding attitudes, and they won’t ask you where you studied your anatomy. I’ll just tell my Democratic friends at Albany that a distinguished European painter, attracted from the crowded studios of London by the unparalleled beauties of our American scenery, has decided to make his home by the setting sun, and to devote his remarkable pictorial talents to the glorious furtherance of the Democratic cause. If I add that he is about to marry one of Columbia’s fairest daughters, I should think that would tickle ’em up, and they ought to be prepared to come down handsome with fifteen thousand dollars a year, the frescoes to be completed within five years at the outside. That would give you time to get up figures, wouldn’t it?”

Within a fortnight the whole question was fully settled. I was formally installed as Pictoriographer by Appointment to the State of New York, on the understanding that I should produce two frescoes within five years of a strictly Democratic and anti-Republican character. Melissa went to England in the autumn, while I gave up my circular ticket and settled down as an American citizen at Albany, where I at once buckled to work at getting up figures for my frescoes. At first Melissa went as a sort of family-boarder at the house of a country clergyman, and assiduously cultivated the Queen’s English, together with the amenities of European society; but after six months of probation, I judged her sufficiently advanced in her mastery of that foreign tongue to take up her abode under my mother’s roof. In the succeeding year I returned to London for a few weeks’ holiday; and there we were duly married at Kensington Church, the important event being even chronicled in the *Morning Post*, thanks to my exalted position in the world of art as Pictoriographer by Appointment to a friendly Government. Melissa is the cleverest, prettiest, and best of wives. My frescoes are now progressing favourably. I have acquired a conception of the majestic attitude which befits a Democratic leader, and of the Satanic spite to be depicted on the abject countenance of a baffled Republican; and when my five years’ engagement is completed, I expect to return, with my little wife, to the suburban shades of South Kensington, and spend the remainder of my existence happily in executing remunerative commissions for all the wealthiest legislators of the American Union. I regard Judge Decatur as the true founder of my artistic fortunes.

THE MINOR POET.

Arthur Manningham was a minor poet. But that was forty years ago; and in those younger days the minor poet had not yet become a public nuisance, as at our end of the century. Besides, he enjoyed the friendship of the Great Poet. The Great Poet was fond of him. He recognized in his friend, as he often remarked, the rare secondary gift of high critical appreciativeness. Whenever the Great Poet produced a noble work, Arthur Manningham was always the first man in England to whose eye he submitted the unprinted copy. It was Arthur who made those admirable suggestions in red pencil so familiar to collectors of the Great Poet's manuscripts; and the curious, who have compared these manuscripts with the final published forms of the Siegfried poems, are equally familiar with the further fact that Arthur Manningham's corrections almost always commended themselves to his distinguished companion. It was delightful to see the two out on the moors together; the great man laying down the law, as was his wont, in his double-bass voice, and Arthur, by his side, bending forward to listen rapt to the deep music that fell from the master's lips with all a disciple's ardour.

And Arthur, too, was a poet. Not great, but true; a minor poet. For ten years he worked hard at some few dozen lyrics, which he polished and repolished in his intervals of leisure with Horatian assiduity. One or two of them he rejected in time as unworthy the world's ear, for he was fastidious of his own work as of the work of others; the rest he perfected till, for trifles that they were, they had almost reached his own high standard of perfection. Almost, not quite, for no work of his own ever absolutely satisfied him. Tremulously and timidly, at last he published. He distrusted his powers even then. "But, perhaps," he said to himself with a timorous smile, "if there's anything in them the Great Poet's friendship may avail me somewhat!"

When, in the fulness of time, his thin volume appeared, clad in the grass-green binding that then overgrew all Parnassus, he sent the very first copy of his timid-winged fledgeling to the Great Poet. And, after that, he waited.

The Great Poet did not desert his friend. By the very next post came a letter in the well-known hand—broad, black-dashed, vigorous. The Great Poet's strong virility pervaded even his handwriting. Arthur Manningham tore it open with eager hands. What judgment had the Bard to pass on the work of the minor singer?

"My dear Arthur," the letter began, "I have just now received your delightful-looking volume, 'Phyllis's Garden.' I didn't till this moment know you too were among the Immortals. I look forward to reading it with the greatest pleasure, and shall hazard my opinion of your sister Muse when I next have the happiness of seeing you amongst us. But why make her anonymous? Surely your name, so well known at the clubs, would have carried due weight with our captious critics!"

That was all. No more. Arthur waited with deep suspense for the Great Poet's final opinion. He knew the Bard could make or mar any man. A week passed—two weeks—three—four—and yet no letter. At last, one morning, an envelope bearing the Savernake post-mark! (The Great Poet, you recollect, lived for years at Savernake.) It was in his wife's hand; but—yes—that's well!—'twas an invitation to go down there. Arthur went, all trembling. To-day should decide his poor Muse's fate; to-day he should know if he were poet or poetaster!

The Bard received him open-armed; talked of his own new tragedy. All afternoon they paced the forest together; the Great Poet talked on—but never of Arthur's verses. He spoke kindly to his friend; inquired after his health; suspected, as usual, he'd been overworking himself. This daily journalism, you know, is so very exacting! Not a word of "Phyllis's Garden." "He's waiting," thought Arthur, "to discuss it after dinner."

And after dinner, in effect, the Great Poet button-holed him confidentially into the library. "I've something special I want to talk over with you," he said, looking interested.

Arthur's heart gave a thump. "Ha! He likes my verses!"

The Great Poet sat down—and produced his own tragedy!

'Twas a tragedy for Arthur, too. He could hardly contain himself. The Bard had never known his friend's criticism so weak, so vacillating, so pointless. He didn't seem to listen, that was really the fact; he was evidently preoccupied. "Well, well," the Great Poet thought, in his tolerant way, "men are all so petty! They're often so engrossed with their

own small affairs that they have no time to bestow on the biggest and most important affairs of others!"

And from that day forth Arthur Manningham never heard another word, by mouth or pen, from the Great Poet, of his poor little lyrics. He had but one guess to make; his friend had read them, found the verse poor stuff, and, wishing to spare his sensitive feelings, avoided speaking to him of his utter failure.

The press, that dispenser of modern laurels, dismissed him in half a dozen frigid lines—"Very tolerable rhyme," "Fair minor poetry."

Forty years passed. It took Arthur Manningham just forty years of his life to get through them. He wrote no more. He had given the world his best, and the world rejected it. He knew he could never do better than he had done. Why seek to multiply suspense and failure?

He lived meanwhile—or starved—on daily journalism. He never married; who could marry on that pittance? There had been a Phyllis once: she accepted an attorney. His love died down; but he had still the Great Poet's friendship to console him.

One day when the broken soul was over seventy, and weak, and ill, and wearied out, and dying, a letter came in a crested envelope from the Great Poet, now rich and mighty, and the refuser of a baronetcy.

> "My dear Arthur," it said, just as friendly as ever, "I send you herewith a charming wee volume of fugitive verse by a forgotten author—middle of the century—name unknown, but inspiration undeniable—which our friend the Critic, ransacking the bookstalls, quite lately unearthed for me. I'm sure you'll like it, for the verse has that ring and all those delicate qualities which I know you appreciate more than any man living. They're true little gems. I'm simply charmed with them. Pray read and treasure.
>
> "Yours ever,
> "The Poet."

With trembling fingers of presentiment, the worn old man untied the knotted string, and stared hard at the volume. He knew it at a glance. It was "*Phyllis's Garden*"!

Weak and ill as he was, he took the first train that would bring him down to the Great Poet's great new house at Crowborough. With a burning heart he dragged himself to the door; who was *he* that he should ride? and a fly three shillings! The Bard was at home. Arthur Manningham staggered in. Without one spoken word, he seized his friend's arm, and pulled him on to the library. There, in a well-known corner, he selected from a specially dusty shelf a well-known book, whose place he had often noted in his mind before, but which never till that day had he ventured to take down. He took it down now, and handed it—all uncut as it was—to the Great Poet. The Bard opened the page wondering. On the fly-leaf he read in Arthur Manningham's hand these few short words, "To the Prince of Poets, from his affectionate and confiding friend, the Author."

"You promised you'd read it," Arthur Manningham faltered out; "and now, I see, you've kept your promise!"

He died that night in the Great Poet's arms. And the world has taken six editions since of "Phyllis's Garden."

THE END.

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[The end of *Ivan Greet's Masterpiece* by Grant Allen]