





THE BLACK LAMB

By

ANNA ROBESON BROWN

Burr
"

AUTHOR OF

"ALAIN OF HALFDENE," ETC.

"If you've 'eard the East a-callin', you won't never 'eed naught else"

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TO
W. O. J.

THE BLACK LAMB.

PROLOGUE.

The years march on : no faster we than they ;
The years march on, then hasten while you may ;
If you are cumbered with a trust, drop trust,
With honor, love, and friendship, by the way.

ON a certain morning in November, 1880, Colonel John Baird Sartoris came into his dining-room as usual to breakfast. He made sufficient ceremony of the meal to give to its purpose the best room in his old-fashioned house in Washington Square ; a room bearing a cheerful spirit, and marked with individuality. The hues, perhaps, were a thought sombre, the furniture substantial and of honest material rather than effective or graceful, still there was much in their choice and arrangement for a sensible man to praise, and little for an artist to condemn. A coal-fire stared with red unwinking eye from the grate, while its reflection danced glistening on the sides of cups and bowls as solid in weight and cumbrous in size as the mahogany sideboard on which they stood. Over the mantle hung the only object likely to

retain the roving eye,—a charcoal sketch with a famous name scrawled in the corner,—the half-long figure of a young man leaning up against a window. The face, even in so rough a drawing, had certain elements of unusualness that lifted it above the commonplace and made it hard to forget. 'Twas a countenance of extreme distinction, a cast of feature that meant many things, and all of them interesting. Long, lean, aquiline, one could read the attributes easier than the lines. Self-centred, clever, a little poetic, a little dreamy, more than a little dare-devil,—nine out of ten among the colonel's guests found that particular face fit at once to the likeness of some acquaintance in fiction, some salient character, Mr. Isaacs, Dupin, Zanoni, Sherlock, Holmes, Monte-Cristo,—student or adventurer as that quality predominated in the gazer. This was the more natural in view of the owner of the sketch,—a man whose very modern, practical personality served in sort to disconnect him with anything so æsthetic as the cynical-eyed countenance over his mantle-shelf.

Colonel Sartoris was an admirable specimen of American, strong in body and soul, active in mind and pursuits, an anomaly in that his colonelcy was a well-merited fact, and perhaps for that very reason often preferring to call himself Mr. The title and his personal safety were the only things which he had brought with him from the Civil War, if we

except the one prejudice of his life, against Southerners and the South. In all other matters he was exceptionably temperate, in that alone fiercely unreasonable. At the time of this chronicle Colonel Sartoris was a widower, with comfortable means and few cares, living in New York with his sister, and superintending the education of his only child, a boy of ten.

The colonel came into his dining-room, said good-morning to his sister, and seized the newspaper, as if the delay of five minutes in its perusal would have been his unutterable ruin. Few men are agreeable before breakfast,—Mrs. Copperthwaite, the colonel's sister, knew the order of the meal, and was too wise to offer any observations. Newspaper, breakfast, mail, cigar; when the last was fairly alight she knew that she might safely venture on conversation. But on this particular morning she did not have to wait so long, for the first letter that the colonel opened (newspaper and breakfast had passed in respectful silence), broke the day's events squarely open.

“Jove, Sue!” he ejaculated, pushing his chair from the table and spreading the letter open beside his plate. “Who do you think this is from? Dick Conway's widow! You remember that Creole girl poor Dick married and took to India with him?”

“Rather a handsome woman, I think,” observed

Mrs. Copperthwaite. "What is she writing to you about from India?"

"From the Brevoort House, you mean. She is over here with the boy. He must be eleven years old now. I remember saying to Laura when he was born," the colonel pursued, his eyes becoming retrospective, "that I wouldn't be in that lad's shoes for a thousand dollars."

"Why? Because you didn't happen to like his mother?" said his sister, in astonishment.

"Why? Do you remember what Dick was?" waving his hand toward the sketch over the mantleshelf. "Was there ever a dear, dare-devil bundle of the devil's impossibilities like Dick? Shall I ever forget him,—a mystic, a dreamer, a man dipped in Orientalism, soaked in philosophy,—as full of superstition as an egg is full of meat. And he goes and marries a *Creole*,—a girl from New Orleans, one of those indolent, frivolous, empty-headed—well, I leave it to your common sense, Susan, if their boy is not bound to be a specimen!" The colonel's voice was warm with interest; his sister, however, was not kindled.

"I do not think it should follow. His father may have been all that, yet he was undeniably a gentleman. But you haven't told me what is in the letter."

"Oh, she only asks me to call on her this morning on business," replied the colonel, tossing the

letter across the table, "and a lot of sentimentalism about poor Dick's best friend."

Colonel Sartoris wandered over to the mantle-piece, where he lit his cigar, and stood puffing it, contemplating the picture of his friend. "You don't remember Dick, do you, Susan?" he asked, without turning his head.

"Not very well. I only saw him once when you brought him down with you from Yale," replied Mrs. Copperthwaite. "He struck me then as rather a fascinating sort of man, although certainly not from any effort of his own."

The colonel chuckled. "Hardly," he commented. "Indifferent, sensitive, adventurous, cynical, with a morbid love for horrors and one of the most speculative intellects I ever met,—that was Dick. Ah! he was a strange fellow; he wasn't built for this age nor for this life." The colonel puffed at his cigar and contemplated his picture. "He was an only son and a spoilt one; that may have had something to do with it. But he was a scholar, a thinker, the only man in his class to take Sanscrit. Buddhism was new in those days; we weren't so advanced as we are now. Conway created a sensation by his views. When he married he went to India to live, to pursue his studies at the fountain-head, and it was time, for Hanover, Massachusetts, was too hot to hold him; the good people were not accustomed to have their family spectres taken seri-

ously, nor to having the old Puritans raised by astrological spells and black magic. They didn't understand spiritualism and voodooism and alchemy and the occult sciences."

Mrs. Copperthwaite rose and came over to her brother's side, resting her elbow on the mantle-piece. "I should think not!" she declared, emphatically.

"Then he tried all sorts of experiments on himself with opium and haschisch; and he wandered over Hungary one summer with a band of gypsies——"

"Mercy!" cried she, "what an agreeable prospect for his wife!"

"Very," agreed the colonel. "It left her perfect liberty to flirt with other men, and that was all she wanted. But nine years of it killed him, and I only wonder that it didn't kill him sooner, the climate and the life."

"He was always fond of you," said Mrs. Copperthwaite.

"He was always fond of me, and yet we never agreed on a single point. Funny! the oddest of men get on best with their commonplace friends, and Dick was always a good fellow."

"A bad fellow always is," said his sister, dryly.

There was a sound like a faint peal of thunder and a clap, followed by a second, louder peal of

thunder, and a clap. That was Jack coming downstairs.

“Morning, Aunt Sue!” he cried, rushing in; “do you know where’s my ’rithmetic? Oh, good-morning, father!”

He stood, cap in hand, every nerve in his body twitching with impatience. “Run along, boy!” said his father, kindly, “or you will be late for school.” There was a third peal of thunder on the staircase, and a bang as the front door shut after the boy. Then the house, as it were, shook itself, and relapsed into quiet, but the colonel’s train of thought had been derailed, and he turned away from the mantle-piece.

“I suppose I had better go and see Mrs. Conway,” he said, rather gloomily; “she said to come before twelve. Now, what do you think she wants me for?”

“Business probably,” his sister replied, “or, from your description of her, she may be yielding to her fondness for masculine society.”

“If it is *that*,” Colonel Sartoris answered with emphasis, “she is making a mistake. It will be another Civil War!”

“I hope the South will not win,” said Mrs. Copperthwaite, laughing. “I’m not particularly anxious for any reconstruction of this household.”

“You needn’t be afraid,” said her brother, departing; “I know the lady, and she knows me, I fancy.”

Lest our readers should form any mistaken idea of Colonel Sartoris from this somewhat vainglorious speech, it may be well to take a more particular glance at him. He was a man verging on fifty, remarkable for nothing in his appearance save a gentlemanly bearing, and with features disclosing the qualities of firmness, cheerfulness, and judgment. He was a man of the world—not only a man of his individual world—in the better sense of this misapplied term. He had loved, and married for love, and his sister need have felt no fear were Mrs. Conway twice as fascinating as she was. The colonel trod life very steadily, sheltered from emotional follies by what is aptly called “the umbrella of cynicism;” yet to do him justice, he never raised that shelter for less than a downpour. Moreover (as he himself said), when a man has been through war and a hospital, experiences that flutter less regular pulses leave his undisturbed.

His thoughts, as he went his way, fell into the by-paths of the past; and the face of his dead friend—that young-old, jaded face—stared him from every street-corner. Numberless characteristics till now buried and forgotten, incidents he had not dwelt upon for years, came crowding and marching into his mind, each blowing the trumpet of remembrance. Dick Conway, the dreamer, the theosophist, the man of occult superstitions; his friend Dick, the poet, the self-allotted adventurer,

—he reconstructed the obliterated personality until it walked beside him as vivid as in life. Had Dick in person come to greet him, as he stepped into Mrs. Conway's parlor at the Brevoort, he would scarcely have been surprised.

The room into which he was shown bore every mark of the confusion of arrival. Large trunks stood against the wall, from these an Indian Ayah in unfamiliar costume was lifting piles of woman's gear and carrying them into an adjoining room. Hardly a chair was unoccupied, a state of affairs for which Mrs. Conway apologized as she hastened to greet her visitor. The colonel observed her studiously. She was dark, handsome; quite as handsome as when he had seen her twelve years before, —with a flame in the pupils of her velvet-black eyes, and the same charming smile on her too-full red lips. She had preserved her poise and grace, and if Indian life had rubbed a little of the bloom from her cheek, it was far less than a Northern-bred woman would have lost in the same duration of years. Yes, she was still remarkably handsome, and the colonel dwelt on the thought with a touch of envy, as he recalled his own progress. Her dress was black, but covered with jet ornaments that swung and glittered, and somewhat offended his taste, which recoiled likewise at the blazing gems at her throat and on her soft, brown hands.

“ This is very good of you ! how kind you are ! ”

she cried, holding both hands out to him with an unstudied, radiant smile. "I cannot tell you how obliged I am! Noël, come here, and speak to Colonel Sartoris!"

A thin boy of eleven, who had been curled up on a rug in front of the fire, rose at these words, and came forward, not shyly, yet with a certain grave hesitancy. Colonel Sartoris put forth a hand to draw the boy near, when, to his astonishment, the child salaamed, and then folded his arms as one that waited.

"Hullo!" said the colonel, staring, "what's that for?" Mrs. Conway laughed, as she underwent in her turn the contemplation of her visitor. "The boy has run at large in the bazaars," she explained; "he really is a perfect little Hindu. It's on his account chiefly that I wished to see you,—I am so anxious for Noël to learn the ways of civilization."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said the colonel. "Come here, boy, and let us have a look at you."

He drew the child to his knee, and turned up the small face to his. Undoubtedly he resembled his father, with those curious, light eyes in a dark face, and those high-arched, un-English eyebrows.

"He is like Dick," said the colonel to the mother, as he studied the visage tenderly, as if he would fain find a more marked likeness to his dead friend. "But what did you say about the bazaars? I don't understand."

“My poor husband had so many singular ideas,” said Mrs. Conway, with a sort of protest. “He believed in what he called the Indian type,—that we all reverted to it,—that Western ideas were exotic, and at bottom it is only the old Aryan race after all. So he experimented on Noël. He wouldn’t have any English servants,—he insisted on the child’s being brought up entirely by natives. I needn’t tell you that I utterly disapproved.”

“Ah,” commented the listener, “yes; that sounds like Dick. And then——?”

“Where we lived—at Raithapoor—it was only a station you see, only a few English families; but there is quite a famous Buddhist temple there, and Dick would have Noël go. Dreadful, I thought it,—so unsettling for the child!”

“Bless me!” cried the colonel. “Buddhist temple indeed! What a pernicious education!”

“Then when Dick died,” Mrs. Conway continued, “it was so hard to change. English servants in India are rare and very expensive. I was forced to keep ours, who were devoted to Noël, because I knew I could trust him with them when I was away.”

This sentence was English, yet it bore the need of a translator. Briefly, it meant that the bearer and Ayah had stood to little Noël in the stead of a mother, nurse, and tutor for full two years since his father’s death, and that he had not been ten

hours of that time in his mother's company. The colonel, however, held the key to Mrs. Conway's language, and filled in the blanks with guesswork. He glanced at the child with sudden, curious inquiry; but the boy stood while his mother was speaking, his eyes fixed on her face in a devotion that stirred the watcher to the vitals.

"Run away, Noël," said his mother, waving him aside; "stay quietly in the next room with Ayah till I call you."

"A very well-grown child," the visitor said, politely, as the door closed on the little figure. "You had a pleasant voyage?"

"Oh, very fair. I left India last April, you know. I had a great many visits to pay, and spent some time in London for the season. Noël and Ayah followed me in September."

"Ah, I see. Do you intend to make a long stay in New York, Mrs. Conway?" The colonel confessed a little curiosity about his hostess's plans.

"That depends. Really, that has to do with our chat," she replied. "I am very desirous of getting a good school for Noël, and have him brought up among his father's countrymen. His circumstances, poor child! have been so unfortunate! You see for yourself that he is quite impossible."

The visitor had not seen it, nor was he over-

whelmed by a sense of conviction. There is something in the eyes and voice of a true mother that carries potency whoever she may be that speaks. One of the few mental pictures Colonel Sartoris carried about with him was that look in his dead wife's eyes as she bent over her child. He watched for this signal as the sailor watches for the guiding light, but when their talk proceeded and he never caught a glimpse of it, he hardened his heart.

“I fancied you might be able to help me in my search,” she continued, as he preserved silence. “Your little boy must be nearly Noël's age; does he go to school?”

“No. To a class of lads under a very excellent tutor,” the colonel replied. “I dislike boarding-schools for boys so young. College takes them away soon enough.”

“Yes—of course—you are right, a tutor is better,” agreed the lady. She felt rather pleased with her new *role* of occupied mother discussing education. It was a picture that she fancied, and she was always contemplating herself from a distance.

“Is it your plan to settle in New York for the present?” inquired the colonel. He was very suave and properly interested, but the question caused his hostess an unaccountable embarrassment.

“No. That is—not exactly. The fact is——” She paused, hesitated, blushed a little, and looked extremely confused and charming. It was most ungallant of the colonel to offer her so little assistance. “The truth is, Colonel Sartoris,” she began, “I am in great trouble and perplexity,—I hardly know which way to turn. Mr. Conway”—her voice sank religiously at the name—“Mr. Conway has left me very scantily provided for.”

“Indeed!” he said; “you surprise me. Dick had ample means when I knew him.”

“He had; but you must remember what a wretched man of business my poor husband was.” The colonel at this turn of the road began to fidget; he scented monetary difficulties, and mentally braced himself. “He invested recklessly,” pursued Richard Conway’s wife, in her tone of smooth confidence. “He neglected his interests, and left his affairs to subordinates,—and of course they were mismanaged. At his death, I found myself considerably straitened. Noël has the fag end of the estate,—about twelve hundred dollars a year.”

“Not a fortune, certainly,” commented the hearer, who did not like to ask the exact income to which the lady had been reduced.

“When I was in England last spring,” she went on, “I was very gay, and met a great many society people. I spent a week with Mrs. Granville Mer-

chant at her house in Carlton House Terrace. It was there I met Sir Robert LeBreton."

Although the colonel divined what was coming, he tingled with amusement at the jerk of pride and delight with which she gave forth the name. The *r*'s rolled under her tongue like a choice, delicious morsel.

"Sir Robert is a widower,—perhaps you can guess the rest?" cried she, half laughing.

"Perhaps I may," said the colonel. "Sir Robert could not help himself?"

"We became engaged toward the end of my visit," she proceeded. "It is a very fine establishment, a beautiful old place in Surrey——"

She glanced at the colonel, who felt called upon to offer the usual congratulations.

"A very great change, Mrs. Conway," he concluded, "and such a fine prospect for the boy."

She fidgeted in her chair, while a spot of red flashed into her cheeks and fled again. Some inkling of truth to come may have vibrated through the colonel's mind, for as he surveyed her his lips tightened under his gray moustache.

"That—that is the question—it is about Noël," she began, but her composure left her clutching wildly at the skirts of calm. "I—I haven't told Sir Robert—he doesn't know about Noël!" she broke out. There was a significant pause, for the

colonel, although not greatly surprised, thought it wise to appear so.

“What!” he cried, very sternly, “you have not told your future husband that you have a child?” His voice sounded back from the walls of the room like a trumpet-peal.

“You—you don’t understand,” she interposed, hurriedly and scared. “I don’t mean that I concealed anything, but I was alone in the house; none of the people there had known my husband. Of course they knew I was a widow, but, curiously enough, they hadn’t heard about Noël, and I didn’t mention him; he was so far off, you know, and——”

“Then it is all very simple,” put in the colonel: “you can write to Sir Robert and tell him at once.”

She peered anxiously into his face, but finding no alternative there, to his horror took refuge in tears.

“I—I can’t do that now—you don’t understand,” she sobbed. “Sir Robert isn’t a rich man; he has two sons of his own to provide for. The—the Le-Bretons are not millionaires. If he heard I had a boy he might——”

“Might get out of it, you mean?” the colonel interjected, brutally. “Well, if he is such a man, wouldn’t it be better to let him go?”

“You are very, very unkind,” wept Mrs. Conway. “I’m tired of being poor. If you knew what it was to be poked off in India without any

society or culture,—nothing but natives and children! Dick should have thought," she moaned; "now his carelessness parts me from my child."

The colonel pushed away his chair and stared at her. "Bless me," he said to himself, "if she isn't blaming Dick!" He gave her a moment or two, and then began to argue the subject as moderately as he was able. Possibly he was too moderate; in any case, he soon saw that plain reason was as ineffectual as sentiment. He pointed out the uselessness of concealment on so mortal a circumstance; he stated over and over again that if the English baronet was a man the news would have no effect on his affection; that if it had, surely marriage with such a character was a detestable contract. His eloquence and logic were alike in vain. Mrs. Conway chose to regard herself in the light of an ill-used person, torn by cruel fate from an only child. So complete was her deflection of the truth that she imagined her procedure to partake of the nature of martyrdom, a dumb heroism that suffers and says naught. She declared with admirable constancy that she dared not so offend her husband's memory as to raise his child in England among Englishmen; and she solemnly asserted her horror at the thought of such a future for him. The colonel at length, driven to the extreme of his patience, dropped the tone of argument and adopted that of indifference.

"As I understand you, then," he said, with

ironic politeness, "you intend to continue this deception and give up your boy? May I ask how you propose to set about it?"

Mrs. Conway, after a few sniffs, put aside her handkerchief. "I thought if I could put Noël into a good school," she said, briskly, "he might go from there to college, and be quite happy. I have no acquaintances in the North to keep track of me when I go back to England. With the ocean between us and our names different, there would be no need of any further change."

"Oh," said the colonel, dryly, "I see."

"If any of my husband's relatives are alive they might see to Noël. It could all be so easily arranged. My boy would never know how his mother loved him, how her secret prayers followed his career."

Colonel Sartoris rose and walked to the window. Disgust rang so loud within him that very proximity to the lady was unpleasant.

"Dick has no relatives in the East at present," he said, after a pause. "An aunt and some cousins of his live in San Francisco, I believe. You could hardly apply to them. As you say so truly, they would hardly understand. I don't disguise from you, Mrs. Conway, that I think you're—you're making a mistake; but I would rather look after Dick's boy myself than leave him to strangers. He could go to school and college with my Jack, and spend his holidays with us."

He spoke in a peculiarly deliberate, monotonous voice, without a trace of feeling. The whole incident struck him as monstrously unnatural and wicked; he was no Puritan, but few men can forgive a woman for a lack of maternal sentiment, and the colonel, charged with holy memories, least of all.

“Oh, how good! how kind! how shall I thank you?” she cried, rising in a pretty rapture of gratitude. “You set my mind perfectly at ease, and Dick could have wished for nothing better! But perhaps Mrs. Sartoris——”

“No,” said the colonel, gently; “my boy is also motherless.”

He need have wasted no such sarcasm. The woman resembled a down-cushion against which steel was blunted; her eyes and his looked upon different worlds, and attached separate shades of meaning to the English language. What he called internally “a heartless desertion,” she described as a “duty to his father’s memory and his father’s country that compels me, at whatever cost, to educate my child in America.” The phrase was noble, and filled her with a glow of sacrifice.

“We will make the necessary arrangements later,” said the colonel, making a pretence to glance upon his watch. “I have outstayed my time as it is. Good-by, Mrs. Conway; I will call again, and we will go more fully into this.”

The lady would have thanked him with profusion, but he cut her short, bowed formally, just touched her outstretched hand, and walked rapidly from the room.

“I dared not stay another minute,” he declared, recounting the interview to his sister, “or I should have forgotten that I was a gentleman! But we’ll look after the lad, Sue, you and I; and if that woman keeps out of his life he may turn out happier than his father,—who knows?”

CHAPTER I.

These are our full years, full of sounds and sights,
Of loves and junketings, of feasts and fights ;
Youth's caldron kept a-boiling at white heat,
Youth's candle kept a-burning days and nights.

A BRIEF summary only is necessary of those fourteen years from the day when little Noël, weeping bitterly, was set down at Colonel Sartoris's door, to the day when he makes his second appearance on the stage of this history.

The two children, so unlike in temperament and so opposite in education, lost no time in becoming fast friends. When Jack had dried Noël's tears by the exhibition of his mechanical engine, and the boy, although still silent and shy, seemed to feel more at his ease, the colonel took him on his knee and strove to draw from him some details of the parting with his mother. At the word Noël very nearly began to sob again, but restrained himself by an unchildish effort of self-control. All the colonel could gather was that "Mamma had cried very loud, and told him to be a good boy," and that "Ayah had cried too, and kissed his hand very many times when she gave him a little charm to

wear; and was mamma going to stay away *very* long?"

Mrs. Copperthwaite, who was leaning over her brother's chair, choked at this, and carried the boy off to bed, where beside Jack's ruddy little visage his own thin, swart one looked more Oriental than ever. Three months later, Colonel Sartoris saw announced in the newspaper the marriage in London of Adele Bourgereau Conway to Sir Robert LeBreton. He burned all the papers in the house bearing the same announcement, and that evening he took Noël into the library, and told him gently that his beautiful mamma was dead, and that she would never come to see him any more. The course was one which he had decided upon after much thought, as sufficiently developing Mrs. Conway's idea and not running counter to his own. Noël opened his great gray eyes, wide and puzzled, and said a few words in an unknown language.

"What is it, Noël?" asked the colonel, tenderly.

"That? Oh, I forgot, you do not understand," said Noël, drawing away. "Will they take her to the ghât to be buried, like in my country?"

"You will not see her again," said the colonel, pitifully and very sad; "she has gone to be an angel in heaven."

Noël did not seem to understand; he broke into sobs and murmured Hindustani, until once again

the mechanical engine came into request as comforter.

The boys studied, fought, and were punished together. They were both uncommonly quick, and prepared to take their college examinations at the earliest limit of the required age. Six months before the date of their entrance, the colonel unfortunately went to an intercollegiate foot-ball match. He came home raging, and told Jack that very night that he preferred to send him to Heidelberg, "where," said the colonel, swelling, "you can fight, if you must, with rapiers, like gentlemen, and not mash one another's faces open for money, and to give twenty thousand people an excuse to get drunk!"

So the following spring carried the two lads to the new experience of a German university. The choice, admirable from many points of view, was in one respect unfortunate. The pair were clever, whimsical, and of marked precocity of mind. They had been much alone, and had early developed an unsociable tendency. Reading and undue shyness made them, if intellectually superior, an unusually self-sufficient pair of youths, who sought no company and found little interest in the sports of their age. "Savages, young savages, with an ounce of the book-worm thrown in!" the colonel described them. His own youth had been too similar for him to measure the possible disadvan-

tage to his son of a fundamental difference with his class.

Letters travelled back and forth during four years, letters of study and lectures, letters also of duels and drinking-bouts. "Rapiers and beer are healthier than foot-ball and whiskey!" cried the colonel at these effusions. Even when Noël had his head laid open by a fellow-student from the ear to the crown, the colonel was no whit dismayed. "Fight well," he wrote; "when you hit a man, knock him down. These long-haired, spindled-legged collegians I see about town are no example of Americans for *you*, my boy!" To the same letter was added the following postscript: "You seem to have a fine mediæval taste for adventure, and to be draining the literature of three languages. What does Noël read?"

"Con reads everything he can lay his hands on," Jack wrote in reply. "He's an awfully clever chap, and the professors are proud of him. But he's a perfect savage, shy as a deer, won't look at a woman, although there are some pretty ones here. At present he's deep in theosophy, black magic, and all the rest of it. One of the Herr Professors is quite an authority, and Con has turned disciple. I don't quite make it out myself, but it's very interesting. Con is making investigations into spiritualism, and Madame Blavatsky, so we're very mystic all round just at present."

the colonel received this epistle in his dining-room, and as he finished it, glanced hastily up into Richard Conway's lean, dark face over his mantelshelf. "Ah, Dick, Dick!" he thought, "what have you left this boy of yours?"

At the end of four years, Colonel Sartoris stood on the wharf to welcome home his sons. He was alone, for his sister had died a year before, and he was beginning to feel his loneliness. When he saw the two tall figures towering above the crowd, he was seized with a pang of delight. "Two big rascals! Two big *men!*" he kept repeating. "By George, Jack, you must be six feet!"

"Six feet two, father," said Jack, cheerfully.

"And Noël?"

"Six feet three *just,*" cried that giant, laughing.

"Good!" ejaculated the colonel, seizing an arm of each. "You come with me, and we'll show New York what we can do in *men!*"

There was no need, he told them after dinner that evening, for either of them to settle down to work yet awhile.

"There will be a place in the firm for each of you when the time comes," he said, contemplating what he called his "mastodon pups" with proper pride. "In a little while,—a year or two. Everything is looking booming, and likely to look so for a long time. The places will keep; they're not going to run away," he concluded, with that lack

of foresight which possesses the best of us in
of prosperity.

So after a barren winter in New York spent
a manner altogether unorthodox, and when Fifth
Avenue and fashion knew them not at all, the pair
went West. Hunting and fishing thus alternated
with meditation in the wilderness; life was seen
and judged upon; there was a lust of adventure
in these two spirits that was worthy of a more
heroic age. Then, hard upon a short visit home,
another trip was planned, and a brace of months
were spent in Central America and Mexico, where
these nineteenth-century knights-errant got into
trouble and out again, and used their revolvers
without annoying any consul whatever. Wherever
there was an incident, these two were on the trail
of it, the natural and supernatural alike found them
at the heel.

One such occurrence, in fact, served to confirm
one of them in the indulgence of certain views.
It was on a night of heat and tropic downpour.
The rain fell level, in sheets, like water from a
spout, straight from a sky so near that it seemed to
lie heavily upon the tops of the tallest trees. There
had been thunder and vivid blue lightning, but now
the lightning flickered like a spent candle on the
horizon, and the thunder roared with the rain, like
the roar of distant breakers on a pebbly beach.

The two boys had been riding all day and were

stiff and soaked: the very manes and tails of their mules dripped with water. It was after nine o'clock and very dark when they came on a hut, backed against the steep of a hill, down which they had clambered in slippery clay paths among the loose stones. At sight of it they stopped, and Jack groped for the door of the little building, and hammered at it.

No one replied, and when they had entered, they found a deserted adobe hut, leaky and comfortless, but in a measure a shelter. They led in the weary mules, tethering them in a corner above a heap of hay, and spreading the packs on the mud floor.

Noël carried matches in a waterproof pocket, and Jack a bit of tallow candle, so by this light they spread out the damp blankets as they were, for there was neither firewood nor hearth. Both agreed that it was a bad business, but better than out-of-doors. When they had eaten and fed their beasts, they turned to inspecting the premises for the night. The hut contained an inner and an outer chamber, equally empty and damp, with a hole in the mud wall to serve as door between them. The poor wet mules stood in one corner of the outer room, while their masters spread out the blankets on the hard inner floor. Meanwhile the rain gushed steadily down and dripped musically from a dozen leaks in the roof, so that when the two had stretched out, rolled in their blankets, sleep was not easy.

Jack was at length dozing off to this accompaniment when he felt his companion roll over and grip him by the wrist.

“Jack!” Noël whispered, “do you hear? What is it?” Jack sat up and listened, straining his ears. The continuous gush of the descending rain made a dulling envelope of sound, against which background it was hard to pick out minor disturbances. Occasionally, one of the mules in the next room would paw the mud or shift from foot to foot; and the *tink-a-tink* of rain-drops falling to the floor made a confusion of half-melodious noises. All these Jack heard.

“Do you hear it?” asked Noël again, and his voice betrayed an odd excitement. “There must be something in the next room.”

Just then the rain lulled, the air cleared of sound for an instant, and the tinkling drops slowed in their fall. In this momentary limit of silence Jack seemed to hear another noise, the distinct clap of a light step and the rustle of a woman’s dress, that crackly, papery sound of silken draperies trailing to and fro. Then the downpour drowned it out in a renewed flood.

“I do hear something,” Jack admitted, sinking his voice. “Can any one be in there? Shall we go and see?”

He felt an interest, but not strong enough to leave his blanket without a cause; moreover, he knew

that Noël would prefer to lead the investigations. Jack was normally interested in the supernatural, but to Noël it was a passion.

“It can’t be,” Conway replied, in his lowest whisper; “we barred the door, and I know there is no other. Listen! there it is again.”

In truth, the sound once more reached their ears, and this time much more definitely, the firm tread of a foot and the rustle of draperies following it.

“Light the candle!” ordered Noël.

“What are you going to do, Con?” asked Jack, curiously. There was a fresh pause in the rain, and this time the odd disturbance was unmistakable. Some one was certainly walking about in the next room. Jack lit the bit of candle under the shelter of his blanket. His hand shook a little, but it was from excitement, not fear; he felt a zest of the adventure, and was anxious for the climax.

“Give it to me,” Noël said, abruptly, reaching for it. “Stay here till I call.” He shook himself free of coverings and rose noiselessly to his feet, shielding the light by his hat, that he had snatched from the floor. Jack saw him thus walk stealthily toward the door, the candle-flame lying horizontal to the draught, and the young man’s tall shadow creeping behind him on the wall.

Jack himself sat still in a stupor of excitement and tension. All this time, in the fresh silence

after the rain, he could hear, as he thought, the light step treading to and fro, softly, yet without apparent effort at quiet. Then the light and the light-bearer vanished through the broken doorway, leaving the watcher in darkness.

“Who’s that?” he heard Noël say, sternly. Then in quite a different voice, “Ah!”

Jack waited a minute, two minutes; but nothing happened. “Con!” he called, “what was it?” But Noël made him no answer.

Then Jack sprang up and was in the next room in two bounds. It was quite as they had left it, empty, save for the silent walls, and Noël, who stood in the centre, still holding the candle with the flame rising steady and clear. His eyes were fixed, his jaw a little dropped, his whole body rigidly still.

“Con!” Jack cried, angrily, shaking him. “What’s the matter, man?”

Noël turned toward him slowly. “Did you see it?” he said, solemnly. “I knew it would be granted to me some day. I have seen her.”

“Seen her? Seen who?” cried Jack.

“My mother,” said Noël, quietly.

“Bah! You’re crazy! What did you see?”

“I tell you I saw my mother,” Noël repeated. “She was permitted to manifest herself to me. She was standing *there!*” and he pointed. “And she held a hand out to me as she used. Then she van-

ished. I tell you I saw her quite plain,—her aura,—her spirit. It was a wonderful manifestation.”

Nor could all his friend's reasoning shake him from the belief.

When an account of this reached the colonel, he groaned in spirit.

“My dear boy,” he wrote, “your father had the ghost habit before you,—take my advice and check it while you have time.”

To which Noël responded,—

“My dear sir, there is nothing in literature or ethics to prove that we may not, at need, open our eyes upon the intangible world of spirits,” and the reply caused the colonel to groan louder than ever.

In due time the ghost-seer and hunter returned very sun-browned and healthy, and on this occasion, finding them set upon yet farther wandering, the colonel decided to make one of the party, and the three spent an idle Bohemian summer of it in Europe. In the autumn he was called to New York upon business, and left the two by themselves in London, armed with letters which they scorned to produce, yet promising themselves a rich harvest of the picturesque.

CHAPTER II.

Nay, wait and rest, the days are calm and bright,
What need of weapon where is naught to fight?

Then suddenly, lance up, and vizard down—
A cry has rung, unsuccored through the night!

THE action and reaction of character is a thing very difficult of description. How far respect and affection will bridge the gulf created by unlike temperaments and differing sympathies is a calculation that is forced upon each in his turn. Occasionally one will arrive at true results, and this consummation devoutly to be wished had been reached between the two with an epoch in whose lives we are about to deal. Their days had been passed much in each other's company, yet their minds had developed separately, seeking only assistance one from another in the simpler phases of life. To any one else either one of them would have proved a singular companion. Noël Conway in particular, with his mystical tendencies, his flashes of nervous energy and apathy, his morbid fancies, his black moods, his moments of rare and grotesque imagination, was stamped by his very face and bearing as exotic. Jack Sartoris was, as a whole, more normal, his disposition more even,

the poles of his temperament less inclined from the ecliptic. There was a strain of the savage in him, a robust spirit of daredeviltry ; he lived in a different world from the men of his age and caste. He read more, and had waded deeper in the tide of life. He was, in fact, strongly of that mettle that makes your knight-errant—your gentleman-adventurer. Like Noël, the grotesque appealed to him ; he would be content to lead the existence of a Roderick Usher, and look upon the world through a camera-obscura of his own. Up to this time these tendencies, unchecked, ran riot in the breasts of each ; the vim of youth, the healthy Bohemianism of nature, had been by happy circumstance plentifully indulged : it was to be seen if age and the bitterer draughts of life would alter them for better or for worse.

It may be well imagined that to such a pair London held a fascination peculiarly keen, and unfelt by the average traveller. They wished to probe the heart of the monster, “to see,” Noël said, “more than a man sees through the glass of a hansom cab.” They sought out the unusual, the complications of existence. They passed days in exploration of forgotten localities and forlorn courts, of innumerable sects, nations, and personalities. They went to socialist meetings in halls, and to anarchist meetings over grocery-shops. They ventured on the Thames at night, risking

their lives at every third stroke, and being pursued by a police-boat that chose to regard their movements as suspicious. This sport possessed all the excitement of the chase without the ignoble consciousness of crime. Called to render an account of themselves, they held their peace, escaped in the darkness, led the officers a bewildered chase in a labyrinth of docks and alleys, and when once in safety, sat down and laughed together over the boyishness of the proceeding. They got into so many street rows that one of the inspectors came to know them and to refer to them as "them American gents as is allus lookin' out for a lark."

They went into gin-shops, and tempting the appointed stranger with grog, drew from him his history, and thereby wondered at the untiring invention of life. A day that passed without some such interest was a blank day and not to be endured.

One such occurrence will bear rehearsing, from its importance in the future. They were returning late one night from the Lyceum, and chose to wander and lose themselves rather than make direct for Dover Street. This idea was the more pleasing in that there was a fog, one of the first of the season and traditionally impenetrable. Electric lights and gas-lamps converted it into a yellow curtain, behind which, as under cover, carriages rolled and people passed to unknown ends. Now and again a figure

would touch them at the elbow that might, as Jack said, be the Prince of Wales himself for all they knew to the contrary. They had no notion of their whereabouts, having turned off Wellington Street at random, but as cabs clattered past less often, and the misty figures that touched and vanished grew rarer, they began to fancy that they must have drifted into quieter regions, respectable and tame.

“When you’ve had enough of this,” Jack remarked, turning up his coat-collar, “we’ll get hold of a policeman and find out where we are.”

“I am very well content,” replied Noël, and plunged once more into brown study.

In the silence of the night, which is never wholly silence, the fog seemed to bear oppressive weight, like a tangible thing. It seemed to gather in folds together, shift onward like some live creature, while the distant roar of a street, the clap of a sudden footstep, blended into the noises of the monster as it coiled above the town. Just at the moment when Jack’s ear, caught by this fancy, was hearkening to the murmur of an unseen thoroughfare, another sound right at his elbow cut the air all around him like the whistle of a whip-lash. It was a young, shrill voice calling, “Help, help!” and the cry rose in repeated intensity almost to a scream.

They were standing on a corner, and Jack’s eye

noted the black gulf of an alley, into which he plunged. Sounds of a struggle were audible before they had gone very far, and ere they knew it they tripped over the combatants: four men twisted as inextricably as the Laocöon. It was hard at first for the rescuers to tell which they were to save and which to punish, but Noël stooping, saw a gold watch dangling from a dirty fist and quivering at every wrench of the chain. He drove a smashing blow to the wrist above the hand which left it useless, and then diving into the group, snatched the thief by his coat-collar, shook him free of his prey, and held him apart limp as a kitten.

“That’s right,” sounded the same shrill voice that had been the clarion of the alarm; “now get this fellow off of my back, please.”

The second rascal at this point judged it prudent to retire, so that the owner of the shrill voice was able to stand up unimpeded. He did so, breathing hard.

“Who is it? I can’t see anything,” he cried. “Thanks, awfully, anyhow. I’m afraid my friend here is hurt. Is it the police?”

“No, only a couple of passers-by,” replied Noël. “We heard you call and jumped for the sound. Is there a man down? It’s too dark to see anything in this hole.”

“Here,” said the shrill-voiced man, reaching him

a hand. He knelt as he spoke by the side of a dark heap. "I say, Merchant, are you hurt? Can we help you?"

"In a minute,—my head's been knocked giddy," said a second voice rather unsteadily. "Give us a hand, will you?"

At this stage of events steps were heard, and a policeman tumbled over the group gathered about the prostrate man.

"Here," Noël cried to him, thrusting forth his prisoner; "take this man in charge, please. That's all you're wanted for now."

"Wot's all this?" said the officer, turning the eye of his lantern full on the group and on the shabby wretch shivering in Noël's grasp.

"Attempted robbery and murder!" answered the shrill-voiced speaker, proving under the lantern-light to be a thin young man in dress-clothes and an Inverness cape. He was helping his friend to his feet, an older man similarly dressed, down whose cheek a thin stream of blood was running.

"It's all right, policeman," said this individual, with a voice and manner of authority. "These gentlemen came just in time. My friend and I were talking when somebody or something clubbed me over the head——"

"And tried to trip me up," chimed in the younger man. "We skirmished around here in the dark,

and I couldn't see the fellow, so I just held on and yelled. They dragged us up this alley before we knew what had happened. I'm very much obliged to you for turning up," he added, turning to Jack, who was unscrewing the top of his flask before handing it to the injured man.

"We'll make our statement before the magistrate to-morrow," the first speaker continued; "for the present just lock this fellow up, will you? and let me have your number."

"Very well, sir, cert'nly, sir," replied the officer, as something clinked into his hand. "Bad fog to-night, sir. Hard to tell where sounds comes from. You," shaking his prisoner roughly, "you'll come along with me."

By this time they had emerged from the alley-mouth into the street, the older man protesting that he was "all right."

"By the way, where are we?" said Noël, as they turned away from the policeman. "Will you direct us to Dover Street?"

The officer gave him explicit and verbose directions, and marched off into the fog with his charge. The quartette halted on the street corner as the oppressive silence fell on them once more.

"Come home with us, won't you?" Jack said, addressing the younger of the two men. "There's some supper at our lodgings, and you must be pretty well knocked up. We're Americans,—

my name's Sartoris,—my friend here is named Conway."

"Delighted to make your acquaintance," was the reply. "My name is Musgrave,—Andrew Musgrave,—and this gentleman is Mr. Roderick Merchant. What do you say, old man? Do you feel like seeing how our gallant rescuers look by lamp-light, or would you rather go home?"

Mr. Merchant asserted that he would be only too glad to prolong the evening, so the four set out for Dover Street at a brisk pace. The elder of the two strangers was somewhat silent, though perfectly courteous; but the younger was all gayety, and chatted on most cordially about every detail of the occurrence,—what he had done, and what Merchant had done, and what they had both said and thought. He had a frank, good-humored laugh that warmed the hearts of our Americans.

It was nearly two o'clock when they reached home, and climbing the stair, threw open the door of their little sitting-room. Oysters were set forth on the table with bread and cheese, cold meat, and bottles of Bass's ale. Jack set chairs for the guests and opened the bottles, Noël poked the fire and turned up the lamp. He was thus able for the first time to take stock of his new acquaintances. Mr. Andrew Musgrave, of the shrill voice, was a typically admirable specimen of a young Englishman. He might have been twenty-three or twenty-four.

He was boyishly fair and handsome, with fine sparkling blue eyes, a charming smile under his yellow moustache, and a general air of good-breeding and *bonhomie*. In every respect he differed from his companion. Mr. Merchant might have been thirty or thirty-five; he was a person whose age was hard to determine. He was an under-sized, clean-shaven man with wooden features and straight brows over near-sighted eyes. If he presented any impression at all it was in a vague atmosphere of dissipation. The cut across his forehead had been bound with a handkerchief, but it left an ugly smear of blood. He was pale, well dressed, decidedly clever-looking, and owned a pair of remarkably strong, dexterous-looking white hands.

The couple were oddly ill-matched, yet both had the appearance of gentlemen. Merchant had an agreeable, deep, English voice, Musgrave a thin treble, quite as distinctive.

In their turn the guests beheld two unusually athletic-looking fellows, one of whom had a keen, regular face, brown eyes, and a light moustache. The other, exceeding his comrade in height and bulk, was colored in brown and black. His swart aquiline face, high forehead, and long jaw, even his sleepy gray eyes under very curved black brows, had an Eastern contour that was connected in the mind with a turban and sandals.

“I’m uncommonly glad it happened to be you

and not the police that heard me yell," said Mr. Musgrave, helping himself to oysters.

"Merchant, old man, how are you feeling after the day of judgment?"

"Pooh!" said the person addressed, who seemed in a measure to resent his companion's chatter. Turning to Jack he inquired, "Have you been here long? Have you any friends in London?"

Jack shook his head. "We have letters," he made answer, "but we haven't presented them. Fact is, we're rather solitary chaps, and have been seeing London in our own way."

"And a very good way, too," commented the listener; "you must let me put you up at a couple of clubs."

"Thank you, but Con and I don't do that sort of thing," replied Jack; "we'd be a failure at it I'm afraid, wouldn't we, Con?"

Noël assented. "I don't think you have ever been inside of your own club in New York," he said, "and I'm quite sure I haven't."

"Then what do you do with yourselves? what are you?" questioned Merchant, in surprise.

"Oh, I'm a spectator of life, with a turn for a row," said Jack, placidly, "and he," nodding toward Noël, "is a Buddhist."

Merchant favored each in turn with a short inquiring stare, and then fell to lighting a cigarette. From that moment he plainly lost interest, and his

manner displayed more than a grain of patronage. Mr. Musgrave meanwhile had been conducting investigations.

“What have you been about?” he asked, with indignation, waving his arm at a pile of books. “What a disgraceful exhibition! I say, are you two *literary* chaps? because if you are, out with it, and let the worst be known!”

“Not as bad as that,” said Noël, laughing; “but we read a good deal, and lately we’ve been doing London.”

“London! that?” said Mr. Musgrave, contemptuously; “that’s no more London than *this*,” and he blew the froth from his mug, “is ale.”

“Very true,” asserted Noël, “but it helps to mean London to Americans.”

“Oh, I forgot you were Americans,” said Musgrave; “are you a colonel, and have you a silver-mine?”

“Neither one nor the other. I come from the sea-coast of Bohemia. It’s the only country where titles aren’t necessary or silver-mines,—whole ones, I mean.”

“I really should have taken you for Englishmen,” broke in Mr. Merchant’s smooth voice. “I suppose,” he added, as neither answered his observation, “you consider that a great compliment?”

“In a sense only,” replied Jack, a little stiffly.

“Well, in America they say all English tailors

are German, and here all French dressmakers are Irishwomen," said Musgrave, "so it all comes to the same thing in the end. But I like Yankees. I'm going to do the States some day—for my health," and he laughed with a heartiness hardly justified by the remark. He rose as he spoke, and Merchant rose also, both repeating their thanks, and promising to see the Americans before many days. Jack lit them to the door, and the two friends were not too weary to pass judgment on the events of the night. Of Merchant they were doubtful, his manner somehow struck them as displeasing, but both were agreed in hoping to see more of his comrade, in whom they detected kindred spirits and a certain gleam of youthful good-fellowship.

CHAPTER III.

Man thinks him safe, and with free hands refills
His cup : but ere it touch his lip he thrills,
Frowns, turning white, for comes a distant tread,
His Future, thundering among the hills !

THE Englishmen were as good as their word. Mr. Merchant made a formal call, and left a formal invitation to supper in his rooms, which curiosity only led the recipients to accept. They were also too indifferent to decipher his elaborate coat of arms, and thereby make a guess at their host's standing in society.

Andrew Musgrave dropped in once a day for a week, always in overflowing spirits, and ready to join in any expedition, but less anxious to do the honors of his city than any one of his class the Americans had ever met. He was a retiring individual, this light-hearted, blue-eyed youth, never inclined for a crowd, usually unaggressive, and seeking no company save theirs and Merchant's. To his friend he appeared full of devotion, which was a vaguely-puzzling circumstance to the Americans when they considered the two men. Nevertheless, Andrew's gayety, his *bonhomie*, his unflagging spirits, and careless good humor made him a de-

lightful comrade, one of a thousand. He owned frankly to being "poor as a rat" and "awfully hard-up," talked about his own and Merchant's straitened affairs with entire outspokenness; and questioned his new friends very closely about the business chances of the West, concerning which territory he showed the average ignorance of the average untravelled Englishman. Yet with all this speech of poverty he seemed never at a loss for ready money, never denied himself a trifle, however costly, and walked under the most pressing difficulties of life as if they had been flower-garlands.

Nor was Noël, who had considered young Musgrave with some curiosity, less surprised in Merchant's direction. Prompted as he was by the other's constant talk of poverty and economy, he looked to see some outward and visible sign of these conditions in the rooms to which he and Jack were bidden. On the contrary, they showed more than the goodly outside of falsehood, and were not only the apartments of a man of wealth but of one who indulged the very final tastes of ease.

The walls were hung with silken tapestries, the lamps glowed in bulbs of soft color like luminous flowers. Water-colors by Alma-Tadema hung upon the walls, and Whistler etchings were set against the margin of the mantle. The china and the

carvings were genuine and of rarity, the bookcase held tomes in illuminated vellum, and a selected collection of improprieties bound by Lortie. A broad divan followed the curve of the room, on which the host and two of his guests lay sprawled as the Americans entered. These two were likewise Americans, the host and young Musgrave were the only Englishmen present.

One of the strangers they knew by sight, as well as by his works, which turned out, by the way, to be a very incorrect guide. Noël had a book on his table which bore the man's name, "Clement Frey," and he was anxious to observe the author. Had Mr. Frey been a third as spiritual as his stories, he would have been a personality to unlock the soul, but Noël failed to note any kinship between their delicate strength and quaint exotic fancy and this pale, pudgy man whose eye was as dull as that of a fish. The failure probably lay in the observer, for when Merchant introduced the two young men as countrymen, Mr. Frey's greeting was scarcely enthusiastic.

"You're not an American?" he said, with some vivacity, to Conway, who had taken a seat upon the divan.

Noël nodded.

"But your people weren't?" continued the author, in a tone of conviction.

"I beg your pardon," Noël answered; "my father

was a Yankee. He came from Hanover, Massachusetts."

"Well, I am one myself," said Frey, "but I begin to wonder what it signifies. Take the head of a Ceylonese Brahmin and put it on the torse of a thirteenth century Crusader, and then tell me that it came from Hanover, Massachusetts! No, you must have been changed at birth."

"I was born and brought up in India," said Noël, a little stiffly, for he did not exactly understand Mr. Frey's remarks.

"That's interesting," said the author, meditatively, flipping the ash from his cigar, "very interesting." He considered the subject for a moment, and then, having apparently reached a decision, turned about and fell into talk with the man on the other side of him.

Conversation in this oddly-assorted company was not spontaneous. There was plenty to smoke and to drink, but the spirit of conviviality was wholly absent. The host was fidgety and nervous, his cheek had been plastered, and the white patch had somehow a sinister effect in that room full of intercepted lights. Clement Frey chatted in an undertone with the man he had brought with him. Noël locked the doors of his spirit and smoked in silence. Only Jack and Andrew kept up a jovial, high-pitched conversation, full of easy laughter, and filled and re-filled each other's glasses. But the men were all shut

to one another, and to Noël the scene gave an effect distant and unreal; the beautiful room, with its blended hues, and the soft brilliance of its lights, the black-and-white figures of the men, and the jaded face of Roderick Merchant, whose lips kept a smile in which his blank eyes took no part.

“I went over the ‘Antarctic’ to-day, Merchant,” said Clement Frey, raising his voice.

“Oh, did you?” said Merchant, with interest. “What did you think of her?”

“She’s a fine boat,” said the author.

“Fine, indeed; but the ‘Hamburger’ is finer,” replied Merchant. And at his voice Musgrave checked in his laughter and looked at the speaker.

“I’m not so sure of that,” said Frey, musingly. “That new engine in the ‘Antarctic’ is going to make a big difference in speed, if it works as they expect.”

“If,—but it won’t. I am very much interested in the whole affair, as you know, and I have been carefully over the two ships. There seems very little advantage, but what there is lies on the side of our ship, the ‘Hamburger.’”

“What are you talking about, the rival liners?” broke in Jack, with interest. “Are you connected with them, Mr. Merchant?”

“I’m somewhat interested in Train, Vanbrugh & Co.,” replied the host, “and that makes me certain of what I am saying. Why, man, the

‘Hamburger’ is finished up-to-date to her smallest screw. I know ships, and I tell you there’s not a finer afloat.”

“I know that you have had every opportunity of judging,” said the writer, “but I think you are mistaken. The ‘Antarctic’ has some Yankee improvements that are going to bring her out ahead.”

“Are they built on the same model?” Jack asked.

“No; the size and *general* appearance are the only likeness between them,” answered Merchant; then addressing Frey, “I am so sure of what I say that I’m willing to stake on it. I will bet you five hundred guineas to one that the ‘Antarctic’ won’t get into harbor within an hour of the ‘Hamburger.’”

“Done; but you’re awfully rash,” said the author, quietly. And the wager was entered in the note-books of each. Silence followed, while the host, with drawn eyebrows, scrawled in his betting-book. If Noël had been doubtful of his pursuits before, they were easily determined by the manner of his producing the leather record. He shut it up finally and slipped it into his vest-pocket with a swift glance of apology for a moment’s oblivion and rudeness.

“I hope you haven’t been putting a lot of money on the ‘Hamburger,’ Merchant,” said the man who had come in with Frey, breaking the pause.

“Why?” asked Merchant, who seemed a little teased by the query.

“Because you’ll lose,” was the answer, bluntly. “The betting’s been going against her now for a week. Kerr, of the Cunard Line, told me that there wasn’t any doubt but that she would be beaten by those new engines of the ‘Antarctic.’”

“I don’t think so,” said Merchant, confidently, spilling a bottle of champagne into his glass, with so careless a haste that it foamed upon the table-cloth.

“You’re a fool,” said Andrew Musgrave, sharply, watching him. “You’ll lose on this.”

The man laughed with a shrug, draining the wine, and Andrew turned away frowning. He seemed so much disturbed by his friend’s recklessness that Jack thought him a fine fellow for his sympathy, and liked him better than ever. Noël, who had observed the scene through the smoke of his pipe with the same sense of distance as if it had been a pantomime or a play, came out of his dreams and waked up a bit. He had been interested with the rest of the world in the two rival steamships waiting at Southampton for the day of their trial trip, and he would have liked to hear more. But nobody seemed to care to return to the subject, and very soon afterwards the company took its departure. Taking it all in all, it had been a singularly unprofitable evening.

A cablegram lay on their sitting-room table, as

they entered it, addressed to Jack. He opened it and read the code words, too easily translated into "Your father seriously ill. Come home." Poor Jack dropped the paper and looked into Noël's eyes. The phrase had choked the delight out of them as effectually as if it had been a volume, and the same fear was written plainly on the face of each.

"Come," said Noël, at last; "when does the next steamer sail?"

"This is Monday,—not till Wednesday," Jack replied; "wait,—one of those new ships they were talking about. Don't they sail to-morrow night? We might get a state-room on one of those."

"We'll try the first thing in the morning," said Noël; "meanwhile, pack up, old man."

"But how—what do you suppose it is?" said Jack, miserably. "He was perfectly well at the last accounts."

"I should have known," Noël made answer; "all day there has been a message for me, and I would not hear it. The currents were strong,—I felt particularly subjective. And, then, I knocked a spider into the lamp last night, you remember. Oh, I should have known!"

By the time next day that Noël had returned from the company's office and secured a state-room on the "Hamburger," Jack had made all ready to start by noon. He had found time to present his

last draft at Morgan's, and to leave messages of farewell for Merchant and Andrew Musgrave, neither of whom he found at home.

London, as they roared and rattled out of it, did not leave them a regret; England, as they watched it fade and fade on the horizon, was nothing to them now. In comparison with what might be to come, travels and adventures grew cold and lifeless, and what they left behind hardly interesting.

The decks were comparatively deserted as they stood smoking, exchanging few words. A man wrapt in a long ulster, with the red tip of his cigar glowing from the collar, prowled up and down in the half-darkness. He glanced at the two curiously now and then, but they were too self-absorbed to return his interest. Not till he went and stood under the swinging lantern that Jack caught a glimpse of his face, and started, crying out "Musgrave!"

"Aha!" cried Andrew, merrily. "Did I not surprise you? I've been meaning all along to try Colorado for a change, and as I got the funds I needed yesterday it seemed nonsense to wait any longer. So here I am."

CHAPTER IV.

Yea, they would mould thy surges on their plan,
And rend thy bosom with the prows of man.

But thou, Unconquered, tam'st them by one glimpse
Of the swol'n forehead of leviathan!

THERE was no question but that Musgrave's unforeseen appearance was a great diversion. No man could be long sad in his company; he bore the burden of any sorrow with such willing cheerfulness that it lightened immeasurably. Under his influence Jack became happier; his mind turned into hopefuller channels; he did not look forward to the end of his journey with such a sinking dread as heretofore.

It was otherwise with Noël. Since the receipt of the message he had fallen into a blackness of the spirit from which there was no present recovery. He dared not speak to Jack of premonition and presentiment, of voices that trilled in his ear in the dusk, of sudden palpitations of the mind like the fluctuations of the waters he beheld. "The spirits' are thick about me," said Noël to himself; "the unseen world is so near that I can touch it with the antennæ of my mind." Forebodings were constant with him, and every trifle of existence was magni-

fied and changed. He fell a-dreaming, as he had done once or twice before when under similar strain of anxiety of his childhood, picturing the brown hill-sides rising to their distant crown of snows, the groves of palm and deodar, the brazen splendor of the zenith, and the conch-shell of the temple blaring into the sunshine. The passengers came and went; Andrew and Jack passed up and down, their voices chiming pleasantly together; the ship rose and fell and labored onward, straining her sinews; and Noël stood under the stars, turning his dark face up to them, oppressed beyond all power of telling. It was as if the sea-sickness that forbore to touch his body entered into his mind, a mental cowering and discomfort, a mental nausea and depression.

Jack knew him in those moods, and wisely let well alone. He was too nearly depressed himself to be any aid to a soul so darkened, and he dreaded what his friend might intimate in his absent manner and moody eye. It was a relief to turn to Andrew, to hear his anecdote and story, to join in his easy laugh at nothing worth the laughter, to sun one's self in the radiance of his buoyant, unfailing good humor.

Meanwhile, others on the ship were anxious, if for a different cause. Our friends, wrapt in their own concerns, had been little touched by the talk on all sides of them. They had forgotten that they

were racing neck and neck with another great hulk that was pounding along somewhere in the darkness beyond. A great deal of money had been spread over either ship. Each came to the top notch of their respective company,—they held the championship of the seas between them. Upon the decision of this voyage depended a vast deal more than the casual on-looker divined; the difference of an hour or two in speed meant the difference of thousands of dollars in the spring when the tidal wave of travel breaks over Europe and floods it to the highest mountain-passes.

The passengers on the “Hamburger” caught a reflex wave of this excitement, and the crowd that gathered near the log was a shade more interested than any similar crowd. The officers were confident, as they had not yet sighted the “Antarctic,” that she had fallen behind. The weather had been propitious for November; winds were boisterous and seas heavy; but the skies contained their blue, and the sun rose and fell in undiminished magnificence.

Four days passed. There was speech of shores to come in place of shores left behind. Field-glasses began to be taken out, and men who had remained in the smoking-room like rabbits in a burrow came blinking on the deck and glanced about them.

On the morning of the fifth day a light fog

blew up ; the seas were uneasy under it, springing up and falling back with a sharp emphasis of spray, as if they resented the fog-horn's voice bellowing into the mist. A fog is always more or less interesting, but when the answering bellow of another fog-horn began to sound out of the waste, and to sound louder and nearer, and still louder and nearer until the throb and throb of the screw came with it, the passengers were conscious of a growing interest.

The "Hamburger" slowed down ; although it was time lost, the captain dared not do otherwise ; bells tinkled from every quarter, and officers went to and fro with rapid steps. The fog had grown thick and white, beads of damp crested on every cheek and coat, the wind that drove it had died to a whisper. Then some one caught sight of something in the whiteness, a mere bulk, shapeless and blown upon by fog-wreaths. Noël, leaning on the rail, murmured to Jack that it was leviathan, stirred from his rest by the challenge of the fog-horn ; but the officers knew it to be none other than their rival, the "Antarctic," and a trifle nearer than they could have wished. The tide ran very strong ; though unpropelled, they were conscious of perceptible movement, and that too in a dangerous direction. Signals were exchanged, horns blown, and bells rung ; the "Antarctic" turned to let her rival pass to leeward ; the cap-

tain of the "Hamburger" rang (as he supposed) to reverse engines till she had passed. One breath afterwards he realized that there had been a blunder, a misinterpretation of orders, for, instead of backing, the "Hamburger," quivering, drove ahead at full speed and crashed like a cannon-ball into the side of the "Antarctic." The echoes of that crash rang out undisputed in a silence of utter horror. Then arose a babble of noises, a thundering of orders and voices, punctuated by screams, shrill and terrifying, and a clangor of bells. The captain, his eyes starting from his head, plunged like a madman into the hold to seek the engineer. The "Hamburger" withdrew slowly from the side of her rival, and so thick was the fog that even at a short distance it was not possible to see the extent of the injury. There was a confusion of terror and distress among the passengers, voices crying, exclaiming, advising: a flood of excitement overwhelmed them. On deck no time was lost; the boats were lowered without slip or mishap, one came to the side, and the first officer hurled himself into it. Then the boats put off, and there was a hideous interval of waiting, a breathless silence for passengers and crew. Inside of ten minutes, although not one of those waiting estimated the time correctly, a boat returned. The officer, his face wiped of color and expression, came on deck.

“Two water-tight partitions and an inner one cut through, sir,” he told the captain briefly; “she’ll sink in twenty minutes. Our boats are bringing the passengers.” As he spoke, the second of the boats came alongside, laden with white-faced women and children, who were landed with creditable rapidity. Then another boat followed, and another; the “Hamburger’s” crew had not lost time. Each came out of the fog, and went back into it, as puppets come out from behind a curtain.

The time of year and the fact that the vessel was new and untried were happily the reasons why there were no steerage and very few second-cabin passengers; but to the waiting groups on the deck of the “Hamburger” there seemed a never-ending crowd. Most of the officers and crew at last were safe, the sailors were scrambling into place for a final trip, when there came a sharp crash, a shuddering of the air, a long sighing roar that sounded miles away, and then eddies and white-caps in the water, and short, angry waves that raced out of the fog.

Andrew, Jack, and Noël stood together on deck, and Andrew was the first to speak.

“Good God!” he cried, shaking from head to heel, “she’s gone!”

Noël saw that his face was white. “Here,” he said, kindly, taking him by the arm. “This has

been too much for you, and no wonder. Go and get a drink."

Half an hour later the "Hamburger" was pounding on her course, and her passengers were doing their best to make the shipwrecked passengers comfortable. Many gave up their state-rooms to the women from the "Antarctic," who had been shaken by the fright.

Noël, as he passed through the saloon, heard an officer say to a tall young girl, "I will do my best, but of course we are dreadfully crowded, and——" He interrupted them. "I can sleep anywhere," he said, in that rather haughty manner that covered an intense shyness; "you can have my cabin, if you like; it's 57."

He did not wait to ask Jack, because he knew Jack's answer beforehand. The young lady, who had a pair of very expressive brown eyes in a pale, handsome face, said, "Oh, thank you!" And Noël bowed formally, as he went on.

"A woman needs our cabin," he said, as Jack came up. "I gave it to her, of course."

"Of course," Jack echoed; "but oh, Con, isn't this ghastly? Such a hideous piece of carelessness, so utterly unnecessary!"

"Horrible! Whose do they say was the mistake?"

"They don't know; the electricity or something. The second engineer was on duty, and drove ahead

full steam instead of reversing engines. They say he's almost ill."

"He'd better be,—confounded incompetence!" cried Noël. "Where's Andy?"

"I don't know. Not in his cabin, for I've just been to see. Come and have a cock-tail, Con. I feel shaky after all this."

They were on their way to the smoking-room when they came full against young Musgrave coming up the companion-way. His face was still pale and his lips tremulous.

"Where have you been?" asked Jack, as he joined them.

"Down-stairs, talking to the chief engineer," Andrew answered, lightly, in spite of his pale face. "He's in a dreadful state of mind over the overhauling there's bound to be when we get into New York."

He seemed to take the engineer's trouble to heart in his peculiarly sympathetic way; and, in fact, the shock of the accident left its traces on his smiling countenance for quite twenty-four hours. But he was delighted to find that he had no cause to resign his berth, and teased his friends unmercifully on their sudden gallantry.

CHAPTER V.

You waked me rudely. I had closed mine eyes
While my regret sobbed out of Paradise,
Now you have cleft the gates apart, and now,
Shattered and dust-bestrewn, mine idol lies.

THE story of the collision and disaster had been signalled to all incoming and outgoing vessels, so that by the time the "Hamburger" made Fire Island all New York reverberated with the news. But what he might hear of his father was in Jack's mind a fact that cloaked the other and left it insignificant. He took no notice of the swarm of reporters that buzzed about the ship, nor did he raise his eyes to see the departure of the culpable engineer, marched away by a couple of policemen. He barely took time, when they landed, to bid Andrew Musgrave good-by and God-speed. Andrew was going on to Denver by an early train, and was profuse in his farewells.

The colonel had had a paralytic stroke. That much the two boys learned at once from the junior member of the firm, who had been sent to meet them with a cab. He had been stricken down in his office and taken home, where he lay "much,"

said the partner, encouragingly, "much better, and most anxious for their coming." Noël asked for the exact date of the stroke, and after hearing it turned to Jack with one of his electrifying expressions.

"You remember," he said, "the night we went to Roderick Merchant's? And all day there were voices speaking to me, and I would not listen!" His face glowed for one instant with thought like a piece of heated metal with color, then relapsed into its statuesque immobility. The junior member glanced at him curiously before proceeding with the recital.

The doctor was to meet Sartoris on his arrival and have a talk with him; they had a trained nurse, and everything was being done for his father's comfort and recovery. The firm, in one shape or another, had called every day, and hosts of old friends had left their cards. This was, in brief, what Jack learned in the drive from the docks to Washington Square.

It is only in story-books that when the near and dear are stricken the doctor says, "he will die" or "he will live." In real life they are less anxious to commit themselves. No one knows the coquetry of Nature better than a physician, and no one is less desirous to promise and vow in her name. Jack found that every hopeful sign was qualified with a parenthetical discouragement.

His father was seriously ill (but not, for the present, dangerously). There was a chance of partial recovery, but the end might be six months hence (or to-morrow). The colonel's vigorous constitution was in his favor (but his son must bear in mind that he was no longer young). The paralysis had certainly been slight, but there were indications—in fact, his condition was grave (yet men had lived, and for some years, after similar attacks). And this satisfactory, quieting information was repeated after another fashion at each daily visit. We are doing very fairly; we are not quite so well; the recovery of speech is a favorable indication, the non-recovery of strength is less favorable: but what boots more of this? Any one can supply it from personal experience,—can supply as well the helpless sense of impotence, the underlying worry, the growing dread, the wrenching of the heart, that such experience brings with it. These things, however graphically portrayed, can in no way touch the reality. For the pangs and tortures of love mankind has a vast and varied library of description, but for those who wait on illness there is no literature. Jack, unused to such a tread-mill, went almost wild at first, settling as the weeks went on into calm that was not rest nor resignation. Noël shared his every feeling with his most delicate sympathy, put aside his morbid fancies, and in the face of present

trouble left the closed doors of his mind for a space unopened.

It fell to his lot, and to so shy a man it was particularly displeasing, to see callers and satisfy inquiries. I will not pretend that he acquitted himself well; he was too self-centred to be winning, and not by any means a man of elaborate manner. A certain indelicate curiosity, such as is often shown by the sympathetic caller, stiffened him at once into ill-concealed indifference; but those who said enough, and not too much; who asked, yet did not press his vague replies; who showed a genuine kindness of voice and eye, were very apt to go away with a very pleasant remembrance of the odd, dark face and the young unstudied courtesy.

On one of these occasions the visitors, whose card bore the unfamiliar legend "Mrs. and Miss Axenard," turned out to be no other than the brown-eyed girl and her mother to whom Noël and Jack had resigned their cabin on the "Hamburger." Noël had quite forgotten the occurrence, nor had her face lingered in his memory, when the young lady herself recalled it in a few graceful words of thanks. The same card had accompanied a box of beautiful flowers a few days since, and when Mrs. Axenard announced herself as an old friend of the colonel's and her daughter as a little girl who had often been sent for to play

with Jack, he was quite ready to be won. Mrs. Axenard's delicate elderly face struck him as unusually charming; her gentle tact led him to talk more unreservedly than he had yet done. Perhaps the unmothered hunger of his eyes, in their swift glances from mother to daughter, touched the motherly fibres of Mrs. Axenard's heart, for she called him "my dear boy," and begged him to call on her for anything and at any time. The daughter was naturally a little left out of the conversation, but her manner was in its quieter way as sympathetic as her mother's. She was decidedly handsome, with a sweetness and nobility in her face that came direct from the elder face beside her; she was tall and composed, had a sweet, cultivated voice; was very simply and very fittingly dressed. This much Noël observed; he was too shy and too indifferent to see more.

Miss Axenard on her part was more generous of interest, and subjected the young man to a girl's swift and microscopic scrutiny. His size and carriage she approved of; his face in its striking type puzzled her; it was like a mask lit by parti-colored fires of expression, now with a smile altogether boyish and charming, now with an older and more complex intensity of feeling.

"He looks East Indian," she concluded, mentally, "and I fancy he's lonely."

Perhaps the thought may have struck some

echo in his own mind, for certainly, after their departure, Noël fell into bitter musings, in which his dead mother, an exquisite and radiant figure, rose in his mind to sadden him with a sense of loss. The young man had a sensitive recollection, and the memory of his mother was with him a species of idolatry.

The next afternoon Jack was called down-town, and Noël took his place in the colonel's room. It was not, of course, the first time of his doing so, but on the other occasions the sick man had been incapable of anything but a whispered word or two. To-day he seemed really better; his speech, though labored and slow, was fairly fluent; he had been raised a little to look out upon the Square, powdered with the first snow of the year.

Noël sat by the window, while the nurse bustled about to put things to rights before going for her walk. As the door closed on her, Colonel Sartoris shifted his hand on the coverlet, and looked over to the window. "I'm glad you're here this afternoon, my boy," he said, "because I want to have a little talk with you."

"Won't it tire you, sir?" said Noël, drawing nearer.

"No it won't tire me," replied the colonel, irritably, "and I'll stop when it does. I've had it on my mind, Noël, ever since you were a grown man, that I ought to tell you more about your own people.

Your father,—you've often heard me speak of him, a brave man and an odd one. You look like him, and you've got his hatred of civilization. Noël, do you remember your mother?"

"Quite a little,—yes," Noël answered dreamily; "just as I remember the place we lived—the temple and the palms—as if it was a picture. Was she not tall and dark, with very soft hands and dark eyes?"

"Yes, she was all that. By Jove, it seems like yesterday when I went to see her at the Brevoort, and she called you, and you salaamed to me. A little thin lad you were then,—'a regular Hindu,' she called you. It seems like yesterday!" The colonel sighed, and moved his head wearily on the pillow.

"What did she die of, sir?" asked Noël, simply.

The colonel almost jumped,—that is, he started, and one shaking hand rose feebly while the other lay disobedient.

"My dear boy," he said, and his voice sounded low and apologetic, "that's just it. She died, Noël, to *you*, to your life then and now, and, please God, in the future. But she is alive at this moment—as alive as you are, and I fancy much more alive than I."

"Alive!" repeated Noël. He rose involuntarily to his feet, and looked down upon the sick man from his great height with a pair of expectant eyes.

"Sit down!" ordered the colonel, pitifully striving

to motion with that helpless, disobedient arm. "I'll tell you the whole story, and you can judge for yourself if I did wrong in telling you that she was dead."

Noël sat down, and the colonel, in his slow utterance, recounted to him plainly the scene that is contained in the prologue to this history; his first knowledge of Mrs. Conway, and his last. When he had made an end,—

"There's nothing under all this?" cried Noël, almost sternly. "You're not deceiving me again, Colonel Sartoris? She was all right—my mother?"

"Oh she was an honest woman for all I know, if you mean that," the colonel replied with hasty impatience; "and your father was your father, I believe,—and this isn't a dime-novel. Your mother wasn't bad, Noël. She was only thoughtful and provident, with a rigid idea of adherence to her dead husband's desires. That's what a great many people would call it even now."

The mere remembrance of the woman, although dulled by fourteen years, whetted his tongue into a scythe once more. There was silence, for the boy had dropped his head between his hands. It does not fall to the lot of most of us to live until twenty-five without the loss of our most cherished illusion as it had befallen Noël Conway. And it went hard with him, who dwelt in a world of illusions, so that the colonel's heart swelled with pity.

“Don’t take it to heart so, dear lad,” he begged from the bed. “She isn’t worth it. She was only a shallow, treacherous fool, doubly a fool because there was no need on earth for her to keep silence about you. But if she loved you, she loved the title, and the diamonds, and the paragraphs in the papers more,—and there are plenty of women like her, as well as a few unlike.”

“It wouldn’t matter,” said Noël, his voice ringing sharp with pain, “only that I always had a belief in that kind of love. You know I’m not ungrateful, that I appreciate all your kindness; but I’ve always missed my mother—in my memory she is so kind and beautiful. It has been one great sorrow to me not to be able to have her to work for, and think about. So you see there’s a shock in this that turns me upside down.” He laughed miserably and his face hardened. “Mother-love!” he said, with scathing contempt. “What a farce it is,—and I had fancied it was different!”

“No,” said the sick man, watching him, “it isn’t all a farce,—although your mother’s was, my poor boy, your mother’s was. But the reason I told you this, Noël, was because I watched you and saw that you were an honorable man. It was impossible for Dick Conway’s son to be otherwise,—just as it was impossible for Dick’s son not to be superstitious and to believe in ghosts. Still, had you been otherwise, I might have left you undeceived.

If I had not seen pride in you and a sensitive heart for all your ridiculous notions, depend upon it you would never have learned this from me."

"Perhaps you had better have left me in my dream," said Noël, sadly; "but you are right, sir—quite right, and I have only to thank you still more. But you haven't told me her—name?"

"She married Sir Robert LeBreton, of Surrey. They get on very well, I believe."

"She has never sent or written to ask about—me?"

"No!" cried the colonel, energetically. "Not a damned word!"

Noël was speechless.

"For God's sake don't get to pitying her!" the colonel added, as he saw the boy's face twitch. "She isn't worth a tear of your's or any man's. I knew her affairs; she wasn't poor. Your father left her enough to live on in a quiet way and bring you up like a gentleman, if not fashionably. But she was mad for the position, and the name of Lady LeBreton. Don't waste a thought on her,—look about you,—get some nice girl to make a home for you somewhere,—and never think of this again!"

"You don't quite understand," Noël replied. "I am not—not like that, I can't forget, My mother would have taken me as I am, would have understood, would always have forgiven,—I would have loved her to the end because of this. You know

I'm not like other men. I want to go back to the East, where I was born—every bone in me cries out for it—and against this hustling West. I don't want what men here want, money and excitement,—I don't like women. I want quiet, and the great philosophy I began in Germany,—to reach another world in my cycle higher than this. Fancy any woman—any of these New York women—understanding that!" he laughed a little at the humor of the thought; then his voice saddened again. "But if I had had my mother I could have worked with a good conscience, because my existence mattered to her."

"My dear boy!" said the colonel, tenderly, "don't feel that as long as I'm here; and after I am gone," he went on in a solemn tone that made his hearer's heart stand still, it was so full of conviction, "as long as Jack is alive, he'll need you. When he doesn't," he continued, more cheerfully, "get you gone to your Thibetan monastery if you must,—I give you leave."

"Thank you," said Noël, "I will remember."

"You see, you don't really know the world yet," went on Colonel Sartoris, argumentatively. "I fancy when you've knocked about a little more in America this idea will go naturally. You'll find staunch friends, and good women, and life here will grow easier as you are older. You and Jack are savages nowadays, you'll grow more like other men

in time. There will be compensations, lad, there will be compensations."

The nurse tapped warningly on the door, and Noël went from the room as she entered. He took his hat and went out into the Square. The afternoon was cold, a sharp wind flicked the blood into his cheek, and braced him like a tonic. But he could not forget his mother and his mutilated idol. Had Noël been like other men, full of occupation, burdened with affairs, normally balanced and constituted, such a story, while it pained, could not long have influenced him. But Noël was not as other men; he was, comparatively speaking, idle; his constitution was abnormal; he had just that little leaven of higher imagination which is often far happier for the world at large than for its possessor. He was sensitive and nervous as a woman, strong in affection, and very full of youthful cynicism. The story he had heard filled his heart to overflowing with bitterness and rage. The one thing he had held to, his very life-preserver of memory, had failed him unutterably, and the failure was a shameful, a dishonorable thing. He had no interest strong enough to drive it out, no responsibility or passion to absorb or distract him. The thing sank deep down through layer after layer to the very floor and foundation of his mind, and rested there—a lost birthright, a robbed inheritance—a difference with the world.

From that day, too, the vision of the gray temple

of Raithapoor lay underlining every thought, and every action. At times the vision leaped before his eyes, and glowed and sparkled, and took life and color and shape; the palms waved, the hot sun beat upon the metal ornaments of the worshippers, the bronze-shouldered adepts came and went beneath the portals. But usually 'twas dim and lifeless, far away, no part of him,—a childish memory, dear and unattainable.

Whether the conversation had tired the colonel, or whether some link of life gave way, on the morrow he was much less well, and on the day after still worse. Then a little better, and worse again,—the flare and sinking of the lamp; and one morning, at the hour when the soul seems nearer home than at any other, his slipped beyond.

When day fairly came, Noël sent for Mrs. Axenard, and she, true to her promise, came, and did much to help and comfort. Her brown-eyed daughter Philippa too came in and out with her, and had a warm hand-clasp and kind word for the two who seemed at that crisis nothing but two lonely boys. Jack's grief was deep and settled; he could bear Noël words on it, but no others, so her gentle ministration passed unheeded. Noël, seeing her in such a way, grew used to her presence, and felt it familiar, even hazarding a word or two in the desolation of his heart. But, as a whole, Philippa's kindness was very ill repaid.

CHAPTER VI.

This is a sunny corner of the earth,
Where of warm words and welcome is no dearth ;
And sighs the man who has a tale to tell,
“Oh for an hour beside your quiet hearth !”

THE Axenards belonged to that small class of New Yorkers who are content to seek their society among any but the set which monopolizes that term. To them display and ostentation were vulgar ; wealth, unless properly bridled, a delicate and dangerous steed. Secure in the knowledge that, if they liked, any door was open to them, they were able to pick and choose, did not scream for recognition, and lived quiet, self-respecting lives far from Fifth Avenue and fashion. On the other hand, they were neither snobbish nor narrow, and Philippa Axenard had seen enough of the gay world to acquire the poise which is a prerogative of an American girl. She had acquired as well a few characteristics yet more valuable, a dignified bearing for one thing, for another, an intolerance of mediocrity. Although not accounted rich among the wealthy, the Axenards had comfortable means, yet had never sunk into well-to-do sloth. As a family, they kept their intelligences remarkably well shar-

pened and keen. Musicians and authors flocked to their house, rejoicing that they were not made use of and exhibited. Among the most assiduous was Clement Frey, who had been heard to say that the Axenards were the only placid household in New York, and who certainly had every opportunity of judging.

Philippa liked him, and in celebrities Philippa was hard to please. She knew him to be full of opposites, and so was not surprised that, although he loved being lionized, he should return week after week to take luncheon with people who treated him quite straightforwardly, without pretension. He came regularly, poured out his ideas and experiences with his peculiar facility, and quite forgot that he was conferring a favor by his presence. As a family they were intelligent, the women at least sympathetic, and their unshaken principles on a great many subjects did not prevent them from keeping up with all literary movements here and in Europe. So Clement Frey never had to explain, and he hated explanation. He never acknowledged a misunderstanding, and he often kept the mind of his hearer leaping the chasms of his rapid conclusions. Argument with Frey was like racing with the witch in the fairy tale, who kept changing the course now into a quagmire, now to a precipice. It was breathless work and inglorious, for Frey was never convinced, and his opponent usually, too

confused to be, a state of affairs that frequently led to coldness. The Axenards, however, avoided argument; they let him talk and they listened, so that so far no chill had ever arisen between them. One of Frey's idiosyncrasies was what he quoted "the admirable habit of always being late." He invariably sauntered into a room ten or fifteen minutes after the specified hour, without apology, "for apology," said he, "is one of those mistaken explanations that I never allow myself to make."

The Axenards lunched at half-past one. It was quite a quarter to two when he marched into their dining-room, his flat, inexpressive face beaming with a smile.

"Don't get up," he said, as Mrs. Axenard and Philippa rose to meet him, "you know what I am, better never than late. This time I was really busy,—not spoiling pens or paper, either. Thanks," as the maid handed him a dish, "and I want to tell you all about it."

There were never any preliminaries in Frey's talk, he had a perfect horror for what he termed "the baggage-wagons of conversation."

"You know what a lily of the field I am," he continued without a pause, while Mrs. Axenard settled herself to listen, glancing at Philippa with a smile. "I toil not, although I do spin yarns. Well, to-day I went into Wall Street to see life. It was very noisy and realistic, and I didn't like it at all

until I ran across Bobby Jermyn, and he said to me, 'You are wasting time and gaining no experience, come with me.' So I went with Bobby, like the Prince in the Arabian Nights, you remember? It appears that Bobby is on the Board of Underwriters, to which some novelists belong, although it isn't a literary academy, Miss Axenard. And they were going to investigate the 'Hamburger'-'Antarctic' collision. I shall always regret that I took a later steamer."

"Ah!" cried Philippa, "you need not be, Mr. Frey!"

"So Bobby took me to the investigation," pursued Frey, whose eating never seemed to interfere with his flow of language, "and I stayed there two mortal hours, and investigated like mad. They had the whole gang of them there,—officers and men. The captain of the 'Hamburger' was there, and the chief engineer, and the first officer, and the second officer. You recollect the captain of the 'Antarctic' with two of the officers went down with her?"

"Yes," interjected Mrs. Axenard, shuddering, "I remember."

"So they had only the first officer, and he was hard of hearing," Frey went on. "All the American representatives of both firms were there, and several reporters, and Bobby Jermyn and I. When I came in they were questioning the man Gordon,—kind of anti-mortem Rhadamanthus. He stuck to

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his story very straight, I'll say for him. He'd been in charge a half-hour when the collision occurred, and had been attending to his engines in obedience to orders. When the bell rang he took it for the signal 'go ahead full speed.' At the crash he was horrified, and rushed up the ladder to meet the captain coming down."

"What was he like?" asked Philippa, as the narrator paused for the first time.

"I was too far back to see," Frey replied, "which disappointed me, because his voice was distinctly familiar. Mr. Gordon and I have met somewhere in this little world. I never forget anything. The chief engineer was at dinner at the time of the accident,—but the two stokers bore out Gordon's story,—how he had jumped for the throttle, and at the jar of the collision had fallen back as white as a sheet. And the deuce of it was that neither of them could say whether it was two bells or one,—they were stoking the engine at the time,—so there it was!" Frey looked about him triumphantly.

"The captain of the 'Hamburger' had been dreadfully upset," he went on. "He was an old maid, anyhow. You couldn't get out of him if the mistake was or wasn't at his end,—he used the whole vocabulary of the English language,—and nobody was the wiser. But his previous record was unimpeachable, and everybody thought that if he had fumbled it was quite unconsciously.

Both the other officers were on deck during the accident."

"Who was Gordon,—a man they had long employed?" put in one of the listeners edgewise.

"No," answered Frey, "he was a new hand,—a *protégé* of a fellow I knew in London, Roderick Merchant. Merchant got him the place, and they had a letter from London to say how sorry he was that his *protégé* had disgraced himself,—and so forth. Merchant was a queer devil,—a great sporting-man. He's the second son of a baronet, and has been through two fortunes already. He's interested in Train & Vanbrugh,—the steamship line,—and he got Gordon the berth because Gordon had a lot of letters testifying to his honesty and ability."

Mr. Frey paused again and reined in his tongue; but his silences were never very inviolable.

"Then they couldn't fasten the negligence on anybody?"

"No, they could get no satisfaction—anyway. The engineer was at fault,—but nobody knew how far to blame the captain, and how much was the fault of the electrical apparatus of the vessel, which, of course, was new and untried. So they did what they could. They dismissed Gordon, whom nobody knew, and kept the captain who had sailed for them for twenty years. And they hustled Bobby and me into the street when they were done."

Mr. Frey, being at an end for the moment, devoted himself to his guinea-fowl in silence. He knew that the others were far too interested in the subject not to chase it into every hole and corner.

“The whole thing was so grossly careless that I remember it with a sort of wonder,” said Mrs. Axenard. “I confess I thought that such things were impossible nowadays on ocean steamers.”

“I am truly thankful that I never knew of it till you told me,” said Mr. Axenard; “but all the same, there is nothing to wonder at in the accident. Such things happen every day, only this, of course, was a particularly prominent case. Where did you say you met the fellow Merchant, Frey?”

“In London, just a month or so before I left,” Frey replied. “He asked me to his rooms and presented me to a young fellow named Musgrave,—a charming specimen of Briton, I thought.”

“Musgrave,” said Philippa. “Mother, didn’t Mr. Conway tell us about meeting some man of that name,—at some house where Mr. Frey was?”

“Conway—Conway,” repeated Frey, thoughtfully. “I remember meeting two big chaps at Merchant’s rooms one night,—and one of them was named Conway, I think. I remember, for I took him for a Hindu,—a great big fellow with a long brown face.”

“That is certainly Mr. Conway,” laughed Phil-

ippa, "and his friend was poor Colonel Sartoris's son. Your Mr. Musgrave crossed with them on the 'Hamburger.' "

"Is Musgrave in New York?" cried Frey at this; "why I must see this fellow and find out where he's staying."

"No, he went on to Colorado."

"Colorado—Musgrave! How absurd, and yet how natural. Musgrave was just the inexperienced youth to fancy that his fortune lay in the golden West. He won't stay. He'll turn up inside of a year—very badly off."

"Many do, certainly; so don't think yourself a prophet," put in Mr. Axenard. "Only see that he doesn't come to you for money to pay his passage back to England."

"I wouldn't have it to give him,—I'm a pauper!" declared Frey. "All my last set of stories has gone to one of his countrymen—Merchant, no less—in a bet I was fool enough to make."

"And we fancied that you had no vices, Mr. Frey!"

"Oh, I haven't," said Frey, cheerfully, "not one—not half a one. When I'm tired of being virtuous I sit down and make my hero forge a check and commit murder, or run away with his neighbor's graven image, and covet his ox and his ass, you know. It lets off steam, and doesn't compromise one's private character."

“What an excellent idea. But this wager,—was Merchant wise in the horse that wins?”

“No; curiously enough, it was this wretched ‘Antarctic’ business,” said Frey. “I bet Merchant that she would get into port an hour after the ‘Hamburger’, and you all know that she did no such thing.”

“There really seems to be no end to it,” Philippa joined in. “But you’re not the only loser, Mr. Frey. Lots of lovely things went down in my trunks, and just when I knew that I had nothing really dutiable.”

“Your pang would have been worse if you had,” he assured her; “surely that’s a consolation. But I really must be off; I have an appointment at three, and it is after that now.”

He lingered a moment, and then took his departure with accurate tardiness.

Mrs. Axenard and Philippa went into the library and sat over the fire together. Mr. Axenard, who was a restless man, paced the room in a path that he had laid out for himself in imaginary definition on the carpet.

“Young Sartoris came to see me to-day,” he told his wife. “The colonel was very careless, in not placing the boy before this.”

“But surely Jack Sartoris has money?” she replied, looking up. “His father left him all he had, I suppose.”

“As he left just about two thousand dollars in bank, and not another cent, the boy’s as good as penniless.”

“Impossible!” she cried. “Why, Colonel Sartoris was rich!”

“He lost every penny in his ‘Duchess’ mine speculation. Lucky for him he didn’t live to be ruined. The firm kept it from him, and sprung it on the boy.”

Philippa gave a little cry of pity, and her mother exclaimed,—

“How terrible! Poor boy, what will he do? And there’s Noël Conway, too!”

“Conway has a trifling yearly income, I believe, about enough to keep an average man in neck-ties. But he’ll have to make it do. I’m going to look about for the lads; they’re smart, and will do very well in time.” Mr. Axenard ceased his pacing to kiss his wife, and left his women-folk to digest this information, which they did with much analysis and more pity.

CHAPTER VII.

Rustum to Raksh, his horse, spake, "Let us see
What monster howling in yon cave may be."

With drawn sword Rustum strode into the cave.
Lo, 'twas the wind that roared through vacancy!

WHEN Jack Sartoris came to look into his father's affairs, and found that beyond a few thousands he owned absolutely nothing, he was conscious of no feeling greater than amazement. Money had always been plenty with him; he had lived at an easy gait, not perhaps as a millionaire, but within compass. What joy of life had been denied him? This new problem had never faced him, even as a possibility. He had not been an extravagant boy, and his father had been a generous-minded man,—never hinting economy, never suggesting retrenchment, never opposing an objection to any plan of travel Jack might desire to undertake. What more natural than to suppose that this attitude was enduring?

Jack had planned with Noël during these last long evenings a prospective tour, to be taken just as soon as they could get out of New York, and had decided that this time it was to be the East, Egypt and Palestine, and later India. Beyond these

stretched an indefinite vista including Japan and China, the less-known provinces of Asia Minor, a trip to Kamschatka for the hunting, and a search for the Grand Lama among the sacred cities of Thibet.

“Partons, nous sommes seuls, l’univers est à nous !” Beyond these four eyes glowed a veritable cycle of Cathay, a lifetime of wanderings with none to let or hinder. All that must be considered (in their plans) was the sale of the house in Washington Square ; all that must be arranged was the settling of affairs and the disposal of effects. Then the first steamer was to carry them bodily into their dream. And now to find that it was indeed a dream !

For a long time Jack could not understand it ; the situation refused to be weighed and measured. He had long talks with the lawyers and went over innumerable documents, statements, accounts, mortgages, and certificates of stock. He brought home immense ledgers and account-books, and, saying nothing to Noël, locked himself into the library, and pored over them. He estimated and re-estimated, calculated and recalculated, figured and pondered, wrote and puzzled in vain attempts to conjure his vanished fortune into reality. The thought grew from a horrible conjecture into a swift and no less horrible reality that he was without prospects and ruined. He pushed the books

from him, and tossed aside the papers with a slap, saying, and his voice seemed to clinch the thing, making it irrevocable,—

“The truth is I’m a pauper, and to-morrow I’ve got to get something to do.”

“Eh?” said Noël, drowsily from the next room. The library was large and oblong with book-cases rising to the ceiling. Over the fire-place hung an oil painting of Jack’s mother in a befurbeled ball-gown. The desk at which he sat was lighted by the lamp in a great white circle, into which the young man’s troubled face kept emerging and retiring. The fire had gone out, but there was a bright one in the smoking-room,—a little nook built out as one builds a conservatory, and softened by silk hangings and rugs. A dim lamp hung from the ceiling, and, as the door stood open, Jack could just see Noël as he sat deep in his chair, his head on his breast, the thin smoke of his pipe rising like a veil before his half-shut eyes. His hair was roughened into peaks, and twists, above the high narrow forehead. His eyes, under their heavy lids, shone like agates or opals, the long lines of his frame were in repose, and his face was dreamy. Jack hesitated to rouse him.

“Eh?” said Noël again, as his friend made no answer. Then he went on in a slow monotone, “There’s a certain concentration of mind that the higher adepts attain, by clinching their soul, as it

were, around one thought. It's akin to the trance state, but——"

"Bosh!" exclaimed Jack, irritably. He was usually tolerant enough of Noël, to-night his nerves were jangled, and the other's mysticism annoyed him. "Con," he said, "jump out of that mental tangle and come here. This will cure your vapors."

Noël came into the room, his pipe in hand.

"Look there," Jack continued, thrusting forward a paper on which he had scribbled the result of his calculations, "do you see *that*?"

"You're horribly materialized since you came into this Gehenna," Noël remarked, taking it. Then, "Ah!" he said, holding it under the lamp, "that's bad; good Lord, Jack, that is bad!" He laid the paper down and stared at Jack with a glance clean washed from the state of mind of the higher adepts.

"I've been fiddling over it for two days trying to make it turn out better," said Jack, wearily, "and that's the result. You see what it means? No Egypt or India for us, but hard dirty work somewhere in this blaring city.

"This house and everything in it will have to be sold as soon as possible," he continued, as Noël whistled softly, but made no reply. "We can't go on living on our principal, our princely fortune." He flipped the edge of the paper contemptuously. "If my poor father had lived he'd have been a

ruined man. And now the question is, What are we to do?"

"Take rooms together, and turn in," said Noël, succinctly, with a flash of practical insight.

"But to what?" persisted Jack. "Who'd have us? We've no experience? What use would I be? And who'd have you with your head full of Buddha?"

"The brothers at Raithapoor would take us in," said Noël, not enthusiastically, but as one offering a suggestion.

"No, they wouldn't!" said Jack, sharply; "you know what father thought of that, Con. No, there isn't much of a chance,—and that's a fact."

Noël put himself into a chair and bent his brows over the problem. It was always impossible to tell what he was thinking about with that stony mask of his, so Jack waited.

"Go and see Mr. Axenard," he said, at last; "he'll be a help, if it's only in advice. You're right, old man, we are an impossible pair of devils—for the scramble of New York."

"That's an idea,—I will. He might get me a place on a newspaper,—it's the awful slaving at a desk I hate," and Jack began to look more hopeful.

He went to Mr. Axenard next morning and laid the case before him.

The business-man listened with considerate kindness, lamented the young man's inexperience, asked many questions, answered none, and sent

Jack away, promising nothing but his word of help. As it turned out, he was better than his word. Owing entirely to his influence Jack got a berth, an underling of underlings, but in an important firm. He felt that there was small cause for triumph, yet he was triumphant. Mr. Axenard's kindness did not stop here. He did much wire-pulling for Noël, with the result that a minor weekly paper consented to avail itself of that young gentleman's valuable services. It was a position that could not well be termed journalism, but was a beginning. Noël had the sense to lock his beliefs and opinions in the inner casket of his soul, to appear as like other people as he could, and to rouse himself from his rather indolent habits of life. He hated the work, yet being undeniably clever, somewhat original in method, and quietly persistent, soon slipped into a niche that he filled fairly well.

The house in Washington Square was placed on the market, and Mrs. Axenard was constant in her help during the dismantling that followed. Sometimes Philippa dropped in with her, so frankly natural, so naturally helpful with her quiet decision, that in time her great superiority to her sex dawned on their minds. Jack chatted and laughed with her, both sought for her opinion with anxious deference, and Noël felt no restraint at her presence, but went his way with renewed cheeriness of heart. She, on her part, if she liked Jack well, studied his

friend with a growing interest. It was not easy to come to a decision concerning him. At first she termed him, with unqualified disapproval, "rude;" later, she substituted the adjectives "morbid" or "moody." She discovered that he was nervous, susceptible to sound and sight, and easily unbalanced. She discovered that he was abnormally superstitious; she noted the expression with which he threw down knife and fork on one occasion when thirteen dined by chance at her father's table. The utter impassibility of his face, with its quick flashes of vivid expression, set her watching it; and how much of this was truth, and how much *posé*; how the moments of black mysticism when he sat blind and deaf, wrapt in a chaos of meditation, were to be reconciled with his frank, simple manner and occasional boyish gayety, was to Philippa a perpetual puzzle.

She fell to looking at him with a great pity in her brown eyes that Noël neither saw, nor, had he seen, would have understood. The fatal vision of his mother, her lovely face bent over him, thrust itself between him and any woman's face he had a fancy to note. Often as he dwelt on it, the bitterness never dissolved; the draught was stronger at every taste.

It was well into the New Year by the time the boys were settled in their new quarters. They had a couple of rooms, sitting-room and bedroom. If

one was small, the other at least was well-sized and cheery, and filled with dear familiar things. The portrait of Jack's mother and the colonel's charcoal sketch of Richard Conway formed a supplementary gallery to their collection of photographs and foreign relics. There was a well-filled book-case, and in the centre of the room a round table,—the colonel's favorite table,—and a couple of big leather chairs from the colonel's library were drawn up under the lamp. The other furnishings were meagre and necessary: a lounge and a desk, a rack for pipes, and a cabinet where they kept anything from twine to cheese. Small as it was, they contracted a love for the place, and night after night, when they returned from the drive of work, it grew more homely and familiar.

Otherwhere matters were less satisfactory. Work was a new task, the drudgery went slowly against the grain. Jack, 'tis true, with something of an American's activity, grew to accept his fate and the world with a livelier interest. Noël, although his stint had more variety, found it grate against every fibre of his philosopher's constitution. He hated the city, its hurry and tension, its ostentation and clamor, the self-satisfaction of its fashionable crowds, the screaming activity of its trade. Every day and all day he combated against the indolence of his Creole heritage; he strove to walk the same beat as other men, to make his pulse throb along with

theirs. But in this whirling crowd, where was his place, what his interest? To his comrades in the office he was simply an oddity who took no interest in elections, and looked up with blank eyes at topics on which most men are extravagant; who had no normal taste save perchance for athletics. He found very soon that he was being treated with ill-disguised contempt and surliness, and he was not a man to allow either. So he took the chance one day, when the editor happened to be out of the room, to give a practical exhibition of boxing. It might have cost him his position, but as it restored him to respect it was worth the risk. Later on, a similar bout at fencing, given at a less dangerous moment, and a succinct history of the long, thread-like scar that ran up one side of his face from jaw to crown, increased respect to a qualified admiration, whereat Noël, having achieved his intention, fell back into indifference.

One friend, however, he did make. This was a brisk young fellow named Forbes, whose particular passion for all sorts and conditions of men led him to make advances to the "queer fish" in the *Weekly Record* office. He carried Conway by storm in a series of blunt and masterly kindnesses, and Noël could do no less than take him home for Jack's benefit. Forbes stayed until two o'clock, and went away in a glow of enthusiasm. The two "gentlemanly adventurers," as he termed them, their ideas

and their travels, Noël's superstitions and his religious views, all these threw this student of human nature into a frenzy of discovery. His mother implored him to remember that his last treasure-trove had disappeared with some of the table-silver, and that among other nuggets of oddity for which he had digged, several had proven far less satisfactory as acquaintances than as studies. But Forbes had the passion of curiosity, his whole talk was of his "Hindu priest," and nothing might quench the fervor of his penetration. Forbes joined to the fluent vitality of the journalist the ardor of the author for types. Life was for him a chase among anomalies, a perpetual adventure lacking only finish and *dénouement*. No geologist seeking for specimens was more insatiable than he; he played the dual rôles of dramatist and spectator, and characters swarmed in his imagination like bacilli under the lens of a microscope.

This temperament had some points in common with Noël, who recognized and seized upon it. Forbes took him home, where Mrs. Forbes, relieved to find the specimen so harmless, received him graciously.

Noël found Forbes, if as restless as quicksilver, interesting and his household not alarming. He disliked new places and new people, but these were to his taste; there was no effort in the greeting, and he promised very willingly to come again.

CHAPTER VIII.

Chance, how it moves and circles, nears and nears,—
Past folly and blank ignorance tacks and steers ;
 What man shall mark his Fate approach him, till
Its footstep gives the echo to his fears ?

MR. CLEMENT FREY was a somewhat anomalous figure in the literary life of his city. As a story-writer he owned considerable charm ; as a man, singularly little. He had contrived by a trifling expenditure of sarcasm to make himself generally unpopular, although, like many an unpopular man, his friends were as fervent as his detractors were clamorous. They clamored the more impotently perhaps because cavilling criticism could find exceedingly little fault with the matter and manner of his work, which from the first bore the stamp of an impressive talent. It was delicate, it was individual, it was marked by an exquisite perfectness of fancy ; without being slavishly eccentric it followed the tread of a higher literature than the present. It had been translated ; it had been issued in English editions, and it had been compared variously, and with an equal suggestion of truth, to Sterne, or to Hans Andersen, or to Jean Richepin.

But although in the main an amiable man, and certainly a well-meaning one, no author was more disappointing to meet than Frey. His Muse seemed to despise him, she did not brush him with the airiest flutter of her wing. He was pasty, he was pudgy, his eye, although quick to note, was dull; his conversation, as we have seen, was the galloping narrative. His mind, when you struck through the envelope of personality, had many companionable qualities; at the Axenards, where he was at his best, and at his club, where he was at his worst, his opinions were trenchant, and his rapidly gathered conclusions notable for their frequency and inaptitude. But the frank observation of an older man of letters—"How he must irritate his genius!"—was a verity that had been brought home more than once to every soul of his acquaintance.

During the winter, and while Noël Conway and Jack Sartoris were viewing day after day slip through their hands with the same maddening insufficiency, Mr. Frey was putting the finishing touches to a work that was to stand very high among the exalted. He worked haltingly, almost flippantly, picking up the manuscript and scrawling at a page or two before going out to dinner; or rewriting a paragraph during the pauses of dressing. To see him dash at his desk for half an hour in the interstices of an astonishing net-work of occupation would convince one that literature was

a pastime, and that dining-out, theatre-going, and sitting at clubs were the serious affairs of life. His Pegasus was but a skittish colt nibbling shyly at the grass of Parnassus, or anon giving a kick of its heels to unseat the rider. But the concentration of the man during these half-hours, the delicate touch of his tool as he worked, these were beyond praise. His mood, while it carried him, bore him aloft level and firm; he put pen to paper with an unwavering certainty, and ceased only because the light flickered or grew dim. At times a fever of work would lay hold upon him for a longer strain, at this engagements, appointments, promises,—everything went by the board until the thing was done.

One such night as this he sat writing while his valet waited with his coat, and a cab waited at the door to take him forth to dinner. The night was dark and wet, a cold and clinging mist hung in the air, and rain-drops bespangled the pane of the uncurtained window. A fire of logs cracked upon the tiles, the lamps burned steadily; and through an open door one beheld the piled dressing-table shining with silver,—while in the pier-glass stood reflected the figure of the valet, daring not to speak, and still perplexedly holding his master's dress-coat in his hand. Clement Frey, coatless and in his white waist-coat, was writing furiously, his mouth drawn in a thin line, and his eyes glued to the paper.

Suddenly there came an interruption, an electric bell vibrated, steps were heard, and voices in the corridor. Frey, with a second subdominant portion of his brain, heard one ask his name, and heard his man give answer,—

“I don’t know, sir. You’ll have to wait, sir. He’s at work, and I daren’t disturb him now.”

“Martin!” he called, sharply, “who’s that?”

“Gentleman to see you, sir,” replied the valet, advancing into the room with a card. Frey looked down and up, bit his pen-handle, wrote a word or two, made a despairing grasp at the skirts of his vanishing inspiration, and finally turned with a sigh.

“Give it to me,” he said, resignedly; “who is the damned fool, anyhow?”

The damned fool, on the testimony of an absurdly small piece of pasteboard, proved to be no other than Mr. Roderick Iveagh Wimborne Merchant; and Frey, still coatless, was presently shaking him by the hand in the corridor.

“My dear fellow!” cried the author. “I had no idea you were on this side of the ferry. When did you arrive?”

“Yesterday, on the ‘New York,’” Merchant replied, as he followed his host into the room. “I had no time to let any one know I was coming, so I looked up your address at once.”

“And now you’re here you’ll stay of course?”

urged Frey. "Martin, give me my coat." He pulled it on in a series of jerks, talking all the time. "We'll make a night of it,—you haven't dined? Of course not. We'll have some supper sent in and arrange your Gotham campaign,—for of course you're going to do society? I've nothing to do, and it's a beastly night. . . . Working? Oh, yes, but that can wait."

He scribbled on a card. "Here, Martin, take this up to the restaurant,—oh, and tell them to send my Perrier-Jouet, and not that stuff they sent last week, for I shan't drink it."

"And the cab, sir?" said the man, doubtfully.

"Haven't I said I wasn't going out?" said Frey, sharply; "send it away, of course. Or no, send it to the house where I was to dine and present my excuses. Say, Mr. Frey is at work, do you hear? It isn't rude," he continued, addressing Merchant. "I've been making myself too cheap lately, and am going to take refuge in eccentricity. Stupid house and stupid people, but they appreciate eccentricity. Tell 'em to look sharp, Martin." Concluding these remarks, Mr. Frey settled his disordered cravat, poked the burning logs, and drew up a chair for his guest.

No smile of pleasure at all these preparations for his comfort crossed Merchant's face. He looked thinner and smaller than he seemed five months ago in London; his face, although as featureless as his

host's, had a less ingenuous expression ; there were hair-like pencillings on his forehead and near the corners of his mouth, and his air of subdued dissipation had in some degree intensified. He spread out his broad white hands to the heat, and rubbed them, while Frey poured out a torrent of questions.

“I would have let you know my plans at once, had I known them myself,” he answered to one of them ; “but I decided only at the last moment.”

“Ah, so it's business, is it?” said Frey. “That's bad. I had a hope it might be pleasure.”

“Pleasure, no doubt,” replied Merchant, courteously ; “but primarily business, I believe,—this horrible affair of the ‘Antarctic,’ you know——”

“So that's what brings you? Well, well. I thought that would stir up something. Will they prosecute, do you think?” Frey seated himself on the opposite side of the fireplace, and leaning his head on his hand contemplated his visitor.

“That's what I am to find out,” Merchant made answer. He was still warming and manipulating those wonderful white hands of his before the blaze. “We are particularly anxious to avoid a lawsuit——”

“Naturally,” interjected Frey.

——“and I have been instructed to take a semi-official glance at the situation. Some sort of a settlement will have to be made, so don't mention

the nature of my mission, will you? My name is not in the firm, and I'm supposed to be pleasuring."

"Oh, I shan't turn over any other cook's omelette," said Frey. "You can rely on my indiscretion; I never talk about anybody but myself. But you're very much in this, aren't you? The man who was at bottom to blame for the whole affair,—Gordon,—wasn't he a *protégé* of yours?"

"No *protégé*, save in the sense that I got him his place," said Merchant, who must have been thoroughly chilled, for he had drawn yet closer to the fire. "Of course it's dreadfully unfortunate. Poor Gordon,—he seemed a trustworthy fellow. I am distressed that he made such a beastly mess of things."

"Well, you may be right, but I should hardly call him trustworthy," said Frey, jerking his chair back from the hearth.

Merchant smiled his stealthy, not reassuring smile. "You can hardly, I fancy, be so good a judge of that," he remarked, politely.

"No," said Frey, "perhaps not. Still, I was there at the investigation, and I remember it struck me that Mr. Gordon was pretty badly scared." He spoke meditatively, gazing into the fire from whose depths he evoked the whole scene, and even the strident, pleading voice of the engineer as he told his story; so 'twas not for a second or two that he noticed how Merchant had turned towards him a face

from which the smile was wiped, leaving it gray and dotted with shining beads of sweat.

“You were present at the investigation?” said Merchant, his eyes fixed upon Frey. “That’s curious, now; I shouldn’t have thought you liked such things.”

“Oh, I went,” replied Frey, carelessly, “as one goes to any show.”

Merchant had twisted himself around in his chair to regard his host, and even the broad back of his hand, laid over the arm, was damp like his face. “You didn’t think Gordon trustworthy,—why? What did you think of him?” There was a piercing note of anxiety in the man’s voice, however he tried to keep it light and indifferent.

Frey rose suddenly, and going over to the table, turned down a smoking lamp. “Oh, I didn’t think much about it,” he said from where he stood; “the fellow was deuced careless, of course, but he’s likely to suffer for it as much as any one.”

“You’re quite right,” said Merchant, in his smooth, deep voice. “I am truly sorry for poor Gordon, and anxious to interest myself in him. Is he in America, do you know?”

“He took the next steamer home, they tell me,” said Frey; “but more I never heard. And here comes supper,” he added, as two waiters bearing trays made an appearance in the door-way, “and I’m as hungry as the fellow in Grimm, you know.”

Merchant protested jovially that he was equally voracious, and they sat down to table.

“And to get back to first principles, how long do you intend to favor Uncle Sam?” Frey asked, noting with an exquisitely observant under-glance how his guest’s face flushed at the first glass of wine, while his food remained untasted.

“Oh, as long as possible. I’ve always wanted to do New York, don’t you know,—and I’ve several letters of introduction.”

“You must let me put you up at my club, and take you to some friends of mine,—charming people, and quite out of the ordinary.”

“I shall be delighted.”

Then fell a pause: conversation, which at first flowed in so smooth and genial a channel, seemed unaccountably obstructed. Frey ate with frank avidity: Mr. Merchant used those dexterous hands of his more on his wine-glass than on his knife and fork.

“You got my check?” said Frey, suddenly looking up. “You must have won a lot of money by that accident, Merchant?”

The remark was abrupt and impertinent, but Mr. Merchant was a man of good humor. He too looked up and laughed. “Oh, not so much,” he said, lightly; “I made a great talk about it, but I wasn’t in deeper than other fellows. And really, you know, I felt as if I ought to call the thing off, winning in such a way.”

“The terms were all right,” Frey said. “Certainly the ‘Antarctic’ did not get into New York within an hour of the ‘Hamburger.’ And that reminds me,” he continued,—“what’s become of that nice boy I met at your lodgings,—Musgrave? I hear he’s on this side.”

Merchant looked to right and left with a show of embarrassment. “I haven’t heard from Andrew Musgrave,” he said, slowly, “and, between ourselves, Frey, I’d rather not. We won’t go into it, but he behaved rather badly, and I was forced to drop him, you understand.”

“Oh, all right,” said Frey, whose mood was unusually acquiescent. “Have some more champagne?”

The flame of their talk flickered to and fro, and burnt low. Frey was not sorry when Merchant rose to go after promising to accompany the author to luncheon at the Axenards before many days. It was striking eleven as the door shut upon the visitor, and Frey counted the strokes as he threw himself into a chair. His face was seamed with thought, the eyebrows contracted, his hand beat a restless tattoo on the arm of his chair.

“There’s something in it,” he ejaculated with a jerk of his head. “The man was scared and shaken as if I had hit him somewhere. The wine leaped in his glass, his fork rattled on his plate,—now, what the deuce? I must find this out, there’s

something here, be sure. His hand was wet when I wrung it, yet he was well on his guard too. Queer. I wonder where young Musgrave really is?"

He rose, leaning his elbows on the mantel-piece, and contemplated a photograph of Philippa Axenard that rested there. The calm eyes and delicate mouth touched him with an indefinable thrill of pleasure.

Clement Frey was quite uncertain in what light he regarded Miss Axenard. He adored many pretty women. This girl held a place which, if it was not among these, at least none among these had invaded. He could not compliment and he could confide in her. Often had he told himself that these were dangerous signs, even although in her presence his pulse had never fluttered a beat faster.

"I'll take him there," ran his thoughts, "and she'll help me; a clever woman is worth a corps of Lecoqs. This is a case where a man's intuitions are too rusty; he doesn't sharpen them on every unfortunate, like a woman."

He whistled a bar or two, and went into his bedroom in a comparatively satisfied frame of mind.

CHAPTER IX.

Life is a song, so sing it perfectly,—

What if, in singing, ye let saints go by?

I make the song, so sing it true and clear,—

What matter if, in singing, ye shall die?

A NEW YORK girl is either the broadest or the narrowest creature in existence; if the first of these, then she is apt to be one of the most charming. It is a place where life flows at its most generous current; but there, also, a spirit of local conceit is most easily fostered, and such a spirit becomes markedly manifest in women. There are, however, a few families in it whose attitude does not bristle entirely with self-satisfaction, and some beautiful and gracious women touched only to their advantage by the chafing flow of cosmopolitan life.

Philippa Axenard, at twenty-two, was a girl of unusual decision and liberality,—which does not mean that she was advanced to divided skirts and woman's suffrage. She had read, seen, and thought; noted and understood. Her innate love of beauty led her deep into the literature of three languages, just as her inborn taste had led her to see foreign

countries with a calm, measured absorption and a discriminating perspective. In her mind, "beautiful" did not stand indiscriminately for the ocean and the Alps, the Venus of Milo, the creations of Worth, the operas of Wagner, and the photographer's latest fad. She did not grant to every pretty face, new book, or strain of music an equal epithet, and she had the rare grace of being able to apply a due word of praise to people and things which she personally disliked. It was this faculty of appreciative discrimination that was one of her charms for Clement Frey, who was wont to say that in talking with Miss Axenard the enthusiasms of the hour seemed out of drawing, and things fell into a proper proportion one with another. In her home-life Philippa had been particularly fortunate; she had been taught to cultivate her affections as carefully as her mind. While her parents were devoted to their children, they had never sacrificed their individuality in this direction, and in Philippa's mind were no distorted values, or unhealthy fallacies. The world was a good place; home, a better. Books, music, paintings, tastes, ambitions,—these were good things to be striven for and held high; but home, love, the closeness of ties, the life with and for others,—nothing must be allowed to interfere with these. In this rare household the intellectual life held its true place,—a little below the spiritual life, but nothing above these two; and

each member of the family seeking out his best gift for the joy of all the rest.

About two days after Roderick Merchant had been brought to the Axenards to lunch, Philippa received a box of roses from Clement Frey, with a note asking her to walk with him the following afternoon. She wrote an affirmative answer, but a little pensively, for this was the first time Mr. Frey's courtesy had taken any form that could be construed into attention. Her mother, when Philippa carried her the flowers, had said, "From Mr. Frey? What beauties! How very kind of him, dear!" and had gone on writing notes.

Philippa carried her thought away in silence, arranged the roses in a slender vase, and did *not* tell everybody who entered the house who had given them to her. Yet the inevitable possibility that rises in every girl's mind at the first distinct indication of masculine preference was present in hers, nor was she strong-minded enough to drive it away.

When she went down she found him standing in the middle of the floor, looking at his watch.

"What do you think! I am actually *on time!*" he cried as she entered, turning towards her a face so frank and so unimpressed by her entrance that her little self-consciousness quickly fled.

She laughed. "You must be reforming, Mr. Frey," she said, tendering her hand, "or else your watch is slow."

“That’s it,” he replied; “at least I hope it is. I have been so accurately unpunctual all my days that I don’t know what might happen if I took to arriving on time.”

The afternoon was not too cold, and recent rain had swept the pavement. It was a delightful day for walking, but Philippa knew better than to say so. Frey had a hatred of obvious remarks.

“Lie, my dear fellow, for heaven’s sake!” he had been known to remark to a friend, on his hazarding an observation on the beauty of the sky, “and at least I can dispute with you. Surely better break the truth than commit an assault on the conversation.”

As they came out into the street, he bowed to a passer-by. “Do you see that woman?” he remarked to Philippa; “she’s a victim to the dreadful habit of mourning. It’s incurable. It’s a second cousin now, and she’s in crape to her toes. When she comes out of this attack she’ll go around suffering in colors, till some one else dies and permits her to indulge her appetite for crape.”

Philippa smiled and the two walked on in silence. She knew that Frey was preparing to talk, and saw no use in precipitating the crisis.

“Miss Axenard,” he said, at length, and very gravely for him, “are you fond of detective novels?”

“Yes—quite fond,” she answered; “if you mean the kind where a murder is done in the first

chapter, and the rest of the book is spent in finding out who didn't do it? I quite like them, particularly if the detective picks up the murderer's cigar-ashes, or tells the family what kind of coffee is spilt upon the table-cloth. I feel so helpless, so in the hands of the author that I can't criticise,—and I'm quite happy."

"Happy because you can't criticise!" said Frey. "You are extraordinary for a woman."

"Perhaps I should say happy because I don't have to think. I don't know the difference in cigar-ashes or coffee-stains, and the author does or says he does; so I just trust to him with that delightful feeling one has in seeing somebody else do the work."

"Seriously," said Frey, as they stood on a corner waiting for a dray to pass. "I'm right in the middle of a real detective story, and I want your help."

"As critic, or amanuensis, or what?" asked Philippa.

The author looked at her. "You don't understand," he said, in a tone of severe reproof. "This is life—not fiction. I'm making copy, not using it. How did you like Merchant?"

"Well," said Philippa, slowly, "you know I'm rather hard to please, Mr. Frey——"

"That means you didn't?" His tone was so nearly one of satisfaction that she was surprised.

“Not very much,” she assented, quietly, “that is true.”

“I ought to begin by begging your pardon, Miss Axenard,” said Frey. “I brought Merchant to your house as an experiment. I wanted to know what you thought of him,—I wanted a woman’s impression. Now let me tell you all about it, and get your opinion.”

He paused, but Philippa was far too wise to obstruct the impending flood by any observations.

“I think I told you a couple of months ago,” he continued, “about that investigation I went to in the ‘Hamburger’-‘Antartic’ collision. Did I mention Merchant, and the bet I had with him in London?”

“Yes,” replied Philippa in a tone of interest; “you spoke of it at the same time.”

They were walking slowly up Fifth Avenue, the only leisurely figures in the block.

“When this fellow turned up here last week,” Frey went on, “I confess I was surprised to see him. He had the reputation in London of being pretty well swept out, through connection with various circumstances, masculine and feminine,—particularly feminine. Of course, the conclusion was idiotically simple; he had scraped enough cash together to try his luck for a rich American. Like the man in the Bab Ballads, you know.”

Miss Axenard did not know, but then the aptitude of Mr. Frey's similes existed only in his gymnastic imagination.

"I might never have had a suspicion, for I am naturally as guileless as James I., when the man himself put an idea into my head."

"How?" queried his auditor.

"Well," said Clement Frey, impressively, prodding the pavement with his cane, "I mentioned—quite casually—that I had been present at the investigation, and at that the man went gray with terror. I never saw fear written so plain upon a countenance."

"You mean——?" cried Philippa.

"I don't mean anything—yet," he returned, for he never liked others to jump to conclusions as rapidly as himself; "but it set me thinking, and I want your opinion."

"I must wait," she said, shaking her head judicially, "until I hear the rest of the case."

"I sat down and summed up all I knew about Merchant," proceeded Frey; "and two facts in the affair struck me hard. Who got the author of the accident his place, Miss Axenard? Merchant. Who, if any, benefited by the result? Think. Merchant again."

"Ah!" cried Philippa, hastily, "surely—think of the risk, and for such a comparatively small sum as your bet!—no man would undertake it! Why,

there might have been no fog,—they might never have sighted each other during the voyage!”

“There’s weight in your first objection,” agreed Frey; “as to the second—well, that’s my suspicion.”

“You mean the thing was managed,” said Philippa, under her breath.

“Yes,” he replied; “I suspect the thing was managed, and Gordon in Merchant’s pay.”

They walked on for a few paces in silence.

“And why do you tell this to me?” Philippa said, rather distastefully.

“Because I want your help. Merchant will be in New York all this spring. You’ll meet him; you can’t help it. He’ll do society like the Comte de St. Germain. You’ll have opportunities to judge what he’s capable of. Men naturally relax one side of themselves before a woman, and you’re as naturally observant as Heloise. In your presence he might drop a dozen clues that would never slip out in mine. I tried the other night, but, bless you, I couldn’t trip him. Oh, he’s doing the thing artistically, no doubt, and I only hope that he will keep up to the mark.”

“But, Mr. Frey!” remonstrated Philippa, “this, what you suspect him of, is criminal. It’s accusing a man of—well, I don’t quite know of what——”

“Of conspiracy to obtain money, and indirectly of murder,” he interrupted. “Don’t you see that

is the beauty of it? it's practically a new crime, or at least one that's never been found out before. I never before had such an opportunity to trace a thing up, and I don't want Merchant scared away too soon."

Philippa was silent, and Frey pursued :

"There's a man I shall have to get hold of,—young Musgrave; he knows if Merchant made more extensive bets on this one thing. We haven't a bit of evidence yet, you see; only suspicions. I'll gather it gradually, and when it's all in shape we'll slip it into the hands of the police, and nab our gentleman quietly."

"And he will have to stand trial and undergo, say, fifteen years' hard labor—if convicted?" put in Philippa.

"True," said Frey, with an alteration of face; "it isn't pleasant for him, poor devil!"

"I will help you by observing Mr. Merchant when I have the chance, but I shall not make these chances. What you have described doesn't tempt me, Mr. Frey." Her eyes and voice were a little cold; the proposition was distasteful to her, and Frey felt it.

"I suppose you're right," he said, greatly disappointed; "still, you'll help, and it's just, you know. If he had anything to do with this, he surely ought to be arrested. Think of your trunks!"

"Tempter!" she laughed; "if I help you, it

will not be for revenge. But, in my opinion, you are mistaken. The risk strikes me as too heavy, the gain too small, for such an attempt. No; I may not fancy Mr. Merchant, but I don't think him responsible for that collision."

The afternoon was blending into evening,—a lamp stabbed the dusk here and there. Clement Frey's steps grew slower and slower.

"It's astonishing how much I like to walk with you," he said, meditating.

"Do you?" replied Philippa. "I'm very glad."

"May I drop in to-morrow evening?" he asked, as they came in sight of the house.

"Not to-morrow," she answered; "we're going to the theatre. Marion Forbes and her brother join us, and Mr. Conway and Jack Sartoris."

Frey's face grew suddenly irritated. "Do you really like that Ram Lal youth?" he said, distantly.

"He always seems to me to ape Zanoni."

"He's never read the book," she rejoined, quickly, "and that's as near as you usually get, Mr. Frey."

"Humph!" sniffed Clement Frey; "why do you like him better than Sartoris?"

"What makes you think I do?" The dusk hid a little color that burnt in her cheek at the question.

"Because you are so careful to call him Mister. Good-night, Miss Axenard."

CHAPTER X.

I have plucked bitter fruit from barren tree,
Burnt berries of distrust and enmity,—

What wonder that I clutch them in my need,
These golden apples of your sympathy?

“Now, what made him say that?” she thought, vexedly, as she went up to her room. She slammed the door with impatience, and threw her hat and coat on the bed in a little gust of temper.

“I never mentioned Noël Conway to him before,” she thought; “and to make him think—so silly! As if calling a man Mr. means—— Authors think themselves so awfully clever! And he must think me a perfect fool. It makes me furious!”

“Mother dear,” she said, for the doors were open between their rooms, and by raising her voice Philippa was easily heard by Mrs. Axenard, “do you think that Clement Frey is so very clever?”

“In his books, yes,—not in private life,” said her mother’s voice; “but he is wonderfully observant.”

“Ah, observant!” cried Philippa. “Don’t you think he sometimes observes a good deal more than there is to see?”

“Ah, yes; but that makes an author,” rejoined her mother, appearing at the door of the room,

“If they did not see more than there really was, there would not be many books written.”

“And that would be a good thing,” Philippa remarked. Her mother laughed, as she went to and fro.

“Well, do you think that Mr. Frey has any sense of humor?” she asked her daughter. “I have often wondered.”

“No,” replied Philippa, confidently, “of course not; and that’s why he’s so amusing. Some people have got to be without it, mother, in order to sharpen it in other people. But he thinks he has.”

“What has Mr. Frey done to make you whet your tongue, Phil?” inquired Mrs. Axenard, re-appearing in the door-way.

“Nothing,” replied Philippa, meditatively, “only to think himself dreadfully observant when really there was nothing to observe.”

The theatre project to which Philippa had referred was an undertaking of her mother’s.

“My dear,” Mrs. Axenard had said, “those two poor boys need a little pleasure. Let us ask them to do something.”

Philippa looked dubious. “It will have to be very small and informal,” she said, “because, mother, remember Jack’s father.”

“I thought of asking them to go to the theatre. It’s not good for those two to work hard all the time; it will make Jack a dull boy, and Noël too.”

“Mother, if you ask any strangers, you will frighten them away!” exclaimed Philippa. “They are so——” She paused, for it was not easy to epitomize the difference she had in mind.

“I shall ask only Lyndon and Marion Forbes,” said Mrs. Axenard, with determination. “They know Lyndon; and if Marion alarms them it will not be her fault.”

When Jack and Noël understood that there was to be no hostile element introduced, they accepted the invitation with delight. Life had grown so dark and barren the last few weeks that they welcomed the idea as a spot of light. Noël in particular was in high spirits, his laughter ready, and the burden of his egotism slipped for an evening from his shoulders.

When Philippa, a little late, ran down to greet her assembled guests, she found Jack already deep in conversation with Marion Forbes, while Lyndon in his jerky, restless way was detailing some jest to his hostess.

Marion Forbes was a slender, impetuous little thing, with a pair of superb eyes and hair of red gold. She was frank and feminine; she shared her brother's vivid interests, and occasionally his volcanic enthusiasms. Moreover, she had a talent for designing that lifted her personality above the commonplace. The Forbes family were far from rich, and Marion contributed much to their income by

her deft and delicate pencil. Although as womanly a creature as ever breathed, she was proud of her distinction as a bread-winner, and did not make that honorable position a platform for crude opinions or the expression of affectations. She was natural, alive, buoyant, and far more impulsive and mercurial than her friend.

“Oh, Mrs. Axenard,” Jack cried, “I do want to tell you something delightful about Con! He——”

“Look here, shut up!” said Noël, sternly, advancing on him.

“You know what a lady’s man he is,” pursued Jack, dodging the attack. “Well, there’s a woman down at the newspaper office, and she——”

What the lady in question had said or done was not known, for Noël fell upon Jack, and they fought together amiably like a pair of young elephants.

“Boys! boys!” interposed Mrs. Axenard, “the room isn’t big enough for such Brobdignagian gambols. You remind me of the thunder in ‘Alice,’ that got into the house and rolled about the room in lumps.”

“Mother, that remark is inapt enough for one of Clement Frey’s,” laughed Philippa.

“He would probably liken them to the Alps,” put in Marion. “He would call Mr. Conway ‘Mont Blanc,’ you know, because he is so dark, and Mr. Sartoris ‘Jungfrau’ because he is so shy.”

There was a general laugh at this, and Lyndon

Forbes cried, reprovingly, "Marion, please do not be so frivolous in the presence of my latest discovery, or I shall have to suppress you."

"Am I your latest discovery? Why?" said Noël, as Forbes waved an arm dramatically in his direction.

"Oh, you take yourself so seriously," said Forbes, with his head on one side, gazing at him as a naturalist examines a specimen, "and you're so un-American, and——"

"Now, this is too bad, Lyndon!" cried his sister. "Mr. Conway, he'll study you dreadfully if you don't prevent him. He's a mental vivisectionist."

"I will protect myself, if necessary," said Noël, seriously.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we must be off," said Mrs. Axenard. "Mr. Forbes, you shall come with me. Mr. Conway, do I need to remind you that Nirvana is a region of absolute calm?"

"I take the hint," he replied; and Philippa found herself more puzzled than ever at his unrestrained spirits. He seemed once more plunged into boyhood.

So they all put on their coats, and hats, and capes, and went off to see a celebrated tragedian, who ought (so Lyndon Forbes said) to go about like a patent medicine labelled "Beware of Imitations!"

The night, which had been cloudy, was faultlessly clear when they came out of the theatre. Marion begged to walk home, the air was refresh-

ing after the hot play-house, and Mrs. Axenard saw no objection. They were to go back to the Axenards' to supper, so she marshalled her forces in twos, and herself started on with Lyndon Forbes. Marion and Jack followed, deep in gay chat; and Philippa, to whose side Noël had stepped in silence, found herself glancing up at him with a kind of comical dismay.

“I feel as if I were taking the Sphinx for a stroll on the Sahara,” she thought. The conceit amused her, and she laughed softly.

Noël jerked, and looked down at her. “I beg your pardon,” he said; then with sudden irrelevance, “How very kind it was of your mother to take all this trouble!”

“It was no trouble,” Philippa replied; “and naturally she is very glad to give us pleasure.”

If she spoke tritely, it was from an instinctive idea that he, of all men, might not agree with her. She had noted at times in him a strain of savage cynicism so at variance with his character that she had been pained by it. This was one of those happenings which leave, one knows not why, the doors of the mind wide open, so that the naked soul looks forth, and in the darkness and flying shadow of the streets she felt emboldened to ask plainly what the delicate touch of her sympathy had long divined. At her remark he laughed, a miserable laugh that rang falsely on her ear.

“Naturally,” he repeated, “a mother devotes herself to her children’s happiness!” and he laughed again; for it was in Mrs. Axenard’s presence that his own loneliness lay heaviest on him.

“What is it?” she asked, gently. “You are not happy?” She did not apologize nor fence about her sympathy with words. It seemed natural and right to ask him all about himself.

“I have only one cause to take from any happiness,” he replied, with an effort,—“and I am morbid, I know; but the contrasts cut me deep.”

“And nobody can help you?” Her voice was very low and steady; it drew his sorrow gently to the surface and gave it words. The desire came and settled upon him to tell her all, because she was a stranger, because she seemed to care. What he could not talk about with Jack, who knew him to his innermost fibres, he could tell this low-voiced, quiet girl, whom he had not known a year.

“You see, I go to your house, and I notice how your mother loves you all,” he said, looking anywhere save at the person he was addressing, “and it hurts me because my mother——”

The never-spoken word stuck in his throat.

“She did not love you?” Philippa said, pitifully.

“I was in her way, and she disowned me,” replied Noël, with an icy distinctness of utterance. “It would have relieved her greatly if—I had died.”

Reserved people, in moments of tension, some-

times do very unreserved things. Philippa, in the first gush of her pity, put out her hand with an involuntary gesture of comfort, then, remembering herself, drew it back. Noël had not seen the motion, his eyes were fixed on the centre of the street. But even the silence was enough. He poured it all out with rigid self-analysis,—he did not keep back one morbid thought,—his bitterness, his selfishness, his passionate longing for a place and people of his own. Not with puling complaint or accusation, but simply, boyishly, ridding his heart of everything that cankered it,—the loneliness, the abandonment.

“This is all dreadfully egoistical,” he concluded; “but I don’t mean it so, indeed, Miss Axenard. It’s only that a man has some rights, and surely his mother’s love is one of them. And it isn’t unnatural to feel sore when you are knocked out of it, is it? Especially when you need it more than anything in the world.”

Philippa was silent. They were passing under a lamp, and he glanced at her. Her face was turned aside, and only the delicate profile showed in relief against the dark background. The long lashes were rigidly horizontal, but her lips were quivering.

“You are very good,” he said, holding his breath; and for a little they went on without speaking.

“I am afraid I can help you very little,” she said, at length, and her voice was steady as ever, so

steady that Noël wondered if he had been mistaken to think her moved. "Yours is not a grief that you can share with any one. But I feel sure it will all come right. Some day your mother will need you, and be ashamed. Some day she will come to you, ready to give you all the love she has stored up for you, and then it will be your turn to be sorry."

"I would like to think that,—I shall try to," he replied; "and believe me, were she to send one word to-morrow I should forget it all—all—if she would only care for me once more. In my memory she is so lovable."

"You will not fail her when the time comes, I feel sure," Philippa said, earnestly; "and oh! I am sure that she has had her punishment. But—all this is of no use to help you."

"You have helped me more than I can say merely by listening," he answered, and he held her hand close for a moment. "I can forget myself among the clouds at times, but we are all so chained to earth, the warnings that come to us are so little regarded. I must have known you in some former existence I think, we speak so easily together."

Philippa started to speak, and paused in a dumbness of perplexity. The dark face above her gave no clue, the eyes were half closed and dreamy. Was it conviction or pose, or the way madness lies? Which was the real man, the mystic or the boy hurt to the death by a great loss of mother-love?

“Which is you?” she said, suddenly.

“Oh,” he answered, seeming to understand her a little, “I don’t know. I’ve worked through many cycles. This is only a phase, after all. Think of what is beyond,—manvantara and pralaya——” He paused, looking down on her in a sort of apology. Their eyes met, rested full upon each other, and parted. In Philippa’s there grew a questioning sorrow, but she did not speak again till they reached home.

The little supper passed off very gayly, and Noël was as merry as the best of them. Jack told him that Marion Forbes was simply the loveliest creature he had ever seen, and Noël laughed at him and his rhapsody. For himself he thanked Philippa with his eyes. He told himself that he would see more of her, and checked his customary cynicism when it rose to suggest that all women liked confidence and all girls’ tears were very near the surface. Somehow she took a new place in his mind,—that of a friend, and his image of her grew pleasant and comforting, yet without glorification or a touch of love.

CHAPTER XI.

We trust each other : what is this our trust ?
What but the wine-lees smoking in the must ;
The leaven that makes all life work and rise ;
The sunbeam, that to golden turns our dust.

THEIR jaunt, besides sweetening many an hour of recollection, had two results. It took them more to the Axenards' on Noël's account, and more to the Forbes' on Jack's. Scarcely a week passed that did not see them with one or the other, and Sundays were divided between the two. In this manner they felt that friends had been gained, their world had grown wider by two households, and the city of their exile put on a friendlier face, as if to say, "For you also a door is open and a welcome waits."

One Saturday night a week or two later Jack and Noël sat at ease after work was done. The night was a chilly one at the end of March; the wind blew, bringing rain with it from every quarter of the sky. Overhead, above the glitter of the electric lights, great brown clouds were rushing in every direction at once, and wind shifted at every gust, now into a gush of rain, now into a rattling handful of hailstones. From their window, across

which the curtain was not drawn, they looked into the gulf of a pit-black street, and at the end of it a little glimpse of Broadway, wind-blown and brilliant. What passers-by there were charged at the storm with lowered umbrellas and flapping capes that made grotesque shadows under the white eye of the electric lights. There was a black shine of wet on everything, and the city reflected the glitter like a polished boot.

Saturday was commonly one of Noël's busy nights, but from some combination at the *Weekly Record* office his task had been finished at the accustomed hour, leaving him a long evening in which to read and dream. This occurrence was rare, and he had appreciated it by being more than usually comfortable. He sat up under the lamp, his long legs extended out on a convenient chair, and Sinnett's "Esoteric Buddhism" propped against his knee. Jack sat on the opposite side of the table deep in a detective novel. Smoke curled upward as from two incense-burners; the big tin of tobacco stood handily between the two. The lamp in the centre of the table cast the two unlike profiles clean-cut on opposite walls, where they bent and wavered. With all the battered homeliness of its furnishing, the little room was undeniably cheerful. The proprietors were at home and at peace.

The clock in a far corner tinkled out nine musical strokes. Following the sound came another, the

quiver of the electric bell at the vestibule of their room.

“Who’s that?” said Noël, looking at Jack; “who’d go out on such a night as this, do you think?”

“Lyndon Forbes, perhaps,” Jack suggested. “Yes, he’s coming up-stairs.”

A footstep sounded on the stair, weary and heavy, and then, after a moment of hesitancy, came a knock. Jack jumped up and went to the door, to start back dumb as the figure came in. It was Andrew Musgrave, yet changed beyond all words of description. He had altered into a creature gray and colorless; the tint had gone from his yellow curls, the light from his blue eyes. Torn and dishevelled, tired and dispirited, he lay against the door-post like a man utterly worn out, and looked at his two friends with the mere ghost of his old-time smile. They were too much astonished at the first to greet him, but stood staring as he said, “Hullo!” with a heavy intake of the breath, like a sigh of utter weariness.

“I’ve dragged all over this city in search of you,” he continued, in a regretful monotone. “I’ve been down to Jack’s house in Washington Square. I walked from there.”

“But, Musgrave, what the devil has happened?” Jack cried, impetuously. “We thought you were in Colorado!”

Andrew looked over his friend's head to the wall with his tired eyes. "I was," he said. "I got into New York this afternoon—before dinner," he gave a little laugh as weary as his voice; "that is, before any chance of dinner for me. All the rest of the time I've been looking for you." He continued to stand at the door, shifting from foot to foot.

"Do you mean——?" said Noël, rising also.

"Cleaned out," said Andrew. He threw out his hands with a comprehensive gesture, embracing the shabby suit and muddy boots. "All I own in the world is on my back," he remarked, as unimpassioned and weary as before.

"But, good heavens——! How could such a thing happen?" gasped Jack, remembering the lively carelessness of London days, and hardly able to believe his eyes. All that had been buoyant and vivid in the young man had given place to a wretched sordidness and fatigue. There was no distinction, no charm about the dejected figure; it had shrunk suddenly into commonplace shabby meanness.

"It did happen," said Andrew, simply. "I'll tell you all about it as soon as I've rested a little. I fancy I'm all right now I'm here; but the getting here—in such weather—has tired me a bit. You haven't got such a thing as a brandy-and-soda?"

The request stirred them to activity and stung

their hospitality. Brandy-and-soda was naturally not to be had, but there was whiskey, and this Andrew said would do for once. Still wondering, still hardly able to believe their eyesight, they busied themselves about the traveller. Noël brought him whiskey and water, and stirred the dying fire. Andrew fell into a chair Jack pushed over to him and drank the spirits greedily in gulps.

“You see, I had a row with my father before I left home,” he began, setting down the glass; “had to cut Oxford in my last year,—sent down, you know, and all that. Beastly fuss over a trifle, I thought, but the old man was in an awful wax. So when I came to America I determined to burn all my boats; so I took every penny I had, y’know, drew it all out. There wasn’t much left by the time I reached Colorado, but my step-mother’s an awfully good sort,—she’s always helped me out when the governor wouldn’t. She sent me a hundred, and I meant to go on to Nevada,—to a ranch out there. But there were a lot of fellows I knew in Denver, and they had it high at poker and loo every night, and I very soon found I couldn’t keep it up along with them. The mother wrote she couldn’t send another check, so I got some cash out somehow and skipped back to New York. My last dime went on the elevated to-day, hunting up you fellows. That’s the whole story,—except I’ll never go West again.”

He drew a chair towards him with his foot and put his leg on it.

“Beastly night!” he remarked, with a shudder. “I’m glad I found you. Of course I knew it was all right when I got here, but the getting here wasn’t lively,” and he stretched the other leg over the chair with a sigh of satisfaction. The shrill liveliness of his voice had quite gone as he told his story, and it was evident that he had suffered from several points in his recent experiences.

Jack looked at Noël and Noël looked at Jack. Each felt a glow of satisfaction at Musgrave’s naïve trust and confidence, Each felt an outburst of pity for the prodigal. The memory of him as he struck them on their first meeting, gay, merry-humored, debonair, made the contrast all the more vivid and pitiful. Andrew watched their faces with wearily keen eyes; but he had no need. They were quite of one mind in their welcome and hospitable intentions.

“You’ll stay here for to-night anyhow?” asked Noël.

“If you’ll let me,” Andrew said, modestly; “otherwise I’ll have to make for the nearest magistrate’s office and get put in jail. It’s too wet to sleep in the streets. But I’m afraid I’ll put you out?”

“Not a bit!” cried both together, and, “I guess you’re pretty hungry, too?” cried Jack, glowing with hospitable warmth.

“Well, I’m not starving, but I haven’t had a square meal since yesterday noon,” replied Andrew, in a burst of confidence. His face was already beginning to lose its gray look and his eyes to open and lighten. He flung back his arms, resting his head upon them, and luxuriating in the comfort of the room.

“I’m beastly untidy,” he said, apologetically, glancing at his clothes; “soap and water will do me as much good as anything—except a pipe.”

There was an eating-shop not far off, and Noël dashed to it, where he invested in a hot oyster stew. They had also tea and crackers and whiskey, to which the traveller did full justice, and under the cheering influence regained a little spirit; plucked up heart to tell them of his woes. Something of the old lively ring came back into his voice as he told how he had received his step-mother’s check in Denver; how that very afternoon he had encountered the Hon. Percy Fortescue, living in Denver, “for his family’s health,” said Andrew, with a grin; how the Hon. Percy had introduced him to the “boys,” and of the month of gay, wild living, when the check had melted like a handful of sand under the bore of Niagara. Then he told of the following weeks of pinching and skirmishing,—borrowing from this person and working for that,—the gradual disposal of his baggage, his saddle and fishing-tackle, guns and

revolvers, dressing-case and silver spurs. And finally, the last week of discouragement and despair; his hurried flight back to the East, and his penniless arrival in New York. It could hardly fail to strike his hearers that nobody was to blame for Andrew's misfortunes but Andrew's extravagant, thoughtless self, yet this truth did not influence their proper sympathy. Jack, who could not recall anything but lavish kindness on the part of his own father, was shocked to hear of one who could disown his son for a few college escapades; and Noël, with an ever-ready cynicism, heard grimly of the woman who refused money to her step-son.

In this atmosphere of interest in his trials Mr. Musgrave expanded. "I'm going to try this place next," he said, at the end of his story. "If I could get to know some decent people in it, I don't doubt I'd soon get something,—a tip on the stock-market, say, and make my pile. Just see how you fellows are settled, and you didn't have much pull."

His friends hardly thought that speculation without capital was a profitable profession. They were not slow to air their recently acquired views on the labor question, and between them delivered much sage advice, in particular as to writing home for credentials. "Not much use in that," said Andrew, sadly; "the governor's poisoned everybody against me. You see I'm bound to do what I can here,—no chance for me at home. I will look

around to-morrow," he continued, puffing at his pipe, "and see what's best to do. I don't doubt something will turn up."

His tone grew insensibly more cheerful, to the delight of his friends. It was so out of their imagination to conceive Andrew Musgrave down-hearted that it had quite worried them.

"You mustn't get down-hearted, old fellow," said Jack, reassuringly; "this is a big place, and I thought it a pretty nasty one last Christmas; but it's not half bad when you come to know it better."

"Oh, I'll keep up," said Andrew, sighing; "perhaps the mater will send me another hundred. She's always been fond of me,—liked me ever so much better than George, and she's about the only one of them that does."

"You'll always have a berth with us till you get someting to suit," put in Noël, knocking the ashes out of his pipe; and Andrew thanked them both very honestly and boyishly. It was a pleasure to gain such thanks as Andrew had to bestow,—it warmed the giver's heart.

They sat chatting until late, arranging how and where to bestow their guest. The lounge in the sitting-room was very hard, and, determined that the wanderer should have a good night's rest, Noël took it, giving Andrew his own bed. It was a long time before he fell asleep, and he twisted and tossed on the uncomfortable surface most of the night.

But when at last he slept, it was to dream distorted dreams, in which some one stood beside his pillow and called him "my son," while all the time the face of his father's portrait on the wall above his head seemed to writhe with silent diabolical laughter.

CHAPTER XII.

His lips are honey, and his words are sweet,
Oh, happy heart, such gay songs to repeat.
Our path is often sodden and o'ercast,
But all the ways are golden to his feet.

HE opened his eyes upon a clear, bright Sunday, and gave thanks for a day of rest.

After breakfast the trio held a council of war in regard to Mr. Musgrave's prospects. Andrew himself was quite frank in acknowledging these to be sombre. He knew nobody and nobody knew him; he had no credentials, and he dared not look to home for more than uncertain and temporary help. But after his night's rest he was buoyantly hopeful and confident that something would "turn up," and, meanwhile, he was assured of a welcome where he was. There was a room empty in the house, and this Noël, out of his slender income, agreed to rent for him for a couple of months. This was no small undertaking, but Andrew was so grateful, so certain to return it, that Noël ended by feeling that a favor had been conferred on him by the arrangement. Mr. Musgrave, undoubtedly, possessed the art of making the world anxious to oblige him. For temporary expenses the two

friends made him a joint loan of twenty-five dollars, thereby augmenting what had been heavy enough before, nor dreaming in their youthful generosity that no business man in the city would call them wise.

“But I’m sure to pay it back,” protested Andrew, pocketing the check. “I’m going to write home this very day,—you have some paper, haven’t you, Sartoris?—and in the mean while I’ll look about me,—lots of fellows have relatives or connections here, and I’ll soon get a lift, you’ll see.” With which assurances Andrew fell a-whistling and refilled his pipe at the big tobacco-jar.

Sunday had heretofore been spent at the Axenards, but to-day neither Jack nor Noël made a suggestion that the customary visit should be made. They were burning with loyalty to Andrew, and with sympathy for Andrew’s misfortunes. No hint touched their minds that they were doing more, far more, for their friend than he could reasonably have expected; but they dreaded telling his story to a cold heart that did not know him, and know thereby how harmless was any indiscretion that flowed from that boyish, impetuous nature.

So it happened that Philippa, who passed that entire afternoon in-doors, from a vague hope that Somebody—she did not name it more definitely even to herself—might drop in for a chat, was disappointed, and spent the evening indulging a regu-

lar attack of Sunday "blues," in which she killed and buried herself with every variety of moving and pathetic circumstance. And Marion Forbes, who had been led to much the same expectation, vibrated restlessly from piano to drawing-board all the afternoon, and went to evening service in a state of mind in which gentle religious melancholy predominated. Yet when they met, at a Literature Class on Monday evening, Philippa told Marion that she had had "such a nice quiet Sunday,—so restful," and Marion had been loud in praise of the music at St. Bartholomew's.

Meanwhile, the unconscious causes of this duplicity were much less healthily employed. Andrew had his adventures to tell; they were many, and he recited them with much naïveté. He touched but lightly upon his home-life and boyhood, and always with a manner of reserve, as if he would not expose the neglect of those to whom he owed loyalty and duty. Yet his hearers were enabled to gather a whole history from his evasions. Jack, looking back upon so opposite a childhood, grew indignant and pitiful, and Noël's too-sensitive sympathies tightened with a pang of fellowship.

"You American chaps don't realize what it means to be a younger son," said Andrew, half enviously,— "no importance and no luck. George had horses and a yacht. Mind you, I'm not blaming

George, for he's a deuced good fellow. He'd give me halves now if the governor'd let him."

"And they didn't do anything for you?" asked Jack, indignantly.

"Oh, yes," said Andrew, cheerfully: "I went to Eton and to Oxford, but after I got sent down the governor swore he wouldn't have anything to do with me. Of course I had debts, you know, and all that," continued the culprit, handsomely, "but what's a fellow to do? Every fellow has debts. What I would have done without the mother I don't know. She's always stayed by me, and she's only my step-mother too. I was nearly ten when she married the governor, and she took to me at once, nursed me through scarlet fever and all that. She's a brick."

"Good heavens, but there's a difference in women!" cried Noël, spasmodically, as if the exclamation were wrenched from him.

"Well, there is," said Andrew, with simplicity. "Some of 'em are angels—a few. But I say, how do you know?"

Noël gave a laugh and a shrug, and Jack put in,—

"He doesn't know. He won't have anything to do with 'em. Con's a misogynist."

"So's every man," said Noël, with fine cynicism, "when he's awake."

"Then men are a pretty sleepy crowd," volunteered Mr. Musgrave. "Now, I'm no saint,—you see

that,—and I'm cool-headed as most; but some women can turn me round their little finger like worsted,—and they've done it too." He laughed, with a reminiscent chuckle, and a glint in his blue eyes that lent them a new expression.

In the evening Lyndon Forbes dropped in, not altogether to Noël's pleasure. Forbes more than any man he had as yet encountered bore journalism stamped in large letters over his personality, and burnt with the fever of modern activity. He was self-confident, shrewd, and rampantly energetic, with the concentrated push and power of the New Yorker; and with all his modernity he fairly scintillated with appreciation of life. He was always playing bear-leader to some oddity, studying men and their ways with passionate interest, and collecting a mental gallery of types. In person he was wiry and slender. A face stamped with nervous energy and self-possession, eyes snapping with fire and excitement, and a feverish restlessness of gesticulation,—this was Lyndon Forbes.

Very rarely this agile enthusiasm was stimulating, but when Noël happened to be in his own dreamy world, it jarred him. This evening Forbes struck a discord with the first sentence of his greeting.

"Hullo!" he remarked, standing upon the threshold and contemplating the trio, "has your Mahatma come from Thibet to pay you a visit, Conway, or is that merely his 'aura'?"

“Come in, Forbes,” said Noël, a little coldly. “This is our friend, Andrew Musgrave.”

“Delighted to see you,” said Forbes, plunging at a chair, as Jack went on,

“I’m glad you turned up just now, old man, as Musgrave’s in rather of a hole and you might suggest a way out.”

“Do my best,” said Forbes, dashing at the tobacco. “Englishman, I see? Going to do society?” And his eye gleamed with the anticipation of half a column.

“Not exactly,” said Andrew, to whom he was evidently a new specimen of Yankee; “in fact, I can’t,” he went on, laughing with his peculiarly winning boyish laughter.

“Fire away,” said the journalist, “and if the Buddhist there will hand me a pipe, I will listen with more attention.”

Noël rose, with a sensation of helpless annoyance, and handed his guest a pipe in silence. Forbes settled himself to listen as quietly as his nature permitted, which meant that he incessantly jerked, twisted, and interrupted while Andrew told his Western experiences and laid bare his present penniless situation.

“No money, you say?” said Forbes, as he made an end.

“No,—none.”

“And no letters?”

“Not one.”

The journalist shifted to and fro with an incisive look upon each of the waiting faces. Then he puffed a huge eddy of smoke and took out his pipe.

“You go home,” he said to Andrew; “you’ve not the ghost of a chance here. Go home where you are known, and you’ll get something surely.”

“I can’t do that,” said Andrew, obstinately; “the governor’s dead set against me, and he has influenced my friends. There’s no one at home I’d be willing to go to—sponge on, I mean.”

Forbes opened his mouth to speak, and shut it again with another triangular glance.

“Of course you know your own affairs best,” he replied, knocking the bowl of his pipe on the edge of the table “but without letters not a man in New York will take you. If you had credentials now, I might suggest addresses at least. A bright fellow, well connected, stands as fair a chance in this town as in any, I guess.”

“I can try to get letters,” Andrew cried, eagerly.

“There’s your friend Merchant for one,” suggested Noël.

“True,” said Andrew, fiddling with a bit of paper on the table. He seemed to ponder for a minute, and then thrust the paper across toward Forbes.

“Will you give me the addresses anyhow? When I get credentials I may want to try them.”

“Certainly,” said Forbes, taking the paper and

feeling in his pockets. "Hullo!" he said, with a change of countenance; "now where's my pencil?"

"Here's one," cried Andrew, impatiently.

"But this is a gold one my sister gave me," explained Forbes. "Funny; I know I had it on when I left home."

He pulled out a chain with a broken link at the end.

"Maybe you dropped it here," said Jack, moving.

"I'm afraid it has been in the street," said Forbes, mournfully; and although they moved chairs about and examined the carpet, no pencil was found. Forbes was evidently much put out at the trifling loss. He wrote the addresses for Andrew and then rose to go. Noël went with him to the street.

"Have you known Musgrave long?" the journalist asked suddenly, his hand on the door-knob.

"Since last October," replied Noël, waking from a reverie. "We met in London."

Forbes looked at him with lips laid together for whistling. "Well, it's none of my affair," he continued, slowly, "but don't you let him live on you now, Conway. Some of these chaps think that New York's made for them to sit down and dine in."

"You quite mistake Andrew," said Noël; "he has no such idea."

"Of course,—I know; but you remember. He's been a swell, any one can see that, and he doesn't know how to work any more than I know how to

reach the 'seven stages of divine contemplation.' Now you see that he gets letters and starts in."

Had Lyndon Forbes known it, the force of this speech was quite neutralized by one tactless allusion. Noël was already weary of having his peculiar beliefs harped upon, and this was so wantonly dragged in that it blotted the excellent advice from his mind.

"Thank you," he replied, too weary even to protest, "but I think you're mistaken in Musgrave."

"Time will show," remarked the journalist, and took his departure.

"Rum chap," said Andrew, when he returned, and they fell into discussion upon Forbes's advice. "Rather a cad, now, isn't he?"

"No," said Noël, tolerantly, "he's no cad, but he's a peculiar fellow."

"I shouldn't call him a gentleman," responded Andrew, yawning; "so jerky, you know. Are you fellows going to bed? It's early yet. Oh, work in the morning and all that,—I forgot. I think I'll go out for a walk. I'll sleep the better if I do."

During the fortnight that succeeded this conversation Mr. Musgrave experienced the luck of the improvident. His first loan went in two hours in much necessary, and some unnecessary clothing. Comparatively little can be done toward the outfit of a gentleman with twenty-five dollars, so what Andrew could not pay for, he had charged. The prompt payment of a few dollars will purchase an

extraordinary amount of credit even in New York, if the purchaser be not too eager and use address. Jack, who assisted, regarded him with amazement and admiration.

“But what are you going to do?” he asked. “There’s the coat and trousers, and the hat at the other store, and——”

“Oh, the bills won’t come in for a month,” Andrew said, easily; “by that time something will have turned up; and you know one must have clothes.”

Jack laughed with him. He did not feel a bit of righteous indignation, but instead a sort of good-humored tolerance. Andrew was such a boy, so open and frank and generously careless; one could call up no sympathy for tailor or bootmaker at the sight of that merry face.

At the first it seemed as if Mr. Musgrave’s prediction was actually to be fulfilled. He went down one night with Conway to the *Weekly Record* office, “as a matter of curiosity,” he said, and rendering the editor an opportune service by a rapid translation that was needed, he earned a small sum thereby. The incident enlivened him; he felt that he was a bread-winner, and had an excuse for spending a week making no further effort toward self-support. It was true, as he said, that until he could furnish letters and credentials such efforts were useless, and the papers were long in coming. His friends did

what they could for him. They presented him to Mr. Axenard, who, however, quite refused to do anything for him until he had proper testimonials, and they took him to the Forbes' to dine. Noël recognized in the invitation an implied apology for Forbes's doubts on the night of his visit, and made his greeting heartier than usual. Andrew was pleased with everything, with Lyndon, of whom he seemed to think better than at first, with Mrs. Forbes, who was an elderly and moderated edition of her son, and superlatively with Marion. That young lady, in her pretty frock, her hair twisted in a red-gold coil, was the embodiment of graciousness to all three. She directed her attentions chiefly to Jack and Andrew, leaving Noël to chat undisturbed with his hostess and Philippa Axenard. She could hardly have pleased him better, although under the mask of his face he studied Philippa, quite aware, in that intuitive perception of his, that behind her reserve she was observing him. Their discourse was guarded, quite different from the night when he had spoken his naked heart to her and she had well-nigh wept for sympathy. To-night she seemed more than usually cold, Noël was more than usually impenetrable, yet they were oddly well satisfied with each other.

“That girl is so restful,” he thought, examining the delicate oval of her face, “she is so absolute a lady.”

“A curious morbid man,” she thought, watching the smile flame up into his lips and eyes and go out, leaving his face expressionless. “Yet how much he has seen, and how well he has seen it!” Then their eyes would meet and pause, baffling each other, yet so thoroughly in the spirit of friendship that neither felt a hint of embarrassment.

The young Englishman made a very favorable impression. He was all deference, and blunt honesty, and admiration. He talked and laughed with charming ease and simplicity, made instant friends with all, and joined with interest in the search for a diamond clasp which Miss Axenard dropped as she was leaving. He got under tables and chairs, and held a candle to the floor with the most untiring assiduity.

Marion declared him “almost as nice as Mr. Sartoris,” and he was loud in her praise as they walked home.

“Are all New York girls like that?” in a tone of such anticipative curiosity that his friends laughed.

“Not as nice,” said Jack.

“We’re not the right sort to ask,” Noël replied; “but I don’t believe they’re all as pretty. Miss Forbes is a designer, you know. She pays for the little fellow’s schooling and dresses herself on what she makes.”

“Fancy!” exclaimed Andrew, “a girl like that! Now at home she’d have a season and make a match, I don’t doubt. Why, if she had a clever mother,

she might hook an earl even,—she's quite good looking enough."

It was on the following evening that Andrew, coming into the room, asked Noël for a loan of five dollars. Noël had come in late and tired. He had been working hard, and the dinner at the Forbes' was his first break for some time. Jack had subsided into a book, but his lay unopened on his knee.

"Five dollars?" he answered to Andrew's question. "Oh, yes, of course, Musgrave. Want it now? It's in my room on the bureau."

"To-morrow will do," said Andrew; "but I do want a sheet of letter-paper, old fellow."

Jack looked up. "There's some in the desk. What are you going to do, Andy?"

"I'm going to write home a masterpiece of pathos," said Andrew, tugging at the desk-lid. "Mother didn't take any notice of my last. This time it will be a marvel of entreaty and despair. She ought to send me something—it's two months since her last check." He opened the desk and, burrowing in its contents, extracted writing-paper and envelopes. In doing so a mass of material scattered and fell, bills, letters, and photographs, at Andrew's feet. He picked them all up, and was in the act of stuffing them back again when one of the photographs caught his eye. He laid down the rest deliberately and took it to the table, where he examined it beneath the light,

'Twas an old-fashioned photograph of a woman holding a little child, with the name "Adele B. Conway" written slantwise across the card-board. "Who is this?" he asked, slowly.

Noël, who was reading, lifted his head and glanced at the photograph Andrew held toward him. His face hardened all over. "That is my mother," he answered, and went on reading.

Andrew bent forward and looked at him, and then back again at the photograph. There was an odd surprise in his eye.

"Dead, of course?" he remarked, after a pause.

"No,—alive."

"Divorced perhaps?"

"No."

"Oh, married again?" hazarded Andrew.

"Exactly," said Noël, turning a leaf. "She is now, I believe, Lady LeBreton, of Surrey."

Andrew looked once more at the photograph, at Noël elaborately unconscious, at Jack deep in his book and heedless of the scene. Then he put the picture back, whistling softly to himself, got paper, pens, and ink, and sat down to write, his eyes glittering. His letter was long and seemed to cause him some meditation to compose. Once or twice he looked up suddenly with suspicion and startled side-glances, but he did not speak until the last scratch-scratch of his pen as it wrote the address.

“Is it finished?” asked Jack, looking up and yawning.

“It is finished,” replied Andrew, and he laughed, a sudden, hearty peal. “It’s a masterpiece, Jack, a masterpiece, and it means fifty pounds at the very least.”

This is what Andrew wrote :

“MY DEAREST MOTHER,—When you wrote with your last check that you would never send me another, you did not, I am sure, realize what a very little is one hundred dollars in this expensive country. The railroad journey to New York took all of it, as I wrote you, and I landed here without a dime. I am most awfully sorry to have to ask you again, but one must live, and while I hope and expect soon to get a start here, I must have something meanwhile. You know it’s of no use applying to the governor ; he never cared a rap for me from the time I was a little motherless child ; no one ever cared about me but you, who have been all and more to me than my own mother, so you are now my only help. I told you about my arrival here and the fellows that took me in, but I did not tell you what I now know, namely, that one of them is your son,—Noël Conway ; and a very queer fish he is too, although a pretty decent fellow for all his outlandish ideas. He hardly does you credit, mamma dear. Unfortunately, there’s no doubt at

all about who he is, for he owns a photograph of you with your signature across it, and between the child on your lap and the grown man there is a very damning appearance of likeness.

“I don't quite know what the governor would say to this young man, and of course so long as you stick by me I shall tell no tales. But you must remember that I am still a LeBreton, although I do not use the name, and the family honor rests in my hands as fully as in George's. In fact, I am not sure that it is not my bounden duty, considering the circumstances, to write Sir Robert what I know; but after all, as long as you are kind as heretofore, my love to you outweighs the duty to a father who shows himself so little anxious about my welfare. How it is consistent with his principles to leave me without funds in this beastly country I cannot understand. I do not wish to be unpleasant over this business, dear mamma, but you know it costs to live. I hope you are well, and that George's baby is as healthy as of course it ought to be to keep me out of LeBreton Park.

“Always your affectionate

“ANDREW.

“Nurse Musgrave will hand you this letter as usual.

“A.”

A fortnight later a letter with an English stamp lay on the table. Andrew picked it up, the queerest look of mischief snapping in his blue eyes.

“You see,” he cried, gayly, “my eloquence bears fruit! Mamma is melted at last! I wonder how much is inside?”

“Humph! Perhaps there’s nothing,” said Jack.

“Oh, no fear of that,” Andrew declared, confidently. He tore the letter open and drew out a slip of paper, with which he pirouetted about the room. It was a Bank of England note for fifty pounds.

“I knew she could not resist that last pathetic stroke!” he cried, waving his prize. “I think I shall have to go into literature.”

CHAPTER XIII.

I wander with thee, harmless and thy friend :
Thou see'st mine eyes, their gaze is hard to mend ;
I see thine eyes, and lo ! thy secret sin
Is in my hand, and in my hand thine end !

As the spring grew, the intimacy between Roderick Merchant and Clement Frey became more close and remarkable. It was noticed abroad, spoken of and commented on ; not so much Frey's liking for the society of the unintellectual and coarse-fibred Englishman, as the Englishman's preference for the very uninspired and barren company of the author. What the one, who had seen the world through a lens of his own magnifying, had plunged and waded in the floods of life deeper, and with more unprincipled zest than most, could find in the dainty littleness, the spasmodic energy of the man-of-letters, was a question that puzzled many an acquaintance.

Merchant, it was allowed, had gone the pace. He had a glib familiarity with race-track methods, a damning comprehension of all games of chance, the cold eye and boisterous distrust of manner that stamp a certain type of adventurer. Not that he was less well received in the society for which his

letters sponsored him, because of these truths. Men spoke of him with a nod and wink, as one to whom, at least, no American vice was new, yet no man would have been able to back these insinuations with cold fact.

His manner was suaver than that of the average Briton, in conversation his tongue raced neck-and-neck with the freest, his dress and bearing in club- or ball-room were quite "tolerable and not to be endured;" and to women he showed deference and a plenitude of compliment. No stranger with the eye of New York on him seeking for offence could have borne himself more unexceptionably. Yet, marking his broad pale face above the shining oval of his shirt, the black, blank eyes, the mouth at whose corners nervous wrinkles had seamed themselves, the dead black-and-whiteness of the man's figure—marking these no woman had ever failed to ask what he was, and that with a secret quiver of the soul. Men were much less sensitive.

His face and Frey's, in mere words of description so alike, furnished a significant contrast. They were always together, the blank, sinister adventurer, the pasty, featureless author; the eyes that saw nothing save a horror of their own, the eyes that saw everything, and above, and below, and behind everything. The broad paleness of Merchant's countenance, marked by a jet-black lock on the forehead, went down Broadway and up Fifth

Avenue in continual company with the healthy drab of Frey's, whose mouse-colored hair and lack of beard gave his face a curious colorless quality, while his friend resembled a pen-and-ink drawing. They went to club, theatre, and opera together,—in ball-rooms stood side by side, smiling,—a critical pair, and whispering a word into each other's ear. Nor was this intimacy apparent only in public places or before an audience. It was often told how a chance visitor on either would find the two together, for the most part silent, yet evidently gaining solace from mutual presence. The thing became a matter-of-course to their segment of the social circle, and no one invited Merchant without Frey, and seldom Frey without Merchant.

Philippa saw the whole, and marvelled privately. It was like and yet unlike Clement Frey. He rarely took so much interest in a person, and yet how often before had she seen him on the trail of a plot, like a hound following the doublings and windings; and, if this indeed was his intention, there was little escape for the prey. When she had recoiled with distaste from the first story of his suspicion, she had but expressed a momentary feeling that had been replaced by one of unwilling interest. She was conscious of a half-excitement, as one who watched the game from a distance, yet understood its meaning. When the intimacy between the two was commented on in her presence, she would feel

a thrill "I could an' if I would——" and yet forebore. Yet, withal, Frey did not gain by it in her estimation. If it was a game, if the friendship was false and the implied liking a snare, how treacherous a part he played in the drama! She almost fancied it argued a callous brutality in his nature—although a certain phase of the artistic sense readily accounted for the whole. What was man or woman to Clement Frey in comparison with his need in the cause of literature? She never met him that she did not long to ask, "Have you found?" and yet by tacit consent they avoided the subject. The Axenards did not fancy Merchant, and Merchant now had footing in more golden mansions than the Axenards. In this manner Frey likewise saw less of them, and Mrs. Axenard was quick to note that when he did come it was to see her daughter. Being a wise woman she said nothing, and Philippa was prevented by instinctive feeling from confiding the story to her.

One evening, a few days after dining at the Forbes's, Philippa made ready to go to her aunt's box at the opera. Mrs. Gregory Axenard was always lamenting her handsome niece's indifference to society as society, the quiet of her life, her distaste for the blare of trumpets going on around her. She was continually urged by her aunt to do this or that; and Mrs. Axenard being herself what Clement Frey called a "twenty-horse-power

woman," compounded of nerves and energy, was contemptuous of Philippa's frequent refusal. Nevertheless, Philippa did not suffer in comparison, because her life flowed in a gentler current on this special evening. She was feeling and looking remarkably well, the clear yellow of her frock admirably suited her pale skin and red-brown hair. The smooth oval of her face, serene and tender, formed a startling contrast to the faces all about her, —faces young and old, haggard and bold, beautiful and animal, or tense, and lined and drawn. There was a tint of color in Philippa's cheek, her movements were deliberate and graceful. Lookers-on said that Miss Axenard was "stately," and wondered if she really was going to marry the brilliant young author just entering the box behind her.

Philippa had been surveying the house with the feeling that always came to her in fashionable crowds; that it was a brilliant, impossible scene, from which her life was mercifully removed as far as from that other brilliant and impossible scene represented on the stage. It was a Venusberg of many goddesses and Tannhaeusers. Her aunt sat well forward in the box sweeping the house with her glass. She found Wagner heavy, and had invited Philippa out of a dim idea of compensation to the master. If Wagner did not please her, it was well he should please somebody in the party. The curtain fell on the first act, and Philippa leaned

forward to clap her loudest, when a voice said in her ear :

“How do you do? How can you clap such stuff?”

She turned, and saw Mr. Merchant bending over her with a challenging smile.

“You evidently wish to draw me into argument,” she replied smilingly, offering him her hand.

“On the contrary, I wanted to reprove you,” he answered; “to like German opera is such a mistake.”

“I did not know you were so great a musician,” said Philippa, leaning back in her chair; “I fancied you were only a——”

“A what?”

“A moralist.” She spoke the word slowly, almost reflectively. Merchant started a little, and drew his brows together.

“You must have been hearing terrible things of me,” he said, lightly. “I had rather almost that you thought I liked German opera.”

“If you do not, why do you come?” said Philippa, serenely. Merchant shrugged his shoulders, and made a little well-bred gesture toward the parterre.

“I came to see the ladies, not of the opera but of the audience,” he said; “I wanted to be dazzled, and I am.”

“Then Miss Axenard’s conversation must be brighter than the electric lights,” said Clement Frey, shaking hands with Philippa. “Why do they keep the place so dark do you suppose? Something must be the matter with the dynamos.”

Merchant rose, yielding him the place, and going forward began to talk to Mrs. Axenard. Clement Frey sat down beside Philippa and surveyed her with approval.

“And how are you?” he said; “I haven’t seen you—I mean I haven’t heard you—for a month of Sundays.”

Philippa put her fan before her lips and spoke behind it, “Andrew Musgrave is in New York,” she said, very low, yet laying no stress of accent on the words. “He is staying with two friends of his; I met him last week.”

Clement Frey laid his arm lazily on the rail of the box, and twisted his position a little nearer. To see his face one would have said that he was talking about the weather.

“Did you tell him?” he asked, lowering his voice, and jerking his head in the direction of Merchant’s back.

“No,” said Philippa, “I wanted to speak to you first.”

“You are the only sensible woman I ever met!” breathed Frey, fervently.

“And you are taking to compliments!” she cried,

laughing, and speaking quite loud again, for Merchant had half turned his head in their direction.

“Don’t mention it, will you?” Frey said, to the outside world indicating a bediamonded dowager in an opposite box. “It might spoil everything. Who’s he with?”

“Jack Sartoris and his friend,” and Philippa colored a little at the remembrance of one of Mr. Frey’s remarks. But he had quite forgotten it.

“Then he’s as safe as the Bastille. We’re not much further, Miss Axenard. No proofs, but they’re coming.” He was settling his boutonniere, and speaking with his head down; “and, if I’m not mistaken, it’s a bigger thing than we thought.”

“Oh, but Mr. Frey, it is so treacherous!” said Philippa; “is it not Mr. Merchant?” she continued leaning forward, as her aunt looked toward them.

“Isn’t what treacherous?” asked Merchant, with his pale smile.

“Taking advantage of a silly old man, and leading him on,” said Philippa, smiling composedly.

“I’ve been telling Miss Axenard about old Smith at the club,” chimed in Frey, at which Merchant laughed, and the anecdote had to be rehearsed for Mrs. Axenard’s benefit. The curtain went up in the middle of it, however, for which Frey rendered thanks.

“You’re an angel!” he whispered, enthusiastically, as she settled back to listen. Merchant heard

the words, and looked at his friend with an amused, significant smile.

“Hush!” said Philippa, cautiously, as soon as his eyes once more turned away; “you’re very clever, but you’re not quite daring enough, Mr. Frey!”

That he should have chosen her as the confidante of such a secret was odd enough; that she should really have enjoyed the position was almost as curious. According to all standards, moral and social, she should have been horrified, she should never have lent herself to the position of amateur detective for an instant. But Philippa owned a slice of feminine curiosity, and, although it did not often manifest itself, a feminine love of excitement. She could not feel any pity for Merchant, if indeed he was in danger; his fate was utterly indifferent to her as his presence was repugnant, for she both distrusted and disliked him. At first, and at bottom always she felt that Frey’s “story” was being pursued at some loss of personal dignity,—yet this sentiment often paled beside her interest in the chase. Her pulse beat a little faster as she looked at him and at Merchant, and she felt as one who watches a street fight from the safe side of the window-pane. The feeling was not commendable, perhaps, but Philippa was no saint; nor was she, for all her calm, a negative character. Yet, as she sat there, weaving the music with her thoughts, she felt it her duty to enter a form of protest. Her

opportunity came at the end of the second act, when Frey asked her to walk with him in the lobby. Once out of hearing of Merchant, his thanks grew voluble.

“Mr. Frey,” said Philippa, stemming them, “do you think all this is exactly fair? Everybody is talking of your intimacy with this man; you seem inseparable, yet in truth you are simply entrapping him!”

“But the story,” answered Frey, surprised; “how could I do otherwise? It’s only in that form of intercourse that I could discover anything!”

“It’s not my place to reprove you,” said she, puzzled, “but— isn’t it—is it exactly honorable, I mean—to be so friendly?”

“There isn’t a question of friendship between us,” answered Frey, a little stiffly; “I am clinging to the fellow for dear life, that’s all. Oh, no, don’t waste pity on Merchant! What I have found out during this last month hasn’t added to my respect for him, even if it hasn’t given me proofs that he is what I suspect. I am tracking him like a dog, and I don’t say it to anyone else—possibly I’m a fool to say it to you.”

“Please don’t be angry,” she cried, brightly, “I am really very much interested. I only wanted to be quite sure on your account.”

Frey smiled on her with renewed good-humor. “I can’t quarrel with *you*,” he said, significantly.

“There’s not another woman in New York I could have told it to. But I assure you it’s all right. He’s won money, and he’s borrowed it. When a man begins to borrow you can have him, if you’re sharp enough.”

They were talking in subdued, but not unnaturally lowered, voices, and Philippa suddenly realized it with a shock, as she glanced at the throng in the corridor.

“I’m afraid we’ve been very imprudent!” she said, whispering. “There are so many people. I quite forgot that we might be overheard.”

“Not a chance of it,” said Frey, composedly; “a crowd is the safest place in the world to talk in. Have you caught any one else’s conversation? Of course not. Anybody would have difficulty in separating our voices from the general hum, even if they cared to, which they don’t, of course.”

“Have you discovered anything?” she pursued, glancing about her and not wholly reassured.

“Nothing definite. Gordon has disappeared. Quite vanished since he landed at Southampton,—that’s curious, like the Princess in the fairy-book, you know. And he has quarrelled with Musgrave; he won’t tell me why.”

“Is that——?”

“Yes.” Frey could never let any one else state his reasons. “I don’t want them to meet till I’m ready. If he is with that Buddhist youth you

affect, he is not any more likely to run across Merchant, although they are in the same city, than if he had remained in Colorado."

"They may meet in the street."

"Merchant will cut him if they do."

"And how long," said Philippa, slowly, "is this going on?"

"Till I'm quite ready to have it stop," replied the author, bowing to an acquaintance. "When my evidence is all collected, and my proofs are complete (you see the 'if' is changed to a 'when'), I shall spring the mine and arrange the *dénouement*, like Monte Cristo, artistically."

"But will that be soon?" she persisted, as they turned toward the box again.

"It depends. I'm in no hurry. A hurried climax is bad art, and then the fun's over so soon."

"You remember that Monte Cristo acknowledged his mistake in the end?"

"Yes, but he was a Frenchman," and Clement Frey smiled, secure in the unassailable inaptitude of his repartee.

She looked at him with mixed feelings. To him the thing was "fun;" a chase to be prolonged and relished. To the figure whose elbow touched his what was it? She did not like to think.

"Mother, I don't think I admire the literary character," she declared that night, as she brushed her

hair before the mirror, "at least, not as much as some others."

"What, for instance?" her mother inquired, from the next room.

"Well, the speculative and philosophical," she said, dreamily. Her dark hair fell softly about her, as she stared in the glass. "To-morrow is Sunday," she thought, "I wonder if he will come to-morrow?"

CHAPTER XIV.

In the dark shrine the bronze God sits, arrayed
In champak garlands ; by his feet are laid
Caskets of sandal, and for offerings
Turquoise and jasper, emerald and jade.

It was hard to realize that the eventful winter was really over. A few weeks of rain and wind, then a sudden powdering of yellow on the trees in Central Park, fresh odors in the air, new potency in the radiant yellow sunbeams. And before the sweetness of that time had fairly worn into the soul, behold, it was summer in the city, the trees were clothed and vivid, there were open cars, a blaze of sun, and a sudden irruption of storm-doors on Fifth Avenue like an epidemic.

The Axenards went out of town as the first country violets came in ; but the Forbes stayed on Lyndon's account until his annual holiday in August. Mr. Merchant, accompanied by the ever-faithful Frey, departed for various watering-places, and our trio were left to pursue the even tenor of their way through blank days and uncomfortable nights. It was now they felt most strongly the change in their condition. Up to this time they had not experienced any material hardship ; novelty and

the tide of business kept them from making contrasts, but now, when the pavements were baked, and the air brought no refreshment, they felt poor indeed. Work was not less exacting than if it had been December. Jack found that sales were made and recorded without reference to the thermometer, and Noël that things would happen that expected to be noticed in the paper.

In June, while the Axenards were in Long Island, the Sundays spent with them sweetened the torrid weeks. Jack sat on the piazza with Mrs. Axenard, never weary of dwelling with her on dear past days, his parents, his boyhood, the friendships and happenings of vanished times. Under the spread arms of cool oaks and beeches Noël and Philippa wandered and chatted, alternating the parts of teacher and pupil. When the young man held the superior place the talk often grew deep, "of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate," of occultism, and adeptship, and of the spirit world. That neither arrived at a conclusion on these topics was no dampener to their ardor in pursuing them. But when Philippa taught and Noël listened, having a need for such teaching, more simple and homely questions were discussed,—the tendernesses of life.

Noël, for all his metaphysics, was an humble boy; he knew his faults, he understood what those meant who called him "impossible." The load of his own egotism lay heavy on him and bore him

down to despondency. "You see I'm so confoundedly morbid and selfish," he told her once. "I cannot take the first step toward the philosophical life without throwing off this deadly burden of myself. It stands in my way,—it meets me at every corner."

"You will throw it off some day in one great sacrifice," she replied, hesitating a little, "and then—I hope it will not be wholly for philosophy."

It was curious that it never entered his head to fall in love with her. Their acquaintance had been from the first without the constraint of surprise; plain and open, like the good-fellowship of man with man, untinged by romance or the slightest mutual deception. Philippa valued this man's confidence, and she was cleverly tactful in securing it. She was his very good comrade, quick, sympathetic, easy to confide in. He did not like girls, yet could not have told you the difference between "girls" and Philippa, and in this lay his inconsistency. Say that he was shy, and that she never frightened him; that she never appropriated him, or called upon him for a man's services to a woman, or put any artificiality in their relations, and that he would never have recognized the person who bore her name to Clement Frey,—these are some of the reasons why their conversations were never tinged with self-distrust.

At the end of June the Axenards removed to Mount

Desert and the last solace of the left-behind was taken. They were thrown wholly upon the Forbes household for consolation, and scarcely a free evening came that did not find them there. The little apartment was always cool, and fragrant, and softly lighted. There were couches of wicker for the weary, and tall tumblers of lemonade with ice tinkling against the sides, and Lyndon with his energy unabated by any heat, and Marion in her white gown moving softly in and out, the lamplight on her burnished coils of hair. Once, as Jack was dwelling on her bent head with an intensity of gaze he hardly realized, she caught his eye and blushed. Upon which Andrew made a sudden impatient movement, and shot Jack a quick needle-like glance from his candid eyes.

Mr. Musgrave, be it said to his credit, was daunted by no heat and soured by no dust and drought. He still carried on his search for work; that is, he departed in the early morning and returned at night with the same good-humored smile and the same history of failure. His credentials, which were full and most satisfactory (so he told his friends), had been despatched from the other side, but had unhappily been lost in the mail, and he never received them. Any one else, his comrades told each other admiringly, would be disheartened or cast down by such reverses, but Andrew was never out of temper, was never depressed, and was never discouraged.

Meanwhile, he subsisted on money sent him at irregular intervals from home ; his mother was very generous, and her supplies, although uncertain, were more frequent than many would have supposed. When a longer interval than usual passed between remittances he would borrow a dollar or so, or return with a bill earned in some hap-hazard fashion that he never seemed able to repeat. His debts toward his friends had mounted by this time to a considerable sum, and Andrew often spoke of it regretfully, apologetically even. "It's beastly to borrow of you fellows ; I hate to do it, and wouldn't if I wasn't sure to pay it back the moment I get anything to do. But I feel badly about it,—I do really. You've done quite enough,—taking me in and all that,—and I'm going to try So-and-so to-morrow, he said he might hear of something."

When to-morrow came he would set forth, to return at dark the inevitable failure, and the almost as inevitable request for a small loan. Had he been any other human being but just Andrew Musgrave, happy-go-lucky and good-humored, his friends would certainly have resented this state of affairs. But he was so charming, so amiable, his laugh so cheery, his simplicity so childlike and winning, that they spoke of his imprudence with a laugh, of his carelessness with affection, and felt his mere presence a compensation for whatever he might choose to borrow or they to lend. Who could be

angry with Andrew? If you called him scapegrace, it was with tenderness for his recklessness, with compassionate fondness for his very faults. He was generous and heedless (they said), time would cure these faults, and meanwhile he was so good a comrade, so unselfish in the amenities of life!

“I must have brought you bad luck, fellows!” he would exclaim, troubled over their affairs as over his own; “I never knew such men for losing things. Now Jack’s lost those silver-mounted pistols of his father’s. I can’t find them for him anywhere!”

Jack’s carelessness might have been accounted for by the fact that he was exceedingly in love. Being a healthy youth as well as a busy one, he did not betray his state of mind by any of Rosalind’s tokens, but went about his affairs as usual, and his comrades were unsuspecting. But poor Jack regretted his lost fortune as he had never yet regretted it, was much cast-down, and only comforted by a rise in his salary with which his diligence was rewarded. It was not enough, but still it heartened him wonderfully, and at once impelled his steps toward Marion, to tell her the good news.

Marion was sympathetic to a most satisfying degree, and Jack’s heart was filled with delight at her reception of him and her genuine interest in his news. He had suspected that Andrew stood a little in his light, but on that subject Marion was entirely non-committal. She would not give an opinion of

Mr. Musgrave. Her brother, however, having no such scruples, was voluble on the subject and strong in disapproval.

“Musgrave has just been here,” he remarked, jerking his chair about. “Has he found anything to do yet?”

“Not yet. His letters from home were lost in the mails, and so far have not turned up: such a pity!”

“Well, how does he live?” said Forbes, sharply. “Surely you don’t——”

“Oh, no!” Jack interrupted him eagerly; “his mother’s very generous to him. He gets checks from home fairly regularly.”

“He seems very light-hearted about himself,” commented Marion. She was bending over her drawing-board, putting the final touches to a delicate design.

“I confess that I don’t quite understand him,” Lyndon said, bluntly enough. “He’s too light-hearted entirely. He will have to get something to do, you know, even if it is breaking paving-stone at the head of a gang.”

“There’s no harm in Andrew,” and Jack grew warm in his friend’s defence.

“I grant you that he’s careless and imprudent, but one must remember how he was brought up. This sort of trouble is entirely new to him.”

“It’s new to you and Conway,” replied Forbes,

and his sister nodded at him in approval, "yet you have turned to work all right."

"But Andrew's different,—in many ways he is nothing but a boy. Then he's so generous,—he can't bear to say no, and of course that costs."

The brother and sister kept silence. Marion because she admired Jack for his championship, Lyndon because he feared to offend. There was nothing for it but to change the subject, as even Forbes saw the tactlessness of a further protest.

One rainy Saturday afternoon in late July, Noël, who had a free hour or two until evening, saw by the paper that the Rev. Sri Gautama, of Benares, was to lecture on the Brotherhood in Ceylon. He went at once. The very names buzzed in his head, the damp pavements—it had been raining—seemed to change to baked brown earth, the clang of the cable-car into the conch-shell of the temple, and in the sunshine walked the row of yellow-clad, bare-shouldered priests, two by two, into the dark, cool shrine beyond. The picture stood out vivid and clear; he could almost smell the Champak blossoms; the peace of the whole thing seemed to suffuse him, and his eyes grew dreamy and abstract. The longing for it, that life he yearned to lead, tugged at his heart as he walked onward with bent head. So he went in to hear the lecture, and the mild-eyed Pundit had at least one attentive listener.

The lecture proved most interesting. The Pun-

dit and his descriptions revolved pleasantly in Noël's mind as he came out into the street. It was still quite light, and clearing into a multi-colored sunset, as he reached home, mounted the stairs, and opened the door of his room. Then he stood for a second on the threshold. The window was open, the room full of golden, western light. Bending over an open bureau-drawer stood Andrew Musgrave, so intent on his occupation that he had not heard the mounting steps nor the opening of the door. He was ferreting in the drawer much in the manner of a fox-terrier at a hole, tossing the contents about in a feverish search. The sight was startling.

“Why, Andy!” Noël cried, when his amazement gave him voice. Andrew turned, violently upsetting a photograph that fell to the ground with a clatter.

“Oh, is that you?” he said, smiling and breathing hard. “I've been hunting for a postage-stamp. Where do you keep them?”

CHAPTER XV.

The yellow-robed, bronze-shouldered priests, whose fine
Dark faces gleam, move onward to the shrine,
 With chelas following, contemplative, calm.
What do I in this place when that is mine?

WHILE Clement Frey was paddling Miss Axenard over the turquoise-blue waters and in the spicy breezes of Frenchman's Bay, the city was vibrating from murky hot to dusty hotter. The changes in the temperature were sometimes refreshing, but they were not stimulating. Our trio felt them keenly, grew irritable, and dragged: and even Andrew's spirits showed a sign of flagging, he grumbled unreservedly at the climate, and at his fate. Perhaps he noticed the slight, the very slight, the delicately subtle shade that seemed to dim the confidence and good-fellowship of his companions.

Noël had been both puzzled and troubled at the incident just described. The glib lie with which Musgrave met his unspoken accusation did not deceive him for an instant, yet he would have been glad to let it do so. The very fluency was worse, to his thinking, than the mere lie. If Andrew wanted anything, why not ask for it? Surely his comrades did not merit any double-dealing on his

part. Noël was forced to go back into moral analysis for an explanation. He tried to put two and two together, and sum a lack of moral courage in his friend's past, which was constitutional weakness. Andrew was much of a child yet in many ways (this Noël knew), perhaps like a child when startled he turned involuntarily to falsehood.

Whatever may have been the explanation, Noël had not been human to let it pass without its affecting his relation with the Englishman. He was no less loyal to him and hardly less fond, but there was a darkening of that open trust between them. He found himself weighing and measuring Andrew's behavior in a more critical spirit, and at bottom awoke some dormant instinct of suspicion. But of this he was ashamed, and looked upon it as a mental fault of his own rather than as the effect of a cause. Jack, on his private part, had been quick to find that Andrew was frequent in his visits to the Forbes's; and although not jealous by nature began to think of him as a rival, and to treat him with perfect good-nature, yet guardedly.

In brief and plain, a very great change had taken place in the relations of the three since Andrew's arrival in New York. At that time their trust in him had been boundless, their confidence absolute. They had rejoiced in his company, and for the privilege were willing to give even to the half of their kingdom. They had taken him in unquestioning, treated

him without reserve, and given him share and share alike of their good or evil fortune. Now in August there came a difference, yet none could have told exactly what caused, or even what constituted it.

Andrew was just the same, just as amiable, careless, and cheerful; the fact that apparently they had changed and not he grieved his friends in their loyalty.

Therefore, although they well knew they should miss him, they were secretly relieved when he one day announced that he was going to leave them.

“I shall go to a place I know,” was all he said, when questioned as to his plans. “I don’t know how you fellows stand this heat. I can’t. Why don’t you come along?”

“Can’t just now,” said Noël, regretfully.

“I couldn’t leave the office with things where they are if it was twice as hot. We’ve got to stand it, old boy; but there’s no reason why you should.”

“Well, a check came from the mater to-day,” went on Andrew, smiling with pleasure; “it’s little enough, but more than last time. If I stay on here I’ll be knocked up by the autumn, when I want to start work.” Andrew always spoke of work as though it was settled and awaiting him. His confidence in the future was unshaken by the truth that he stood no better chance of a livelihood now than he had done six months ago. “I shall pack up, and get me gone to cooler climes,” he said;

“and I only wish you two could come with me. By the way, I picked up this to-day,—thought I’d see if Miss Forbes would accept it. It’s a trifle, but isn’t it pretty?”

He drew from his pocket a little hand-mirror set in a twisted frame of antique silver of a very graceful shape and pattern. Andrew admired his own yellow curls in it with naive vanity before handing it to Jack. That young gentleman, although wishing to be pleasant, was not proof against dislike of the arrangement, and was therefore tepid in his comments. Noël, however, admired the toy.

“Very pretty,” he remarked, handing it back to its owner.

Andrew stretched out his hand to take it, and somehow between them it slipped, and broke into splinters of glass on the floor. Noël shuddered with a sudden backward movement.

“A bad omen,” he whispered.

“Con, you’re too ridiculous!” cried Jack.

Noël looked from one to the other, then he stooped and picked up the silver frame. His face had visibly paled and his lip twitched; some stray emotion shook him. “I wonder——” he began, and then broke off.

“Which of you dropped the thing?” asked Jack, lightly; “that’s the one to get the bad luck.”

“It fell exactly between us,” Andrew made answer. “But, of course, I don’t believe in it.”

“I do,” said Noël, throwing out his hand. “You wait and see what will happen.”

“You believe that bad luck will come of it?”

“Certainly!”

“I take the chances,” said Andrew, confidently, pocketing the mirror. “Your superstitions are such a queer streak in you, Con. You don’t strike anybody as a superstitious man.”

“Nor does he strike the fellows at the office as a nervous chap,” put in Jack, quietly. “Yet he is—aren’t you?—awfully nervous.”

Noël nodded; he had not yet entirely regained composure, and his face was still cloudy.

“I challenge bad luck!” cried Andrew, stretching his limbs. “Look at me; I’m not nervous. The world is mine oyster, only I haven’t got an oyster-knife. Pooh! I don’t believe in signs, and all that.”

“The luck will come,” said Noël, half to himself, “and probably when we are weakest to stand it. I’ve had a presentiment lately, and Musgrave’s in it, too. Andy, I wonder what you were in a former cycle? You’re such an animal.”

“Thank you. How refreshingly frank! But if you’re going into transmigration of souls, I had better get out. Oh, Con, Con, what a fellow you are! I wish I had you at home. You would be such a nut to crack for mother and George.”

He went out, laughing, to make arrangements for his journey. At the last minute, the next day,

he found himself short of funds ; borrowed twenty dollars from Jack with many protestations and declarations, thanked them both warmly with much incoherence of language, and departed, leaving a void not easily filled. Jack, whose every spare moment was spent with Marion, did not feel it so much, but Noël did. He fell into one of his old moods,—old because the active material life of the last months had necessarily driven him out of himself. But now he became once more silent and dreamy, in a humor of blackness and meditation.

He went about his work silent ; his eyes were turned in upon himself, his spirit seemed far from the material world. At home he smoked incessantly and was speechless, his face grew grim and mask-like in its dark serenity. When he talked it was on topics deep and inscrutable, the occult world seemed to flit by his very elbow. Once before, when he had fallen upon such a mood, he had been sharply shaken back to life by Lyndon Forbes, who planted himself on the hearth-rug and contemplated the dreamer with so passionate an expression of interest and artistic delight that Noël had seen the clouds part under his feet, and had clapped earth very suddenly. But now Lyndon was afar, and Jack unobservant, there was none to heed his mental debauch, or to disturb it.

He fell, poor boy, to dreaming about his mother, to long for her with an intensity of lonely desire, to

long for the scenes of his childhood, the country of his birth. The city jarred on him ; he set himself to periods of studied contemplation ; for hours he sat immovable, his face like stone. To free his spirit, to give his soul wing among the upper regions, to reject and cast aside the material fetters of his life, these were his only desires. One night, when the leaven of the East seemed to work in him most strongly, he took a train, and getting out at a chance country station, wandered aimlessly in the fields. The night was blue, crowded with stars. Far behind shone the railroad-lights ; in front were the mere fields : there was a sense of infinite possibility, a glorious unrest. Noël set forth with a stride and a swing ; the dry stubble crisped and crackled under his feet. He made for a shadowy mass that widened into a grove of trees, and flung himself full length under their boundary of branches. Oh, the difference from the city,—the sweetness of the night ! Why make money,—why work ? A gypsy life among the hills, books and meditation by day, the expanded scroll of heaven by night, why not these ? “I should soon be adept,” he thought, “if I dwelt on such skies as these.”

The fancy pleased him,—in his present mood any pure fancy led him,—and throwing back his head he studied the stars. Not an air stirred the leaves, the fields lay before him shimmering like a sea,—

a pale August moon rose over the trees looking like a nebula brighter than the rest. To his nostrils came the faint perfume of summer herbs, night-flowering blossoms, and his mind was filled with visions as a jar with wine.

Sleep fell upon the dreamer like a garment laid lovingly over the shoulders, his head fell back on a cushion of soft grass. The night waxed and waned, the dawn crept up and put out the innumerable eyes overhead, the dawn-breeze played about him.

He awoke at sunrise, stiff and dew-drenched, but with a new peace. "I have been in Nirvana," he thought, "if it was only in sleep!" And he greeted Jack as one come back into the world.

CHAPTER XVI.

The pilgrim rests, where the sun rays aslant
Fall on led camel and war elephant,
And to his weary cheek there comes a breeze
Blown 'thwart the Sultan's gardens odorant.

It must not be supposed that Philippa forgot her friends in town. She corresponded regularly with Marion, and there was almost always a postscript or an added word. "Do you see anything of Mr. Sartoris?" or, "What are Jack Sartoris and Mr. Conway doing?"

"Mr. Conway comes here very seldom," Marion wrote, "and when he does come he sits in the corner, smoking, and never says a word to anybody. He does not like me, and rarely condescends to honor me by his conversation. Mr. Sartoris comes here very often to see Lyndon," a phrase which did not delude Philippa a whit.

"Noël Conway sent his remembrances to you," Marion wrote in a later letter. "He is such an uncanny creature. I feel that if I made the sign of the cross over him he would writhe and vanish! I cannot make him out at all, but I am sure he likes you tremendously, Phil dear."

Marion, in truth, had so nearly arranged her own

love-affair that she was inclined to match-making on behalf of her friend. Jack had not yet spoken, but it was not so hard to read Jack's eyes, and she knew what she should answer when the time came. Marion was a very human little person, very anxious to be happy and to give happiness. What did it matter if Jack was poor? Had she not a talent? could she not also work? Surely, their life would be the freer, and she no drag on him. There was no possible obstacle to their marriage in Marion's warm, loving heart. While he in fear and trembling was conjecturing his fate, she had in imagination papered and furnished their future home, somewhere,—very cheap, and went about with a mental vision of its interior. Jack on one side of the fireplace—for there must be a fireplace—and herself on the other, sewing or drawing. And supplementary to this blissful picture she had another of Philippa married to Noël—an idealistic vision which took no account of the Axenard family and their wealthy and respectable connections—coming to dine with Jack and herself. Ah, it was charming!

Meanwhile, the only way to forward such a desirable state of things was to praise Philippa to Noël, who listened gladly to such praise, and to cherish his least word to send to Philippa. Poor little Marion would have been deeply hurt had any one suggested that she might be doing more harm

than good by these devices,—that more young ladies than Miss Austen's Emma had repented of such manipulations. She was so full of her own coming happiness, the blessing that some word of Jack's was to shower on her, that her heart grew tender toward his friend, and she was anxious to manifest good-will. She either forgot or purposely overlooked the practical disadvantage of her scheme: the fact that the Axenards might not at all relish their daughter's marriage to a man with little money, few prospects, and singular articles of belief. These things are interesting in a guest, but to most minds undesirable in a son-in-law. But Marion wrote Philippa long letters assailing Noël dextrously, and Philippa, quite blind to the trap, covered reams of paper in his defence, and oftentimes went about her day with a face stamped on her retina that was not to be found in Bar Harbor. She was, however, quite right in one of her assertions. It was certainly a pity that the two were so unsociable, that they made so few friends, and mixed so little with their kind. At the start of their life in New York they had practically been strangers in the city; six months later Lyndon Forbes was the sole new friend they had made out of the many with whom they had touched. This friendship, too, had been more of his seeking than of theirs.

Their unsociable, self-sufficient tendency naturally kept the young men much out of the world.

This was foolish and, had they known it, dangerous. After business hours they inhabited a world of their own,—an unhealthy place of residence, with oftentimes an exorbitant rent attached. So it is not hard to see why they never saw or heard of Merchant, why Andrew Musgrave's doings were never echoed to their ears when he was once out of their doors.

Early in September Andrew turned up again, brown and cheerful, pleased to see his friends and full of commiseration for their lack of holiday.

“There wasn't a chap at the sea-shore that could touch you two,” he said, sitting on the arm of Jack's chair and patting him on the back with one of his childish, affectionate movements. “They were all such jerky fellows,—strung on wires,—and the girls kept telling me how they loved ‘dear old England,’ you know. I told them I'd found it dear enough, certainly.” He laughed, his jolly irresistible peal, and his eyes twinkled at the recollection. Then he stretched himself out on the sofa, filled his pipe, and ran on for an hour telling his experiences and describing the people he had met, while his remarks were broken now and again by what the French would have called his “good” laugh. Ah, it was pleasant to have Andrew back again!

“And how have you come out in funds?” asked Noël. Andrew's face clouded, he kicked the air dejectedly.

“You fellows will think I’m awfully extravagant,” he said, at length, “but I haven’t come out very well, that’s a fact. I’ve about five dollars left, I think. But I was really economical, don’t you know,—I had a room at the very top of the hotel. Of course there were always things to do, picnics and all that, and unless the mother has a generous mood, I’ll be in a hole.” He pounded the sofa-cushion with a sullen expression that was new to him. His friends were silent; it was significant that neither of them proffered a loan, yet they were sincerely sorry. Despair at his recklessness was soon swallowed up in sympathy for his distress, and when he announced that he was “Done this time, and no mistake; awfully down on my luck, fellows,” Jack proposed a visit to the Casino, where hot-weather amusement was in order. Andrew’s spirits were greatly raised by the performance, and they passed the evening gayly.

Coming out of the theatre, Jack noticed an elderly man standing to one side of the crowd and ruefully examining the broken end of an old-fashioned chain from which the watch was missing. “If I could get a policeman,” he was repeating helplessly, “I might find it.”

“Look at the old person,” said Jack; “pick-pocket been at work there. There’s a policeman, Con; I’ll whistle him.”

The gentleman who had lost his watch looked

gratefully at Jack as the policeman made his way toward them through the crowd, and began to relate his misfortune in many sentences much interspersed with ejaculations. "The fob-chain, as you see, is chased and very heavy. I may have jerked the watch out, letting it dangle, when," with a sad look in the direction of a waist he could not see, "dear, dear, I should never notice it,—never."

"What is it?" asked Andrew, coming up behind.

"Old gentleman's pocket picked," replied Jack. "Come along."

Andrew, however, would not come until, with much politeness, he had advised the old gentleman to inquire at the box-office and to put an advertisement in the morning's paper.

"It was a very valuable watch," said the elderly gentleman; "a Swiss repeater,—one of the old-fashioned kind. Dear, dear, I wouldn't lose it for the world! Yes. Thank you very much."

The handsome young fellow, with his frank eyes and boyish face, struck the old gentleman very favorably. "Very polite boy that," he thought, as he turned his steps toward the box-office to follow Andrew's advice. "Unusually good manners; very polite indeed."

"What made you take all that trouble?" said Jack to Andrew as they walked toward home.

"Oh, he looked like a jolly old chap," said Andrew lightly, and Jack sighed as he thought of

his chance with Marion against this irresistible, kindly nature.

The friends kept silence on their homeward walk. Only Musgrave's whistle, thin and cheery, warmed their hearts. When he said good-night and tumbled into bed, falling asleep like a child, they made ready for bed themselves, glad that he was there. The scene of the evening filled them both with kindly feeling toward their friend; and Noël in particular took himself roundly to task for his previous suspicion. What if Andrew was not altogether truthful, was he singular in this respect? And who could be a better comrade, so cheerful, so untiring, so ready with sympathy, so unfailing in good humor? What if he was in debt to them? surely he paid it by his very presence!

Noël lay awake, pondering these things, and envying Andrew his untroubled slumber. "The sleep of the just, I suppose," he thought, twisting restlessly, and then he, too, found oblivion.

CHAPTER XVII.

A robber in a stream his finger-tips
Laved and would drink, for at the moon's eclipse
He was a-weary with his bloody toil,
But lo! the draught turned bitter at his lips!

SEPTEMBER brought no abatement of the murky, hot weather. Nevertheless the town seemed to wake up, men trod the streets more briskly, shops put new stock in their windows, the air had a renewed liveliness. Since his second return Andrew began to indulge in longer absences from his lodging-place, sometimes remaining away for a couple of days at a time. His comrades questioned him once or twice, but getting little satisfaction, let the subject drop, and tried to feel wholly at ease about him and his doings, which they did not. He had asked to borrow as usual, and had seemed grieved and surprised when Noël told him, very kindly but very decidedly, that they had no more to lend, now or in the future.

The truth was that Jack, contemplating an establishment of his own, needed every cent of his salary, which was little enough, and Noël, to whom Andrew stood in debt to the tune of some hun-

dreds of dollars, realized that this sort of thing could not go on. He explained this to Musgrave, whose frankness made it a most displeasing task.

“Oh, yes, of course,” he said, gloomily, “I owe you a lot I know, and I hate to have to borrow of you, anyhow. I’ll have to get something. It’s all right, old fellow.”

But that he felt the change was evident. Later, as Noël found, he tried to borrow from Lyndon Forbes, who had nothing to lend and was quick to say so. After that experiment Andrew held his peace on the subject of his finances, but took to those long absences which, though they made his company more valued when he bestowed it, gave Noël a vague and involuntary uneasiness. Sometimes Andrew came home with money, and he had always a gay account to give of his luck in earning it. More often he dropped in upon them and turned out his empty pockets, laughing. The cares of existence pressed very lightly on him ; penniless or no, he was always ready for pleasure at his own or somebody else’s expense. About the middle of September occurred an encounter that bore some importance to his prospects. The three were taking a Sunday walk in the heat and dust down Fifth Avenue ; a disconsolate thoroughfare of blank doors and vacant windows. Andrew walked between them, according to his habit, with a hand on the shoulder of each. He was in a particularly

good humor, and whistled loud and clear out of the pure joy of his heart.

As they were in the act of passing the Waldorf, a man hurried out into the street and walked rapidly a few paces ahead of them. Andrew's whistle checked in the middle of a trill, for a second he was silent, then he plunged after the stranger with a shrill call: "Merchant! I say, Merchant!"

The man turned, facing him directly, but the friends noted that he did not hold out a hand in greeting, nor was his face, darkened by a scowl, pleasant to look upon.

"So you are here, are you?" was what he said.

"Got here last spring," Andrew replied, beaming. "Awfully glad to see you,—jolly! How long have you been in New York, old man?"

His smiling face, alight with pleasure, formed a distinct contrast to the surly avoidance of his friend. Jack and Noël, undecided in the face of this encounter how to bear themselves, stood hesitating a little way from the pair.

"I'm in a hurry," Merchant remarked, pulling out a watch. "I've a train to catch. Hope to see you later on, Musgrave." He was walking on, but Andrew kept up with him, and the friends more slowly followed. "Are you stopping there?" Andrew asked, jerking his head in the direction of the hotel. "If you are, I'll come in this evening. I've nothing to do."

“I have an engagement,” growled Merchant, whose face bore a most disfiguring expression of ill humor.

“To-morrow, then,” Andrew persisted; “any evening will suit me, but I want to see you.”

Merchant glanced at him sidewise, and seemed to hesitate. “Very well, to-morrow,” he replied, walking fast, and left Andrew on the sidewalk without chance for a further word of farewell.

“Low-bred cur!” said that young gentleman between his teeth, as he turned back to his companions. “Fine greeting for an old friend, isn’t it?”

“I wouldn’t go,” said Jack. “Why do you?”

“Oh, his bark has always been worse than his bite,” replied the Englishman, who could never hold his anger long. “Very likely he will do something for me, although he is so standoffish. You never could tell with Merchant.”

This estimate was borne out by the facts, for Andrew announced on Monday night that Merchant had insisted on lending him a small sum, and was going to speak of him to influential friends.

“Awfully good of him,” Musgrave proceeded, spreading the crisp bills out before him; “he wouldn’t hear of my not taking it. And he’s going to find me something; he said if he had known I was idle he should have tried for me long before.”

This information made Jack and Noël glance at each other with compunction, as though they repented of judging harshly a man more loyal than themselves. Indeed, Merchant's behavior was in every way the opposite of his manner. He kept Andrew handsomely supplied with money, and often sent for him to investigate possible situations. Several times Andrew came within an ace of settling upon one thing or another, but the secretary's nephew wanted the position, or he could not read German well enough, or any other slip chanced to throw him out of the place. He was really discouraged once or twice, as his comrades noticed with dismay.

Nevertheless, no affair of business kept him from his daily visit at the Forbes's. At first Marion had been cool, fearing to frighten Jack out of his visits, but as the days went on she changed her tactics, and began to treat Andrew with considerable graciousness. Jack, as she reasoned, needed a little punishment. So when Mr. Musgrave called she was charming, accepted his flowers and wore them, accepted his compliments, and otherwise treated him with favor. There was nothing in her manner to give him or any other man cause for self-satisfaction, yet she certainly did not discourage Andrew. So he came and he came, till Marion grew a little weary, and was not as gracious as at first. He called upon her one afternoon—he had a great ad-

vantage over Jack in his being able to call in the afternoon—burdened with some exquisite roses. Marion had her own ideas, and they were not far from the truth, as to the source of Mr. Musgrave's income, and she looked upon his gifts with a secret displeasure as so much wasted of Jack's substance. But she took them from him with a few graceful words of thanks, and observed him as she did so. There seemed to her in his manner to-day a certain masterfulness and confidence which did not please her. He stood beside her as she set the long-stemmed flowers into slender vases, and she, with a subtle foreboding, began to wonder if she could mentally telegraph Lyndon to join them and stave off the impending interview. There was a significant silence about Mr. Musgrave, and an alert manner which was new to him.

“I will set these on the mantle-piece,” she said in a matter-of-fact tone, “so that mother can enjoy them.”

Andrew watched her as she lifted the jar to its place. His eyes glittered like the sea on a sunshiny day. He took a step toward her as she turned and caught her by the hand.

“Marion, I've loved you for ever, and ever, and ever!” he cried.

Marion grew a shade paler and drew back. The boyish face had grown older, the blue eyes deeper, the volatile, careless manner that had made her

treat his advances as those of an affectionate child had given place to a certain swagger and poise that she did not recognize. Encouraged by her silence, Andrew came nearer. "You do love me! you must!" he cried, with an impetuous vehemence that carried all before it with a rush.

The girl was frightened. Here was no timid respectful wooer, but one who commanded more than he entreated, whose pleadings were more than half masterful. Luckily for her she was a decided little person, and knew her own mind better than most; yet even she stood wavering and speechless under the passionate flow of words. Most girls would have told Andrew Musgrave they loved him in ten minutes simply because he expected it, but Marion was level-headed, and her hesitation was surprise merely. She would never have known him in this new character; he seemed to leap suddenly to twice his age.

"I've loved you ever since I saw you!" he cried, rapidly. "We were made for each other, Marion! You do love me, don't you, dear?"

"Hush! Don't!" she said, pulling away her hand and retreating before him step by step. Her hesitation did not check him. He poured out entreaties, protests, vehement words, with an overcoming violence that would have won with any other.

"Let's leave all these stupid people!" he pleaded, catching her hand again. "There's a train for the

North to-night. Marion, come with me! Be my wife! I will make you so happy! We will be the happiest people on the earth!"

She looked at him with wide eyes, poised between amazement and anger. "Do you mean to say that you are asking me to run away with you?" she cried, shrilly.

"I want you to come with me. I love you!" he persisted. "Marion, say you will!"

"You must be mad!" she cried, with a gasp, thrusting him from her. "What in heaven's name gave you such an idea?"

"You won't?" he said, surprised in his turn. "Don't you love me?"

"I don't love you the least bit," Marion declared with emphasis, "and I wouldn't elope with you if I loved you ever so much. Leave my mother like that! I can't understand your daring to propose such a thing!"

She had drawn herself to her full indignant height, and as he looked at her angry eyes the assurance died slowly out of his face.

"You're treating me cruelly!" he said, in a hurt voice. "I've done nothing except love you. Isn't there any hope for me?"

"Not the least in the world," she said, decidedly; "and I cannot imagine what led you to suppose there was! I like you very well, of course, but as to anything more, why, it's ridiculous!"

This was sufficiently plain speaking: Andrew turned slowly away. His face, although the confidence had left it, was still old and thoughtful, his eyes perplexed, the lips set in a firm line. He knew enough to know that vehement love-making was useless when she used that decided, practically-annoyed voice. Had he seen the slightest evidence in his favor he would not have withdrawn so soon.

“I think you have treated me very unfairly,” he said, turning on the threshold of the room. “You certainly did not show me that my visits were disagreeable.”

“They were not until the last,” retorted Marion, who was still standing, “and if you will avoid the present topic in future, they may not be again.”

“I might have expected it,” said Andrew, the least quiver in his voice. “Everybody from my father down has said good-by to me! I was a fool to think that any one could pity me a little in my loneliness!”

His hearer was not moved by the pathos of this speech, but remained painfully matter-of-fact.

“It’s no use trying to work on my feelings,” she remarked, cheerfully; “moreover, when you have so little cause. It struck me that you had particularly loyal friends. I’m sorry if I encouraged you to this, but I assure you if I did it was most unintentional.”

Andrew did not reply; he was nonplussed for the first time in his life. Muttering something about "American girls," he departed.

Left to herself Marion was inclined to be tearful, but she was a character that knew the value of self-restraint. Nevertheless, although she did not indulge hysteria, she could not refrain from expressing some displeasure at the occurrence.

"I don't believe in him a bit!" she told herself, as she reviewed the scene. "He is always, directly or indirectly, talking about himself. He doesn't half appreciate what they do for him, and tell me that he can't get work to do! I'm going to tell Jack that I think he is a fraud, a charming, blue-eyed fraud. That is, I'll tell him when——"

And the "when" set Marion a-dreaming until dinner-time.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A sin, to snatch what dangles at mine eyes?
A sin, to heed not some spent stranger's cries?
I tread the world to take my share, no less
Than your cold creeds and worn philosophies.

ANDREW did not come home that night nor the next. His friends were by this time too used to his irregularities to take much note of them. The night, although the season had reached October, was sultry, a lamp made the room oppressive. Outside, a warm wind whirled the dust into eddies, the stars glinted faintly through the haze.

The city seemed dried-up and gasping.

"Phew!" said Noël, coming into the room in his shirt-sleeves. "This is awful! Are you going out, old boy?"

"Yes; to the Forbes's. I promised Miss Forbes I would come."

"Where's Andy? I wonder what he's about. Do you know, Jack, I don't half like this way he has of disappearing."

"Why not? What's your reason?"

"Oh, no reason," Noël replied, impatiently. He was leaning on the window-sill trying for a breath

of air. "Only I don't like it. I think it's deuced inconsiderate. He has left his coat in our room."

"Oh, well, carry it into his. He knows you're no end of a good fellow, and that's why he leaves his things lying about. He is only careless." And Jack banged the door after him, and jumped downstairs three steps at a time.

Noël sat on the window-sill and looked into the street. By and by he rose, and going slowly into the next room, picked up Andrew's coat and carried it down the corridor to his bedroom. There was no light there, and groping for one he stumbled, caught his foot in the coat, and jerked half the contents of its pockets on the floor. "Dash it!" he cried, vexedly. "Where the devil does he keep the matches?" When he found one and lit the gas, he stooped to pick up Andrew's belongings and restore them to his coat-pockets. He had scattered a pile of letters and bills hither and yon; but what caught his attention was a pile of pasteboard strips, a whole drift of them, twenty at the least. He picked one up,—it was a pawn-ticket.

"Aha!" he thought, laughing to himself. "So that's where some of his money came from!"

When he picked up a second and saw that it was the same, and yet another, and the whole heap, and noted that they were all pawn-tickets, the laughter faded out of his face to be replaced by a look of half-troubled surprise. He stood hesitating, wavered

between his wish to do nothing underhand and his growing, undefined suspicion. Then with a sudden movement of decision he gathered the pile together, turned out the gas, and went slowly back to his sitting-room. Under the lamp he examined the strips of card-board.

There had fallen from Andrew's pocket no less than twenty-three pawn-tickets, bearing the address of seven different pawn-shops at widely separated quarters of the city. Noël spread them out on the table, a dawning terror in his eye. The mere truth of their existence was not what troubled him, but the dim question, where had Andrew Musgrave got twenty-three articles to pawn? His clothes? Noël ran back to the room he had left, relit the gas-jet, opened the closets and drawers: they were all quite full. He might easily overlook two or three articles, but not twenty. By this time he had quite left behind him the natural repugnance that at first made him turn from investigation. Surely, in the position in which he stood toward Andrew Musgrave, no one had a better right to know if he were being deceived. He went back again to the sitting-room, recounted the pawn-tickets, and then threw himself into a chair, and tried to marshal his thoughts into regular definition. When Andrew arrived from Colorado the previous spring he had owned absolutely nothing except the clothes on his back,—not a scrap of jewelry, not an article of personal

property. Since then, although he had of course furnished himself with necessities, he had certainly no large supply of personal effects on which to draw. Moreover, Noël knew most of his belongings, and they were all in their places. He might easily pawn a trifle or two, a book, or the silver mirror which he had bought to give to Marion Forbes, but there were twenty-one pawn-tickets unaccounted for, and if they did not represent Andrew's own property, what did they represent? Noël's eyes, merely puzzled at first, grew, as he thought, into fear and horror. There came trooping into his mind a dozen events of the past six months: Andrew's falsehood, his secret search in Noël's bureau, and worse than all because so vague, his reticence, and his absences.

This line of thought was maddening, and charged with impatient suspense. Noël picked up his hat, not knowing what he dreaded, but dreading what he knew. One of the pawn-shops was but a block or two away, and he made in that direction, walking fast and trying not to think about anything at all.

The man, a Jew, was civil enough. The young man belonged in his opinion to the best class of his customers,—those who seldom redeemed their pledges. He took the ticket and went to the back of the shop, while Noël waited, towering between an Irish laborer sodden in drink and a colored

woman in a purple shawl that made a splotch of harsh color in the dingy interior. The man returned unwrapping a parcel, threw it on the counter, and tapped commandingly with his pencil for the next comer. It was a little diamond clasp, sparkling vividly in the flare of the gas-jet overhead. Noël did not pick it up, he simply stared at the initials engraved on the back that was turned up to his view. It was Philippa Axenard's diamond clasp; he remembered it quite well. He stood so stone-still that the colored woman glanced at him curiously, then coming to himself with a jerk, he pushed the clasp to one side, and handed the man two more pawn-tickets with a gesture almost of command. There was something odd in his manner that caused the Jew to glance at him with sullen suspicion when he laid the two articles upon the counter,—a gold pencil, evidently the property of Lyndon Forbes, and a handsome heavy, old-fashioned gold watch of Genevan make. This gave him a start, and there shot distinctly into his imagination the picture of an elderly gentleman standing on the sidewalk and ruefully regarding the broken links of his watch-chain.

There was a sort of numbness about him as he paid the money and redeemed the pledged articles, and he stepped out of the shop into the dusty street hardly able to understand what it all meant,—what it meant to Andrew, what it meant to

himself. He spent that evening going from pawn-shop to pawn-shop with a thorough determination to sift the wrong to the bottom. When he came out of the last, which was far down-town, and took the Elevated home, the scope and extent of Andrew's thefts were horribly plain to him. He had not of course redeemed a quarter of the pledges, but among the twenty-three articles he recognized Jack's silver-mounted pistols, that had been his father's, his own gold sleeve-links and other trinkets, and another watch bearing an unknown cipher. The rest turned out to be bits of jewelry which Noël had never seen before, and which sickened him to think of identifying. Jack was in bed and asleep when he re-entered the house, and he was glad, as during the ride home he had decided to say nothing of his discovery for the present. The first thing to be done was to save Andrew, to pluck him from the shameful path he was pursuing, and it was like Noël that he put this object before the insult to himself. The situation was frightful, and left him very uncertain as to his course. Until he knew Andrew's record and the full history of his thieving proclivities, he could not decide whether wholly to condemn or partly to pity him. It seemed so incredible to connect petty pilfering from acquaintances, acts of robbery so daring and so sure, with those straightforward blue eyes, that honest, open, boyish laughter. The pure audacity of the whole affair was

staggering. Noël remembered how Andrew had searched on his knees with the rest for Miss Axenard's clasp; how politely he had advised the old gentleman to advertise for his watch! Was he perhaps a kleptomaniac, irresponsible for the moment? Was he anything but a common thief?

"I will find out all before I speak," Noël thought. "Merchant knows him, I will find Merchant at once. Together we will talk to him, help him up, give him a fresh start. He may have some claim on him we do not know, some dependent asking for money, and he has been driven to theft from despair. Yes, it must be that; Andrew cannot be bad,—he is ashamed, and that is why he stays away so much."

Noël Conway, with his eyes only half open to the world, was not a man to look farther than he knew. As yet he felt no anger toward Musgrave. A great pity, a great sorrow, a dreadful uncertainty what to do and how to do it, these mingled confusedly in his mind, but there was no personal sense of indignation. The charm of the man was on him still, and it dulled the edge of wrath. It would take more than one wrench of discovery to shake his affection for the comrade whose company was so greatly to his taste.

His suspicion, moreover, spread no further than it had done at first; the fact was so bad that it never occurred to him there might be worse behind.

Another nature would have been prone to any belief after such a discovery, but Noël had touched bottom ; what he had found out was to him so terrible that it blotted the possibility of worse from view, and prepared him not a whit for his further awakening. With the recollection of Andrew's kindly, genial comradeship in his heart, with the recollection of Andrew's open, cheerful face in his eye, he was as duped as though he had made no discovery at all.

His mind was full of Merchant and his help to raise Andrew to honesty once more, the full explanation, the remorse, the new start on the straight way. For once he forgot Noël Conway utterly in his concern for Andrew Musgrave, and that concern held his mind in its own circle, so that he finally slept racked, indeed, with shock and distress, but as innocent of the truth, as far from suspicion of the whole, as though he had never found out Mr. Musgrave's amiable weakness for other people's possessions.

In the morning he sought Merchant, but the man had left town, giving no address. The delay was cruel, but Noël preserved silence through it all, and not till the 1st of November did he gather by a chance remark of Andrew's that his friend was once more in New York. Noël had not spoken even to Jack, for an odd sense of justice restrained him from denouncing the thief until he could point a path to honesty. Merchant would help him, and

they would talk it over with the culprit decidedly, but kindly. He had replaced some of the pawn-tickets in Musgrave's pocket, and knew him well enough to be quite sure that he would not keep any too minute a record of their existence. So he was himself secure of discovery, and free to wait and plan his generous intentions.

CHAPTER XIX.

Save me, I crave my succor at thy hand!
Save me, no other one can understand
That if I sink now I shall drag thy soul
Down with mine own below the Stygian strand!

It was Clement Frey's habit to spend the month of October near town, visiting in country houses at Long Island, Tuxedo, or on the Hudson. He rarely settled in the city before the middle of November, and could not be entreated to spend so much as a night in New York on any pretence whatever from the 1st of May until the date of his return for the winter. Whatever summers he spent in Europe, he was invariably in his accustomed place at his accustomed date. Being one of the most obstinate men that ever lived, and one who rarely broke a rule, his acquaintances were surprised to find that he had moved into his apartment on the last day of October. Two causes linked hands to induce this departure: first, the publication of his new book, a work which he always superintended in person; and second, the fact that Mr. Merchant, growing wearied of his round of visits, announced his intention of returning to town.

Since they went away together in the spring, Clement Frey had not been parted from his new friend for longer than a week. They had gone everywhere, seen and done everything together. Frey knew how to keep his companionship from becoming irksome, and the freer and easier Merchant became in his society the closer Frey set his steps by the Englishman. The task that the author mapped for himself had entailed a considerable wrenching of his way of life, as well as the most untiring vigilance, patience, and tact: qualities worthy in themselves, yet running in a pursuit surely ignoble.

On the morning of the 1st of November Mr. Frey might have been seen in his study had he not given strict orders to admit no visitors. The room was still dismantled and disarranged. The windows were dingy, the shelves and cabinets bare. A case of Chinese curios presented by a friend stood open, but unpacked, in a litter of straw. The bookcases were shrouded in gray cloth wrappers, the pictures veiled in mosquito-netting; the whole apartment presented that chrysalis appearance which is so oppressive to the owner. Had Frey been a married man, he would doubtless have picked up his hat and spent the day at his club, returning only when the chrysalis had given place to the butterfly. As it was, however, he was forced to sit forlornly by his writing-table, while his valet

carried things to and fro, and shifted other things about, in an anxious effort to establish order. At Mr. Frey's side on the desk and on his knee were two piles of papers,—big legal envelopes marked "Private," which contained a mass of telegrams and letters. These he sifted and rearranged, the frown deepening all the while on his unexpressive face. "No proof! no proof!" he grumbled; "every possible likelihood: motive found and manner guessed, but no proof. The whole summer wasted over this business! I must get at young Musgrave—I have put it off too long already—and Gordon. Damn it all, where has Gordon gone to?"

"Shall I unpack the case now, sir?" said his man, suavely.

Clement Frey looked at him blankly. "Case? case? Oh, yes, of course; unpack it and be careful. It's full of ivory carvings, and if you break a point of one I'll discharge you. If the set is not perfect, I don't want it. . . . And all this time no proof!"

"No what, sir?" asked the servant, waiting.

"No place for you if you break my ivory carvings. Get my coat, Martin. I'm going out."

He lingered a moment, still frowning, and then went slowly out into the street. As he turned his steps toward the Waldorf his mind reverted to its annoyance. "Philippa Axenard was right," he thought; "this can't go on, and it's quite useless. She usually is right, that girl,—a sort of mental

balance to other women. Now, if I wanted to get married she would suit me delightfully. We would be a remarkably discriminating pair ; no misplaced enthusiasms. Perhaps it might be a good thing. I can easily fall in love with her if I want to ; the question is, do I want to? Love is like brandy, when a man gets to a certain age, either he wants it neat, or he doesn't want it at all. I'm not sure which is my case. We'll see—after this business is over."

It was like him, to whom perversity was a science, that because he should have hurried he walked slower and slower. The frown faded out of his face in time, and his thoughts resumed their placid current. Merchant had a little apartment of two rooms, entered by means of a vestibule, that was screened from the latter of them by a heavy curtain. Frey did not send up his name, but went up at once, and tapped in person at the vestibule door. There was no answer ; so, after waiting a second, he opened it, closed it after him, and then stood stock-still behind the curtain as Merchant's voice, deep-toned and angry, rang upon his ear.

"I tell you I shall not give you another cent!"

The voice that came to Frey's ears in answer was shrill and high-pitched.

"Do you say that, knowing what you say?"

"I say I shall not give you another penny! I'm tired of all this, dead tired, do you hear? I've been

bled enough, I'm damned if I stand any more of it!" His voice was deep and strident. Frey, who had not moved a finger since his entrance, drew a sudden breath and made a sudden gesture, both of which he checked as suddenly. The shrill voice replied, with an undertone of threatening truculence,—

"You know what I can do. You had better give it to me."

"You may threaten all you like, I shan't give it to you; I haven't got it to give——"

"That's a lie!"

"Hullo, Merchant!" cried, jovially, Merchant's friend, appearing carelessly in the door-way. "You don't mind my being late, I suppose?"

The two men who faced each other in the centre of the room turned two startled faces toward the speaker. Merchant's was ghastly, Andrew Musgrave's flushed with anger.

"Why, it's Musgrave!" said Frey, advancing cheerfully. "You remember me, don't you? We met in London."

He nodded explanatorily toward his friend as he extended a hand toward the young man. Andrew took it with a momentary return of his bright smile.

"I remember," he said, frankly; "you came to supper. I wasn't down on my luck then, and my friends hadn't turned their backs on me."

“Dear me!” said Frey, sympathizingly, “that’s bad, but not altogether true, I hope.”

“Musgrave!” shouted Merchant, coming forward a step, “I’ve asked you to leave this room!”

“Now, now, now!” said Frey, looking from one to the other, “you two mustn’t quarrel; it’s most unfortunate. Cool down a little, Rod, and talk about it reasonably.”

“If that young puppy doesn’t leave this room, I’ll kick him out!” Merchant answered, violently.

Andrew turned on him with a species of contempt. “I’m going,” he said, hardily, looking his host in the eye; “and I shan’t come back in a hurry, though you may hear from me.” He stood a moment in the door-way, looking back at Merchant. “You’ll hear from me again!” he said, and went out.

Frey turned to Merchant inquiringly.

“Oh, he’s a young scamp!” said his friend, answering the look. “I was a deal too good to him in London, when a man of more sense would have let him go his own way.” The color had crept back in part to his ghastly face, but there still lingered an uneasiness in those blank eyes of his, and it was evident he was strongly swayed with anger. “He’s always at me for money!” he jerked out, twisting irritably in his chair; “his people at home won’t give it to him, so he comes to me. I’ve given him heaven knows how much, and now,

when I'm tired of it, he threatens me!" He clinched his fist in a sudden flame of rage. "He may do what he likes, he may send us both to the devil, I shan't give him another penny!" he cried.

Frey, who had been observing a new water-color, turned slowly at this. "You are right; I shouldn't," he said, briskly. "Send him home. Why did he come to you in the first place?"

"Oh, he was hard up, and so was I," said Merchant, impatiently, "and when I got some I gave him a share, more fool I."

"He came over on the 'Hamburger,' I think?" said Frey in his quietest tone.

"Yes; and I furnished him with cash to go to Colorado."

"Ungrateful young cub! Did he win much on the 'Hamburger' business?" said Frey, still more quietly. The recollection seemed to sting Merchant into another fit of anger.

"Oh, all he won went in a month," he said; "he wouldn't take odds enough. Why, I went——" he checked, and looked askance at his companion.

Frey, however, with drawn eyebrows, was examining the bottom of Dresden plate. "What an extravagant young fool!" he said, absently. "I say, Rod, did you get this plate here? No? I thought not. Was Musgrave with you in the Tyrol?"

"No; we quarrelled before that. I didn't know anything of his intention of coming to America."

Mr. Merchant spoke carelessly, almost too carelessly, apparently forgetting his statement with regard to Andrew's money matters, and Frey seemed to pay very little attention to what he said.

There was a pause, and then the author set the Dresden plate in its place. "Look here," he said, briskly, "there's something to do somewhere, and you need amusement. What shall it be, old fellow?" He seemed to have forgotten the subject of their converse, linked his arm in the Englishman's, and did not refer again directly or indirectly to the scene he had witnessed.

CHAPTER XX.

A palace for the angels was my soul,
A niche for contemplation and control ;
Lo ! like the riot of a masquerade
Come grinning passions, and defile the whole.

WHEN he left the Waldorf, Andrew Musgrave experienced the first sinking of the heart that he had ever known. All avenues seemed blocked to him. He was reckless enough, yet he dared not attempt another theft, for he had noticed, with momentary cold fear that Noël had been more careful with his keys than usual during the past few weeks. He had a sudden undefined paralysis of his nerve and of his daring ; he was smitten for the first time with nervous dread ; for the first time he sweated with suspicion, and had a creeping horror of returning home. One by one his resources had failed him, his friends, his step-mother, Merchant. In all his career there had always been a crevice ahead through which he might creep if hard pressed, but now the way was a blank wall, windowless, sheer, a wall of stone and iron.

Leave New York ? How could he when he had no money ? and to pawn all his belongings would not bring him enough for any distinct purpose. He

thought desperately; his invention plunged into every channel of escape, only to bring up against the barrier. He breathed hard, and glanced about him furtively on all sides like one entrapped; an overmastering terror numbed his powers of expedient. There were two courses only open to him. One was to carry into force his threat against Merchant, and Andrew had his own reasons for hesitating to resort to that dark and doubtful extremity. The other was to live each day for itself, with a blind trust to blind chance. Where he was his living was at least secured to him, yet at this point he foresaw with a sickening clairvoyance the day approach when even that would be denied him.

These reflections were so contrary to his ordinary habit of mind that they lowered him inch by inch into a black and unusual depression. Turn any way he would, set his feet on any path, face any horizon, he must front a consequence that to his mind bore a hideous importance. With this new contemplation Andrew seized pen and ink, and dashed off a last desperate appeal to the woman who had never failed him.

“Unless something is done at once,” he wrote, “expect to hear that I am in jail, for before God I do not see any other road before me. I have been driven to worse than borrowing, and I stand in hourly danger of detection. You have always loved me,—I turn to you as a savior. If you can get me

out of this, I promise on my sacred word of honor to be everything you and my father can desire hereafter. I have had my lesson. If not, the LeBreton honor is lost, and you at least have seen the last of

“ANDREW.

“Do not fear that I shall live to stand trial.”

The theatrical protest of his note had been duly weighed, and was characteristic. That it was callous to brutality did not enter the mind of the writer. A swift steamer sailed the following day, he stamped and posted the letter, and by a sheer effort of will drove away his fears and resumed his customary bravado. “In twelve days,” he thought with a shrug, as though to throw the whole on to the shoulders of Fate, “in a fortnight I shall know.”

And picking up an acquaintance on the street after dinner, he passed the evening at the theatre.

Meanwhile, Merchant had returned to his hotel in an ill-humor no gayety of Frey's had been able to dissolve. He had been sombre and taciturn, had drunk a good deal, and had excused himself rather coldly when the author suggested going out. He was tired, he had a headache, it threatened rain, these were his excuses; and Frey did not accept them without protest. Merchant declared that it was his intention to pass a quiet evening and go to bed early; and once assured that these were really

his desires, Frey did not press his company upon his friend. Unfortunately, Merchant's evening was disturbed, for scarcely had he settled himself to read than a servant announced Mr. Conway. The night was warm and damp, the clouds lying thick along the sky, and reflecting the dull red glow of the city lamps. All the windows in Merchant's room were open, and the lamp under whose light he had stretched himself smoked and flared in the gusts. Merchant was in his smoking-jacket, the *Rider and Driver* and the *Sporting Times* upon his knee, and a tall glass of brandy-and-soda at his elbow. Despite the frown on his brow and the worried twitch of his mouth, he looked extremely comfortable, and rose to greet Noël when he came in with enough cordiality. The young man shook him by the hand, with a repetition of the impression that had been made on him at their first meeting. He looked very tall and rather solemn, his eyes examined Merchant behind half-closed lids, and his whole manner was weighted with a purpose.

"Delighted to see you, my dear Conway," said Merchant, smiling, as he went to meet his guest. "Awfully good of you to come. I should have dropped in on you before this if I had not been so dreadfully busy, don't you know."

"I did not know till yesterday that you had returned to New York," replied Noël, seating himself.

“Have something to drink? No? A cigar, then. I can recommend these,” said Merchant, hospitably.

“No, thank you,” Noël answered; “my errand is a little difficult, and I would rather not smoke till it’s over.”

“Oh, just as you please,” Merchant said, with a smile. “I’ve not forgotten the good turn you did me in London. Do you remember? That beastly fog.”

“I’ve come to you, Mr. Merchant,” Noël said, with just a shade of hesitation, “on rather a delicate sort of business, and that’s a fact.”

Merchant had thrown himself back in his chair, and was regarding Conway carelessly as he lit a cigar. At this, however, his eyes contracted, he steadied the match in his hand, and displayed more attention. “Go on,” he said; “I’m listening.”

“You’re a friend of Andrew Musgrave’s, I believe?” began Noël.

A black rage spread over Merchant’s face; he tossed away the match and raised his hand commandingly. “If you please,” he said slowly, but with venom, “don’t believe anything of the sort. I’m not a friend of his, and I’ve no intention of being; no, nor of acting like a friend of his in any way whatever.”

There was so concentrated a hate in the words that Noël stood surprised, hardly knowing how to proceed.

“If Andrew Musgrave has sent you here,” Mer-

chant proceeded still slowly, and choosing his words with nicety, "you can tell him from me that I never forget; that I consider all communications closed between us; that if he chooses to write me I will burn his letters unread; and that if he dares to speak to me I'll horse-whip him, if it should be on the public street!" His anger gathered headway as he spoke.

"Andrew certainly did not send me," said Noël, more and more surprised, "nor does he guess that I am here. I don't understand exactly, but I fancy you've found him out yourself, and you are angry; indeed, I don't blame you!"

"I have found out a good deal about that young gentleman in the course of years," Merchant replied, grimly. "What have you found out?"

The first hard drops of rain pattered on the window-sill as Noël paused, flushing a little. Then the gust came sweeping into the room, and the down-pour followed as Merchant rose to close the window. "Well?" the Englishman continued, turning.

"Well, the truth is," Noël went on, very slowly, "I am a little perplexed how to act, and wanted to consult you. You see, I can rely upon you not to mention it, of course, but Musgrave has been stealing."

"Stealing!" interjected Merchant, scornfully. "Is that all?"

“All!” said Noël, rising in his astonishment. “Isn’t it enough?”

“Not for Musgrave,” answered Merchant, with decision. Then seeing Noël struck speechless by the remark, he continued in a different tone: “Do you mean to say that you do not know about him? Is it possible? I beg your pardon, Conway; I fancied, of course, you knew. I never dreamed he was deceiving you.”

A flash came over Noël’s face, and he spoke quickly. “Know? Know what? What do you mean? What should I know? What is he?”

“I mean about his Oxford career. Didn’t you know that he had been sent down?”

“Oh, *that*, yes! He told me that himself.”

“Did he tell you that he eloped with one of the instructor’s wives and took her to Paris with him? No? I thought not. That was the cause of his expulsion. He took her to Paris, and then left her. It made quite a sensation last spring a year ago. His father disowned him, after he caught him presenting a forged check,—but perhaps you know all this?”

“Musgrave!” gasped Noël.

Merchant pushed away his chair with a quick burst of irritation.

“Musgrave!” he repeated, contemptuously; “his name is no more Musgrave than mine is. Do you think he would stick at an alias? Why, man, he’s a LeBreton, Sir Robert LeBreton of Surrey, his sec-

ond son. He has been a devil unchained ever since he was breeched for all his innocent blue eyes."

Noël put his hand out and caught the back of the nearest chair.

"Tell me more!" he said, hoarsely. "What else has he done?"

Merchant glanced at him curiously. His lips, always firm, were welded together, his eyes glittered. So powerful an agitation struggled in his dark face that Merchant felt his own indignation rekindle at the sight. "He's done everything to get hung!" he cried, furiously; "borrowed and stolen right and left. Everybody cut him in London after the elopement, so that's why he took another name. They say his step-mother spoilt him beyond measure when he was a lad—— Why, man, what's the matter with you? you're ill!"

"No!" cried Noël, who had staggered a pace. "Tell me; go on. What else?"

"Nothing else that I know of," said the Englishman, sobered by the listener's expression, "except that you had best get rid of him at once if he is living on you. The young scoundrel! He would stare the fiend himself out of countenance."

Noël put his hand up to his throat,—he could hardly breathe. A fury shook him from head to foot like a blast of wind.

"Thank you," he said, bowing politely to Merchant. "I shall go home and take your advice."

Then he went out into the street, staggering. LeBreton! LeBreton! the name had fallen on him like a bomb and scattered fire among his thoughts. He had been tricked, fooled, duped, played upon like a passive instrument from the first moment of meeting, and all the while he had trusted, excused, believed! Rage swayed him to and fro, blinded him, roared at his ears, made flakes of foam gather at his lips,—furious, overmastering rage. Oh, to have given, to have trusted, to have believed every word, to have suspected nothing, to have withheld nothing from the sunny face, the frank blue eyes! Noël neither saw, nor heard, nor felt. The rain poured upon him, splashed upon his hands, beat upon his face, soaked him to the skin; he did not even know that it was raining.

And the woman, that good generous step-mother,—it was his own mother,—she had aided the thief, and covered him, and he had forced money from her by threat of exposure. An inarticulate cry rose in Noël's throat as the thoughts hammered themselves upon his brain,—he had been the tool, the gull, thrown between their hands like a ball, used as a terror to blackmail Andrew LeBreton's mother and his own.

For the moment he was like a madman; he writhed his hands in the air, plucked at his clothes, rung his teeth together, and ground them. The philosophic garment, the calm, the contemplation,

the dreams, and the visions withered before this passion like straws before a furnace. A Niagara of anger poured upon the dreamer's soul, the foundations of thought shook under it, his ears resounded with the roar of it, his head reeled with the clash and confusion of it, and the whole world seemed like a pit filled to boiling with the flood.

A thought suddenly led him to remember that Andrew was still unpunished. He tore through Broadway in the sheets of lashing rain, reached home and up the stairs three, four, steps at a time, fumbled with the lock like a drunkard, plunged with bloodshot eyes into the room. It was empty. He stared about him, breathing hard. No one was there. In the sudden unexpected silence he seemed to realize his own frenzy. With an effort for control that was like the grasp of a drowning man, he walked over to a chair, sat down, clasping the arms of it with his hands, and tried to think. His face was absolutely rigid, but the fury, the shame, the humiliation, surged over him in great waves. The madness that had assailed him in the street was not bitted firmly like a raging horse, and carried him steadily on and on in his thoughts for revenge. Not a muscle twitched, his eyes were wide open and hard, his hands wrapped so tight about the arms of the chair that they grew white at the joints.

And when Jack came in at midnight, Noël was still sitting there, silent, as one overwhelmed in thought.

CHAPTER XXI.

Thus life is measured by death's measuring rod :

Thus life is levelled, silent, sod by sod.

Who is the Measurer and Leveller,
God ? And the echo still re-echoes, *God!*

MARION sat in her pretty room, looking so pretty herself 'twas a pity no artist had been there to see. She was embroidering ; her face bent over the delicate-hued silks was pensive, her eyes a little sad. Last evening had been the first that Jack had failed to come, the first time that she had ever waited for him in vain. It gave her new and not agreeable matter for thought. Above her head a canary swung, breaking now and again into spasmodic trills and quavers. The rain of the night before had given place to all-enfolding sunshine ; the air had a keen autumnal zest, it was really November at last. A letter from Philippa Axenard lay beside her, and Marion picked it up to reread a few sentences.

“ I am so glad you sent young Musgrave to the right about. I never altogether liked him, yet for no reason, as he is undeniably charming. But from your letters I feared that he was really living on Jack and his friend, and I know how generous they both are. You cannot drop a hint, I suppose ? Mr. Conway would take it ; he is very quick. I shall not be sorry to come home, although the

country is lovely. Expect me a week from to-day. It will be great fun to stay with you until mamma and papa move into town."

The house seemed very still, thought Marion, as she laid down the letter. It always seemed still after Lyndon had departed to his work. He was one of those superanimated persons who let their presence resound, as it were, in a sort of excitement. He rose at six, and occupied himself between that hour and breakfast-time in rousing every one else to bear him company. When he was in the house, all things were pervaded by an atmosphere of restlessness, and his sister noted the contrast with relief.

Her meditations were hovering over the color of her parlor carpet, when the maid stood in the doorway.

"Plaze, Miss Marion," said this functionary, who invariably asked permission for whatever happened in her province, "here's Mr. Sartoris."

Marion jumped up, flung down her work, and flashed out of the room without stopping to brush her hair. Jack at ten in the morning boded something unusual.

He was standing in the centre of the room hat in hand, and came swiftly toward her with a distressed face. "Oh, Marion!" he cried, "can you come? Something is the matter with Con! I don't know what, but I am sure he's ill!"

The name seemed so natural from his lips that she did not even blush at it.

“I will come at once,” she replied, quietly drawing her hand from his tight clasp. “Wait here. I will be back in a minute.”

Indeed, it was scarcely longer when she made her appearance dressed to go out.

The unconventionality of the situation never occurred to either of them; it was as it should be if Jack needed Marion that Marion should go.

“Now tell me,” she said, still in her quiet voice, “what is it? What is the matter?”

“When I came in last night I found Con in a sort of daze, hot and cold at once,” Jack explained, as they walked rapidly up the street. “It appears that he had been sitting for a couple of hours in his wet clothes. You remember how hard it rained last night? Well, when he came out of that he took to shivering. I gave him some whiskey, but he acted so queerly, tossed and talked in his sleep all night, that I got worried about him. He got up this morning, but was giddy and felt queer,—complained of headache. About an hour ago he got so much worse that I thought I’d come for you.”

“I am very glad you did,” she said, heartily. “It may be no more than a bad cold. What made him sit in his wet clothes?”

“Heaven only knows!” Jack replied. “I pitched

in to him for it, but he only said, 'Did I?' He did not seem to understand. I would have come sooner, only I couldn't leave him."

"Where was Mr. Musgrave? Did he not help you?" asked Marion, rather distantly.

"Andy? Oh, he wasn't home. He did not come in at all yesterday. He spends most of his time away nowadays."

By this time they had reached the house, and they ran up the stairs to Jack's room. Marion had never been there before, and looked about her with quick, curious glances and much interest. Noël lay at length upon a sofa that looked too short for him, and took no notice whatever of their entrance. At the first glance Marion thought he was asleep. She walked swiftly over to his side and bent over him. His eyes were closed, his mouth a little open; his breathing came short and irregular. She noticed that his face had a purplish tinge, and that his hands and head were hot with fever. Marion knelt beside him, touching his wrists and forehead; then she rose and turned to Jack.

"Is there a doctor near?" she said. "He has fever, and ought to go to bed at once. A doctor can tell you if it is more than a feverish cold."

"Is he very sick?" inquired Jack miserably, devouring her with his eyes.

"I hope not, I believe not," she made reply; "but you had better get a doctor as soon as you can."

“There is one around the corner,—a fellow I know,” he said, doubtfully; “but——”

“I will wait here till you come back. It is all right,” she told him reassuringly. “I do not mind in the least. After the doctor comes I will go home and get mother. She will tell you just what to do.”

There was something so steadfast and self-reliant in her bearing and in the natural, unself-conscious words, that Jack could hardly deny her. There was a simple adaptability about Marion that gave her a dignity of her own.

“I will go immediately,” he cried, “and I shall not be a moment longer than I can help.”

Left to herself, Marion pulled a coverlet over Noël and scrutinized him sharply, and then wandered about the room looking at the pipes and photographs; Jack and Noël as Heidelberg students, Noël and Jack, gun over shoulder, in Central America, on horseback in the Plains, at the bow of a little sail-boat somewhere else, in tramping costume for the Black Forest, by their camp-fire in the Rockies. She stood a long while gazing at Richard Conway’s picture. “How like he is!” she thought, glancing from the face on the wall to the face on the sofa, “the same queer contour and Eastern features.”

Then she turned to the portrait of Jack’s mother, recognizing it by some tender instinct, and her eyes filled with tears, mute and appealing. “You had

him then," she thought, her face uplifted to the sweet, serious, painted one, "and oh, I want him now!" The befurbeled blue ball-dress and old-fashioned appearance of the portrait were to her like the nimbus and lily of a saint, and she sought for the likeness in the mother's face point by point with conviction and reverence.

Just then Jack came in followed by the doctor. The physician went rapidly through the usual preludes to examination. Noël took no notice, and only once stirred, when he opened his eyes and said, "Ah! fooled!"

"Delirious," nodded the doctor, with a finger on the sick man's wrist; "not extraordinary with the fever at 104°. You ought to get him to bed at once."

He scribbled a prescription, shrugged his shoulders when Jack plied him with questions, gave a few terse directions about diet and so on, and said he would call again later. He gave these, by the way, to Marion, evidently taking her for the responsible person, a sister to one or the other.

"I had better go," said Marion, as the door shut after him.

"No; do wait a minute," Jack begged. "Wait till I get him safely fixed. I want to speak to you."

He half coaxed, half dragged his friend into the next room, and Marion could not refrain from in-

ward laughter as she pictured Jack in the character of sick-nurse. However, she shut her ears with resolution, picked up a book of which she never turned more than one page, and waited. In half an hour he came back.

“He is all right,” he declared. “Must you go?”

“I must, indeed; but I will send mother. Give me the doctor’s prescription; I will leave it at the drug store as I pass.”

She held out her hand for it, and there was a pause between them in which her heart jumped a beat or two faster.

“Oh, Marion!” said Jack, holding her hand fast. She looked up at him with a transfigured face, and in that moment he could find no words. And the dingy room, and the rattling street, and the smoke-besmeared sky had shifted at the word: there was a dazzling blue arch overhead, and a carpet of thick blossoms underfoot, and a great burst of enfolding sunshine. Neither of the two spoke a single word: the vision was too clear for speech.

By and by Marion lifted her head. “I must go,” she said, suddenly, not offering to move. “Good-by.”

“Yes, you must go,” remarked Jack, foolishly, not offering to move either. “Oh, Marion!” His entire vocabulary was reduced for the present to this noun and ejaculation. There was another pause and then Marion moved away.

“ Good-by. I will send mother soon.”

“ Good-by, and don't forget the prescription.”

“ Good-by,” she called, tremulously, hurrying down the staircase.

“ Good-by,” he called after her over the balustrade.

Marion danced home, dashed into her own room, and fell to laughing and crying both at once. Her work lay where she had thrown it, the canary seemed asleep upon his perch, but at her entrance he burst into his most florid song, evidently under the impression that it was expected of him.

“ Oh, you can sing!” she cried, hysterically; “ sing loud! sing all you like, you silly bird!”

Her eyes shone as she recounted a part of the morning's events to her mother.

“ I told them I would send you,” she said, “ because, you know, mother, I am sure that Jack Sartoris hasn't an idea about nursing.”

“ I should think not,” declared Mrs. Forbes. “ Why didn't you tell me before, Marion? I will go this minute.” She hurried away, and returned later with a face in which dismay and amusement struggled for the upper hand.

“ I am glad you told me,” she remarked, grimly, as her daughter with the most filial haste came to meet her. “ The place was in a perfect litter: and I leave you to guess, Marion,” this tragically, “ what young Sartoris was doing in the sick-room,—*smok-*

ing! I very nearly fainted when I saw—I mean smelt him. He took the whole affair very easily I thought; he fairly beamed on me.”

“Did he, mamma?” gasped Marion.

“I am going to send over some beef-tea as soon as I can get it made. Noël should not touch solid food, but when I asked Jack Sartoris what he intended to give him, he said the only thing he could think of was ‘curds and whey!’ Now, what do you suppose put that into his head? He behaved in the most extraordinary way all the time; he stood around and smiled on me and didn’t hear a word I said. I hope that young man is rational, Marion, but I have my doubts.”

During Mrs. Forbes’s recital her daughter was torn between love and laughter.

“Oh, my dear! my dear!” she thought, “how very badly you need me to come and look after you!”

CHAPTER XXII.

Behind the lattice where I sit the din
Of fighting in the court-yard rings within.
Ah! he is down, my lover, in the game;
What cares my sick soul though the Sultan win?

NOËL had a sharp attack of fever that for a couple of days seemed likely to turn into typhoid. There was a good deal of it about, and he had been working hard and was run down. However, this result did not take place, and the fever, although most unpleasant, was not at any time serious.

Thanks to Mrs. Forbes, who came regularly every day "to see," as she expressed it, "that he had not been killed during the night," and to Jack's devoted, if clumsy care, he was very well looked after, and in ten days seemed really on the mend. He had been delirious several times, and had talked wildly of being robbed and duped in a way that puzzled Jack not a little; but most of the time he had been sleepy, and stupid, and easy enough to manage. He had been inclined to his old ways, too, in later convalescent moments, and wanted to talk metaphysics with Jack. But Jack was less tolerant of these periods than of old; his active material life had shaken a good deal of the dust of

the East out of his eyes, and he was frankly a little bored when Noël ventured into the subject of the Supreme Cycle and the Astral Current. So Noël finally gave over and held his peace ; but the change hurt him. He was naturally weak and rather restless, very indignant at being kept in bed, and apt to vent his indignation by throwing things at Jack's head. When two plates and a soap-dish had retired from this cause, Mrs. Forbes suddenly rose on the scene, and promptly ordered all such games to cease. They were so afraid of her that Noël lay back quite meekly, and Jack, who had picked up a pillow to retaliate, put it down without a word. She quite bullied and ordered them about, so that they hardly dared to call their souls their own.

All the week Noël's fever was at its height Andrew came and went, offering help in his genial way, and when it was accepted proving very deft and skilful. He was looking white and pulled down himself, and spoke to Jack once or twice of his prospects in a tone of such discouragement that Jack implored him to take heart and accept a temporary loan.

In his present state of beatitude Jack would have given anything that was asked of him. Andrew seemed distressed about Noël, and pressed his services upon Jack at every turn. " True," as he said, " I'm no use at night, old boy, for I'm sure to drop asleep, but I'll do anything you like in the day-

time." So Andrew slept the sleep of the unburdened, while Jack took care of his friend. As Noël began to mend, Andrew absented himself more and more. He may have had a vague suspicion, or he may simply have had no desire to offer services for which there was no need. However that may be, 'twas certain that from the day the fever broke he was never in the sick-room and seldom in the house. Jack felt surprise when he thought of it, but then Jack was in a sublime muddle of other thoughts.

Noël never asked after Andrew, nor mentioned him. His remembrance of events on that night was at first dim and vague. And as his thoughts cleared and brightened, he found it hard to speak of, to think about. A sort of reactionary apathy had settled over him, a pleasant weakness that he shrunk from expelling: to rouse the devil of his emotions seemed hard and displeasing. The passion of that night's discovery had wasted out in sickness, but it had left a steady unquenchable fire behind. He waited to feel stronger before taking action, before telling Jack and preparing for the end. Meanwhile, he put off the evil day, the bitter cup, and remembered nothing but the pleasant listlessness of convalescence. As long as Andrew stayed out of sight, Noël, from the very fierceness of his first anguish, drove him out of mind.

He did not lack attention by any means. Lyndon Forbes came often, and was so kind, so careful to

control his restlessness, to subdue his energetic manners to the quiet of the sick room that Noël felt ashamed and grateful. Bunches of flowers found their way into his room, together with kind messages of inquiry, from Philippa and Marion.

This young lady had confided her engagement to her mother and her friend. She found the former kind, making no objections, but as unenthusiastic as the average mother over a prospective son-in-law. The latter, however, was as sympathetic as could be required, and never yawned over the catalogue of Jack's perfections even when she heard it for the twentieth time. She entered with admirable heartiness into all Marion's plans and calculations, and assisted (in imagination) to furnish a dozen future homes, each prettier than the last. The two girls sat about in their night-gowns braiding their hair, and discussed Marion's future life with minuteness and zest.

"But won't you be very poor?" objected Philippa, during one of their nocturnal debates.

"Well, we shall not be rich, exactly," Marion replied, shaking her hair over her shoulders in a golden shower. "But Jack's doing splendidly, Mr. Raeburn told Lyndon, and I have something. Do you know, Phil," proudly, "that I made a thousand dollars last year? And I can do more if I try."

"How will you live?" asked Philippa. She had,

of course, heard this all before, but that made no difference in her interest.

“Oh, I’m going to learn such a great deal,” said Marion. “How to cook in a chafing-dish—not the other kind, for Jack’s sake—and to do all kinds of handy things.”

“Such as——?”

“Well, to put down carpets, and hang curtains, and all the stupid things people usually pay to have done. And I’ve begun to economize already.”

“You certainly are ‘forethinking,’” remarked Philippa. “How do you practise economy?”

“Whenever I see an advertisement of anything particularly cheap and necessary,” said Marion, seriously, “I always cut it out and paste it into a book, so I shall have it all before my eyes.”

Philippa laughed immoderately. “John Gilpin’s wife is a child to you in frugality!” she said. “Marion, you are too lovely!”

“Oh, I have plenty of schemes,” said Marion, leaping into bed. “You have no idea what an ingenious pair we shall be. I expect to have mothers beg to send me their daughters and have them educated in housekeeping on a small income.”

“I do not doubt you will be a marvel,” said her friend; “and you are beginning early enough, anyhow.”

Such happiness was very beautiful, Philippa thought. She lay awake for some time after

Marion had fallen asleep, and by and by the slow tears crept under her lids, although there lay no distinct cause for them in her meditation.

Jack came back from the office on the evening of the 22d of November considerably elated. He had been called into the inner office, and had been complimented by the head of the firm, who charged him with private business to Boston. The choice of messenger was flattering, the errand, if tactfully performed, would mean another advance, and Jack was delighted, except that he must leave his friend. This at least was what he said.

“Oh, don't mind me,” said Noël, who was feeling much better, and was sitting up in bed clad in a gray wrapper of sober hue and ascetic cut, a monkish garment that he very much affected. “Go ahead; its fine, old fellow. I am all right now; I was up to-day.”

In his heart of hearts he felt relieved, for he had been screwing his courage to the sticking-place to tell Jack all the afternoon. “Now I can write,” he thought, “which will be so much easier for both of us.”

“How long will you be away?” he said, aloud.

“Oh, two or three days,” Jack answered, kneeling by his valise. “There's a train at nine I'm going to get, but I have to go to the office again first.”

He packed and made ready. He had stopped to

tell Marion on his way up, so there was nothing to keep him.

“Good-by, old boy,” he said, cheerily, preparing to depart. “Take care of yourself, and don’t go back to work before the end of the week.”

“I ought to tell him about Marion,” he thought, as he wrung Noël by the hand.

“I wish he knew,” thought poor Noël.

So the two who were wont to be so open sought to escape each other’s eye, and parted with a slight constraint of which each fancied his own secret the cause.

Going out, Jack met Andrew coming up-stairs.

“Look here,” he said, rapidly, button-holing him, “stay in to-night, will you, and look after Con? I’m off to Boston for a day or two, and he’ll be blue. You cheer a fellow up so well.”

“All right,” said Andrew dully, in a voice so altered that Jack would have remarked it if he had not been so preoccupied and hurried. “Good-by, old boy; you’ll write, I suppose?”

“Oh, I’ll be home before long,” replied Jack, plunging down-stairs. “Good-by.”

Andrew, who looked drawn and weary, went into the sitting-room, and presently appeared between the curtains that divided it from Noël’s bedroom.

“How are you,” he said pleasantly,—“better?”

Noël looked up, trembled, controlled himself, and

answered in his ordinary voice, "Better, thank you."

"I have some writing to do," went on Andrew, "so I'll be right in here if you want anything."

Noël said nothing. He was once more shaken by a blast of anger, and dared not speak lest he should rave. He lay down and stared into the darkness. Slowly his rage cooled, and his determination began to pulse stronger and firmer. For quite an hour he lay listening to the scratch of Andrew's pen and staring out into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Fools we, to trust blind Fortune! With a jest,
Slow turns her wheel ; to every man his best
Deals justly, but when weighted with a crime,
How fast it spins, and rolls up interest !

ANDREW LEBRETON was beaten, and he knew it. For twenty-four years he had trodden the world trusting to his luck and his audacity ; but now the end was written in letters of fire on the next page. As a child he had stolen and lied with the same scapegrace unconsciousness and assurance with which he had lied and stolen as a man. There had been threatenings and escapes, yet he had slipped out of the arms of punishment every time. When Oxford grew impossible he had fled to Paris, from Paris, under another name, to London, London to Colorado, Colorado to New York. There had always been a new place to go to, new friends to make and defraud, new crooked paths to tread. He was gay, happy-hearted, and conscienceless as an animal, and like an animal he knew when he stood at bay. Here, to-night, he faced a short shrift, and realized with a creeping shudder that the game was up, the end in all human probability very near.

He sat down, resting his chin on his hand, and tried to make a systematic review of the dangers of the past, and the chances of the future. The first, colored by his imagination, were black and awful; the last certainly discouraging enough. Flight? He had not a penny in his pockets. The resource of borrowing was closed, and none other opened. Yet to stay where he was meant to live agonies of fancied detection. Even now he glanced fearfully at the closed curtains of Noël's room; he half suspected Noël. The letter sent to England nearly three weeks ago had received no answer. Merchant's door was barred to him, and the Forbes's. There was really nothing left but to turn pickpocket in the streets.

Andrew did not call these small transactions with other people's property at the pawnbroker's, stealing. He argued that he merely found the diamond clasp Miss Axenard had dropped, and had held his tongue about it. In the crowd coming out of the theatre, the old gentleman's watch, dangling loose on its swivel, had struck against his hand. As for the rest, they had been thrown in his way, and he had merely picked them up. He was not greatly concerned about them, but he would rather have some more certain means of livelihood.

He might, he reasoned, sitting with furrowed brow and drawn mouth, carry into effect his threats against his mother and Merchant. But the last was

too risky to think of, and Andrew knew his father's temper well enough to understand that there would not be any benefit to himself by the disclosure. And then, as he told himself, he would suffer anything, anything, rather than bring any scandal into the family. This was a fine sentiment, and comforting to self-esteem, but it brought no solution to the problem of existence.

To turn honest, to work, to open life on a new, clean page, this was equally impossible. At any time his comrades might hear the truth about him: the stories of his college life, the flight to Paris, the check, which was a very unpleasant reminiscence. Indeed, he wondered that they had kept ignorant so long; but then they were such unworldly, shut-up chaps, he thought, with a species of contempt. No, he must go at once, he must not remain another day; the hour of his fate was on the point of striking.

He sprang up, the perspiration beading on his face, and then sat down again. Go? but when, and where, and how?

"I must have money!" he thought, so intensely that it seemed as if he had spoken. "I must have money! I must!"

He looked around him on every side. There was nothing in that little sitting-room that was worth the pawning, unless he carried the furniture away bodily. The pipes and photographs, the well-read

books, the few trinkets, the baskets of Mexican straw stuffed with newspapers, there was nothing, nothing! Had Noël been out of his room there would have been his watch and chain, and perhaps some money, but that was out of the question. Andrew sat making this inspection with an eye that grew desperate and dilated. He felt like one slipping down an inclined plane, who has felt one hold and another give way, and now keeps himself up inch by inch by the mere pressure of the body.

He searched the walls, the mantle, the very floor and ceiling; and then his glance leaped upon an object on the table in front of him,—a crumpled check-book of Jack's. Andrew lifted it with hands that shook, and held it under the lamp. There was one blank check left, for the rest were torn and soiled, but the sight of it lit a last desperate hope in Andrew's eyes. If he could only get that check cashed, under the plea that Jack had left it behind for his sick friend! The color crept back to his face and the boyish smile to his lips. He went over to the desk to search for one of Jack's letters, and to cover the noise of investigation started a-whistling, his merry, light-hearted note that cheered the heart so inexpressibly.

All was silent as he came back to the table with paper, pens, and ink. He stepped softly over the floor and looked between the curtains. The room

was dark, but he could make out that Noël lay quietly at full length.

“Asleep,” thought Andrew, turning back; “so much the better.”

He sat down, fitted one of Jack’s pens to the handle, and drew paper and ink near him. The check, ’twas evident, must be scrawled in a hurry, as Jack had just time to write it before leaving. He had procured a letter of Jack’s with a signature, and an old account-book containing figures. With these spread before him he set to work. Once or twice he covered the check with his hand and listened, but he soon became too absorbed to do either. He sat with his back to the curtains in order to get the clearest light, and bent over his work with wrinkled brow and careful eye. There was not a tremor in his penmanship, and notwithstanding the immense hazard, not a sign of diminution of nerve. The slight excitement of haste might have been noted, but his hand was unwavering, and his touch sure. Such figures as he desired to copy were, well for him, remarkably clear and bold, without flourishes or idiosyncrasies; he formed them repeatedly on a sheet of paper, and then turned his attention to the signature. This was much more difficult, as it had absorbed more individuality; he hesitated over it a long time, but his dangerous facility in this sort of exercise helped him before very long to procure a copy to his liking. This done, he spread the check

smoothly before him, laid a sheet of thin paper over it, and traced every letter delicately, and with infinite care and nicety in the place where it was ordered to go. He was now intent and focussed on the work. The signature complete, he held it at a little distance critically; it was really an admirable forgery; and he started with confidence on the remaining letters and figures. He had drawn the check carefully to the balance of Jack's bank account, and his spirits rose as he realized how unassailably plausible it all was.

The figures ended, he began on the date: "November——" A pair of long brown hands came softly over his shoulders and settled like gyves around his wrists, jerking them apart and upward; and Andrew turned his frightened eyes to look straight into Noël's face.

It was no longer dreamy nor brooding. The eyes were open and like two pools of gray ice, the lips set into a stern line, and as he towered above the forger in his straight gray dressing-gown, he bore an appearance judicial and awful, so that at the sight Andrew's strength flowed out of him like water. He twisted, his pale lips fell apart and closed again; he panted, turning his eyes hither and yon; but Noël did not speak. He held Andrew's arms back and above his head, and he looked down on him with that stern, immovable countenance. The mere strength of his grip, slight

enough in fact, seemed irresistible. Andrew could not drop the pen from his helpless fingers, and the glance burnt him like a flame.

“Let me go!” he panted at last. “You hurt me; let me go!”

“You thief!” said Noël, lingering on the words and their bitter contempt, “you cowardly thief! Do you think I am going to let you go now?”

“You’ll answer to me for that!” cried Andrew, flushed, but his under lip shook.

“You’ll answer to me for *this*,” replied Noël, still holding him by the wrists.

A quick clatter of feet sounded on the staircase, and Lyndon Forbes opened the door.

“Hullo!” he began, “why——” Then he stood, staring.

“Forbes,” Noël said, never moving and speaking over his shoulder, “will you do me the kindness to fetch a policeman? I want to give this man in charge.”

Andrew’s head swayed forward and rested down on the table in front of him, but Noël still held his wrists wide apart and high.

“Certainly,” said Forbes, briskly; “but what for?”

“If you will look at those papers scattered on the table you will understand,” explained Noël, with deliberation; “it is the last of his thefts.”

As Lyndon, still puzzled, stooped to gather up

the check, Andrew made a tigerish dash for it with one of his chained hands, failed, and laid his head on the table in front of him again. Forbes glanced at him, at the paper, and whistled.

“I’ll get a man at once,” he said in an altered tone to Noël. “I won’t be long. You can keep him?”

Noël nodded, gravely, deliberately, as he had done everything, and Lyndon plunged down the staircase.

As the sound of his footsteps died away, Andrew once more lifted his face and turned toward his captor.

“Conway!” he cried, in desperate appeal, “you can’t mean to send me to jail,—think!”

“I have thought,” came the low reply.

“Think!” Andrew begged, passionately, turning his gray face to right and left, rolling his head to and fro on his shoulders in his helplessness. “I’m beaten, I give in; I’m humiliated enough, surely! Oh God, I’ll go to my last account soon enough!”

Noël remained scornfully silent.

“Spare me for my mother’s sake! Your mother’s!” The tears poured over his cheeks. “We’re brothers, Noël, brothers!”

Then, indeed, Noël was shaken from his calm.

“You do well to speak of my mother to me!” he cried, in a sudden gust of violence. “You! What is she to me that I should spare you because she cares for you? Did you have any pity on me

when you blackmailed her with my name? Brothers! I have been fooled and duped by you long enough, Andrew LeBreton; you have had your game and laughed in your sleeve at my simpleness, now it is my turn!"

Andrew once again dropped his golden head on the table, and said not another word.

When Lyndon re-entered, bringing with him a rather interested police-officer, both men were utterly silent. Andrew remained so while he was being handcuffed by the sergeant of police, a man well known to the journalist, and a person of few words.

"You will have to come with us, and make your charge," he remarked to Noël.

"He can't," interposed Lyndon, quickly. "The man's been ill,—he's just out of bed,—and it's raining."

"Will you go for me?" Noël asked him. "Here are the papers, the forged check; and here," he took them from his pocket as he spoke, "are the pawn-tickets of some other thievings, and your gold pencil, Forbes."

"Noël!" cried Andrew, sharp and high, "don't do this; don't send me to jail! Have some pity! Think!"

They took no more notice of him than if he had not spoken.

"I'm very glad you found this out," said Lyndon,

wringing Conway's hand, "for I've suspected, not this, of course, but something, for a long time."

"He fooled us from the moment he set foot in the house," said Noël, savagely, "and he asks for pity! You don't know half, Forbes, not half!"

"I can guess," said Lyndon, grimly, laying his hand on Andrew's shoulder and pushing him roughly. "Come on, McGee. Good-night, Conway. I'll be round to see you in the morning with the papers, y'know. Take a rest now, my lad, or you'll be sick again."

So they went away, and Andrew LeBreton spent that night in the Tombs.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Said Vishnu to Parbati the divine,
“Behold, the passions of the world are thine ;
Thou may’st sway each man’s temper, woman-wise,
Sweeten or spice to each his jar of wine.”

FOR the understanding of what follows it is necessary to retrace a little, and accompany the letter which Andrew had sent to England upon the 2d of November. Lady LeBreton received it in due course, and suffered under the blow it dealt with an intensity which only the later impressions of her life had developed. Her devotion to her step-son was as much of a piece with her character as had been her neglect and desertion of her own. Plainly, she was one of those who develop the virtues of life in proportion to their state of prosperity. In the old Indian days when the present was a stringency and the future an uncertainty, the minor excellencies, such as affection, steadfastness, and constancy, had been swallowed up in overweening ambition, self-pity, and greed. But once established in comfort, settled in a rich nook and satisfied with her position, Lady LeBreton was very ready to pour out upon the sons of the man to whom she owed this satisfaction

all the attachment that her Southern nature really contained. Let us do her the justice to allow, however, that there were other causes.

When she parted from Noël, she left a child interesting in character only to a far deeper student of human nature than his mother. A silent, undeveloped, unattractive boy, with none of the graces or prettinesses of his years, neither bold of tongue nor buoyant of temper, with an education to which her attitude was disapproving, and with odd morbid fancies of which she was intolerant. She read in him no resemblance to herself, and had not been fond enough of her husband to cherish the real resemblance. The likeness, in fact, was an underprick of mortification to her; and it was true the child was an encumbrance.

As Lady LeBreton, however, she found herself in the relation of mother to a couple of yellow-haired, rosy-cheeked, boyishly charming lads, frank and winning. She saw too little of the elder, although sincerely attached to him, to feel a difference; but Andrew kept from school by delicate health, Andrew, with his winning ways and precocious naughtiness, his blue eyes, sunny curls, and merry face, became her pet and her darling. She spoilt him by every method and in every particular that is possible to an injudicious mother. She shielded him from his father's anger, which was swift and heavy, she begged off his punishment for lying, and

when he underwent solitary confinement in the school-room, she smuggled cakes and "goodies" to him by the maids. Her attitude of constant deceit for his sake was a perpetual neutralizer of the effects of any correction on that score which the child received. The audacity and daring recklessness of the boy excited her vaguely to admiration, his denial of a fault with those innocent eyes so steadily upraised always nonplussed her utterly, and his precocity in childish evil filled her with a species of pride at his smartness. He was attractive as a child in much the same way as he was attractive as a young man,—always devotedly affectionate and amiable, in small matters considerably unselfish, full of winning frankness and charm, merry of face, ready of tongue, open and clear of eye. His faults had always seemed those farthest from calculation, and he was quick to turn her affection to his advantage by his careful support of those amiable qualities she loved in him. All through the trials of his home-kept, stormy boyhood she stood his friend, sent him clandestine sums of money during his college days, and seemed utterly broken when disgrace terminated them; less, it would seem, from the iniquity than from the result that it parted her from her boy. Her husband, to whom his son's career had been a shock never to be forgotten or forgiven, was stern and complete in his anger, and remarkably keen of sight as to

the cause. But Lady LeBreton, just as she had really believed herself in some sort a martyr for abandoning her child, now really believed that Andrew was only weak and careless and had been led astray. The facts of the elopement and the forged check did not for an instant change this impression, or give her any insight whatever into the depth of calculation and deliberate immorality that Andrew LeBreton really possessed. Her son had been equally duped for a time, but she would remain duped till the judgment.

This attitude of mind had an element of the pathetic that made Sir Robert LeBreton, certain of his own determination, hesitate to impose any command upon his wife. Most men would have hesitated in view of the circumstances, and Sir Robert LeBreton surest of all. So he tacitly permitted their correspondence, and, although, of course, he never spoke of or alluded to his second son, did not interfere with his wife's wishes in the matter.

In time Andrew's repeated carelessness and ingratitude took effect even upon Lady LeBreton. She refused point-blank to help him, and might have stood fast in this resolution but for his letter threatening her with disclosure. This frightened her no less that her knowledge of her husband had increased. She knew his unswervingly just and upright temper, and felt that the truth would not

be softened to him by the addition of so many years' deceit; a fact at the outset certainly innocent had perforce taken a darker hue during the past years, and was even harder of explanation. So the foolish woman scraped and stinted to send the blackmailer money, and felt repaid by his loving letters with their bright prospects, and promises of future amendment.

The last letter, however, transformed her at a stroke into what she was not,—a brave woman and a devoted mother. She read between the lines a despair which made her fear the worst, and in the grip of that fear she took a sudden resolution. With the letter in her hand she went into her husband's study and laid it before him.

“Robert,” she said, bravely, “you see this is our last chance. If we do not save him now we never shall.”

Her husband, picking up the paper, heard her breathing catch hysterically, and his face grew dark as he read. He knew Andrew, and he knew just what such a letter from Andrew was worth.

“My dear,” he said, gently, patting her hand, that beat the desk with impatience, “do you not know this wretched boy by this time? Do you take his words for the truth? I am his father, Adèle, and yet I say frankly that I have never met a worse man than this son of mine. I am cruel, perhaps, but it is the truth. I have done my uttermost to save

him, you have done more than your duty and your uttermost to save him, and what has been the result?"

"We must bring him back!" she cried, tears in her eyes. "He has had his lesson, Robert; his letters lately have been so penitent,—oh, don't shake your head!—so truly remorseful! Let us bring him back and forgive him, and give him one more chance!"

"Adèle," said the baronet, "it would be no use."

"If we let him go now he will be lost forever," she sobbed. "Robert, do let me go to him, let me plead with him! Oh, I am sure he will be all you wish!"

Sir Robert looked at his wife, and his heart softened. He was an admirable man with a golden grain of mind. Just as he was, his son was still his son, although he felt the uselessness of the trial. He had before this pardoned, and overlooked, and stood in the fire of shame and disgrace; but was there not a command after all about seventy times seven? He rose and paced the room.

"I should not be more unforgiving than she, I suppose," he murmured, and then turned to her.

"I cannot hold out my hand to Andrew after his conduct," he said, decidedly; "it has gone too deep, and my honor has suffered; but if you wish to try and save him, I shall not forbid you. Mind you, he cannot be brought here; he is unworthy to enter

his home again ; but if you succeed, I shall help you to give him a last chance."

"I will take the next steamer," she said, hurriedly, drying her eyes.

"There is no use sending him money for his return," said her husband, grimly ; "I know him too well for that ; but perhaps—I only say perhaps—your love may touch him to some purpose and lead him to some good. I pray it may ; but no, I do not believe that it will."

"He is your son," she protested, "and he is only a boy. Young men are always wild——"

He interrupted her firmly : "My dear, if Andrew had been merely wild you would not hear me refuse to admit him to my house. Debts and college frolics, perhaps a more serious escapade, I could have overlooked ; but the utter ruin of a home, the lack of honor, the deliberate forgery, these are of another color. No ; he is my son, but if I do say it, he is a hopeless blackguard, the biggest that ever bore the name of LeBreton,—and this I can never forget nor forgive. I know perfectly well that he will be just the same when you bring him home as he is in America, but I am going to let you try, because it is your wish, and because—ah, well, my dear, you saved him many a beating when he was a lad, and, woman-like, you want to do it again."

Thus it was settled. Sir Robert, although he

consented to let her take the journey, forbade her to write Andrew of her plans.

“You may find the true condition of his affairs if you take him without warning,” he told her, “otherwise you might as well stay at home.”

The letter had reached Surrey on the 10th, Lady LeBreton sailed for New York the 17th following on the “Campania.” Her husband wished her good-speed, but gave her little encouragement on her errand, and advised her return as soon as possible. The “Campania” got into New York harbor late in the afternoon of the 22d, the passengers were landed during the evening, and the first thing that Lady LeBreton saw when she picked up the morning paper of the 23d was the account of Andrew’s career, theft, and discovery, with Noël and Jack’s names in full, and other details. Lyndon Forbes had written the article, and it was graphic and unmistakable.

Just about the hour when Lady LeBreton, in a pitiful state of mind and body, got into her cab to present her letters and make her inquiries, Noël dragged himself down to Mr. Axenard’s office. He could not afford to assume any airs of convalescence, and, weak or no, felt that advice must be obtained at any hazard. The day was clear and pleasant, he was feeble, but did not note any ill-effect of last night’s excitement. Mr. Axenard was in, and Noël did not have long to wait before being admitted to

the private office. He told the whole story, reserving only their family connection, and begged Mr. Axenard's advice and assistance in carrying the affair to a conclusion. They had a long talk, in which the elder man expressed his complete approval of Noël's conduct from first to last.

"It was atrocious, scoundrelly!" he said. "You must give every proof, Conway, and get the fellow a long sentence. There is more behind it all, evidently. Frey was in the office a day or two ago trying to get Musgrave's—LeBreton is it?—address. He seemed much excited about some affair in which he thought LeBreton was concerned."

"Did Mr. Frey see Andrew?" Noël asked, in surprise.

"No; he finally said he would write. He was very much worked up; but then you know Frey;—" and Mr. Axenard smiled.

"Well, I think I must go home and rest," said Noël, rising. "I'm not quite well yet. Don't let me keep you, and thank you very much."

"Not at all; I am glad to be of any service. Sartoris is away? I hear great things of him from his employers. My wife was asking after both of you only yesterday. Pray come and see us; we moved in town two days ago."

Thus kindly he ushered Noël out, but rest for that young gentleman was far off as before. At his room he found Forbes with a note-book and

pencil, an increased restlessness, and an avalanche of questions; and he had formally to make his charge. So his day, hour by hour, was an exhausting one.

Ten minutes after Noël left Mr. Axenard's office Lady LeBreton entered it. She had been sent there by the consul as to a reliable source of information, and during the half-hour's interview learned all there was to know, the charges against Andrew and the various aspects of the case. Mr. Axenard's position had often led him into like conversations, but this one puzzled him. Lady LeBreton had shown a deeper distress at the fact that Andrew was in prison than at the sin which took him there; and she had moments of such confidence and decision, spoke so hopefully of the future, that her hearer wondered if she quite understood all the charges meant. She was particular in her questions about these charges, and curiously relieved in manner when she found that so far Noël Conway alone was the person who made them. Added to this she was hysterical and excited, indeed, Mr. Axenard, speaking to his wife later, described her conduct as "flighty." "The shock of it has unsettled her for the moment, I suppose," he said, compassionately.

"And I do not wonder," his wife echoed.

"Young Conway looked cut up by the whole business," continued her husband; "he has been

sick, and the strain has been trying. But I am glad he has been so firm."

"Musgrave! that charming gentlemanly fellow!" Mrs. Axenard remarked. "I cannot get over it; so delightful, so full of spirits!"

"He was a monster!" cried Philippa, indignantly. "He fairly lived off of them, mother, and borrowed their money! They were far too generous."

"Most unwisely so," said her father. "If I had known,—if Sartoris had only consulted me,—my advice would have been energetic."

"But, father, how could they know he was such a scoundrel?" Philippa protested, earnestly. "You yourself saw how little he looked it. And one doesn't naturally suspect one's intimate friends of stealing."

"When you get to be as old as I am, my dear, you suspect anybody of anything,—a saint of murder and a sinner of martyrdom,—with an equal chance of justice. I should be no more surprised to hear that the last murderer had a passion for floriculture, and was devoted to an aged mother, than I would to hear that our bishop was a bigamist. We're made like rag carpets, Phil, in little strips, and only the fastest colors show in the wear."

Philippa said nothing. Her thoughts ran to Noël; she wondered if he was very sad or very lonely.

CHAPTER XXV.

Goddess of young hours, cold and pure as ice,
Fate stakes and throws thee toward me, on cogged dice.

I am all ready with my hoarded love.
What dost thou ask of me,—a sacrifice?

THE object of her thoughts was in verity happier than he had been for many days. True, he was quite wrung and weary, the strain of so many excitements left him dulled and numb, but at least the long day was over and he was free to rest. He missed Jack horribly, and fell a-musing as to what a sensation his letter, written late the night before, would produce in that young gentleman's experience. After all, in a day or two they would be able to talk it over and to take up the old life where they had left it, rid of their protean old-man-of-the-sea, with faces turned once more upon their own dear and narrow circle.

Noël heaved a sigh of relief that the intolerable work was done, pulled the couch near the lamp, gave the fire a purposeless masculine poke, and turned up the light. Then he threw himself down contentedly, spread a red afghan over his knees, and plunged into the *Jungle Book*. In two minutes

he was on the other side of the world and walked at home. Contact with the file of this Western life, greed and ambition, had turned him a little from the trend of his daily thought, now he recovered it with an exquisite delight. His face, as he read, smoothed out the lines of hate, anger, and bitterness stamped on it since yesterday, and became thoughtful and dreamy once again. And the sun beat on the curved roof of the temple at Raithapoor, and the crowd of worshippers swayed and parted, and the yellow-robed, calm-eyed adepts passed through them into the fragrant inner darkness. One part of his imagination dwelt on this picture, beyond and behind the vivid pictures of the book in which he was absorbed.

In the midst of it all the electric bell quivered, and he threw down his book with a cry of vexation. Forbes, of course, with more questions, and another note-book and pencil: would they ever let him alone? He determined not to move, or in any fashion to make the intruder welcome; and when a hand tapped on the door, he said "Come in!" in no inviting voice. It was not Forbes.

Noël raised himself on one arm and stared, forgetting to rise. There in the open door-way stood a tall, handsome woman with a cloak of snow-white fur pulled over her shoulders. Her face, although not youthful, was striking, the hard brightness of the eyes seemed akin to the brightness of the jet

ornaments that covered her gown; she had kept through life a fondness for all that shone and tinkled. In her hair, hardly threaded with gray, flashed a diamond comb, and other jewels shone rather obtrusively at her throat and wrists. He was not near enough to notice the haunting anxiety of her eyes. She stood still, smiling at him with a smile which she tried in vain to make easy and unconstrained.

Noël rose slowly to his feet, puzzled and hesitating. "Did you wish to see me?" he asked, courteously. "I do not think I have had the pleasure——"

"Noël," she said, taking one step toward him, "do you not recognize me? I am your mother!"

He stared at her blankly, and then caught the corner of the table with his hand, and held on. The surprise, the shock, the happiness, flooded him with tumultuous thoughts. He forgot her desertion and the bitter taste of his life; he forgot his scorn and his just indignation. She was there, his mother; she was sorry, she was ashamed, she needed him;—she had come to tell him so.

"I am your mother," she repeated, and held out a hand to him. Slowly, with great passionate eyes, he drew nearer, took her hand, and clasped her in his arms. Then all the banked-up pain in his heart gushed out in foolish, childlike words.

"Oh, mother, mother, is it you?" he cried,

incoherent with gladness ; “ have you come at last ? Oh, I have wanted you, I have needed you ! I have been so lonely, mother ! mother ! Where have you been ? Why did you not come before ? Oh, if you knew—— ! It is you ? it really is yourself at last ? My mother, my darling mother ! ”

The sacred name, the beautiful word, he could not get it off of his lips. His head dropped on her shoulder like a repentant child's, and the tears stood bright in his eyes. What mattered how they parted if they were together again ? She stroked his forehead softly with her limp, brown hand, and made no resistance to his embrace. Perhaps she was touched ; perhaps she waited.

“ Oh, are you glad to see me ? ” he cried, at length, looking into her eyes. “ I have wanted you so badly, mother, you cannot imagine ! And now you have come back to me ! ”

“ My son ! ” she said, caressingly, “ my great tall boy ! ” And she laid her lips lightly on his forehead. She could not have foreborne all emotion, no woman could. For the boy was so gaunt and hungry-eyed, piteous, with such a mighty love in face and voice, and such a pathetic joy in calling on her name ; she could not remain entirely cold under it. Moreover, the drama of the situation stirred her, and she had a conscientious desire to be artistic in her part. So she kissed him, and that kiss lay on Noël's soul like a rose and

comforted him : all things seemed made possible by it.

His eyes dwelt on her face with a gloating tenderness. This was his mother, yet it was not the radiant vision of his dreams, nor the spirit that had shone plain to him for one moment in the Mexican hut. Even in his tangle of new emotions he realized the difference, but it spoke only to his mind, and left his heart untouched. For her part, she stood passive in his arms, feeling a sort of helpless terror at the young man's height and strength, his dark face so like his father's, the intensity of his eyes.

"You have come at last," he murmured, and she made an effort, and laid her cheek close to his for a second. Then she drew away gently and disengaged herself of her cloak, throwing it over a chair. "And now let us talk," he said, drawing her down beside him on the sofa, and putting one arm about her. "This is your place here, beside me : this is where you should have been always. Oh, mother!" he cried, "there is so much to tell! oh, mother, where have you been all these years?"

She smiled on him indulgently, still touching his forehead with her soft hand ; but if he had looked closer he would have seen that her eyes never warmed, never changed, never brightened to the flame of his. He did not look, he was so whirled

about by this strange happiness that he only held her fast, and a pause fell between them.

“So you have missed your mother?” she said, at length.

“I have died without you,” replied he. “I have not been kind, dear. I have had harsh thoughts,—I had lacked so much. But now I see you really care, I must beg you to forgive me.”

“Yes, yes,” she replied, graciously, “we will forgive and forget what is past, for now it lies in your hands, Noël, to make me the happiest woman on the earth.”

He shivered under the ecstasy of happiness these words brought. He was alone no longer: he, too, had a mother and a home.

“If it is only that!” he whispered, brokenly; “mother, you are not going to leave me?”

There was a dim remembrance in his mind that she had other ties and another world. He dreaded lest he should find this vision true.

“Not for a while,—not yet,” she answered, smiling still. Her hand strayed into his dark hair and played with it. “Noël, dear!” she said, caressingly, “I must speak to you—about Andrew.”

Noël’s face clouded. “Oh, don’t let us talk or think about that now!” he said; “let us have this moment just to ourselves, you and I. The disagreeable things can come afterwards. These are my rooms, mother, do you see? There is my

father's picture. Jack lives with me, but he is away. Jack Sartoris, you know,—the colonel's son."

"Noël, my dear son," she repeated, unaltered, "I must speak to you about poor Andrew."

"You have heard what he did?" Noël said, turning for her sympathy; "how he deceived and fooled me, and blackmailed you? Oh, mother, you were far too good to him. It was an infamy!"

"We must forgive, dear." She spoke in her gentlest voice.

"Forgive?" he repeated, "after he has fooled me and robbed me right and left,—me, his friend? Oh, yes, I will forgive him when I see him in State's prison."

"You are not going to send him to prison?" Her voice, calm as she strove to keep it, trembled a little. "He is so young, Noël! And then the ruin, the shame of it!"

"But you do not know; he forged a check——" Noël began, and then broke off. "Ah, don't let us think of it! Mother, we have so much to tell each other, let us talk of something else."

She drew him toward her and parted the hair on his forehead, looking into his eyes. The action was playful, but her lips were quivering nervously.

"My boy has grown so manly and splendid," she said, "and so like his father! Why, when I left you were such a little sprout; but I should

know you anywhere. I am sure you are not vindictive, Noël; he never was. I am sure you are not revengeful; you do not really wish to ruin poor Andrew forever."

"But, mother——" he began, puzzled. For the first time he felt repulsed; the brightness died out of his face. "You have not heard the truth of all this," he said, quietly, moving a little away. "Andrew came to us last spring, and since that time he has borrowed constantly of us and of our friends. Notwithstanding that we supported him, he stole and pawned our belongings, he discovered my relationship to you and played upon it, and finally I caught him in the act of signing Jack's name to a check. It is surely just that all this should not go unpunished."

At his decided tone she grew more agitated. This quiet, determined man was not the force she had reckoned on. "But remember, he is so young!" she cried, fluttering about, trying for reasonable objections and falling back upon helpless entreaty, "and prison means eternal disgrace, now and forever! Noël, I am sure he has had his lesson. I will answer for him if you let him go this time."

"Why should you concern yourself about him? What is he to you?" said her son, with drawn brows and a gesture. "He is merely your step-son, and a blackleg at that!"

“He took the place of my own dear child when I was forced to leave him,” she replied, the ready tears coming into her voice. “I grew to love him. Why, Noël, he represented you! And now I have come to my boy to ask him for his brother’s life.”

“He is no brother of mine!” cried Noël, flashing. “He is a liar and a blackguard! Mother, you don’t understand, you don’t know what you are talking about. Let it go. We have this little time together; let us be happy!” He took her hands, but she drew them away roughly.

“We cannot be happy while Andrew is in prison,” she replied, with a concentrated intensity in her voice. “Noël, his father, Andrew’s father, adores his son. He has never harmed you,—he is my husband,—give him back his boy!” She threw her arms about her son’s neck and strained him toward her.

His face, always impassive, gave no hint of his feelings, but a blackness grew and deepened in his eyes. “I must be going crazy. I do not understand,” he spoke suddenly, not to her but out into the air. “This boy has blackmailed you and—I can’t save him—what can I do?”

“You can withdraw your charge!” She spoke fast and hoarsely into his ear. “No one else has made any; I asked. Withdraw yours, Noël; let me take him home,—take Andrew home!”

“Withdraw my charge? Deny my own word?” He looked wildly at her. “You can’t mean that. It’s impossible. You don’t understand,—you don’t realize.”

“I ask you for poor Andrew’s life,” she repeated, weeping. “Your mother asks you, dear,—your mother!”

He gave her a side-long glance and repeated the words after her with a perfectly indescribable accent. “My mother asks me,—my mother!” He loosed her arms from about his neck and sat still. “I must think,” he said,—“I must think. Mother, do you love me?”

The words were a cry. “Dearly, dearly!” she protested, hanging over him; “so much that I cannot bear a stain to rest on you,—the stain of ruining that young, fresh life. Listen,” she went on rapidly, “I cannot see you turn so deliberately from your duty. Noël, I will not be behindhand. I will tell Sir Robert, and for Andrew’s sake he will forgive me, as he will forgive Andrew for my sake. We will all go away together, you and Andrew and I. He will love you, and you can be of so much use to him; and if you wish reward, I will brave my husband’s anger to reward you!” He was almost too dazed to notice how Andrew’s welfare ran under this speech like a golden thread. He rose suddenly, and stood by the mantel-shelf while she clung to him.

“You ask me to sacrifice my honor!” he said, looking at her. “Do you mean it?”

“I love you so,—I will love you forever!” She wept and hung on him. “Heap coals of fire on our heads, Andrew’s and mine! My boy, we will never leave you. If Sir Robert drives me away, we will all three go together,—we will be everything to one another, Noël!”

He did not seem to hear her; his face had a settled quiet on it as if he had gone beyond the scene of the present into a higher place. She fawned upon him, kissing his hands and wetting them with her tears; then she heard him murmur to himself.

“Give me Andrew!” she begged. “My noble son, my boy, give me Andrew!” He spoke at last in a voice as void of expression as a brazen instrument.

“I will withdraw my charge,” he said, and put up a hand commandingly to stem the extravagant torrent of thanks and blessings she poured out. The gesture was in another character, and she felt a little overawed by the constraint of his manner.

“I am going to Mr. Axenard’s the day after tomorrow,” she said. “We cannot do anything on Sunday, but on Monday they will send and release Andrew, and we shall thank you together. I knew you would do your duty, my brave boy!”

“You wish me to see him?” Noël spoke very slowly, feeling for his words.

“Oh, yes, you must go there, you must tell them!” she said, eagerly, as she threw on her cloak. “I am to be there at three on Monday; they will send to the prison. You will be there at three?”

“At three.”

“Of course, you will not speak of our relationship? I will explain later.”

She pulled her cloak around her, and then turned and clung about his neck with the first impulse of real affection she had felt during the interview.

“Good-by till Monday!” she whispered. “Thank you, my boy!”

Then she went out, and Noël heard the rustle of her dress grow faint and fainter on the staircase. He stood where she had left him, blank, uncomprehending. Then the truth rushed upon him all at once, and the bitterness and the meaning: that she had not come there for him, but for Andrew; that her caresses were not for him, but to save Andrew; that her love was all for Andrew, Andrew, Andrew!

The room whirled in giddy circles; he groped for a chair, and fell into it, laying his arms out upon the table with his head bowed upon them. Shaken to the soul in his utter agony of loneliness, he prayed to die where he sat. Then Andrew's face and his mother's faded out into a merciful unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The hunter sets forth ; at his belt swings low
His curving dagger, so that all may know

He goes well armed : then forward, singing. Fool !
Is the blind lightning an ignoble foe ?

EARLY on the morning of Monday, the 24th, three men ascended in the elevator to Clement Frey's apartment. It would be unwise after a superficial glance to brand the three with that all-embracing term of "gentlemen," since they seemed to hold neither expression, class, nor occupation in common. Their only similar interest was a smile of tolerant contempt, which was marked in different degrees on the three faces. The author came out on the landing to meet them, his pasty face bearing traces of a moving excitement. One of the visitors shook him cordially by the hand ; an elderly man with eye-glasses, a red face, and an important manner. The other two merely bowed, and somewhat doubtfully at that. One was a sharp, rat-nosed little man with an irrepressible underprick of curiosity, the other a lean and weary individual, quite hazy and formless as to feature and manner.

Frey led the way to his study, which had been in

a manner prepared for guests. Chairs were set, the table, cleared of eccentric periodicals and French novels, bore only writing materials, and the servant entered at that moment with bottles and glasses. The host was brisk and smiling, and wore a flower in his button-hole.

“Well, gentlemen,” was his greeting, “let me thank you for being on time; it’s a virtue I utterly lack myself, but I appreciate it in others. You understood my note?”

“Not exactly, Mr. Frey,” said the elderly man, who seemed more in sympathy with the author than the others, probably from a kindred passion for usurping the conversation. “You wrote, if my memory serves me, that you wished to see myself and Mr. Patterson”—he waved a hand toward the rat-nosed man—“relative to the ‘Hamburger’-‘Antarctic’ collision, and suggested that we should avail ourselves of the services of Mr. Beeber here.”

Mr. Beeber, the weary individual, here consulted his watch, with a look at Frey, which intimated his opinion that he was wasting valuable time.

“I shall not keep you,” Frey said, sharply, “and I will make what I have to say as short as I can, which, by the way, is, I do not doubt, just what Burke said before the impeachment of Hastings.”

“The collision is such a thing of the past,” said Mr. Patterson, whose expression, particularly at this allusion, grew more and more disapproving, “that

I cannot imagine Mr. Frey's 'discoveries,' whatever they may be, can alter materially our suit against Train, Vanbrugh & Co. Of course I do not know, but it strikes me that at this late date——"

"Pardon me, but I am more concerned in this affair than in merely supplying your firm (for which I do not care a dime) with information," said Frey, severely. "I have carried on a very exhaustive investigation for some months, on lines that no man has yet attempted, and I am the best judge of its importance."

Mr. Patterson was irritated, but crushed. Frey continued: "The suit of your firm is really so trifling an affair that it had escaped my memory. What I have to say may or may not alter your course. To mince no words, I have become convinced that this collision was not an accident; not, I mean, the result of chance or negligence, but, on the other hand, deliberately planned, and intentional."

He paused to mark the effect. Mr. Beeber had thrown himself back, and was, still wearily, attending to the remarks; the other two had changed color.

"Intentional!" ejaculated the older man. "Criminal do you mean?"

"Certainly," replied Frey, suavely, "very criminal indeed. And the man at the bottom of the whole business was none other than the engineer of the 'Hamburger,' the so-called Gordon."

His listeners would have spoken, but it was a daring and difficult task at any time to interrupt Clement Frey. He crossed his legs, shifted his position, and plunged into the thick of his story.

“I won’t bore you by detailing my first suspicions,” he began, “but they lighted on a man all of you at least know by name,—Roderick Merchant.”

“You mean Vanbrugh’s partner,” said Patterson, eagerly,—“the man who is over here now?”

“That man,” affirmed Frey. “An incident showed me when in London that Merchant had been betting heavily and against big odds on the ‘Hamburger.’ The thing stuck in my memory as an inconsistent recklessness on the part of a man who had a name for shrewdness. He had with him at the time a young blackguard, who, I see by Saturday’s paper, has gone to his proper place at last,—young Andrew LeBreton. Merchant supplied him with money at the time I speak of, they were very intimate, and that boy had the dash of Roland and the innocence of Becky Sharp. Well, last spring an accidental remark of mine frightened Merchant so markedly that I began to suspect. What gave him the fright, apparently, was my telling him that I had been present at the investigation, Gordon’s examination, and so forth. So, remembering that Gordon was an avowed *protégé* of Merchant’s, I just took it into my head that Gordon was in Merchant’s pay, since Merchant seemed to

have benefited largely by the accident. This fell through, partly on the terrible risk Gordon ran, but more from the fact of his complete disappearance at Southampton, a disappearance that left me no chance to prove my case."

Clement Frey took breath and looked at his audience. It gave the most marked and respectful attention.

"Then I tried for another cue," he said, "and another plan. It is too tedious to give details, but the results were plain. I found, in the first place, that at the time of the trial trip Merchant stood on the edge of bankruptcy. A fortnight after the collision the wheel turned, he appeared relieved, claimed to have made money by a lucky speculation, paid off a number of his liabilities, and sailed for America, ostensibly on business.

"He made a big mistake to choose America, of course, but I fancy he had an eye to a rich girl. However that may be, I found by careful inquiries from a great many sources, that from the exact date of the 'Hamburger's' departure from Southampton to the day when Gordon landed and disappeared in England Merchant was supposed to be in the Tyrol. When I got this information I made a thorough search through Tyrolese inns and villages, and found, as I expected, that no man answering to Merchant's description had been in that country at that time. My search was thorough: it precluded

mistake. Our friendship, Merchant's and mine, gave me innumerable occasions to add to my list of proof. I found that engineering was a hobby of his; I saw him manage a steam yacht at Bar Harbor, I heard him discuss the engines of the 'Hamburger' in a tone of absolute familiarity. In a hundred ways like these he delivered himself to me. But I did not feel certain enough to act on my information until nearly a month ago, when I caught LeBreton threatening him for money. I wrote LeBreton to come and see me, but he took no notice of the letter, and was not at home when I called. But I remembered that he had been a passenger on the 'Hamburger'—and well, I put my facts together, gentlemen, and you can draw the results."

He looked about him triumphantly, but the men were silent. At last Mr. Beeber spoke.

"As I take it," he said, slowly, "Gordon was Merchant?"

"Merchant was Gordon, of course," said Frey; "and, moreover, I ended by recognizing his voice. I will take my oath on it, and so will my friend Mr. Jermyn, and I have sworn it in taking out this warrant for the man's arrest." He flung the warrant on the table, and Mr. Beeber whistled.

"Well," he said, with a note of admiration, "you've done for him now, I guess."

"You have papers and letters proving all this, I suppose?" asked Patterson.

Frey pointed to the table. "Every one of them. The innkeeper's statement, the list of his wagers taken from his betting-book,—that was my only theft. You will find them complete."

"The only thing against your theory," said the elder man, magisterially, "is the great risk of such a plan."

"Not if you consider that Merchant was a desperate man," said Frey, impatiently, "that it was jump or nothing with him. And then he had an accomplice on board; and he knew that nothing could be proven against him. Discharge was nothing; he was prepared for it. Improbable? Why, of course it's improbable, that's the beauty of it; the man's a general benefactor. Anything's probable in this camp of a city, but this wasn't. Why, the thing's as plain as Pope."

"Then the only thing wanting," said the elderly gentleman, puzzled, "is Mr. Merchant himself."

Frey looked at the clock. "We shall not have to wait long," he said, gently; "he will be here in just five minutes."

The two gave a visible start at this, and Mr. Beeber straightened himself and looked about him with an alert air.

"So that's what you wanted me for?" he remarked.

"If you please," said Frey, politely.

Mr. Patterson, evidently desirous to obliterate his

first attitude, observed that, although he was no lawyer, it struck him as a clear case.

“Thanks,” the author replied; “but I rely more on the surprise than I do on this evidence. When Merchant sees how things are, I fancy he will give us the rest.”

A pause fell after this, which lasted until the electric bell quivered. The elderly gentleman started at the sound.

“Dear me,” he said, nervously, “if he should be violent, Mr. Frey?”

“No fear,” said Frey, reassuringly. “Mr. Beeber will see to that; and he will not be violent. Seriously now, is this information going to affect your suit?”

“I cannot tell until I see our counsel,” replied the person addressed, still fidgeting; “but I fancy——”

“Hullo, Merchant!” cried Frey, buoyantly. “Come in; these are my friends.”

Mr. Merchant strode into the room with his agreeable smile, and bowed to the three, who had arisen spasmodically.

“Sit down,” said the host, cheerfully, “and take something to drink.”

“Thanks, awfully,” said Merchant, glancing at the trio. “I say, Frey, who——?”

“I’ll introduce you presently,” said Frey. He poured something into Merchant’s glass and handed it to him. Then he laid a hand lightly on his friend’s

shoulder. "Come!" he said, authoritatively, "tell us all about your share in the 'Antarctic' collision."

The glass dropped like a stone out of Merchant's fingers.

"Yes," went on Frey, standing over him, "we know all about it,—where you were during that little trip in the Tyrol, and why Gordon disappeared the day *you* turned up. There's no use denying it, for the whole game is up, and LeBreton will tell if you do not."

Still Merchant kept silence. He laid his head back and stared upon the ceiling with unwinking eyes, like one suddenly deprived of sense.

"Speak, man!" commanded Frey, shaking him. "It's all up, do you hear?"

"It's—not—true!" shouted Merchant, leaping to his feet.

"Oh, yes, it is," said Mr. Beeber, politely. "This is the warrant for your arrest, and here——" Something chinked in his pocket.

Merchant looked him in the eye, and sat down again. With a certain aplomb for which none would have given him credit he managed a fair control of face and voice. He laid his head back, as if too weak to hold it up, and looked at the ceiling. Frey, watching him with relish, was conscious of disappointment.

"What is it you want to know?" Merchant remarked, indifferently.

“How you did it,” said Patterson, marvelling at the quiet of the man.

“LeBreton suggested it. He always was a devil. You don't fancy I would ever have thought of such a thing by myself, do you? He planned it, and the pure audacity of the thing made our chance. I was to go in deep and take any odds. We arranged it all before we sailed.”

“But the fog; you couldn't arrange that?”

“Oh, of course, chance turned in our favor,” Merchant replied; “but we knew the ‘Antarctic’ wouldn't be far off at any time, and I was prepared for any risk. As a matter of fact, the whole thing was easier than we dreamed.”

“Yes,” said Frey, “if I had not been present at Gordon's examination——”

“If you hadn't dogged me and spied me,” Merchant interrupted, viciously. “Sneak!”

There was another and a heavier silence. Merchant presented an attitude of perfect bravado, and the three men watched him. He neither blustered, nor begged for mercy, nor contributed one item to the dramatic interest of the situation. Mr. Beeber broke the pause.

“Well, gents,” he said, with decision, “this is all very interesting, but I've my work, and I suppose I'd better look after this gentleman for the present.”

“You needn't put those things on me,” said

Merchant, listlessly, as the speaker approached him. "I'm beaten, and I can't afford to run away. But if I am beaten," he cried, savagely, "it's by a low Yankee trick, that's what it is!"

Mr. Patterson and his senior declared their intention of going at once to their lawyer's office. Frey accompanied them to the elevator. At the door Merchant turned to him suddenly.

"Look here," he said, "you're not going to let LeBreton off, are you? He's in it as much as I am; he planned the whole thing, first to last."

"He is safe in the Tombs," Frey replied. "No need to bother about him till he comes up for trial."

"Not so safe," said Merchant, bitterly; "his step-mother's in New York trying to get him out, and she'll do it, too. I met her this morning, just before I came here, and she has persuaded the man to withdraw his charge——"

"Who,—Conway?" said Frey; "that freak? Why, how did she manage that?"

"They may be some connection," said Merchant. "Now I come to think of it, her name was Conway before she was married. Anyhow, she says LeBreton will be let out this afternoon."

"He will not!" declared Frey, firmly. He ran back to his study, and returned in a few minutes, folding a note. "Give that to Thompson at the Tombs, will you?" he said, handing it to Beeber.

“He’ll keep LeBreton there until I want him. Good-by; go ahead!”

Merchant shot him a vindictive look, and was marched away by Mr. Beeber, whose arm was linked affectionately in his.

Clement Frey went slowly back to his own room with a disgusted face. “Of all the inartistic blackguards,” he declared to the empty air, “that Merchant is the worst. After all my efforts, to repay me so lamentably. It’s enough to sicken one with life!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

“Yea, I have done thy will; I would be made
Master of mine inheritance unstayed;
See, at thy feet revenge and honor lie:”
“And I will pay thee as thou shouldst be paid!”

LADY LEBRETON presented herself at the Axenards' punctually on the toll of three. She looked radiant. Mrs. Axenard and Philippa, who received her, privately thought her an unusually handsome woman, to whose looks their husband and father had done little justice of description. Her dress was fashionable and gorgeous, perhaps just a shade too gorgeous; her manner left little to be desired. She spoke of Andrew with such love and hopefulness that Mrs. Axenard was touched, although Philippa, with provoking clearness of gaze, was conscious of a certain impatience.

“If I had a son who was a polygamist,” she thought, “I would not speak of him as though he had never been married!”

Mrs. Axenard had been surprised, and not quite pleased, when she heard from her husband that their house was to be made the meeting-place of mother and son. The idea struck her distastefully, and as unnecessary.

“Why could she not have him brought to her hotel?” she asked. “Why meet him here?”

“Apparently Lady LeBreton dreads the publicity of his arrival at a hotel,” he made answer, with a shrug. “At all events she wished it, so I had nothing to say.”

“She must be a——” His wife hesitated for a word at once graphic and polite.

“It’s a kind of prodigal son party,” murmured Philippa, “with Mr. Conway served up as the fatted calf.”

“Conway is the person I do not understand at all,” declared her father, walking his appointed path on the carpet. “He was set on LeBreton’s prosecution yesterday, to-day he is entirely ready to let him off.”

“Perhaps Andrew’s mother appealed to his feelings,” suggested Philippa, ever ready to defend.

“Pooh!” said Mr. Axenard. “Why should the entreaties of a perfect stranger affect him in the balance with such injuries he received at LeBreton’s hands? That’s nonsense. No. What I fear is that he was too hasty in the beginning, and has not got such evidence as he thought, so that now he is anxious to get out of it.”

“I do not think——” his daughter began, but just at that instant her mother called her to come down-stairs and receive their guest. Mr. Axenard followed more slowly. He was not a little put out

at the whole business, vexed at the possibility of a "scene," and with his confidence in Noël greatly shaken. The young man's unaccountable changeableness marked to his mind a wavering purpose which he distrusted.

"He always seemed a fine sort of fellow," he thought, going down-stairs, "but queer, and you can never trust an oddity."

Lady LeBreton, it has been said, was loud in her gratitude, her protests, her assurances, and her distress. She was nervous and excited, to which conditions her listeners charitably credited much that did not please them in her rapid, fluent words and phrases.

Half an hour before, Mr. Axenard had despatched Lyndon Forbes in a cab to fetch Andrew; the preliminaries of his release had been arranged earlier in the day. Lyndon had gone under vehement protest, but only too glad in reality to be the centre of such a coil.

There was nothing for the people in Mrs. Axenard's parlor to do but wait till he returned, in various stages of unrest and discomfort. Philippa and her father sat silent. Mrs. Axenard listened to a catalogue of Andrew's virtues,—it did not suffer because one of his vices would have been more picturesque,—his charm as a child, his warm-hearted disposition, his amiability, his good humor. There had been a fire not very distant, and the

muffled, uneasy throb-throbbing of an engine at the corner seemed to fill the room with restlessness and motion ; Philippa grew nervous.

“I wonder if this is the way people feel in books,” she thought. “It’s like a funeral while you’re waiting for the coffin to be brought down-stairs.”

Just then the door-bell rang—with a sudden decided peal that made everybody jump—and Noël came in. Contemplating him, Philippa felt a leap of alarm and uneasiness, yet too indefinite to describe. He was much as usual ; he said a few words to her father, bowed in silence to her mother and Lady LeBreton, and went over to the window, where he stood looking out.

She had only seen his face for one instant, yet she noted a difference. In all his moods, and she had seen him in many, his eyes had never worn just that expression. After his arrival the silence seemed to grow denser than ever ; every one listened to the uneasy sound of the distant engine, and looked away from their neighbor.

“How long will it take Lyndon?” asked Mrs. Axenard, subduing her voice.

“He ought to be here in fifteen minutes now,” replied her husband, consulting his watch.

Lady LeBreton rose, and going over to the window, spoke to Noël, asking after his health, hoping he was quite recovered, and so on. Her manner was almost caressing ; Philippa noted it with a sensa-

tion of disgust. What business had that woman to ask Noël how he felt, to lay her hand on his arm, to look up into his face? "Anyhow," thought Philippa, "he doesn't like it."

And, indeed, his manner, as he looked over Lady LeBreton's head to the wall and answered her briefly, was almost rude. The self-control with which he had bitted himself was not to be loosed by any trial. The minute-hand crept over the clock; every one but Noël showed a plain discomfort, when the door-bell rang again.

"Is it Andrew?" cried Lady LeBreton, starting up.

"Hardly yet, I think," Mr. Axenard replied, going to the window. "No, there is no carriage. Perhaps it is a message."

The visitor, overcoming the evasive resistance of the servant, walked jauntily into the room; it was Clement Frey.

"And how do you do?" he said, breezily, putting down his hat and smiling on the company. "Congratulate me!"

Mrs. Axenard, knowing him, made a desperate effort to introduce him to Lady LeBreton, who stood in shadow, but failed to get the words out in time. Clement Frey was on his talkative horse, and it carried him fast.

"It's all over, Miss Axenard!" he cried to Philippa with stunning rapidity. "I've sprung the trap and it caught, beautifully! Merchant caved in at

once, flung up his hand, confessed the whole. We've got it all out of him,—the plot between him and his accomplice,—and they're both safe in the Tombs. He——”

“Roderick Merchant!” cried Lady LeBreton, shrilly. But Clement Frey was deaf and blind.

“It was all a plot between him and young LeBreton,” he proceeded, gesticulating, “and a deuced clever one——” But this time he was successfully interrupted.

“Andrew!” cried Andrew's mother, coming forward. “What has he to do with all this?”

“Lady LeBreton,” murmured Mrs. Axenard in Frey's ear, and the horse was pulled in with a jerk.

“I am very sorry,” he said, haltingly embarrassed for once, “but—I am afraid he has a good deal—you see—the thing was a criminal conspiracy, and Merchant and your son will have to stand trial.”

“But it won't make any difference?” she cried, nervously. “He will come? They'll let him out just the same?”

“Let him out?” echoed Frey, understanding for the first time, and looking around for help. “Oh, no; of course not. I'm sorry, but of course he will be detained on this second charge.”

“Oh, no, Mr. Frey!” cried Philippa, springing forward, for the rest were silent. “Don't say that! He's been sent for; his mother's waiting——!”

“I’m awfully sorry,” he said, looking at her with a changed face, “but it can’t be done, you see. The steamship company are wild about it. They won’t let him off.”

Lyndon Forbes had entered unnoticed as Frey was speaking. Lady LeBreton turned to him in mute appeal.

“I’m awfully sorry,” he repeated, avoiding her look, “but Mr. Frey is quite right. They will not let him go, Lady LeBreton; he is detained on the charge of fraud. I tried my best; it’s no use.”

A blank silence fell upon the party, none of whom seemed able to express their feelings. The men stood awkwardly, Frey visibly discomposed; Philippa reached for her mother’s hand and wrung it. Lady LeBreton stood with blazing, indignant eyes. Then she turned slowly. “I see I was mistaken,” she said in a hard voice. “Mr. Conway led me to suppose that his charges would be withdrawn. I fancied him a man of his word.”

Philippa started to her feet, but her mother held her. Mrs. Axenard was not so astonished as the rest,—she had noted her guest’s eyes and mouth. In the pause that followed this speech, Noël came forward and stood looking down at the speaker.

“I do not understand,” he said, simply; “my charges were withdrawn.”

She laughed scornfully. “Of course,” she said, “it is so easy to let Mr. Frey make them in your stead.”

“But I assure you——” Frey began.

She checked him. “That will do!” she said, emphatically. “You cannot make me believe that this honorable young gentleman has not gone back on his word.”

Noël looked at her very quietly. The others, distressed, puzzled, and a little horrified, drew away from the group.

“You believe that I have broken my word?” said Noël, slowly.

She turned on him with swift, flaming anger. “Thank God, Andrew is no sneak!” she cried. “In all his unfortunate recklessness at least he was a gentleman!”

She turned away abruptly and addressed her hostess: “There is no need for me to wait. The carriage is at the door. I will trouble you no longer. Thank you all so much,” pressing Mrs. Axenard’s hand. “I shall never forget your kindness.” She put on her cloak with hands that fumbled and shook, and her face betrayed an anger that even in the presence of strangers she had only imperfectly controlled.

“You have no plans?” said Mrs. Axenard, pitying her.

“I shall go back to England after I have seen my boy,” she said, sadly. “The sooner the better.”

As she went into the hall, Noël, of all the others, followed her, holding out his hand.

“Good-by, Lady LeBreton,” said the son.

“Liar!” said the mother. She gave him one look from head to heel that burnt like fire. “I am going to my son!” she said, flinging the words at him, and went out.

He heard the door close after her and the carriage roll away before he turned. When he did, he saw that Philippa stood beside him.

“Do you believe that?” he cried, making a violent gesture at the closed door.

“Noël, Noël, of course not!”

The reserve was stripped from her for the moment. She held out a hand to him, and her eyes were bright with tears.

“You heard what she called me; that was my mother,” said Noël, looking at her with blank eyes. “Yes, she needed me, as you said she would!”

“Can I help you? oh, can I help you?” cried poor Philippa. There seemed nothing for her to say.

“No, thank you; you are very kind, but you cannot help me, Philippa,” he replied, in that very quiet voice. Then he turned away as Mr. Axenard called to him, and his step was that of an old man.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Life's last bolt wins, although it be the least :
'Tis the last wine-cup that breaks up the feast,
The last short mile that turns the stag to bay ;
'Tis the last straw o'ercomes the burdened beast.

LYNDON FORBES went home with Noël, and tried to show in his nervous way how distressed he really was at the whole business. Lyndon had a queer, inconsistent sort of liking for Conway, apart from his interest in him, a hidden boyish admiration of his size and appearance, and respect for his mental attainments. Had he chosen to confide in any one, he would have found in Forbes a sympathetic listener ; but Noël was very silent, not inclined to discuss the affair, and giving Forbes no opening. Only when they parted, Lyndon found heart to say, jerkily, "Of course you know nobody believes what that confounded woman said, old fellow, so don't worry yourself about it. Everybody knows it was perfect rot."

"Thanks," replied Noël, briefly, wringing Forbes's hand.

The door of the sitting-room was open when he climbed to it, and there in the door-way was Jack, newly arrived and as cheerful as possible.

“Hullo!” he cried, gladly. “Just got in; you didn’t expect me, did you? I got your letter and, oh, Con——” In another tone, “Are you all right? You look played out.”

“I’m tired,” said Noël, listlessly, flinging himself into a chair.

“No wonder, with all this to go through by yourself,” declared his friend, sympathetically. “You might have knocked me over with a feather, Con, when your letter came; and yet I wonder we didn’t suspect him before. Blackguard!” Jack hammered the table. “I suppose he’s in jail?”

“Oh, yes, he is there.”

“Going to stay, I hope?”

“For a few years at least. When did you come?”

“Half an hour ago. I came up here bothered about you. It’s been the very deuce of a mill, Con. Are you all right?”

“Oh, I’m pretty well,” Noël answered, with a twist of irritation. “You’ve seen the papers!”

“Yes; the *Record*,” Jack laughed softly, “Lyn-don’s making his fortune anyhow, so that’s one person benefited. Tell us all about it from the beginning.”

When Jack had received the events in their consecutive order, he burst out,—

“I cannot realize it! Was there ever such a brute? Con, if I were you I should be awfully angry.”

“I was at first,” said Noël, wearily; “but it has burnt out, and now it is too much trouble to be angry any longer.”

He paused, and then went on slowly, as if speaking his thoughts,—

“Even my anger, you see, does not last,—a pitiful fire of straw. I must have been born numb. People seem so far off to me. I was fond of Andrew. I tried at first to save him. I would never have exposed him if it had not been—— And, after all, I was sorry. You’re the only real person in this queer, empty city. All the rest are shadows; they eat and drink and make money—shadow-food and shadow-money—and for the idea that leads them they will not give a thought. We let such little things hinder our chelaship. I am tired of it all.”

“You are not well, that is it,” commented Jack. “You need a change.”

“I thought if you could get off later for a day or two we might go somewhere,” said Noël,—“into the woods by ourselves, as we used. Anywhere out of this brutal city.” He roused a little as he uttered the words.

Jack changed color and fidgeted with the handle of his valise. “I don’t believe I could just at present,” he said, confusedly; “we are pretty busy now and——” He broke off and plunged into some other subject. Then he rose and looked for his hat.

“Going out?” asked Noël, looking up. He had fallen into a revery, with his head laid back on his chair.

“Yes,” answered Jack. He went to the door, hesitated, and then came back. “The fact is,” he said, flushing, “I’m going to be married, old fellow.” Noël looked at him as an animal might. “You congratulate me, don’t you?” said Jack, hurt at his silence. “It’s Marion, and she likes you, you know.”

“I wish you every happiness, old boy,” said Noël, in quite his ordinary voice. “She is a very sweet girl.”

“She is the very sweetest girl in this city!” cried the lover. “And of course, you know, it is not going to make any difference between us, my getting married.”

“Of course not,” said Noël, gently.

So Jack departed to see his betrothed with his mind rid of its burden, and free to be filled with happiness. And he was very happy.

Mrs. Forbes was enchanted that Marion had chosen a gentleman, and not one of the heaven-gifted musicians or political refugees that Lyndon was always bringing to the house. She greeted Jack graciously enough, while Lyndon folded him in his arms with a mock-heroic emotion, and the small brother clamored to call him Jack at once. The Forbes’ were not rich, and as Marion was her-

self a bread-winner, did not regard the match as an imprudence.

There was altogether much excitement in the family at the engagement. Various aunts and cousins wrote Jack congratulatory letters and Marion advisory ones. Mrs. Forbes and Lyndon kept out of the way with praiseworthy constancy, and Jack had no cause to reflect on the circle he was about to enter. The Axenards were delightfully sympathetic and kind, although they seemed a trifle stiff to Noël. In his present sensitive state he fancied a change in them, which may have been true more or less. Even Clement Frey's repeated assurances that Conway was not even aware of the investigation he had undertaken could not rid them of the impression that Noël had acted inexplicably. Philippa might have told, perhaps, but Philippa's lips were sealed upon the matter. Mr. Frey had been profuse and voluble in his exoneration; but he did not like Noël, and thought his conduct ridiculously fickle: and just as Mr. and Mrs. Axenard were, they felt too much in sympathy with this view to escape being tinged by it. They did not, of course, believe what Lady LeBreton said, but they did not understand the scene, and were doubtful of an explanation.

So the hospitable house knew Noël no more, and when Philippa saw him, which was seldom, his face gave her no sign. In the fire of that trial his desire

for sympathy and comfort had been so strong that he had felt his whole nature wheel toward the girl to ask for hers. But that moment had passed, and he was now too dull and numb to seek for its revival; there was nothing left in him, he thought, to care for any one, only for the quiet life, the peace under the stars.

Jack wished to be married at once, and Marion saw no objection. She could not afford anything in the nature of a trousseau, "and as we have nothing to wait for," she said, simply, "why wait?"

These two young people prepared for married life with the most refreshing imprudence: scorning the almighty dollar with an almighty scorn, and undergoing no wise obstacles from a family as imprudent as themselves. Mrs. Forbes had married on a very little, and her happiness had been very large, so that she saw no reason why her daughter should not do the same. Dear Mrs. Axenard discharged her duty in one serious talk with Marion on the subject of her "fearful recklessness," and after that was done, dismissed the subject forever and plunged heartily into the preparations for the wedding. Her husband teased her, and, indeed, she confessed to a little stream of romance which freshened her heart: "and it is so pleasant," she said, "in these days of dollar-worship to come across such an old-fashioned pair!"

Jack and Marion, meanwhile, set forth hand-in-hand into the unexplored country of each other's nature. They discovered much, slept at night full of brave resolutions, rose in the morning full of strength and happiness. And, seeing Marion curb her saucy tongue lest Jack should think her a shrew, and Jack his lordly irreverence lest Marion should lose an atom of her pride in him, those who watched them were inclined to prophesy happiness, even when the first bloom was rubbed off by the years.

Noël went through these days as a soldier marches under orders through a desolate and fever-stricken country. Marion, in her warm-hearted way, was particularly gracious and kind to him, putting herself, as it were, in his place; and he unbent to his uttermost with her, while Jack's joy was increased by the content of his friend. So Noël marched on, knowing that the battle was to come.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Like children in a brook, our souls we lave
Deeper in life and her best vintage crave.

His bowl is wine and honey, mine is gall;
Yet which of us is hero, and which knave?

To his great surprise, and not a little to his indignation, the newspapers did not take that view of Mr. Frey's behavior in the matter of the Merchant arrest which he expected. They did not seem to appreciate his artistic interest, and one or two of them commented quite coolly on his friendship with the criminal. No one excused Merchant; all allowed that the author's suspicions had been worked to a daring and brilliant conclusion, but there was a general impression that the manner had been underhand. Altogether the affair had the result, if any, of making Frey even more unpopular, and of referring to him with that air of contemptuous virtue which the press assumes toward those against whom it has no charge, but of whom it does not approve. This attitude, be it borne in mind, was entirely apart from his work, which was winning him friends, and a name each day more exalted. Few men of forty in any country wrote theirs so high.

Clement Frey was very angry, and wrote several concise and dignified letters to the newspapers, which the admirers of his style cut out and preserved. In future days these letters may go down in "Choice Specimens of Literature" along with Junius and Swift. But he soon found that it was as useless to fight the press as the giant squid, that has a new arm for every one cut off, and covers his retreat in a dark liquid. When the trial came up, he gave his evidence fully and clearly, and was complimented by the judge on his constancy and method. It was due chiefly to his evidence that the sentence of fifteen years' hard labor was not mitigated: nor, all things considered, was it deemed severe.

It was in the interval that Mr. Frey decided to ask Philippa Axenard to be his wife. He had seen comparatively little of her lately,—she was absorbed in Marion's approaching wedding; but once determined that he wanted a wife, he guided himself into love with Philippa, and pushed himself in. His respect for her had risen to the top notch during late events; she flattered his pride and satisfied his mind; she was handsome enough, well-born, dignified, and cultivated, even he could not require more. The thing seemed so entirely suitable that he felt no hesitation. He went to see her many times, had many delightful talks with her, and no man was more utterly dumfounded than he when she gently but positively refused to listen to him.

“But you have not thought, you surely have not thought!” he said, standing over her. “We suit each other so admirably! You are the only woman for me, and my tastes have always seemed in accord with yours.”

Philippa hesitated. She knew that her parents would be pleased if she accepted Frey; she foresaw with perfect clearness the position in the world she coveted, the world of culture and letters which she would obtain as his wife; she knew that in every way it would be a most suitable and admirable match: and she had no words to say why she declined it.

“I am not poor, you know,” he persisted, as she kept silence. “I have a little, and I make a little more; enough to be quite comfortable. We could be delightfully Bohemian, live in Europe if you preferred; I know all the clever set in London, and they would appreciate you. Or we could travel, and have a splendid time. And I love you, Philippa; I do really!”

“You added that as an after-thought,” she said, with a smile, looking up at him.

“I didn’t!” said he, indignantly. “It was the first thought of all!”

“Well, I would like to marry you,” said Philippa, meditatively, “and I wish I cared enough for you to do it; but I don’t, Mr. Frey. Oh, I know it would be admirable, and papa would be pleased; but, you see, I don’t love you. I’m sorry.”

“It would come later,” he said, doubtfully.

“No, it would not,” said Philippa, quietly; “you are a man of the world, and you know that it never does.”

“I don’t see why you shouldn’t,” said Frey, in an injured voice; “you like my work, and you like me. You are the only clever woman I know,—clever in my way, I mean. Why, think of the cases in history——”

“Yes,” interrupted Philippa, stemming his flood of impossible comparisons, “I know. There’s Abelard and Héloïse, and Cleopatra and Julius Cæsar, and George Sand and Alfred de Musset, and many more strikingly similar cases. But, you see, they did; I don’t. That’s the difference.” She laughed as she spoke, but Mr. Frey did not appear amused. There was a silence, during which he drummed on the chair-back.

“So there’s no hope for me?” he said, more earnestly than he had yet spoken.

Philippa shook her head. “I’m sorry,” she repeated, “but there is not any.”

“You were always so discriminating, I hoped you might get to like me in the right way,” he said, rising. “But, of course, that’s the end of it.”

He took his hat, and wrung her hand, then turned back for one more question.

“Is there anybody else?” he asked.

“I do not think that question is exactly fair,”

Philippa replied, slowly. "But no, there is no one else, Mr. Frey."

He left the house with lagging steps, and spent the balance of the day shrouded in unusual and gloomy silence. A fortnight later Philippa saw that he had sailed for Europe, and heard that he intended to spend the winter in Egypt.

At Christmas she received from him a copy of his new book with a little note begging its acceptance. When she had read it she was torn between two surprises,—first, that she had ever dared to refuse the author, and, second, that the man she had refused was responsible for this new classic. For in the exquisite delicacy of it, the old-world fancy and the dainty feeling, there was surely no trace of the Clement Frey she knew.

Marion's wedding took place in Christmas week, and Philippa was her bridesmaid. It was the very gayest little festival imaginable, although entirely out of the scope of the society reporter. No great folks came to it, but then there were no jaded faces, and Jack did not think the worse of his bride that she had helped to sew on her own wedding-dress. Jack, for his part, was straight and proud, and serious, the likeness of his father, glad and humble together at his own happiness. In the matter of gifts, although she had many, the chronicler feels no liberty to expose them to the gaze of the outside world. For it is mortifying to relate

that Marion did not receive one diamond tiara, nor even a string of perfectly matched pearls. These last could hardly have pleased her more than Philippa's gift of a set of china, with innumerable dishes of every size and shape, or Lyndon's of a chafing-dish, or her mother's outfit of linen, much of which Mrs. Forbes had herself embroidered. Marion thought herself an extremely lucky person to receive so much, and her face was so radiant under its crown of golden hair that a tiara would have been superfluous.

They all went back to the Forbes' for a very merry little breakfast, not in the least appalling as such functions are apt to be, and did full justice to Lyndon's extravagance of champagne. The groomsman and the best man drew the corks, and everybody wished everybody else long life and happiness.

The home of Mr. and Mrs. Sartoris had been found in a tiny apartment, "an absurd doll's house of a place," Philippa called it; but which in point of situation, convenience, and rent Marion pronounced a marvel. She had draped the curtains herself, and made the lamp-shades; had chosen the furniture, hung the pictures, and would have laid the carpet if Jack had let her. Her wedding-gifts gave it quite a distinguished air, her drawing-board and work-basket made the atmosphere homelike at once; in fact, Marion declared that she quite longed

for the honey-moon to be over that she might start housekeeping.

They were only to be gone a week, as Jack told Noël, and they would be back in no time. "And you must remember, old fellow, that our house" (it is impossible to indicate Jack's accent as he said "our house") "is to be your home."

They departed the afternoon of their wedding-day by the prosaic medium of the Elevated, looking like a boy and girl off for a holiday. Lyndon showered rice upon them from an upper window, and Mrs. Forbes waved them farewell till they were out of sight. Theirs was, after all, a very humble little romance and hardly bears the recording.

Noël went home by himself and climbed the stairs wearily. There was a withered white buttonière in his button-hole; he flung it down as he entered with a gesture of disgust. All day he had been much as usual,—silent; but then Noël was always more or less silent, yet outwardly content. Philippa had gone up to him and chatted a little, and asked rather nervously if he had been "seeing spirits" of late, he was so quiet; and he had turned on her with one of his sudden, vivid expressions.

"Why do you laugh and say that," he said, "when it is you that do not understand?"

She had not answered, being puzzled and pained, and his face had put on its mask again. Once she thought she saw that beaten look creep into his

eyes, but it was for the merest second. Otherwise she marked little change in him ; he had not talked to her, he was less cynical on occasions when he had been wont so to express himself, and he was a little more absent and dreamier than usual.

It was almost dusk when he gained his room. He did not light the lamp, but threw himself into a chair, catching his breath as if from a sudden stab of pain. The shadows in the room crept near, and enveloped him until his face was hidden in them ; a grim loneliness caught him by the throat. The room was silent ; far down the street came the whirr and clang of the Broadway cars. Every now and then came a sound on the stairs that might be Jack's step or Andrew's whistle,—Andrew's merry, jovial whistle,—but they never came to the room. Noël sat listening,—listening for these,—but the room remained horribly silent ; the step was that of a passer, and went on ; the whistle, too, echoed along the street and died away ; and yet no hand was laid upon the door.

CHAPTER XXX.

Broken of heart, bereft by fate and friend,
To the eternal snows my footsteps tend.

Peace, is there peace, Boudh, in thy nothingness?
This is the end of all,—the end,—the End!

ONE evening a week later a tiny spark far up under the roof proclaimed to the world that Mr. and Mrs. Sartoris were at home. Marion lit the lamp herself, thinking the act symbolical, watched anxiously as the flame rose clear and steady, gave Jack an ecstatic hug, and looked about her with contented eyes. This really was home. She stood, her hand in his for a moment's silence full of blessing for both, then returning to life, she took her work-bag and sat down under the light. This was the first evening of the new life, and to inaugurate it Philippa was coming to take tea. To-morrow Jack was to go back to the office and Marion to her task of designing: to-morrow was the work-a-day world, but to-night was Eden and Paradise.

“Isn't it quite pretty?” she asked Jack modestly, glancing about her.

“Pretty?” he echoed. “My darling, it is beautiful, because it is exactly your taste.”

“It is very good of you to say so,” she said, happily.

“Not at all. You always had an exquisite taste, Marion,” said Jack, seriously. “Anything you do has an individual charm.”

“Do you really think that?” said Marion.

“I really do.”

“Then I think you are the dearest boy in the world. *Jack!*”

The door-bell rang, and Mr. and Mrs. Sartoris started apart with much dignity as the new maid brought in letters.

“Why,” Jack said, picking one up, “this is from Con. Poor old man, I must ask him to tea to-morrow, Marion.”

He tore the letter open while speaking, read a few words, and turned aside with a shocked face.

“Oh, Jack!” cried Marion, jumping up, “what has happened? What is it?”

“Read that!” he said, thrusting the letter into her hands, and going over to the window, where he stood with unseeing eyes. But Marion read no farther than he had done; her thoughts jumped to action.

“Quick!” she cried, catching his arm and shaking it in her excitement. “Quick! Go! Run! You may be in time! you may! Oh, hurry, dear!”

Jack dashed for his hat and coat without a word,

took his wife in his arms and kissed her, then the door slammed after him, and Marion sank into the nearest chair and broke out sobbing. She cried so thoroughly that she never heard the bell ring a second time, nor Philippa's step on the threshold.

“Welcome home!” Philippa cried, entering; but the gay greetings died on her lips. She stood staring at Marion, visions of quarrel rising in her mind, then she ran to her friend, crying, anxiously, “Oh, Marion, what is it? Where's Jack? What is the matter?”

Marion thrust the open letter into her friend's hands and buried her face in a handkerchief. Much puzzled, Philippa carried it to the lamp, spread out the sheets, and read:

“DEAR OLD BOY,—By the time you receive this I shall have gone to my own place. Do not think hardly of me that I could not wait to say good-by. Old man, I knew you would try and persuade me to stay, and I cannot stay. I am going back to the East, where I belong; to some quiet corner where the brethren will take me in, and where, perhaps, I shall find peace. I have always known that this was my place, and now, when you need me no longer, I shall try to find it. ‘When Jack does not need you’—these were your father's very words—‘I give you leave.’ And now you do not need me any longer; you have Marion, and Marion loves you,

and I feel sure your life will be a very happy one. Perhaps one of these days, if I get high enough, I may be permitted to see it with my spiritual eyes. I look for that time, be sure ; but until that time we shall not meet again.

“During this last week I have tried to live this other life that I hate, and I have failed. You can have no conception of what these six days have been ; and to-night I give up. I am beaten ; I turn my face toward my own country. Here it is all push and scramble, and he who pushes hardest and scrambles best is the one to win. There it is thought and silence, and the cycle of the worlds is as one day. For you, perhaps, the good things of this life are true and lasting ; for me it is different, and they have all failed me, honor, and friendship, and mother-love, one by one.

“Salutation and greeting, old friend. Forget me, if it pains you to remember ; and yet I have a comfort in the belief that you, at least, cannot forget. When I go I shall have another name, and the world-life will drop from me, and I shall not be like the Noël Conway that you knew. It will all be different and quieter, and if I reach it, the end in nothingness. So good luck to you, Jack, and good-by.

N. C.

“Give my love to Philippa. She has always been so kind.”

“So kind!” Philippa read the words in a pause, and then laughed softly, a thin, bitter laugh. She laid the letter down.

“Poor, poor fellow!” sobbed Marion, “and Jack and I were just saying that he must come; and Jack feels so badly!”

Philippa laid her hand heavily, comfortingly, on the bent head.

“To go, lonely, like that!” said poor Marion; “and I hoped, and you—— Oh, Phil!”

“*Don't!*” said Philippa, in a sharp whisper. Then, after a silence, she spoke of other things.

It was late when Jack returned. “It is no use, Marion,” were his first words. “He sailed this morning. He has gone.”

And all that evening and late into the night the three sat talking of him and their knowledge of him,—tenderly, as one speaks of the dead,—tenderly, and without reproach.

How little we understand each other! How little we estimate our value to each other! To those in a year of whose lives he had played a part, can Noël Conway ever be a faded memory? To Jack, whose busy, prosperous life holds an empty corner for him, and to whom he is a loss not Marion nor the children can wholly compensate? To Lyndon, in whose mind he rests in a reverent ignorance? To Philippa, on her way through the world, a noble

woman, a nature broad and deep and full ; to whom none ever turned in vain for mental or spiritual help ; small in words, but great in acts of love ; living her life far from the screaming campaign of her sisters ; spending herself for others ; the stimulant and tonic of younger natures ? If it had been granted to him to see all this, the woman's life lived in its small niche, and making that niche beautiful ; not concerning herself much about abuse abroad, but very much about neglect at home ; despising none, overrating none, reserved to most, valuable beyond telling to a few, might it not have occurred to Noël that peace was to be found nearer home than India ? For of the peace that passeth understanding my Philippa's heart and mind were full.

True, the possibilities of the future are infinite. Jack's life has been an unusually active one, yet he and Marion often speak of a holiday journey which they shall make to India, a pilgrimage, when they shall seek shrine after shrine for the face of their friend. But as the years go on life's burdens hardly lessen, and with young Jack at school and little Noël and Marion in the nursery, such a trip seems very far off indeed.

Meanwhile, they do not let his name grow unfamiliar on their lips ; and he is a luminous and heroic figure in the little world of their children. It is to these that his life furnishes comparison.

“To be brave, and to know lots, and to fight, like Uncle Noël,” says Jack, the younger.

“To be brave, to feel it hurt, and to bear it, like Uncle Noël,” says the namesake.

“To be brave, and to do good for evil, like Uncle Noël,” says little Marion.

Such words as these make the distance broad between them. Yet although they may not seek him, wherever he is, whether the blue southern sea curves before his eyes, or the Himalayan snows hedge the crowded world from his gaze, their love for him is undying, and he, if he has found the place he sought, must know it and be comforted.

THE END.

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