

THORPE'S WAY

MORLEY ROBERTS

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THORPE'S WAY

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BY

MORLEY ROBERTS



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THORPE'S WAY

Mrs. Grundy is essentially a savage institution.
Robert Louis Stevenson.

The affairs of any woman after twenty-five are
no one's business but her own.

George Meredith.

The censors of the Press . . . blockheads—
Heine-Reisebilder.

“Remember,” said Mr. Turvey to my father,
“how necessary it is to have a plentiful supply of
thieves, if honest men are to come to their own.”

Samuel Butler—Erewhon Revisited.

The following sentence was neatly cut in the
loadstone that was on the left: “All Things Tend
to Their End.

Rabelais.

THORPE'S WAY

CHAPTER I

*In Which Preliminary Chapter John Montague Thorpe
Makes a Somewhat Startling Proposal to Molly
Fletcher-Mytton at a Public Dinner.*

THE Muttons lived in Hammersmith, climbed into prosperity by a builder's ladder, and, migrating to South Kensington, became Myttons. Mr. Mytton, junior, went on the Stock Exchange, took a Jew for partner, and made so much money that on the death of his father he prefixed Fletcher, the patronymic of his undistinguished maternal grandfather, to his own altered name and grew glorious with a middle-class hyphen. Thus the Fletcher-Myttons blossomed and took a house on the north side of Hyde Park, from the top windows of which, as from Pisgah, could be seen Park Lane. For Fletcher-Mytton, the proud founder of his

hyphenated house, had married his cousin Amy, who also climbed like a well-watered ampeloxis, and with his hopes thus doubled and fortified even Park Lane, the land of gold and rubber, seemed no mere vision of Moses, his partner. Yet no one knew them, and with the cessation of booms their rising hopes, or hopes of rising, were rather centred on Molly, their only daughter, than on the markets about Threadneedle Street. For they knew she was beautiful, and the second son of a poor Earl, whose once shining name glowed with the phosphorescence of decay upon prospectuses, showed signs of love for her. Molly was indeed all they possessed to render them attractive, for they lacked calm or any marks to distinguish them from their neighbours who lived near at hand in porticoed stucco. But Molly almost saved them. She was what scientific folk call a "sport," being either miraculously atavistic, as seemed most likely from her extraordinary resemblance to a still surviving great-grandmother, or a splendid leap forward of nature. She could see humour in her own hyphen and merit in John Montague Thorpe, about whom the trouble began. For in a small way he was notorious, and a very awful person. The *Grandmother's Gazette*, a journal

sacred to intelligent animals and the middle classes, said the last of his five books was perilous and poisonous to the morals of English maidens. It had a fit on the subject in a column and a half, and the hysterical correspondence from provincial clergymen and other old women which occupied three of its pages for weeks afterwards, looked like the *status epilepticus* of insane virtue. Thorpe was naturally much pleased, for he belonged to the class of writer to whom the curse of the *Grandmother's Gazette* is balm in a droughty Gilead, or manna in a wilderness of mechanical and perfunctory praise. And being thus encouraged to do his best, he set to work to instruct the middle classes. It is by far the most exhilarating form of literary exercise known, though it is harder than it seems to childlike youth. It appears fairly easy to sit down and tell the cold truth; but even to students of Machiavelli's admirable *Prince*, which was the first book in history, after Tacitus, to have any cold truth in it, the process is peculiarly difficult. It is likely to make youthful writers hot, and older ones, even if they retain any capacity for truth-telling, are apt to think of their reputations and financial responsibilities. And far beyond these obstacles

there is, as Thorpe acutely remarked, the difficulty with one's self.

"Nothing new is said without a sense of sin," remarked Thorpe, pensively. "We are appallingly, monstrously, and magnificently conservative. Sin means doing what is n't done, or saying what is n't said. You can sin by being behind or ahead of your time. The good reformer always suffers from a sense of sin, if he is really advanced. You measure your progress by the moral blame your disgusting static instincts cast upon you. I live in hopes of dying, when I am too old to think, in a state of horrid remorse for my dearest and most valuable opinions."

It is no wonder that the elder Fletcher-Myttons feared and hated him when they got to know him. The cold truth is always a paradox, and paradox, unless it backs up Providence, is frightfully unpopular. The proper way to earn the reputation of brilliancy is to invert platitude in aid of the accepted, and he who does this, though inherently fat-witted and a blinkard, is sure of hand-claps. But Thorpe, it seemed, was peculiar, and would rather have lost a sovereign than an opportunity of saying something annoying to a moral Conservative.

He was, indeed, more or less independent when he first cast his keen hawk's eye on Molly. He possessed three hundred and fifty pounds a year, which his father had stolen and invested in Consols, leaving it, with his blessing, to his promising son. These were Thorpe's own statements, due, no doubt, to his views on Socialism; but he always swore that he was as proud of his predatory parent as if he had been a land-grabbing baron of the twelfth century. He could now afford to be honest and cultivate the muse of frigid truth on porridge with a few plums in it. Thorpe said, not altogether originally, that all great families were honest and fit to be trusted in politics—at any rate, by those who agreed with them—simply because their ancestors took what did not belong to them, making it sufficient for their simple needs. After two generations the comforting doctrine of *non olet* applies. Their honour rooted in dishonour stands, and to make restitution to the dead, or the State, would convulse the world. But it was a pleasing comment on Galileo's imputed "it moves for all that" that nowadays the barons in Parliament assembled shook in coronets and ermine for fear of the mob.

"But I am not greedy," said John Montague

Thorpe; "what my dear predacious old dad stole will last my time, and if it does n't I shall have the satisfaction of knowing others, equally undeserving, will be in a like case."

Obviously Thorpe was pretty clever, though it is a horrid task having to say so. There is no such difficulty for a mere writer as depicting cleverness even in a minor degree. He may be asked to prove it, and in the effort may realise his hero's nakedness or have to confess that he himself is but a police-court reporter. Sometimes, indeed (to make the direst reporting plunge of all), Thorpe was even brilliant. Brilliance is wit: it is having something real or startlingly unreal to say, and saying it quick and pat and in the proper place, which is always the wrong place for some, with a splash. The English mind, which is essentially savage, gloomy, and suspicious, prefers farthing dips to lightning. Wit is a bull's-eye thrown on its dark, dubious ways. The English know from personal experience that the only time they are personally brilliant is when they are partly drunk, and thus if they meet a man who is always more or less witty, they attribute his disturbing qualities to alcohol. Thorpe, who was quite lively on this subject, pointed out that one

of the reasons foreigners are so dreaded is that they use the language freshly and say awful things by accident. They are brilliant by happiest mischance, and shooting arrows at wild boars kills kings. Besides, brilliance is a merchant of irony, and irony is tricky falsehood to an Englishman who will only endure double meanings in commerce, where he calls it the custom of the trade. Irony tears the cloak of dignity to tatters while pretending to put gold braid on. And most men's dignity is terror of being found out. No wonder Thorpe did not get on with the Fletcher-Myttons.

Of course, the man was not so mad as to risk incarceration by going about being brilliant, or even lively. No one could have stood him, and his magnificent health would have broken down. He had never been ill or even laid up except from a broken leg, when he was engineering in South America at Titicaca or Tarapaca, or somewhere handy to neither. Yet he was currently reported by those who had never seen him swim to be covered with wounds got in some Central American Republic, when he added filibustering and pronunciamientos to his original profession of engineer. Add to his fine liveliness of spirit and the rapid motions of

the satiric, dynamic intellect a reputation for adventures, and what could the Fletcher-Myttons think when Molly declared he was the only man she had ever met who seemed perfect. Their very hyphen trembled: they almost wished they had been never born to fortune. Better the outer darkness of Hammersmith if shame were to befall. They looked at each other with terror, and consoled themselves by saying she was joking. When a friend says what is inconvenient, it is a jest. When an enemy says it, he is a scoundrel. All nations console themselves by saying what is not true till they believe it; but our nation is first among them all. The Fletcher-Myttons loved Molly and her dangling second son of an earl, and swore she jested. She lifted a sweetly-curved firm eyebrow and drummed with her pretty fingers on the table. Heaven knows what tune she would have struck out had that little hand been on the keyboard. We think of the *Marseillaise*.

These two people, Molly and Thorpe, met at the annual dinner of the Authors' Society, a pleasant function enough, where the chatter is bright and frivolous against a deep undersong of thankfulness for better days than those of

Grub Street. Two publishers were in view. They were not placarded "Perfectly Harmless," but it was understood that hostilities were suspended, and that they were there as hostages. Thorpe said they were not for publication, but were evidence of good faith—which meant nothing, but amused Molly, who was on his right hand. She and her rising mother had been brought there by Simpkinson, the risen popular novelist, who, by dint of saying nothing new or true, and saying it every spring and autumn season, had overcome the initial difficulties of his unromantic name, and was now reputed to wallow in sovereigns on his hearthrug as a tonic before he commenced dictation at nine-thirty every morning except Sunday. It was perhaps characteristic of Simpkinson to bring Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, for she was neither new nor true, and had heaps of money, but it was certainly a wonder he included Molly, who was sufficiently in the world of new things to smile at his solemn sufficiency, and true enough to find it hard not to laugh at him. However, there she was, and Thorpe was next to her. Simpkinson greeted him loftily, and Thorpe smiled. He cared not at all for the breed, and looked at Molly with joy. She sat between him

cessful novel, but, like the licensed victualler who had eighteen scarf-pins and rarely wore more than two at a time, she never put on all her plunder at once. Perhaps Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton did, and Molly, in consequence, loathed jewellery. She looked sweet, and Thorpe approved her when he sat down. She eyed him swiftly, but with the eye of the modern young woman which is not so cursed with feigned unconsciousness as that of her savage Victorian predecessors. He was certainly "a little different." She looked at six other men, and then at him again. He caught her eye, and smiled.

"Sinclair Thompson said I had to talk to you," he remarked, much more politely than seems possible for such a speech.

"That's what he said to me," replied Molly, sweetly. "He said 'it would be rather fun, he expected.'"

"The beast," said Thorpe. Thompson was next but one to him, and laughed.

"I'm the most serious man in London," Thorpe added, "and this is a serious function."

"I like extremes," said Molly, taking off her gloves. Thorpe looked at her hands. They were long and fine, and yet brown and muscular.

"We shall get on," said Thorpe. She was

curiously brown, he thought, even low upon her neck. "I'm hungry, too. That makes me serious. I take more exercise when a dinner like this is coming on, for then if your neighbour is uninteresting you can eat. Do you swim?"

"Oh, how did you guess it?" asked Molly. "I spend two days every week at the seaside and sit in the sun in my bathing dress so that I shan't look piebald when I go out to dinner."

"The proper word would be parti-coloured," said Thorpe; "but now I know how you achieve your wholesomeness."

"Thanks," said Molly. They took their soup in silence.

"Is that your mother on the other side of Simpkinson?" he asked presently.

"Yes," said Molly.

"How very extraordinary; but I suppose you are used to it?"

"To what?"

"To her being your mother. And being so unlike."

"We're all more or less used to it but mother," said Molly. "If it were n't for my great-grandmother they would say I was a changeling. Mother declares she does n't understand it a bit."

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"We're all more or less used to it but mother," said Molly. "If it were n't for my great-grandmother they would say I was a changeling. Mother declares she does n't understand it a bit."

"Are you as clever as you look?" asked Thorpe, coolly.

Molly lifted her curved eyebrows. She could move one at a time, which gave her otherwise regular features an air of unexpected piquancy.

"I don't know. Are you?"

"More," said Thorpe, earnestly, "oh, much more. But I keep it as dark as I can. It does n't pay in England to be cleverer than your neighbour."

"I suppose your books don't sell like those of Mr. Simpkinson?" said Molly, in a low voice. She need not have lowered her voice, for the popular novelist was deaf on the left side to anything but a compliment to the fearful outrage which he called his style.

"I wish they did," said Thorpe; "but, no, on consideration I don't. They're good books."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," said Molly, "but Mr. Thompson said I was n't to talk of them."

"Why?" asked Thorpe.

"He said you would get excited and speak the truth about something—I don't know what," returned Molly. "But he was even more absurd than that. He said, 'Speak of Shakespeare'; and when I said, 'Oh, Shakespeare,' he said, 'Not

at all,' and went away. What did he mean?"

Thorpe looked at her humorously. He had peaked eyebrows, and one was a little lower than the other, and when he smiled they gave him an air of elfish mischief. She liked the look of him. He, too, was very brown; his face was singularly irregular, and his teeth looked as capable as a shark's. He leaned towards her.

"Shakespeare is an English god, and I'm an atheist," he said. "I'm tired of him."

"So am I, very tired," said Molly; "but I always understood he was very great. So I've put my fatigue down to want of intelligence on my part."

"Revise your opinion of yourself, I beg," said Thorpe. "He was the greatest word-merchant that ever traded on the weakness of the British. But being essentially a writer of pot-boilers, he never put any human nature into his works."

"Is that the reason he bores me?" asked Molly.

"Does he bore you?" asked Thorpe, with obvious joy.

"Yes," said Molly.

"It would excite attention if I insisted on shaking hands with you at this stage of the evening," said Thorpe, "but you are a brave girl. I admire you awfully."

"Why?" asked Molly.

"Because you are courageous," said Thorpe. "Shakespeare has been an evil influence in this unfortunate country. Every literate ass in England implies that the best has been done. But literature and the arts are only just beginning. Shakespeare had low ideas. His highest passion was patriotism, which is the noblest point in any cannibal. There has been a conflict between Shakespeare and nature, which has ended, in England and Germany, in the death of nature. Look at his women. The critics think if a woman is like nature, she is false to Shakespeare. Instead of going back to nature, we are to go back to Shakespeare, who carved nature for us and for all time. Oh, the cult is a calamity for all concerned. I hope you follow me."

"If you don't go so fast I could follow better," said Molly, politely. "But what you say is interesting, and I'll think of it. I own he tires me."

"All literature that tires a really intelligent girl of twenty—"

"Twenty-three," said Molly.

"Is radically bad," said Thorpe, "or out of date, at the least. Only the middle classes can learn anything from Shakespeare but glorious

words. Intelligent people have absorbed what is good in Shakespeare, and now he is only useful as a companion to Roget's *Thesaurus*. Have you ever found an uplifting phrase or thought in Shakespeare which brought tears to your eyes?"

"I thought it was my fault, perhaps," said Molly.

"Not in the least," bowed Thorpe. "There's nothing in him to make you forget dinner's on the table. But do let us talk of something else. Why are you so like a gypsy?"

She would have looked splendid with a red handkerchief about her abundant locks.

"Am I?" she asked.

"Heavens!" said Thorpe. "I shut my eyes and see a moor and a caravan in the distance, and you with a lurcher dog and a rabbit. It's a clear vision. I'm a bit of a savage myself."

"Are you?" asked Molly. "How delightful!"

"By nature I am," said Thorpe, "and I'm always trying to get back to nature and the cold truth. When I am in difficulties I don't ask what Santa Theresa or Saint Francis of Assisi would have done, or what Saint Thomas Aquinas would have said. Religions are really attempts to trick you into believing that you are an espe-

cial case. But perhaps you don't quite follow. I'm liable to be too savage for dinner."

"I don't quite; but I think I see you in the distance, also with a lurcher and several rabbits," said Molly.

"By Jupiter Ammon and the Great Horn Spoon and the tail of the Sacred Bull," said Thorpe, "you are without any doubt the most intelligent woman I've met since my grandmother died. I begin very strangely to see things."

"What things?" asked Molly, almost in alarm.

"Never mind yet," said Thorpe. "But it's a high compliment to say you are as intelligent as my grandmother. She taught me to suck eggs, and showed me the inherent futility of putting the shells under broody hens. All grandmothers are wise, but they conceal it. They rarely live long enough to get rid of the feeling that wisdom is immoral."

"My great-grandmother—" began Molly. But Thorpe interrupted her.

"You shall confide her history to me later," he said. "Do you mind if I eat this absurd and recondite pudding in silence? I think I can make up my mind while I'm eating it. If I can't, there will be plenty of time while the speeches

are being listened to. You don't mind my not talking for a while?"

"Certainly not," said Molly, who had been taken over a strange course with breathless rapidity. She said to herself that she had never met anyone like him. She said "I wonder," and then she did not ask herself what she wondered. Yet she had quick, living instincts, and she felt them budding within her. She almost trembled. For a minute's relief she turned and looked at the room, and then at Simpkinson—bland, pretentious, and serene with the collected sixpences of the uninstructed. She inspected her mother, exquisitely fat and unprofitably adorned with the latest acquisitions of the Fletcher-Mytton jewel-case. She was talking to Simpkinson's right ear, stretched out like a red stone cup to receive the trickle of her inept but pleasant praise. She loved his books; he led her on to laud his style. She felt she patronised literature; she belonged by the act of commendation to the world of art. Yet if she had any instincts she would have ignored Simpkinson's extended ear and have glared angrily at Thorpe, seductive, amusing, and now strangely silent.

The nameless pudding came to an end, and

still he was silent. Molly ate an ice, and still he held his peace. The toast and speeches began. She and Thorpe heard them and heard them not. They were good and negligible. Then at last he glanced at her and smiled.

"I've been thinking," he said in a low voice, as he leaned towards her. There was a pleasant, frank smile on his face, and something more than a smile which made Molly colour beautifully under her healthy tan.

"Look here, will you marry me?" asked Thorpe.

CHAPTER II

In Which Thorpe's Proposal is Considered Curiously by Molly, Who Tells Him About Her Great-grandmother, and Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton is Sorry for His Failure to Equal Simpkinson's Masterpieces.

THE guest of the evening, a ponderous feminine writer of fifty, replied to the toast in many ill-chosen words which she read from a sheaf of paper stuck under her spectacles. What she said neither Molly nor Thorpe knew. Nor did they care. One does not think of eminent women discoursing of literature and art when really interesting things are to be done or to be considered. And though Molly, being modern, had much self-possession, she was thunderstruck. Sinclair Thompson, who had been in Texas and such-like places, would have said that she had been "knocked galley-west"—whatever that may mean. She gasped a little, showed beautiful teeth, and sat back in her chair.

"Don't be astonished," said Thorpe. "When

you think of this afterwards, you will see how natural it was."

"Shall I?" asked Molly, doubtfully.

"At the very least, it is a compliment, or so I am told," said Thorpe; "and before you reply, which I beg you to do as soon as possible, reflect that I have lived till now, when I am thirty-six, without having asked anyone to marry me, though I have seen many women other men wanted to marry for reasons which I considered utterly inadequate."

"You don't even know my name," said Molly.

"True," returned Thorpe, "most true. Thompson did n't tell me. All he said was that a pretty and intelligent girl would sit next me. But I placed no trust in Thompson. He is a sentimentalist, liable to be bowled over by circumstances and half a bottle of wine. You may have noticed that I have been able to talk to a total stranger at a public dinner without the assistance of alcohol. But that's by the way. What does your name matter? If I had met you in a forest, or on the prairie, or first caught sight of you on the coast of some Pacific Ocean island as you reclined under a grove of cocoanut palms, would your name have mattered?"

"Well, perhaps it would n't," said Molly; "but I own that I am surprised. Surely I may be surprised?"

"Certainly," said Thorpe; "but the point is: will you consider what I have asked you? Provided there is no one else to whom you are attached, I think I might have a chance."

"It is difficult for me—" returned Molly, who did not in the least know where she was. "For, as you say, you are quite sober, unless you drank a great deal before you sat down—"

"I did n't, I assure you," said her lover; "it's a thing I never do."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Molly.

"And now what is your name?" asked Thorpe, in a business-like way which was very childlike and engaging.

"It's Mary or Molly Fletcher-Mytton," said Molly; "there's a hyphen in it."

"Is there?" asked Thorpe, with visible distaste. "How did it get there? Did your mother put it in?"

"She had a great deal to do with it," owned Molly. "She thinks more of it than all the remainder."

"Has your father a coat of arms?" asked Thorpe; "and is it his own?"

"Yes. He paid for it at the Herald's College, I believe," said Molly.

"And your mother uses his crest on her newspaper, does she not?" asked Thorpe.

"Is it wrong?" asked Molly.

"Very immoral," said Thorpe, earnestly. "There are only two crimes in England: one may be committed by a man, and it is to cheat at cards; the other is for a woman to use her husband's crest. But I see you don't belong to your family. Do not mind my going on talking. Pay as little attention as you choose. I want you to think."

He lay back in his chair, and Molly did a great deal of thinking. She owned to herself that her family bored her to death. Her father, kind as he was, had the brains of a rabbit outside his business. Her mother was ancient, preposterously ancient, in every idea she possessed. She was moral to an alarming degree, and tried to make Molly equally moral. For in the middle classes morality consists in being the same as your neighbour until your neighbour is found out. When Molly told her mother that using a crest was wrong, Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton was stricken with a deep sense of shame not to be washed out by prayer. She burned her letter-

paper in secret and blushed all down her spine. She had done something which the upper classes would laugh at. The height and perfection of morality is to do nothing that can be laughed at or objected to by No. 10 and 12 when you live at No. 11, and No. 12 was occupied by a Viscount.

"I think he's amusing and strong and not at all bad-looking," said Molly, "but how extraordinary! Was a girl ever proposed to at dinner by a man who did n't know her name and had n't even taken her in?"

She looked at Thorpe, who smiled at her and drew his bow at a venture.

"It never happened before," said Thorpe.

"Oh!" gasped Molly, "do you actually know what I was thinking of?"

"I guessed," said Thorpe. "And I also begin to think that you are not angry, and may eventually consider what I have proposed."

"I don't know," said Molly. "I thought that people had to be in love before they proposed?"

Thorpe shook his head.

"That's wrong, utterly wrong; all that is necessary is that you should see you will be in love. And I don't mind telling you that I consider the mad love described in books is very immoral.

It's a disease. I'll explain this later. I could n't do it now without raising my voice. I have been looking for you for years. That's sufficient. As I said, I never proposed before. But I've refused seven offers of marriage already."

"Refused?" said Molly. "Seven!"

"Definitely and at once," said Thorpe with decision. "They all offered to give me time, but I would n't have it. I said I would be a brother to them if they liked, but they didn't like. Brothers are bitter critics. Don't think I'm not serious because I talk like this. It's my way when I'm rather excited. And I want you to see me at my worst."

"Yes?" asked Molly. "Why?"

"Because I like being fair," returned Thorpe. "If I waited till I was madly and wretchedly in love with you, I should endeavour to deceive you into thinking I was perfect and very moral and utterly trustworthy and a genius; whereas I'm most imperfect, not at all moral, very fickle, and merely talented, with a kind of gift of insight into things."

"Are you fickle?" asked Molly, ignoring every other quality he claimed.

"Outside, very," said Thorpe, quickly; "inside,

not at all. Most people are outside, but I've considerable inside to me. And, to go on, think how unfair it would be for me to wait till you loved me before you found me out?"

"I suppose it would. But it's usual," said Molly.

"And horribly immoral, with true immorality," said Thorpe. "Just consider. I might have got an introduction to you, and have turned up in a high hat, fawn-coloured gloves, spats (do they wear 'em now?), and a black morning coat, as I understand frock-coats are prehistoric. In that costume, or whatever you consider I should have adopted, I might have made love to your mother, endured her use of that crest, bamboozled your father into thinking he was brilliant by laughing at his jokes, got your pet tame clergyman on my side by a few choice insincerities and a subscription, and finally married you, leaving you to find me out at your leisure."

Molly shook her head.

"You're—you're quite wonderful," said Molly.

"Why?" asked Thorpe.

"How *do* you know my dear dad makes jokes that are increasingly tiresome every day, and that we have a tame clergyman?"

"I guessed both," said Thorpe. "Middle-class fathers are all the same; and as to the other point, in the old days the nobility had private chaplains, while nowadays the middle classes employ a common clergyman, and, by petting him and offering him tea-cakes of unusual succulence, endeavour to establish a bigger property in him than their neighbours have."

"Ours is a Reverend Mr. Mallow, of Holy Trinity," said Molly. "He comes to tea once a week."

"And eats tea-cakes?"

"Two," said Molly; "and tries to convert my great-grandmother."

Thorpe seemed overjoyed. He had learnt much from his own grandmother, but to hear that this bright creature next him possessed a great-grandmother who required, and evidently resisted, conversion was indeed a pleasure.

"Tries to convert her? Go on—tell me about her," he said eagerly.

"She's quite wonderful," said Molly. "She's the only one in the family who thinks I'm all right. She says I'm like what she was, which is rather awful, for perhaps I shall live to be ninety, and look like a brown doll with beady eyes, and say appalling things to everyone."

Thorpe wriggled on his chair.

"This is immense," said Thorpe. "I must know her. If you live to be ninety you'll be a widow long before then— However, please go on. What are her views?"

"On religion?"

"And on morals. I should love to know. I've long suspected that the only sane people with regard to both are the very old and the very young. All good children are intensely immoral and irreligious, but I've rarely met old people. I believe they are killed by the middle-aged in the interests of morality," said Thorpe.

"She laughs awfully, so as to make you shiver, at what Mr. Mallow says," said Molly. "We don't let many people see her, for she's not educated, being part of the family before we had a hyphen and changed our spelling. She lives upstairs mostly, because of her aspirates. Otherwise she's quite aristocratic to look at, and wears a white wig. She's deaf, and has a trumpet like a megaphone thing. When we are boiling she drops a remark like a lump of ice, and when we are chilly she puts us on the fire. I believe you'd love her."

"Perhaps I should," said Thorpe. "But what about her religion?"

"She has n't any," replied Molly. "She says she 's too old to need it. She says, 'Religion is lies, my dears,' and when Mr. Mallow argues, she 's like Sir Joshua Reynolds, and takes away her ear-trumpet. And every now and again she says, 'Have n't I heard it all before, my dears, eh?—years and years ago. Tell that clergyman, Amy' (that 's my mother) 'that he 's an old fool.' And Mr. Mallow smiles painfully."

"One never knows what may be found in a middle-class family, after all," said Thorpe. "And her morals?"

Molly shook her head.

"I should think they're all right now," she replied, as if she still had doubts on the subject. "But when mother looks moral— Do you know what I mean?"

"Quite," said Thorpe. "When I get to know her she 'll look like that."

"Why, then, Granny takes away her ear-trumpet, so that she can't hear mother, and says things no middle-aged woman ought to hear. I can't tell you what she says, you know."

Thorpe nodded.

"I daresay not. You shall later, when we are married. But before then I shall meet your

great-grandmother and talk matters over with her."

"You're as extraordinary as she is," said Molly. "But I believe she would like you."

"I should n't be surprised," said Thorpe. "I think I'd better call to-morrow and see your father. Or should I speak to your mother now?"

"Oh, certainly not," said Molly; "but now or any time, it would n't be any good."

"You mean you definitely refuse me?" asked Thorpe.

"Not definitely," said Molly. "I think I like you, and I shall be pleased to meet you again. Only if I said I'd do what you ask, they would all have fits, for they want me to marry the Honourable Edwin Fanshawe."

"Who's he?"

"He's the second son of the Earl of Shap," said Molly; "and his elder brother has consumption."

"I see," said Thorpe; "then he has one recommendation as husband, at any rate. But he never will be your husband."

"Oh!" said Molly; and then she added hastily, "You should have heard great-grandmother when she saw him. She *would* come down."

"Tell me about it," said Thorpe. But just then the dinner was over, and the *conversazione* began. As they moved from the table Thorpe touched Molly on the arm.

"Introduce me to your mother," he said.

"You 'll be good?" said Molly.

"A model," said Thorpe. "But before we 're separated for the time being, can you lunch with me to-morrow? I 'll bring Sinclair Thompson and his sister?"

"Would it be correct?" asked Molly, demurely.

"Ask your great-grandmother," retorted Thorpe. "There is no authority like that of a great-grandmother."

"I will," said Molly.

And she introduced him to Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, who was like an inartistic jeweller's shop-window, and was decorated with diamond crosses, crescents, and brooches wherever she could pin one on.

"A most delightful evening, Mr. Thorpe," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"I 've enjoyed it more than any evening I 've spent for a long while," said Thorpe.

"Such a privilege to be among so many celebrities. Do you write?"

"I am obliged to," said Thorpe. "If I did n't

I should be subjected to the grossest inconveniences."

"Oh, in what way?"

"I should probably starve," said Thorpe, gravely, "my private income being only sufficient for the merest luxuries."

"Good heavens, this is being a model," thought Molly.

"Ha! a joke—I see," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton sternly.

"I like to come to these dinners," said Thorpe; "I save up for months. To sit for an hour next to a man like the great popular Simpkinson inspires me with the germs of popular stories. I sat by him once and heard him talk for two hours, and after that I wrote three stories in a week which were all accepted by popular magazines. I felt on the verge of real success. But after that I was unlucky enough to be imprisoned in an express train with a novel of Thomas Hardy's. There was no way of escape: the novel belonged to a lady travelling in the same compartment, so I could not throw it out of the window. Thus I was tempted and fell. I read it and have written no more popular stories since. Ours is a perilous trade, Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton."

He sighed.

"Is it?" asked Molly's mother.

"It resembles gambling," said Thorpe. "It's strange, but there are two kinds of bookmakers, both gamblers, and when the popular favourite wins both are out of pocket."

"Do you refer to horse-racing?" said Molly's mother, who hardly knew what to make of him. "I do not approve of betting and gambling."

"Except on the Stock Exchange," said Thorpe, "surely you do not object to the Stock Exchange. How else could the middle classes invest their hard-earned wealth?"

"I really don't know," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"It is a noble institution," said Thorpe, who knew that her husband was in it. "You invest your wealth through the medium of an authorised broker, and you lose it, if you do lose it, without encouraging the unmoral unauthorised broker outside. If you make more, everyone is delighted but the man who loses it. And loss is frequently more morally advantageous than gain. I have known cases where reform has followed a moderate loss. In extreme cases bankruptcy is good, but as a rule I should not recommend it."

"My father says a bankrupt is a criminal," said Molly.

"But what would the officials in the Bankruptcy Court do without them? tell me that," cried Thorpe. "They have families and feelings. Who would support them? Would you throw them on the rates? I'm sure you would not."

"No, certainly not," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"But literature is nobler, I own," said Thorpe. "Did you find Mr. Simpkinson brilliant to-night, Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton?"

"Very," said Molly's mother, who had not let Simpkinson say very much.

"I've known Simpkinson talk for two hours and a quarter by the club clock, and say so much that you remembered nothing, and went away thunder-struck by the plenitude of his platitudinarian information," said Thorpe.

"I should n't be at all surprised," replied Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton more graciously, "we have known him for a long time. We always read his books."

"What a privilege," said Thorpe. "I wish I could. I've tried and can't. It is n't that I can't delight in their profound appreciation of

the jejune: their triumphantly successful resuscitation of phrases which the most ordinary writers have discarded as beyond resurrection, but they depress me, they depress me! I feel I can't equal them."

"It is n't given to everyone to be a Simpkinson," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, who was moved by poor Thorpe's evident distress at not being able to equal Simpkinson's masterpieces.

"True," sighed Thorpe, "but one can't help being a little envious."

"What do you mostly write about, Mr. Thorpe?" she asked.

Molly looked alarmed.

"Morals," said Thorpe.

CHAPTER III

Relates How Thorpe Took Molly to Lunch in Company With Sinclair Thompson, Who Could n't Bring His Sister. And How Molly Had Her Hand Kissed.

IT is impossible to have things all at one time both romantic and realistic, and even a sentimental girl of some twenty years ago might have been amused and attracted by John Montague Thorpe, who was certainly a bright companion, and could hold up his end, or even both ends, of any conversation without trouble. He did n't drawl "eh" or "what" and then relapse in that speechless stolidity which was once held to be the best form. The young lady of the later mid-Victorian period might have considered his attitude almost insulting. But girls in those awful days were as much brought up to be specialised sexualists as if they had grown under the hot glass of a harem and never played with anything but sofa cushions. They were "ladylike," which is now held to be a term of abuse, and their complexions were their chief

preoccupation. The habits and morals of the early and mid-Victorians were thus the direct causes of the increase in tuberculosis. This is known to be a fact, for Thorpe stated it at various times in seventeen different ways. He loved discovery amazingly.

But Molly was essentially modern and healthy, and not being specialised in sex before her time, she regarded love as a jolly joke, which is how it should be regarded. Flirtation is the only legitimate form of courtship, and the heart of the healthy woman knows this to be true. She was, therefore, much pleased with Thorpe's method of attack, and deeply regretted that the crowded company of the adventurous night prevented him from kissing her hand. Little as she knew of these things, she felt he wanted to kiss it. And she was aware that her great-grandmother would have chuckled joyously to hear of such an incident. There was immense confidence between the girl of twenty-three and the withered but healthy old lady of more than ninety, and Molly went to consult her ancestress early next morning, carrying with her a letter from Thorpe, which he had dated "two o'clock in the morning of the day after I first met Molly." This was pleasing, and the matter of the letter was quite

simple and straightforward. She read it to Granny, who sat up in bed, looking like a bald golliwog in a lace cap, for her wig was being combed by her maid. Molly kissed the shining top of her head through the lace and sat down by the bed.

"I had an adventure last night, Granny-ducky," said Molly.

Grannyducky could hear Molly without her trumpet, and she turned her beady eyes on her smartly.

"I love 'em," said Granny.

"What?"

"Adventures," said Granny, giggling. "Was it a young man? Or an old one?"

"He 's thirty-six," said Molly, "but very young for it."

"Did he kiss you?" asked Granny with a vicarious enjoyment of immediate and premature osculation which was pleasing and pathetic.

"No!" said Molly; "there were hundreds in the room. And, besides, I shouldn't have allowed it. At least, I think not."

"I refused to be kissed by several nice young men when I was eighteen," piped Grannyducky, "and it has been a grief to me ever since. You can only be young once, my pet."

"You're young now," said Molly.

"Just as young as ever I was," chuckled Granny, "but the men don't think so. Tell me about him, quick!"

So Molly told her.

"Am I to go to lunch with him?" she asked.

"Read his letter," said Granny.

Molly began to read it. The dating of it was very pleasing to her great-grandmother.

"He is romantic without being sentimental, my chick," said Granny. "Sentimentalism used to make me sick. There was so much of it when I was young. Go on."

Molly continued.

"I hope I amused you last night," wrote Thorpe, "but I was perfectly serious. Do not doubt it. Come to lunch at the Rendezvous in Dean Street, Soho, at one p.m. sharp. As you may regard going to lunch with somebody you never heard of before last night as a serious step (though I hope you look on it as natural) I beg you will consult the highest and oldest authority in your house as to its propriety. Need I say that I refer directly to your great-grandmother, who seems to me, from what you said, to be a remarkable and delightful personality. Sinclair Thompson is coming, but instead of

bringing his own sister I have permitted him to bring mine, who is naturally of more interest to him."

"I love this young man," said Granny; "I positively love him already. Go, my darling, and have lunch. You will amuse him and yourself, and me when you come back. I wish I was young now. We had a perfectly sickening time when I was young, my ducky. It made me 'orribly deceitful, and so meek with it, my dearest. The girls now don't know 'ow lucky they are."

"Then you think I may go?" asked Molly.

"For two pins I'd go too," said Granny eagerly, "but you must bring him to see me."

"I don't think I shall marry him," said Molly.

"Bah, who wants you to?" shrilled her great-grandmother. "I'm not thinking about marriage. I despise it, and I always did."

"You wicked great-grandmother, you know that's not true," said Molly. "You should keep those awful things for Mr. Mallow."

"The old fool," said Granny. "Now kiss me and go away and enjoy yourself, and send Filkins to me with my wig."

So that was why Molly went to lunch at the Rendezvous, while her mother had lunch with

the Simpkinsons and knew nothing about it till afterwards. The mid-Victorians, the ancient dears, might have considered that Molly did wrong, but revolt is heaven's first law, and if the younger generation did as they were told, and acted as they were expected to act, the world would come to a very miserable end. Thorpe said so at lunch.

"Morality, as it is understood by the vulgar," said Thorpe, "is allowing the dead to legislate for the living. It is rare to find any who are really alive after forty. A live man or woman over fifty is a menace to what is called civilisation. But civilisation properly understood is a process of revolution."

"Wait till you meet my great-grandmother before you run down the aged," said Molly.

"I know she's a moral firebrand," said Sinclair Thompson, who was seated next to Thorpe's sister. She was only three years Molly's senior, and much better looking than her brother.

Miriam Thorpe and Molly looked at each other, and with the subtlest agreement of the eyes became friendly. Before the end of the meal they had rid themselves almost entirely of the hostility which separates all women from each other.

"I want to see your Granny with Simpkinson," said Thorpe. "I understand she objects to marriage. Simpkinson's morals are prodigious. He believes in marriage to such an extent that he has married three times. Women are extremely strong to suffer, but Simpkinson's first two wives did not survive two years. He has thus combined most of the advantages of immoral intrigues with holy matrimony."

"Tut, tut, Jack," said his sister. "I wish you would be good. And if you can't be good please be careful. You forget we are in a public place and your voice carries like Caruso's. I am not trying to prevent Miss Fletcher-Mytton from being shocked."

"I begin to understand your brother," said Molly, laughing.

"It's an education in anarchism to know him," said Thompson. "I've learnt a lot from him. He and I are in the same boat."

"It's no good hiding it," said Thorpe. "That's why I brought my sister with me, Molly. Sinclair Thompson wants to marry her and she won't have him."

"Oh, Jack," said Miriam, who looked as vexed with her brother as anyone who was young could be.

"Well, isn't it true?" demanded Thorpe. "And if it's true and not indecent why shouldn't it be mentioned? The art of conversation should be exciting, not sedative like Simpkinson's. If possible, you should say things not said before. I told you on our way here that you would see the girl I wanted to marry, and now she sees the girl Sinclair Thompson wants to marry and we are all on a level. I am enjoying myself immensely."

Miriam, who was a deal prettier than any relative of Thorpe's had any reason to be, looked at Molly and shook her head.

"Are you acquainted with my brother's new ideas on love and courtship?" she asked.

"I heard a little of them last night," said Molly.

"They are very sound," said Thorpe. "I am often right about things, but on this point I am quite right. The moral and physical separation of the sexes has made love a morbid process. The proper keynote of love is simple joyousness. We should not be so fond of each other that parting means three pages of Simpkinson's sixpenny sentiments."

"One would like to be sure of the man, I suppose," said Miriam.

"Impossible," said Thorpe, "and, if possible, degrading. Your sex reminds me of bird-catchers, who, by the way, do most of their deadly work on Sunday, like the middle- and lower-class girl. Men who beat their wives do it, without knowledge of the reason, as a natural revenge for being forced to keep them."

"What do you propose?" asked Molly, gurgling at these propositions in the mouth of a lover.

"I propose nothing," said Thorpe. "One prophet can't do more than express sacred opinions. The future is in the hands of the most important part of the race: the young women. Thank heavens, they begin to revolt. I've been writing for them for years, and thirteen out of England's millions have discovered the fact. Eleven agree with me and two write me abusive letters. I live in hope of amendment in a few thousand years. Let's have coffee and cigars. I wish all women smoked."

This changed the conversation, for it led to the consideration of Mahommedanism and thence to religions in general, and by easy stages to Hampton Court and Kew Gardens, and botany and astronomy, and sour milk, without which no modern conversation can be considered com-

plete. Metchnikoff and old age led round again to Molly's great-grandmother, and the conversation ended where it began. Thorpe paid the bill and the two couples walked to the National Gallery, where they separated with the implicit understanding that they were not to meet at the place appointed. And then Thorpe became tolerably serious.

"Have you thought of what I said last night?" he asked.

"I've thought of nothing else," said Molly frankly, "but you can't expect an answer now."

Thorpe's eyes gleamed.

"That's good enough for me," he said. "I'm not a fool, though I talk too much at times. Let's look at some of the pictures, if there are any you want to see."

It appeared that Molly was wisely anxious to admire Turner, and as Thorpe was a fanatic on the subject they really enjoyed themselves.

"The first and last word on art is that it need not be like anything if it's beautiful," said Thorpe. "If it is beautiful and like itself then it's a *chef-d'œuvre*, and worth as much as a foolish nation can be bulldozed into paying for it. Turner's water-colours are the greatest things ever put on paper, and the man who

does n't like them before he is forty ought to be sent to hard labour and kept there."

"I 'll do my best," said Molly humbly.

"By the way," said Thorpe, "I meant to tell you Sinclair Thompson is arranging that I shall meet your father."

"Oh," said Molly in alarm.

"I 'll be very gentle," said Thorpe.

"He 's quite a dear, good dad," said Molly, "and I 'm afraid. I hope you 'll be—be moderate."

"I 'll really do my best," returned Thorpe. "I 'll ask him about bimetallism. Will that do?"

"For three hours at least," said Molly.

"But I hate deceit," said Thorpe; "by and by I shall have to explain my general outlook on life."

"If you do it as you explained to my mother your admiration for Mr. Simpkinson's work, you 'll do very little harm," said Molly.

"But supposing they find me out and refuse to have anything to do with me, what effect will that have on your decision?" asked her lover.

"I don't quite know," said Molly. "I cannot hurt them by being outrageous or sudden, you know."

"I should n't like you to hurt them, poor dears," said Thorpe; "though the feelings of one's immediate ancestors are the only real obstacles to immediate reform, they have to be considered so long as men are what they are. And, by the way, I've told my publisher to send you my first and last books."

"Oh, thank you very, very much," said Molly.

"Read 'em first," said Thorpe, a trifle drily. "The first is a work of considerable merit. But most of the papers said that the last ought to be burnt by the common hangman, or words to that effect."

"The brutes," cried Molly indignantly.

"I produced exactly the effect I desired," said Thorpe pensively. "Three reviewers came to me and apologised for the tone of their reviews. They said the elderly editors were frantic, and believed that the morals of their unmarried daughters could not survive my deadly influence. So they did their very best to make the dear girls read the book."

"I'll read it to-night," said Molly. "And now should we find your sister and Mr. Thompson?"

"Certainly not," said Thorpe, "if Thompson is left alone he may get Miriam into a taxicab

and run away with her. I'll take you home, or as near as you'll let me."

The Italian Gallery in which they stood was entirely empty.

"By the way, would you mind taking the glove off your right hand for a moment?" asked Thorpe.

"Why?" asked Molly.

"I'll tell you when it's off," said Thorpe, and Molly took it off.

He lifted her hand, looked at it with curiosity, and just as she expected some cheiromantic pronouncement, Thorpe kissed it.

CHAPTER IV

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton Lunches With the Simpkinsons, and Explains to Simpkinson How Much Thorpe Admires Him. In Return, Simpkinson Expatiates Upon Thorpe, Who Dines in Company With Mr. Fletcher-Mytton.

SUNLIGHT seen through a spectroscope would not have been in it for crude colour with Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton's face if she had known that Molly was at the Rendezvous with Thorpe. And this in spite of the fact that she was usually an even, though powdery, pink. The poor lady was aware that Molly had potentialities which had developed late in her own grandmother, but so far she had not run up against them, with the single exception of the girl's absurdly critical attitude towards young Fanshawe. Every Fletcher-Mytton believed that a little experience of life would show Molly that the second son of an Earl with a consumptive and unmarried elder brother was a speculation any well-brought-up girl should put her

"shirt" on. That's how Molly's brother Fortescue, commonly known as Forty, explained it.

"Fanny is a blighter," said Forty, "and he ain't got the brains of a boiled rabbit, but think where the mater will be when you're a countess, Molly."

Fanny was really a long, inoffensive person with a passion for polo, which he hoped to afford if he married the girl he loved. It was a frightful thing for his family to know that he wanted a stockbroker's daughter, but unless Bill, who was the heir, coughed, they said very little. They were wiser than Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, who said a great deal to Molly. And here was poor Amy Fletcher-Mytton prattling amiably about Thorpe to Simpkinson, while Thorpe was paying for Molly's lunch in Soho and hardly making things better by having Sinclair Thompson there. For Thompson was said falsely to be very wild indeed. The Thorpe and Molly-cum-Miriam and Thompson lunch ended happily, with kissed hands and two taxicabs, but the Simpkinson lunch was spoilt by the guest. She talked about Thorpe *à propos* of some praise which Simpkinson gave his own style. As no one else had a decent word for it,

he was compelled to tonic himself up with a self-recommendation to mercy. And then Amy Fletcher-Mytton recollected that Thorpe, a bright and fluent person of the evening before, had said things about Simpkinson which seemed like ardent praise.

"That Mr. Thorpe, who sat the other side of Molly, seemed to think very highly of your work," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"Did he?" asked Simpkinson, doubtfully. Thorpe was the type of mind of which he had a holy horror. No one knew what Thorpe meant—or Simpkinson did not, at any rate. But he had a shrewd suspicion at times that when he and Thorpe met, as they did occasionally, the other man laughed at him.

"Very highly indeed," said Amy Fletcher-Mytton. "He was most enthusiastic, and talked so fast I could hardly take it all in."

"He can talk fast, at any rate," said the novelist, who was not yet satisfied. "What did he say?"

"So difficult to remember what you dear, clever people say," replied his guest, knitting her brow till the powder cracked, "but I'll try to remember. He said that you talked for two hours beautifully, so beautifully that even he

could n't remember a thing, and he went away, thunderstruck with—with—"

"With what?" asked Mrs. Simpkinson, who had grown to like her husband's novels, and regarded them as a necessary of life. As, indeed, they were to many. "Do, do remember!"

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton pondered.

"It was something about inspiration."

"Quite so," said Simpkinson, looking less anxious and more ready to purr.

"Yes, plenary inspiration, I think," said dear Amy. "No, I remember! Plenary platitudinary inspiration."

"Oh!" said Simpkinson, looking as black as thunder. But Amy had it now. She had struck the keynote of Thorpe's hymn to Simpkinson, and could, at any rate, play the air.

"He said your ability depressed him. He could n't do it himself. He said you appreciated the jejune, and used phrases successfully which all other writers had given up as hopeless. He seemed most sincere."

"Did he?" said Simpkinson, who was in a towering rage, but could n't endure to let her think that Thorpe was anything but sincere. He restrained himself with difficulty, but was aided

by his wife's deep pleasure in Mr. Thorpe's praise.

"Of course, he's a very wicked young man," said Mrs. Simpkinson, "and his last book was pollution. But it's very clever."

"Wicked! Pollution!" cried Amy. "But he said he wrote about morals, morals!"

"I'll tell you about him," said Simpkinson, grimly; "or, no, I'll do better than that. I'll send you what the *Grandmother's Gazette* said about him. The *Gazette* is eminently respectable. It has every sign about it of loathing new thought of any kind. Its conservatism is moderate, but, thank heaven, its morals are immoderate. So long as the present editor survives we are safe. I'll fetch it and read it to you."

"He sat next my Molly," said Amy, while he was away.

"He could not do much harm in one evening, and at a public dinner, too," said Mrs. Simpkinson.

"I regard this kind of thing as I should cholera," said Amy. "Modern girls are extremely susceptible to new ideas. Think of ladies throwing stones at windows!"

"Awful!" said Mrs. Simpkinson, whose only

titled friend had been to prison. It made her feel her equal, or very nearly her equal. And then Simpkinson returned with the commination service of the *Gazette*. He intoned it solemnly, and then looked up.

"Praise from a man like that makes me sick, absolutely sick," said Simpkinson. "Thank God, I do not require it. I never wrote a word which could bring a blush to the cheek of any English maiden, or make her acquainted with any of the facts of our fallen human nature."

"Thank God, you have not," said his wife. "Our dear girls have read every word you wrote, and, so far as I can tell, and I am their mother, they are as unsuspecting of evil as any unmarried clergyman could desire."

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton had grave doubts about that, as they were not her daughters, but such doubts are never mentioned among friendly mothers. It is sufficient to each to recognise that what is truth in her case is illusion with the others. Nevertheless, though Molly, being her own daughter, did not partake of common human nature, it was necessary to guard her from contamination. She determined to speak to Sinclair Thompson with severity, since he had more or less introduced Thorpe to Molly.

"There is no need to know this Thorpe," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton; "that is, at any rate, a mercy. I shall tell Molly to ignore him if they meet."

But when she got home, rather late, she had quite a shock. For Molly was dining and going to the theatre with some other hyphenated stucco-dwellers, and her mother learnt from the housekeeper that Mr. Fletcher-Mytton had telephoned to say he was dining at their club with Mr. Sinclair Thompson and Mr. Thorpe.

"I hope that Edward will find him out," said Edward's wife, gloomily. "I never liked that Sinclair Thompson, never! And now I know what this friend of his is like, I feel assured he is bad. If Edward does not see the kind of person he is encouraging by dining with them, I shall enlighten him this very night."

Over the telephone she ordered the back number of the *Grandmother's Gazette*, which contained the diatribe on Thorpe, and sat down to dinner with her son and heir, Fortescue. She interrogated him about the morals and manners of Sinclair Thompson.

"He's a sport," said Forty; "kind of man you would n't hunt for trouble with, or if you did it'd be a short run. He'd hand it out quick."

A cove I know was rorty with Thompson, and Thompson broke his jaw, and bound it up in a table-napkin, and had him in a nursin' 'ome with a surgeon inside of fifteen minutes."

"A very scandalous proceeding," said his mother, sternly. "And I wish you would n't use such slang, Fortescue. I don't like it."

"Sorry," said Fortescue, somewhat abashed; "but when one jaws about a cove like Thompson, who is a real sport, it comes natural."

"I can see no reason why correct English cannot be used about anyone," returned his mother. "Do you know anything of his friend Thorpe?"

"Met him once," said Fortescue; "did n't quite know what to make of him."

"Why not?" asked his mother, eagerly.

"He talked a bit too much," said Fortescue, reflectively; "very confusin' talk, too. Thompson seemed to be eggin' him on, and laughed when I could see nothin' to laugh at. Not that he was n't amusin', but talk with Thorpe seemed like a game which was a bit of golf with cricket and polo thrown in, so a cove don't know where he was."

"Was his talk of an immoral tendency?" asked his mother.

Her son stared at her.

"Blessed if I know," he said. "What is an immoral tendency?"

His mother found this difficult to define.

"I mean, should I have approved of it?"

"Oh, no," said Fortescue, with unexpected decision; "you'd have got your back up in two two's, and sailed out quick."

"That is what I expected," said his mother.

"But Thorpe's all right," urged Fortescue; "you don't think when two or three coves get together in their rooms with whisky and soda that you'd give 'em a certificate, do you, mother?"

"Humph!" cried Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, and she said nothing for five minutes. Then she remarked:

"I disapprove of Mr. Thorpe, and I am disgusted to know that your father is dining with him and Mr. Thompson. He shall not come here."

"Don't see why he should," said Fortescue, gloomily; "not but what he'd liven things up a bit."

"I am anxious about Molly, and I shall be anxious till she is engaged to Edwin Fanshawe, and I was afraid she rather liked this Thorpe,"

said his mother. "So now you understand, Fortescue."

"Oh, I tumble," said Fortescue; "not that I care about Fanshawe myself. A cove that can't play the only game he's fond of, and can't do nothin' else, is n't what I call a sport."

"Your ideas of what you call a sport do not include all forms of eligibility," said his mother, acidly; "and it is obvious he is greatly taken with Molly."

She rose from the table, and so did Fortescue.

"Well, Molly ain't what you'd call taken with Fanny," said Fortescue, "and I'd not back him odds on. Molly's not easy to prophesy about, and I dessay she found Thorpe amusin'. Oh, he *is* an amusin' blighter."

And with that he went off to his club, leaving Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton to wonder how Edward was getting on with Sinclair Thompson, who had broken a man's jaw, and with Thorpe, who was an evil influence.

As a matter of fact, Edward enjoyed himself amazingly. It is not true that a man is only to be entertained by his fellows. Shop must pall in quiet times, and to prate of prices when the world is neither buying nor selling may tire the

most ardent. It is true that Edward considered stockbroking a sacred profession, and himself a financial hierophant. But he was willing to doff his robes. He loved the table, and he grew fattish, a tendency enhanced by a degree of what the doctors delicately call enteroptosis. This tendency he partially corrected by stays, for he had once had a figure. He was rather red, positively undistinguished, loved Molly, feared his wife much, his grandmother more, and was very successful. His partner Moses said he had luck. Moses added insight which was almost criminal, so the two got on wonderfully. They never nursed a Company, but it survived its prospectus. Park Lane was in sight; doubtfully discerned peerages were on the distant horizon, never to be attained, but ideal ends that all good financiers would approximate to, though with the hopeless persistence of a vain asymptote.

To dine with Sinclair Thompson was to take a day off on the river or a round of golf. It was to leave for a moment the atmosphere of strife with one's equals and those wilier than one's self. And deep, very deep, in his heart Edward believed he respected literature when he only

feared the Press. Sinclair Thompson would some day be an editor, and editors can be useful if treated properly. A rich man can pay no greater compliment to a poor one than to dine with him.

And Sinclair Thompson, who was really richer than Fletcher-Mytton, since he had enough money, and more than he needed, did him and Thorpe very well indeed. Before the soup was finished the stockbroker came to the conclusion that he was enjoying himself. Thompson egged him on to talk about currency, which is the metaphysics of finance, and Thorpe aided. Just before the dinner Thorpe skipped through an article on Bimetallism, and offered Fletcher-Mytton a few easy nuts to crack, which the stockbroker tackled eagerly. Thompson and Thorpe listened gravely, and nodded in the right places. As a matter of fact, currency, money with a big M, and such light matters were Thompson's strength, though he kept it quiet. He was almost the only financial critic writing over a pseudonym who was not currently known and approached with tit-bits in the City. So he might have been less than grave sometimes when the practical broker showed he was an amateur in

the loftier realms where money is no more than a subject. Fletcher-Mytton gave him reason to smile at the end.

"But it's a difficult subject, and you fellows can't be expected to have it at your finger-ends like me," he said, pleasantly.

So might a curate patronise a philosopher, nameless in some railway carriage.

"But Thorpe has notions about trade and commerce which would surprise you," said Thompson, as he ordered more wine and saw that Fletcher-Mytton's glass was kept brimming.

"Let's hear 'em," said the stockbroker. But Thorpe disclaimed any authority on such matters. He related several charming stories about Jews and their supposed native inclination to arson as a means of livelihood. Fletcher-Mytton roared, and said he wished his partner Moses had been there. He grew very jovial, and said that he understood that Thorpe had no respect for anything. Thompson had told him so.

"Between you and me and Thompson, I have n't either," said Fletcher-Mytton. "It's all a game. That's what it is—a game."

By ten o'clock Thorpe was induced to make a few pronouncements on things in general, and

people at the neighbouring tables were observed to giggle. By eleven, Fletcher-Mytton, fearless of his wife, invited Thorpe and Sinclair Thompson to dinner for the next night but one, and at twelve he was put into a taxicab and sent home nicely hilarious. He was not intoxicated, but very cheerful, and his head was almost as full of Thorpe's dicta as of wine. A sober stock-broker cannot be supposed to appreciate revolutionary sentiments, but a quart of champagne and three brandies of 1825 might induce him to listen joyously to the Carmagnole.

"Queer fellow that," said Fletcher-Mytton, rolling home to his fate, a sober wife. "Trade's robbery, he said. So it is!"

He remembered vaguely some of Thorpe's joyous notes on modern civilisation. "We succeed by the little bit we cheat on every transaction." "The only work of art really worth money is a good prospectus." "One sell, properly managed, is more profitable than many sales." These are not too brilliant, but Thorpe had a way with him and enough Irish blood to give him an admirable twinkle in his eye. And Thompson was a keen commentator, witty and incisive. He gave instances, especially piquant to a City man, and after a bit turned Thorpe to

morality. Fletcher-Mytton would have liked to be a sad dog. His wife might have made anyone long for an hour with Messalina. "There is virtue which sends men to Paris—on business," said Thorpe.

"B'God, he ought to know Amy," thought the stockbroker. Another half-bottle of Dry Monopole would have made Edward say it aloud.

"There are four hundred thousand unmarried women who can't get married, and yet we complain of the fall in the birth-rate," said Thorpe.

"What d'ye propose?" asked Fletcher-Mytton.

"Give me a proper allowance and I'll marry 'em myself," said Thorpe, promptly.

And now Edward had to go home and tell Amy that Thorpe and Sinclair Thompson were coming to dinner on Friday. If he had been rigidly sober it would have been a horrid task. She nearly sobered him when he told her.

"The man's immoral, immoral!" she almost screamed.

"Devilish funny, m'dear," urged Edward.

"Such fun is immoral. Could you repeat his conversation to me, your wife?" she demanded, bristling.

"Cert'ny not. It would be a breach of confidence, m'dear," said Edward.

"I believe you 're drunk, Edward—drunk! I will tell you what Mr. Simpkinson said of this man Thorpe's morals."

"He'sh a reformer, m'dear," said Edward, as he got into bed, "and he'sh full of remark'ble ideash."

"What are they? Can you tell me? I defy you to defile my ears with them."

"Grown-up women can't be told ideash of reform," said Edward; "reform alwaysh upshets 'em, Thorpe says."

And with that he fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

*Thorpe and Thompson Dine With the Fletcher-Myttons,
and Grannyducky is a Great Success.*

EDWARD was by no means so joyous next morning. It was not that he suffered from the dinner or the champagne, but the knowledge that he had treated his wife with some disrespect at midnight came home to him seven hours later. Amy was speechless, rigid, almost cataleptic. Her eyes looked beyond him; he seemed a speck in her horizon; she preserved a conscious unconsciousness of his existence till half-way through breakfast, which made him meek and murderous by turns. Molly was also in high disfavour; why, she knew not, but her mother sniffed at her and was barely civil. Forty was the only one who seemed to enjoy himself at the horrid meal called breakfast, which is only possible when sympathetic souls can feel for each other as they are called to face the world again. He ate solidly, taking everything on the side-board, while his mother pecked like a jaundiced

parrot at a piece of toast. His father sat in silence and consumed no more than one egg. Molly, who never could eat when a domestic storm was brewing, took a cup of coffee and wanted to box her dear mother's ears. The appalling gloom lasted till Forty came to marmalade.

"I presume you remember, Edward, what you told me last night," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. Her voice made them all sit up and brace themselves.

"What?" mumbled Edward.

"Then you do not remember?" she said awfully.

It was obvious that Edward had either to remember Thorpe or to acknowledge that he was too drunk to remember anything. After some slight hesitation he decided to remember Thorpe.

"Oh, yes, about Thorpe," he murmured.

Molly looked up, not unobserved by her mother. So did Forty.

"Was the cove amusin', dad?" he asked with his mouth full of marmalade.

"Hold your tongue, Fortescue," said his mother. "Am I to understand that you still persist in asking this man to dinner, after I have explained to you what Mr. Simpkinson told me about him?"

If she had done so Edward was asleep.

"What did Simpkinson say?" he asked.

"He said he was very immoral and an evil influence, and that his books were pernicious," said Amy. "Mrs. Simpkinson agreed with him. She will not let her girls know him."

"Thorpe can't teach the Simpkinson gals much," said Fortescue.

"Hold your tongue, Fortescue," said his mother. "I wish to know, Edward, if you persist in having this man to dinner."

"Damn it. I can't get out of it," said Edward irritably. "I've asked him and Thompson, and they'll have to come."

"There is, I opine, no necessity for you to use bad language on the subject," said his wife. "I shall, of course, receive your friend this once with all courtesy, but a man who holds opinions such as his, shall not enter this house a second time if I know it."

"What are his opinions, mother?" asked Fortescue. "What did old Simpkinson say?"

"Hold your tongue, Fortescue," said his mother. "These are not subjects I can discuss before your sister."

Fortescue looked at Molly and, with the eye further removed from his mother, actually

winked at her. His view of modern girls was that they were by no means the kind of creature his mother imagined. She even seemed to think that the Simpkinson girls were babes in arms, and he knew better. Molly smiled scornfully and rose from the table.

“If my presence prevents the discussion of Mr. Thorpe’s morals I will retire,” she said. She knew she could rely on Fortescue for a vivid, if not wholly accurate, report of the proceedings in camera.

“Mr. Simpkinson states he actually advocates polygamy,” said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton when the door closed behind Molly.

“That’s his fun, my dear,” urged her husband, who remembered that Thorpe had offered to marry the four hundred thousand women who could n’t get married, if the State made him a fair allowance.

“Mr. Simpkinson would not accept that view,” said his wife, “moreover, I have a paper with a review on his book which made me shudder. And I wish you to understand that I have other reasons which I am not prepared to state before Fortescue.”

Fortescue, still playing about with marmalade, did not offer to retire.

"I shall ask the Simpkinsons to meet this man. They will come to oblige me. They will keep him in his place."

"If you can't do it, mater, they won't," said Fortescue. "I think Simpkinson a pretentious ass and his books are rot."

"Your opinion of him is neither asked nor desired," said his mother sternly. "His views of family life are perfectly pure. That is something nowadays, when any book may come in from the library and destroy the innocence of the home in a moment."

"Horrid to think of it," groaned Forty.

"Dreadful," said his mother.

"There may be somethin' in it," said Forty; "to think of our Molly readin' one book and becomin' a bad 'un right away!"

"Books have great influence," said his mother; "they are powerful for good and ill. I understand this man Thorpe has brains."

"Full of 'em," said Edward, "full of 'em."

"And he uses them for evil purposes, to make his books sell in thousands."

"They don't," said Forty, who knew better. "If he was out for money he'd write like old Simpkinson."

"Then it is out of pure wickedness," said

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, "if it was for money—"

"You 'd forgive him?" asked Forty.

"No. I should understand it," said his mother. "But after Friday I trust I shall never hear his name again. A clever immoral man is a blight."

"And an ass like Simpkinson is a blighter," said Forty to himself. And then he got up and went out, leaving Edward to his wife's mercy.

"You understand that I fear this man's influence on Molly; she seemed much taken with him," she said.

"Oh, nonsense, Amy," said Edward. "She would n't queer her own pitch with Fanshawe."

"I trust not, if I understand your distasteful language," said his wife, "but I am by no means sure. This Thorpe is clever and attractive, and Molly is infected by the modern love of brilliancy. And, of course, Edwin Fanshawe is not brilliant."

Edward owned that he was not. He admitted that he had not thought for a moment of Molly being fool enough to fall in love with a poor writer fifteen years older than herself, when there was the second son of an Earl, with a consumptive elder brother, at her mercy. He was sorry he had asked Thorpe.

"I naturally could n't see this, my dear," he urged. "You 're right, no doubt."

"I always am," said Amy. "But let us hope no harm will come of it."

In the meantime, Forty had told his sister what had been said about Thorpe.

"She's scared you 'll fall in love with him," said Forty.

"I have n't yet," smiled Molly.

"What would poor Fanny do?" asked her brother.

"Bother Fanny. I shan't ever marry him," said Molly.

"Then there 'll be a damn row," said Forty; "and I tell you what, my child, if we get over Friday's dinner without bloodshed, it will be a howlin' success. I'm lookin' forward to this blow-out as the most joyous event on the card."

"Good heavens," said Molly, "what do you think will happen?"

"I'm hopin' Simpkinson will be rude to Thorpe," said Forty.

"What did you mean by saying he could n't teach the Miss Simpkinsons anything?" asked Molly curiously.

"Oh, nothin', they 're all right, modern to the

last tick of the clock, and their benighted parents think them in the Garden of Eden, 6,000 B. C.," said Forty.

"Oh, what nonsense it all is," said Molly throwing up her head.

"Fair paralyisin'," said Forty, and he went off to business, to be followed ten minutes later by his subdued father, who was somewhat inclined to regret having asked Thorpe to dinner. He was passionately desirous that the family stock should rise in the market, and the "flotation" of Molly and young Fanshawe as a company appealed to his best business instincts. When he considered the prospects of young Lord Laxton yielding his place to "Fanny," who must then finally become the Earl of Shap, he saw Molly as the Countess with more rapture than his partner Moses viewed the prospects of a peerage. The notion that Thorpe could, or would, oust young Fanshawe was alarming at first, but it grew more preposterous as the day went on. No girl of sense would reject an earl's son, actually in hand, for a wild author in the bush.

Thus are parents, in their anxiety to forestall fate, ever a day behind the fair. Molly smiled to think of it, and though she had by no means made up her mind, she smiled still more to think

of the malignant destiny which moved her mother. She went upstairs to see Grannyducky, as she did every morning, knowing that it would delight the old lady to hear that Thorpe was coming to dinner. The divisions in the house were such that Molly knew nothing she said to her sprightly ancestress would be repeated. The survivor of the times when Myttons were Muttons despised her granddaughter Amy, and, like all the healthy aged, was a short-sighted hedonist.

"Eh, what, your young man is coming to dinner?" squeaked Granny.

"Don't be in such a hurry, darling," said Molly, patting her withered claw. "He's not my young man yet, and perhaps he never will be."

"I want to see him," said Granny. "The way he asked you to marry him was so quick."

"Yes, very quick," said Molly laughing.

"And most young men hang about so," piped the ancestress, "or they did in my time. I shall come in to dinner."

"Oh, Granny, shall you?" asked Molly in alarm, knowing she would if she said so. In more senses than one the ancestress was the skeleton in the Fletcher-Mytton's cupboard.

She would have nothing to do with the hyphen, and had been known to repudiate Mytton with scorn. "Mutton I am, and Mutton I remain," she once stated to a roomful of collected specimens of the rising middle class.

"I shall," said Granny. "But I forbid you to tell your mother. Amy always was a fool. So was her mother. I've not been down to dinner for a month. Filkins is dull at dinner. Filkins is a fool. Find me Filkins, Molly."

Filkins was duly found and instructed by the cunning old lady that she was to have a visitor, at dinner-time on the following day.

"Take my best white wig to the hairdresser's, and Filkins, if you forget it I'll pull your hair," said the ancestress.

"Yes, ma'am," said Filkins.

"And I'll wear the brocade, Filkins."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And now go, Filkins, or I shall pinch you."

"Yes, ma'am," said Filkins.

"Oh, are you really coming, Grannyducky?" asked Molly. "If you don't tell mother there won't be a place for you."

"I shall come down before you do and take one," said Granny cunningly. "I hate argument with a fool. And if you tell your mother,

I'll come down in the middle of dinner without my wig."

"Good heavens," said Molly, who knew the old lady was desperately capable of doing exactly as she said.

"And I'll sit next your Thorpe," said Granny. "I shall love your Thorpe. Your young Fanshawe is a fool. Has he tried to kiss you yet?"

"Certainly not," cried Molly.

"I knew he was a fool," said Granny triumphantly.

Fortescue's notion that the dinner would be "a howlin' success" if it passed off without bloodshed seemed more certain than ever. Molly did not tell her the Simpkinsons were coming, and Granny loathed them both. The advanced hedonist of ninety, with the keen judgment of her age, looked on them both as persons wholly incapable of appreciating her own joyously detached immoral point of view. She had been known to remove her trumpet and say "Pish" in a loud voice at intervals of twenty seconds while Simpkinson was delivering his absurd soul of decayed moral *clichés* as if they were the result of the latest investigations in ethics.

"Some of us will enjoy it," said Molly, "but it makes me shiver." Nevertheless, she could

not help knowing that the ancestress might be a very present help to Thorpe in time of trouble if Simpkinson and her mother proved unable to restrain themselves from an assault. She felt that he could take care of himself, but that he might be somewhat embarrassed as to the tone of his counter-attack. Granny, with some incisive pronouncements, might help him by opening fire on Simpkinson's flank.

"I think I might tell Forty," said Molly. "He will enjoy it most of anyone. I'll ask him if I ought to tell mother about Granny."

When the information was duly imparted to Fortescue on his return from the City he almost jumped for joy.

"If somethin' like this happened once a week I could stand the old City better," he said with happy gurgles. "Oh, this is very joyous! I would n't sell my front stall at this show for a month at Monte Carlo. If you let on to the mater about the waxwork comin' to the feast I'll never forgive you, Molly. I thought it was goin' to be the limit before, but now I foresee a musical comedy that'll make George Edward green with envy."

"I hope you'll behave yourself," said Molly with more anxiety than she liked to show.

"Behave! You don't think I'll lose a word?" said Forty. "I'm not in the piece. I'll do the applause. That's me. I'm a gay applauder."

He puzzled the whole staff of his father's office during the next day by bursting into laughter without any visible or audible cause. Any visitor to the City who took him as a sample must have thought Threadneedle Street a happy Arcady and the only home of the simple, joyous life. He had all kinds of ideas for increasing the delights of the coming dinner-party. About lunch-time he rang up Molly and asked her if she thought it would improve the prospects if he sent telegrams conveying insults to Thorpe and Thompson and signed them Simpkinson. Molly was by this time in a state of nervousness that she could hardly conceal, and she threw cold water on the happy proposal.

"Oh, do be good, Forty," she implored.

"You're not half enterprisin'," said Fortescue. "But all right; I won't."

The dinner was for half-past seven, but the Simpkinsons, by arrangement with Amy, turned up at a quarter-past. She received them eagerly and in her most imposing array. Her instincts

suggested to her that Thorpe would be awed by seeing her great possessions. So she hung them wherever they would go, till she shone and rattled like an Indian Medicine Man making great medicine. Her hands were a sample case, her bosom a Bond Street shop-window, her ears those of a savage. No jeweller could have seen her without calculating her value as she stood; an Italian girl of the lower classes would have bowed down and worshipped. And Mrs. Simpkinson was as bad, though, being thinner, she had not the show space which was available for the Fletcher-Mytton trophies. They kissed each other as a kind of ritual preparatory to consuming Thorpe. Simpkinson, the high priest of propriety and the Ark of Convention, looked like a cross between a shopman and a lower-class Nonconformist preacher.

"I asked you to come rather early," said the hospitable Amy, "with a view to hearing your opinion how we should treat this man. I want you to put him down, Mr. Simpkinson."

"Yes," said Simpkinson.

"Politely, of course," said Amy. "I look on him with horror, but we must be polite."

"*Noblesse oblige*," said Simpkinson, uneasily.

"Exactly so," replied Amy.

"How do you propose to put him down, dear?" asked Mrs. Simpkinson.

"I leave it to your husband, dear," said Amy.

"Ah, exactly so," said Simpkinson, who rather wished he had not come.

"Do not let the man talk," said Amy. "You do the talking, Mr. Simpkinson. I do so admire your eloquence."

Simpkinson admired it himself.

"I'll do my best," he said, unhappily.

Fortescue came in and shook hands.

"How do you literary coves get on together?" he asked, in his delightful way.

"I don't regard this Mr. Thorpe as a man of letters," said Simpkinson, haughtily.

"His sixpennies don't sell—eh, what?" said Fortescue; and Molly and her father entered the room together. Molly, knowing how her mother would look, was dressed in the simplest way. She had even taken off the ring she usually wore. Before anything could be said, Thompson and Thorpe were announced. Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton gave them her hand under protest; her smiles were icy, a frosty gleam played on her powder; she looked as if nothing could melt her. If she had melted, like an iceberg she would have been nothing but cold water. She glared

and glittered in the electric light till she hurt Thorpe's eyes. He turned to Molly for rest, and she smiled on him sweetly. And presently dinner was announced by the butler. As the only stranger in the room, Thorpe should certainly have been asked to take Molly in, for Simpkinson naturally took in the hostess. But Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton bestowed her acidly on Thompson.

"So sorry I can't give you anyone to take down, Mr. Thorpe," she said; "such very short notice, you see."

She presented herself to Simpkinson, who had simply scowled at Thorpe. Edward took the haggard Mrs. Simpkinson in. Fortescue went in with Thorpe.

"Look out for yourself," said Forty.

"What do you mean?" asked Thorpe, who was already a little suspicious.

"Old Simpkinson's here to prevent you from being anyone," whispered Forty. "The old lady has heard you're a bit of a literary scorcher. They mean to sit on you."

"Ho, ho!" said Thorpe. "Thanks awfully."

It was certainly a surprise for Thorpe, but not half or a quarter the surprise that Fortescue's dear mother got when she entered the

room last and found Grannyducky already seated at the table on Edward's left hand. She had waited till she heard the butler go to the drawing-room, and had then skipped into the dining-room. The footman told her where Mr. Thorpe was to sit, and she made him put another place for him by her. Molly smiled at her, and Granny chuckled. Edward was paralysed, and could say nothing. But at last he mumbled out several introductions to "Mrs. Mytton, my grandmother," as he subsided into his chair.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. She glared furiously at Grannyducky, but that dear old person did not look in her direction. Fortescue winked at Molly across the table, and Molly looked down her own nose demurely. Her mother would have given half her jewellery to smack Grannyducky, but the situation had to be accepted, and she sat down pallid with rage. Everyone in the room was conscious that Granny had introduced an unknown factor into the problem that every dinner-table presents. She certainly looked remarkable in a highly-dressed white wig, and the brocade which was so stiff that it helped her to sit up. Her beady, black eyes danced with malice, and the moment

Thorpe exchanged glances with her he was aware that, with Fortescue on one side and her on the other, he was not without immediate help if Fortescue's treachery to the sacred purposes of his mother had revealed the truth. The soup was consumed in almost perfect silence, and everyone prayed for someone else to speak.

"Pretty rotten weather this," said Edward at last, making the usual plunge.

"Appallin'," said his son and heir.

Thorpe thought he might just as well cut in as wait. If there are to be hostilities, it is as well to take the offensive.

"The English weather is one of the causes of England's greatness," he remarked.

"Ha, yes? How so?" demanded his hostess, loftily.

"It sends us abroad to steal the countries with good climates," said Thorpe, cheerfully.

"Dash good notion, that is," said Fortescue, who was prepared to admire anything Thorpe said, knowing that it would rag his mother awfully. She glared at him, but glared even more at Grannyducky, who chuckled audibly in a high key. She could hear some people quite easily, and Thorpe had a resonant voice. But,

like so many deaf people who are old, she was of the opinion that no one to whom she did not speak directly could hear a word she said. So she cheered up the table by remarking in an aged alto which penetrated everywhere:

"This is a very clever young man. He looks much cleverer than your Simpkinson."

"Your Simpkinson" flushed visibly and glared past Fortescue at Thorpe savagely. Thorpe appeared totally unconscious of her remark, but Fortescue rubbed it in.

"She doesn't think you can hear her, Mr. Simpkinson," he said, joyously. Mrs. Simpkinson was speechless and rigid. Simpkinson felt he must say something.

"Do you mean we have stolen our Empire?" he demanded.

"Not at all," replied Thorpe, courteously; "we only took it by force from its previous possessors."

"Then, pray, why did you say steal?" asked his enemy.

"Because it's a nice, childlike way of looking at the transaction which appeals to me in my lighter moments," said Thorpe, with an air of simplicity.

And Grannyducky giggled.

"I just love this young man, Edward," she said aloud. "He's got such a nice face."

Thorpe found his ardent ally somewhat embarrassing, as allies often are. She touched him on the arm.

"Don't you mind that Simpkinson," she said; "you talk to me."

"With the utmost pleasure," said Thorpe.

"That's two for Simpkinson," said Forty. And the popular novelist talked angrily with his purple hostess.

"Your great-granddaughter told me about you, Mrs. Mytton," said Thorpe, with much deference. "I came here hoping to make your acquaintance."

"You're a very nice young man," said Granny. "I didn't 'ear it all, but I 'ope that Simpkinson won't interrupt again. I like to 'ear clever people talk."

"You are clever yourself, ma'am," said Thorpe. "I can see that by your eyes."

"Ah, sixty years ago you'd 'ave said somethin' else about my eyes," squeaked the old lady. "But now I'm ninety, and wear a wig. But I like clever people. I want you to come and see me. Come often. What do you think of Molly?"

Everyone in the room was extremely anxious to know what he thought of Molly, and then on second thoughts everyone began to talk as hard as possible. Thorpe and Granny and Forty seemed the only ones of the joyous company not suffering from an attack of acute nervousness.

"I think she is quite as charming as her great-grandmother," replied Thorpe.

"Get along with you," giggled Grannyducky. "I should n't be surprised to hear you are a very wicked young man. How many girls are you makin' love to? Ah, I understand you. I always liked wicked young men. I expect that Simpkinson was a good young man."

It is a confirmation of man's desire to be bold and bad, that bald Simpkinson, the delight of Nonconformists and their housemaids, felt stabbed to the heart by this aspersion on his character. He wished he had kept the conversation in his own hands when he had got hold of it. He might have been rude to Thorpe at once instead of waiting for a better opportunity. He found his food dust and ashes, and Edward's Veuve Clicquot might have been a draught from the widow's lachrymatory instead of wine. And his hostess was between the devil and the deep sea.

If she did not draw Thorpe away from Granny-ducky, whom she regretted not having poisoned some days before, there was absolutely no knowing what she might say, and if she invited Thorpe again into the arena there was no knowing what might happen. Simpkinson, by his acidity and his expression, had already shown his hostility, and Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, perceiving Thorpe's readiness and calm, began to think Simpkinson a rotten reed in savage warfare. She racked her brains for some harmless subject on which to appeal to him, even as she cursed her own and Edward's common ancestor from the bottom of her heart. Her diamond crosses and crescents jingled with agitation.

"Have you been much abroad, Mr. Thorpe?" she demanded at last.

"He 's been in South America and the East," volunteered Thompson.

"I dote on the East," said the hostess, who knew about as much of it as she did of good society.

"What are their morals like in South America?" asked Fortescue, when Thorpe had owned he had travelled a good deal.

"Oh, they have n't any," said Thorpe, "and what they have are shocking."

Simpkinson thought he perceived an opportunity.

"To you?" he said, suddenly courageous.

"Seconds out of the ring," murmured Forty, who was much delighted at the effect he had produced.

"Why not?" asked Thorpe, good-humouredly.

"I should have thought that no want of morals would have shocked the author of your last book," said Simpkinson, with a directness of attack which made everyone shiver.

"Have you read it?" asked Thorpe, pleasantly.

"Certainly not," replied Simpkinson, airily. "But I have been told about it by those who have."

"It is a little hard to understand," said Thorpe, pensively, "so perhaps it's as well you didn't try it."

"I do not intend to—to defile my mind by reading books which should never have been written," said Simpkinson, venomously.

"No?" asked Thorpe. "Well, we are quits after all. I've never read your books either. However, I've heard about them. They seem very humorous."

"No," said Mrs. Simpkinson, suddenly, "they are nobly serious."

"Certainly they are," said her husband; "humour is too often a low quality."

"You surprise me," said Thorpe. "I saw Professor Bury, who is certainly a good critic, reading one of yours the other day, and laughing all the time."

"How gratifying!" said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

It did not seem at all gratifying to Simpkinson, who was certainly not enjoying the fruits of his labours. Grannyducky had her trumpet up, and looked like a gramophone on a shaky pedestal.

"This Thorpe is a clever young man," she squeaked to herself, firmly believing no one heard her. "This is the kind of man Molly ought to marry, not that fool Fanshawe."

"Pray have some more wine," said Edward, hurriedly, to the world at large; and the butler, with that mask on his face which only the breed of butlers can possess, helped to cover up the old lady's indiscretion.

"Simpkinson retires to his corner puffin' and blowin'," said Forty to Thorpe. "That last of yours was a fair knock-out."

"I hope so," said Thorpe. But, judging by the look of vice on Simpkinson's face, he had

not yet received his due. He caught Thorpe's glance and looked fairly poisonous. Thorpe turned away, and found Grannyducky plucking at his sleeve. The others talked their hardest to drown her pipe.

"Simpkinson don't seem to like you," she said. "Are you like me? Do you hate fools?"

"No, they amuse me," said Thorpe. "Besides, we're all fools in some ways."

He caught Molly's eye and smiled at her, wondering if they would get any chance of a talk.

"Of course we are," said Granny; "but there's a difference, ain't there? Do you know the elergyman who comes here?"

"I have n't the pleasure," said Thorpe.

"He's a fool!" said Granny. "He comes here once a week to try and convert me."

Thorpe looked much interested.

"Has n't he succeeded yet?" he asked.

"Rather not," said Granny, giggling. "I gave it all up years ago. Mor'n I can count."

"Gave up what?" asked Thorpe.

"Religion," returned Granny, chuckling. "I'm too old to be taken in. I know I can talk to you, because you are clever and nice, but when I say that to my granddaughter she says I'm sinful. What do you think?"

Thorpe shook his head solemnly, and said he hardly knew. It was a difficult subject.

"Go along with you," said Granny. "I used to think it was, but it ain't. You wait till you 're as old as me. I 'm ninety."

"You don't look a year over forty-five," said Thorpe, gallantly.

"I love a good liar," said Granny. "If I was as young as Molly, I would n't look at that fool Fanshawe with you about."

By now Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, who on this occasion found that she had very acute hearing, had come to the conclusion that if the dinner did n't come to a conclusion as well, she would have a fit. It was Grannyducky's evening out, and after the fair defeat of Simpkinson's first attack, even Thorpe had ceased to be hateful or interesting for the time being. She whispered to the butler, a course was cut out regardless of the symmetry of the meal or the safety of the outraged cook's soul, and, just in time to prevent epilepsy, Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton caught the stony eye of Mrs. Simpkinson, and rose.

"When my granddarter gets me outside I shall catch it," said Grannyducky. "But it's been worth it. Give me your arm to the door, young man."

Thorpe obeyed gallantly, and took her to the door, where he was relieved of his admiring charge by Molly.

"I'm so sorry," said Molly, in a whisper.

"Don't mind me, child; I've enjoyed it," said Thorpe. And Granny squeaked as a Parthian shot:

"That Simpkinson is a fool!"

It had certainly been a wonderful dinner. Fortescue looked joyous. From his point of view, it had been worth much money.

"I would n't have missed this turn-up for the best mill at the National Sportin' Club that ever ended in a prime knock-out," said Forty to Thompson. "D'ye think the blighter got much change out of Thorpe?"

"Not much," said Thompson, laughing. "But is it over yet?"

That was the question, for Edward evidently wanted a little rest, and was not inclined to join the ladies till Amy had had some minutes to recover in. It is true that Mrs. Simpkinson, who was always accustomed to let her husband do the talking, had not troubled him much. Perhaps the show Simpkinson gave had made her even more silent than usual, or perhaps Granny had paralysed her.

"What a jolly night we had the night before last," said Thorpe to his host, thinking Fletcher-Mytton looked in want of a tonic.

"Better than this," said Edward, gloomily. "I don't think this has been much of a success."

"I've enjoyed it amazingly," said Thorpe. "That champagne of yours is simply topping."

That helped Edward wonderfully. He entered into an account of how he got it. And all the time Simpkinson sat looking about as interesting as an empty bottle. However, he was by no means empty, and when port was offered him he took it at a gulp. Such a manner of drinking any good red wine was an insult to grapes and the sun, and Edward noticed it uneasily. So did Thorpe, for if some white wines are diamonds, good red ones are far above rubies.

"Seems to enjoy it," said Thorpe.

"Pig!" said Edward, who had great pride in the bin that Simpkinson swallowed as if it were wash. "You seem to like that wine, Simpkinson?"

"It's all right," said Simpkinson, sourly, quite unconscious of the offence he gave.

"Have it in a tumbler?" said his host, rudely.

"No, thanks," said Simpkinson.

"What do you think of it, Thorpe?" asked Edward.

"I'm not a judge of port, but I should say it is a very valuable wine," said Thorpe, who knew that his host would enjoy telling him what it cost and what it was worth at the present time. When he had done so, he and Thorpe and Thompson talked about Burgundy and the wines of Médoc.

"I don't know anything about wine," said Simpkinson, loudly. "I don't pretend to be a judge of it. I make no pretence of any kind. I don't even pose as a moral authority."

"I believe he's drunk," whispered Fortescue to Thorpe, grinning. Then he turned to Simpkinson.

"Who poses as a moral authority, Mr. Simpkinson?" he asked.

"Some of us," said Simpkinson, looking at Thorpe fiercely. The challenge could hardly be resented.

"Do you mean me?" asked Thorpe.

"Yes!" said Simpkinson, "I mean you."

"Knowing nothing about a subject need not prevent one posing," said Thorpe. "Why, you pose as an authority on literature, you know."

"For two pins—" began Simpkinson; but

Edward rose and put his hand on the outraged author's arm.

"Come, Simpkinson, let's join the ladies," he said, hastily.

"No fight," said Fortescue, as he and Thorpe followed Fletcher-Mytton and Simpkinson and Thompson. "Another minute, and he'd have wanted to punch your head. I wish the dad had n't interfered."

"Your sporting instincts get the better of you," said Thorpe.

In the drawing-room Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton was obliged to let Thorpe have a few minutes with Molly, for unless she held Simpkinson firmly he showed a dreadful tendency to attack Thorpe again. She therefore held on to him, and never allowed him to wander beyond arm's-length. She felt that as a means of crushing Thorpe he had not been a success. Thorpe showed no signs of being reduced to powder. She would have given her ears to know what he said to Molly at the other end of the room.

"Have you thought about it?" asked Thorpe.

"Yes," said Molly, "I've thought about it a great deal."

"Have you made up your mind?"

"Yes," said Molly; "I did it at dinner."

"Then you will marry me?" he asked.

"If I can do it without quarrelling with all my people, I will," replied Molly.

"I fancy it will be difficult," said Thorpe, looking at her mother.

"I want you to overcome difficulties," said Molly, cheerfully.

"Of course, I shall try to get you to reconsider the condition," said Thorpe. "You understand that?"

"Naturally," said Molly.

"It will be one of my difficulties," said her lover. "But your Granny is on my side, I know. Do you want me to tell your people about this soon?"

"Leave it to me for the present," said Molly, "and I will let you know what happens."

"If nothing happens inside a year I shall run away with you by force," said Thorpe, firmly.

"That *would* be exciting," said Molly. Her eyes sparkled and her mother saw them sparkle. She could stand no more, and announcing desperately that she had a headache, she broke up the wondrous evening. When all the guests had gone she almost collapsed.

"Your Simpkinson scheme did n't work much," said Edward, gloomily.

"Nevertheless, that Thorpe does not enter this house again!" cried Amy.

"Next time Simpkinson comes he shall have cider to drink," said Edward, firmly. "And I think Thorpe stood it very well."

"He 's quite perfect," said Molly, as she went out of the room.

Amy and Edward looked at each other.

"Your Thorpe!" said Amy, bitterly.

"Don't call him *my* Thorpe," said Edward, angrily.

He was n't. He was Molly's.

CHAPTER VI

Grannyducky Sends for the Doctor, and Molly Discovers Her Essential Modernity to her Mother. She Meets Miriam Again and Progresses Towards Confidence With Her.

BEFORE Molly went to bed she paid a late call on Grannyducky, whom she found in tears, much relieved by bursts of giggling.

"I 'ope you 'ad an 'appy evenin', my dear," said Granny. "I paid for my amusement by ten minutes with your mother. But I 'll be re-venge'd in the mornin', see if I don't."

"And what will you do, Grannyducky?" asked Molly anxiously. Granny might be a tower of strength against the assaults of that deadly monotony which assails the middle classes hourly, but just now, when war was likely to break out, Molly was all for peace.

"You wait and you 'll see," nodded Granny. "Amy is a tyrant, and always was, worse than her poor mother, but she can't pull my wig off at my age and expect me to like it."

Molly shook her head.

"Oh, come, Granny, mother never pulled your wig off."

"Pretty near, my darlin'. It was all sideways, and she put me in a tremble till my teeth fell out," squeaked Granny. "Ave you settled to marry Thorpe, my ducky?"

"Do you promise me your word of honour to say nothing if I tell you?" asked Molly.

"I'll promise you anythin' if you'll marry him," returned Granny eagerly. "That'll make Amy swear, I know."

"Very well, I'm going to marry him," said Molly, and Granny hugged her happily.

"Let me be there when you tell your mother and I'll give you my earrings," said Granny. These earrings were large ornaments made of jet, and Granny, for some reason which no one could understand, regarded them as peculiarly precious works of art. The mere notion of possessing them made Molly shiver, but not with delight.

"I would n't deprive you of them for worlds," said Molly hastily. "But now you go to sleep. Mr. Thorpe liked you very much."

"Ah," said Granny, "I knew he did. But that Fanshawe is a fool, and so is Simpkinson."

And she fell asleep soon afterwards murmuring that Amy would see to-morrow. She disclosed to no one, not even to the faithful and fatigued Filkins, what her intentions were.

In the morning, however, she despatched Filkins downstairs with a peremptory command to send for the doctor.

As Amy was in bed still suffering from the results of her dinner-party, there was no discussion about the necessity for a physician, and Molly telephoned for him at once.

"What 's the matter, Filkins?" she asked.

"Nothin', Miss. I never saw her better," said Filkins, "but she 's very contrary."

When Dr. Ridde arrived he went straight upstairs to Granny's room, and found her as lively as a bee in a bottle.

"Well, ma'am, what 's wrong with you to-day?" he asked cheerfully. He was a fine, thin, white-headed man, with a quiet, humorous eye.

"Nothin' whatsoever," said Granny. "I never was so well, though I went downstairs to dinner last night and ate awfully, and afterwards 'ad a row with my granddarter, who did n't think I be'aved myself."

"Tut, tut," said the doctor, sitting down by

her and feeling her pulse. "I can't believe you did n't behave with amazing decorum. What did you do?"

Granny chuckled.

"All I said was that Simpkinson was a fool; and so 'e is," said Granny. "And I hate a fool, and always did. I want you to give me a certificate."

"A what?" asked Dr. Ridde.

"A certificate to say I'm not a fool," said Granny.

"I'll do it with pleasure, ma'am. On my word, I think you are less one than most," said the doctor laughing.

"Very well, write it out," said Granny. "I want it in case I made a will. If I made one and they said I was n't fit to make it, would you up in court and say that the person that said so was a fool?"

"I'd go very near it," said the doctor, "I promise you."

"Then get some paper and write it out plain before me and Filkins (she's in the next room) that I'm perfectly sound in my old mind," urged Granny, winking.

He did as he was asked, and the certificate ran thus:

"I certify that Mrs. Mytton, now aged 90, is of absolutely sound mind. She is a lady of uncommon intelligence, and I have much pleasure in stating so much."

When this was read to her she chuckled, and desired Filkins loudly to give the doctor two guineas. She told him that he was quite worth it, and he went away feeling that he, too, had received an invaluable certificate.

"Am I all right, Filkins?" demanded Granny when he had gone.

"Yes, ma'am, but very contrary," replied Filkins. And the precious document went under Granny's pillow until she got up and sent for her solicitor. She had no faith in the one belonging more or less to the Fletcher-Mytton's. When her lawyer came and brought her previous will, which left her immense income of two hundred and fifty a year, originating with the early Mutton, to Amy, she tore it up and bequeathed all her wealth to Molly.

"That 'll teach Amy to make me tremble all over," she remarked viciously. When the solicitor had gone she sent the reluctant Filkins down to her granddaughter.

"Yes, Filkins, what is it now?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"If you please, ma'am, and beggin' your pardon, Mrs. Mytton 'as sent me to you to say she's left it all to Miss Molly," said Filkins gloomily.

"Left what to Miss Molly?" asked the mistress of the house.

"Her money, ma'am," said Filkins. "And she said I was to say, beggin' your pardon, that it was because you made her teeth drop out last night, bein' all of a tremble. Also her wig bein' sideways, though it always is sideways, do what I can."

"Humph," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, "well, that will do, Filkins."

And Filkins retired to her revengeful mistress, who was thoroughly happy.

It was more than Amy was, for the news annoyed her very much. There is nothing more trying to the naturally domineering than to see those dependent on them made independent, and though Amy thought two hundred and fifty a year very little indeed, she was well aware that it would bulk more largely in Molly's eyes. It was impossible for Amy to be generous to anyone when it came to money, and she never

paid a bill, even for what she bought herself, without implying that the tradesman might thank God for her existence and high sense of honour. When she paid Molly's bills she did her best to bring her daughter to the same state of mind. The attempt was a failure, for after extreme provocation, Molly pointed out that her father really paid the money as well as the allowance which had been calculated by her mother as amply sufficient. Amy for once prayed that her grandmother's days might yet be long in the land. To have Molly more independent than she was would, indeed, be a disaster.

"But Granny might die any day," thought Molly's mother. "I must insist on Molly's marrying Edwin Fanshawe as soon as possible."

Even yet she believed it was possible to insist on Molly doing anything. One may shatter the Victorian maternal mind, but the scent of authority in matters that do not properly concern it may yet be smelt on the pitiful fragments. And Amy was not yet broken to the logic of facts.

"I shall have to speak to Edwin myself," said Amy, and she promptly rang him up on the tele-

phone. When she got on to him she went straight to the point.

"Have you spoken to Molly yet? . . . No, but you mean to. Well, if you don't do it soon I think your chance won't be what it was. . . . Yes, I know I did, but you ought to know what girls are nowadays. . . . No, of course I don't mean she's in love with anyone else. What I mean is she appears to be interested in some one, and if you don't show more signs of meaning anything she may change. . . . What's that? Polo? Is it very important? . . . Very well, come to tea to-morrow and stay for dinner. How is your brother? I'm so anxious about his health. . . . Much better? I'm so glad. Good-bye."

Although Edwin preferred to keep an engagement to play polo, which she thought an absurdly dangerous game, to coming to see her that afternoon, she felt quite sure he was much in love with Molly, and this comforted her for hearing his brother was better. Even though young Lord Laxton got well (which was very unlikely), if Molly were the sister-in-law of an earl life would become a delicate and delicious thing for Amy. Whether they moved to Park

Lane or not, such a connection would have hallowed even the purlieus of Bayswater or the wilds of West Kensington. And so far young Laxton was so wrapt up in the condition of his left apex that he showed no interest in any girl. So long as he did not marry and beget an heir there were pleasing hopes for the Fletcher-Myttons, and though Amy read of cures for tuberculosis with grave alarm, she was much comforted by her own old-fashioned doctor, who threw saturnine doubts on all the developments of modern science.

"The Countess of Shap!" said Amy in a sort of holy ecstasy which only the middle-class woman can feel when she approaches the real sacred things of society. And the Countess to be entered the library in which her mother had been telephoning to the possible Earl.

"Edwin Fanshawe has rung me up to say he is coming to tea to-morrow," said Amy.

"Then I wish he would n't," replied Molly almost drily.

"You know quite well that he is in love with you, my dear," said her mother.

"Then I wish he was n't," said Molly. "I'm sure he 'd do better to be in love with some Gaiety girl."

"I do not wish to hear you talk about such people," said her mother.

"Mr. Fanshawe talks about them," replied Molly; "I know the history and the hopes of half of them. When he's not talking of them or of polo he sits and says nothing. I don't know which I like best, but I think it's polo, though I don't quite understand it yet."

"You know it is our great desire you should marry him," said her mother.

"I don't feel the least inclination, mother," replied Molly.

It annoyed Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton to be called "mother." She knew the lower classes used the word, and she regretted to notice that the lamentable vulgarism was creeping into the select vocabulary of the best rich people.

"You are still very young, and ought to recognise that your parents know what is best for you," she said acidly.

"The instincts of a healthy girl are more trustworthy than the policy of parents," replied Molly sentimentously.

"Where did you get that from?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, who had a dim notion that the very words, to say nothing of the immoral sentiment, were not original.

"Out of some book," replied Molly carelessly. It was out of one of Thorpe's. Molly had all five of them locked in her desk, and knew them thoroughly.

"A book that says such things ought to be burnt," replied her mother viciously.

"If I feel it's true, ought I to be burnt?" asked Molly.

Her mother restrained her natural vicious desire to say she ought to be spanked, as such openness was not likely to promote due humility on the part of Molly.

"Certainly not, but you should consider my feelings," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. "Policy of parents, indeed! You ought to have no instincts."

Molly felt that only Grannyducky could have ventured to reply to this in the proper fashion.

"It can't be helped, I suppose," said Molly.

"What can't be helped, pray?"

"Having instincts," said Molly yawning.

"I wish you would n't yawn," said her mother; "it's awful manners."

"I wish I did n't yawn, too. Manners get worse every day, and Forty says it's an awful relief to yawn," said Molly.

"Don't quote Fortescue to me, I beg," retorted

her mother. "I don't know where he gets his from."

"He says it's from associating with the poor upper classes in the City," said Molly. "Look at Mr. Fanshawe's manners."

"I have no fault to find with them," said her mother. "And when he comes to-morrow I hope you will please us all by the way you accept his attentions."

"Oh, mother," moaned Molly, "I don't believe you know in the least what we are now."

"We, who are we?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"Girls," said Molly.

"I trust they are what they always have been, feminine and sweet," returned her mother.

"Oh, we're still feminine, if you come to that," said Molly, "but sweetness is off, I think. We're not so obedient."

"No!" said her mother, "not so obedient?"

Molly shook her head.

"Not half so obedient," she said. "And I read somewhere that it was all a matter of language and definitions. Girls used to have their definitions made for them, and now they are making them for themselves."

"I fail to understand," said her mother.

"Ready-made rules and ready-made clothes won't fit, you see," said Molly presently. "I think that is what he meant."

"Who meant?" asked her mother.

"Mr. Thorpe," said Molly.

There is no doubt that Molly meant the introduction of Thorpe's name to be a deliberate challenge. Her mother recognised so much, and her belligerent nature ached to take it up. Nevertheless, though she often gave reason to doubt the fact, she was not quite a fool, and was dimly aware that Molly was also capable of war. The girl was already fractious about Edwin Fanshawe, and very little more might make her receive him on the morrow with declared hostility. So Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton choked back her wrath for the time, though it almost made her ill to do so.

"Ready-made clothes, humph," she said, and declining battle, suddenly she introduced a subject that was calculated to mollify the most insurgent daughter of the age. "That reminds me. I've been utterly dissatisfied with Madame Olive this long time. She does n't do you justice, my dear. You'd better go to Raymond's and get a couple of new frocks. And I think that hat of yours does n't suit you in the least."

Molly smiled benignantly. She was as well aware of the workings of her mother's mind as if she had the making of it, but the passion for the acquisition of personal adornment is as deep as love, and always survives it. She agreed most obediently. Had not Thorpe stated somewhere that if nudity was the gift of nature, clothes were direct from the gods? She was well aware he had a critical eye, and was especially open to the charm of colour. Before visiting Raymond's she refreshed her memory as to some preferences he had indicated in the book most hateful to the *Grandmother's Gazette*, and armed with these set forth at once to array herself regardless of expense. Her mother meant her for Fanshawe, and she dressed for Thorpe. It was a pleasant comment on the natural duplicity of woman.

By an odd chance, which, after all, is not so odd in London, she ran up against Miriam Thorpe in Bond Street. They had not met since the lunch in Soho, and both the girls were pleased to see each other, though Molly wondered if Thorpe had yet told his sister what had happened after the dinner.

"I'm going into Raymond's. Will you come with me?" asked Molly, "and afterwards we'll have lunch together."

The young woman, or old woman, who will not dally with temptation at a fashionable dress-maker's must be sought in other worlds than this, and Miriam, who was not able to afford such joys, agreed with the pleasurable agitation with which a mere man sees a rich friend purchase a motor car.

The two girls were at first just a little shy with each other, though the subtle hostility which so often marks the relations of women with each other was lacking. Their sex interests did not clash. A woman cannot marry her brother, and Miriam wanted Jack to marry. And nowadays, with the happy extinction of the specialised sexualist that the atavistic male calls the feminine woman, on general principles there is less jealousy between girls. Both Miriam and Molly belonged to the new age, and were in revolt against the treadmill of recognised order. Miriam knew it, and Molly suspected it. Nevertheless, they took a savage delight in personal adornment. If no one becomes utterly base at once, no one becomes like the angels at the sound of the trumpets of emancipation. Miriam enjoyed much vicarious pleasure and many agonies when Molly arranged for her two frocks, and when it came to the even holier matter of hats,

her heart was full. From their feet to their necks women are fairly civilised, and still progress, though with awful setbacks, but on their heads savagery still sits triumphantly. Through maternity and the milliner they keep secure hold on primitive nature. When they emerged at last into the light of day Miriam sighed, like a cannibal reformed by force, who hears of a feast he hankers for in his heart.

"How delightful and horrible," said Miriam.

"Horrible?" asked Molly.

"Not to be able—" replied Miriam elliptically.

"I wish—"

"But, of course, you can't," said Miriam.

"Let's forget it."

"And have lunch?"

"If you like," said Miriam, "that's all right. Not that I'm hungry after seeing those hats."

They compromised on chocolate and cakes, after the manner of the lone woman.

"And you've not told me anything," said Miriam.

"Nor you, about Mr. Thompson," retorted Molly.

"There's nothing to tell."

"Not yet," smiled Molly, "I liked him very much."

"Oh, Sinclair's a good fellow," said Miriam, "but the trouble is I don't seem to lose my head."

"Your heart you mean," Molly suggested.

"Same thing really," said Miriam reflectively. "You know Jack says being all wrapped up in someone else is wicked?"

"I gathered he had some such notion. I've read all his books since I saw you."

"How do you like them?" asked Miriam doubtfully.

"They're full of shocks, I suppose, but awfully interesting."

"I never know what to think of them," owned the author's sister. "Sometimes I think they're all wrong, and at other times I think they'll be all right presently. When I tell Jack that, he swears, and says if he thought he had written a book which would meet with immediate general approval, he would go out and hang himself."

"Yes, he's very strange," said Molly. "Most of his books are all against marriage, and yet he—"

"Wants to marry you!" said Miriam. "That's what he calls an antinomy, I believe. When he gets into inextricable difficulties and

can't get out, he always brings in that word."

"I'll look it up in the dictionary, but I think I understand. Isn't his view that if I didn't believe in marriage, and he didn't, and no one did, there's no reason for it?"

"I suppose so," said Miriam. "You see, he's not religious."

"Only the irreligious are," said Molly, and Miriam laughed.

"You do know his books. And shall you marry him?"

"Yes," said Molly; "at least, I promised to if it could be arranged without any quarrelling with anybody."

"That means you don't love him yet," mused Miriam, looking at her. But Molly smiled.

"I like him heaps better than anyone else," she said, "and I'm going to refuse the second foolish son of an Earl for him to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm very glad," said Miriam. "Of course, Jack's strange, but I believe he's honourable."

"You mean he'd desert me at once if he ceased to love me?" said Molly, sharply; and Miriam stared.

"Is that in one of his books?" she asked.

Molly nodded.

"Let's be frank, or if not, as frank as we can be. You know we are all changing?"

"Who?" asked Miriam.

"Why, girls," said Molly. "We have n't any respect left for the opinions of our elders. It's because they are silly opinions."

"Very often," agreed Miriam. "I suppose we are ceasing to be religious. Are you religious?"

Molly shook her head.

"I believe the reason I like your brother's books is that they have helped me not to be a coward. If people are nice and kind and have decent manners, I don't see what they want with religion unless they are very weak."

"But most are weak," urged Miriam, "very weak."

"Then let those that are be religious," said Molly. "You see, religion is n't anything if it is n't an explanation; and it does n't explain. I don't pretend to be clever, or not cleverer than half of us, but I'm tired of patching explanations with faith, when I have n't any. I felt all this before I ever heard of Jack. You should listen to my great-grandmother on morals and religion. She is ninety, and she is like me, only uneducated. She's our skeleton, and she *will*

come out of the cupboard. But I love her."

"Jack told me about the dinner. I wish I'd been there," said Miriam, laughing.

"It was awful and delightful," agreed Molly; "and now she has left me her money (it's not much) because she says mother shook her when she got her upstairs. You see, she was n't meant to be at the dinner, but when I said your brother was coming, nothing could stop her. Filkins is reading his books to her now, and having fits about them."

"Who's Filkins?" asked Miriam; and when Molly had explained who she was, she began to ask Miriam questions.

"Do you believe in anything?"

"Not much," answered Miriam. "Religious people put on dogmatic clothes to keep warm instead of taking exercise putting the crooked straight. I suppose I've no clothes and am not taking exercise, so I feel rather cold."

"If that's yours it's very clever, and if it's your brother's it's just as good," said Molly.

"It's both," said Miriam. "We talk a lot about things, and sometimes he says, 'That's yours, but I shall use it.' We are rather an odd family. Why, my mother became an agnostic when she was forty, and she's quite calm about

it. Jack says she's a wonder, and she's the sweetest dear you ever saw. We talk about everything with her."

"I wish I had a mother like that," said Molly, regretfully. "I have to go round avoiding everything of any interest except with Fortescue, and he has n't much brains, though he's a duck in his way. If I mention anything that's real, mother becomes stiff as if she were a baby on the verge of convulsions. And my father, though he's jolly enough with me when he thinks of it and the City goes all right, takes it for granted that I'm a chicken with a shell on my back like those you see sometimes in that shop in Regent Street. Parents *are* awful trying, and they think they're wise."

"It's just a pretence," said Miriam. "Mother never pretends to be wise. She's just one of us. We call her Jenny."

Molly threw up her head.

"I see myself calling mother 'Amy'! But I suppose I ought to be going. There are lots of things I want to talk about, but, of course, we've only begun. To-morrow I expect I shall have to tell mother I mean to marry your brother."

"Will there be much trouble?" asked Miriam, anxiously.

"Don't talk of it," replied Molly; "it will begin when I tell Edwin Fanshawe I won't."

"Is he the Earl's second son?" asked Miriam.

"Yes, and his elder brother is consumptive, too," said Molly.

"Then you might be a Countess?" asked Miriam, somewhat awestruck.

"You don't know Edwin," said Molly. "Oh, no, not if there was n't another. I just cannot. I'm like Grannyducky, and she hates fools."

"So Jack told me," chuckled Miriam. "She made it awfully joyous for Mr. Simpkinson, did n't she?"

"I had cold shivers all dinner-time, though Mr. Thompson was very good, and talked as much as possible to cover up the slaughter," said Molly. "I rather hope you'll marry him. You're the sort who ought to be married, I know. I saw that just now."

"How do you know?" asked Miriam.

"I saw you admire—chickens," said Molly. There was a darling baby at the next table, and Molly had seen Miriam look at it very tenderly.

"You're very clever," whispered Miriam, blushing.

"Of course, about those things we all are," said Molly; "but we want to be wise about something

else, too. May I write to you—about things? I don't know your address."

Miriam gave it to her.

"And Jack's?"

"Of course, I know that," said Molly. "Brick Court, Temple. And Mr. Thompson lives on the same floor, I hear."

"I hope I shall see you again soon," said Miriam. "Some day you must come and see my mother."

Molly said she would.

"But I wonder if I can ever show you mine? After to-morrow no one called Thorpe will be allowed to enter our house."

"I'm awfully sorry for you," said Miriam. "But, after all, you are of age, and can do as you like."

Molly appeared uncertain as to that.

"I hate quarrels and misery," she almost moaned, "and I could n't get up and go without great provocation. You see, they'd think it so awful. I don't believe you understand how perfectly middle-class and backward most parents are. But I'll see if I can have you come to tea. Will you? It won't be pleasant, but it might be interesting, you know, just as I shall be interested in your mother—only different."

"It's your great-grandmother I want to see," laughed Miriam.

"You'll love her," said Molly. "But now I must go. We have n't half talked of things, because it's so difficult to begin to say what you think, is n't it?"

Miriam agreed that it was impossibly difficult.

"Jack says that it can't be done, and that genius consists in being mad enough to do it. That's another antinomy, I suppose."

They separated at the Oxford Street end of Bond Street, very well pleased with each other and with the nascent sense of comradeship felt by the younger women nowadays, which so many men resent with an acute sense that their days on pedestals are nearly over. They find many of the girls hard, and complain bitterly when the hardness they experience comes from their own uneasy vanity. Though the male was never taken at his own valuation by women, for the first time in modern history women are beginning to say so. It is a portion of the whole renewed movement towards liberty after the great reactionary ebb that followed the flood of revolution.

It is true that Molly was in some senses hard and critical. She judged her elders, not as piti-

lessly as all children judge them, but with the rising courage to say that they were wrong which children necessarily lack. The elder generation is always afraid of youth; it ever exerts its authority in haste which is born of terror. There is nothing more appalling to the conservative elements of society than to see those who are no longer young preserve revolutionary impulses they themselves have forgotten. It requires a certain hardness to resist the pathetic terror of the conservative hen when the duckling desires the water. In modern times, when the world at last wakes to the interests of the children, it is curious to observe the sufferings of the reluctantly ancient fathers who believe themselves the repositories of virtue and morality, and find their fetiches inspire no terror, and are only objects of mockery, modified by occasional curiosity into their origins. Between the two generations of to-day there is a great gulf fixed: the children of to-morrow behold the ancients of yesterday as savages mourning for an old religion. To the mere observer their sad antics are pathetic: to those engaged in the battle a thin skin is not desirable. And whatever the softness which underlay the outward nature of Molly Fletcher-Mytton, she could not now afford to

show it. The poor hermit crab is glad of its shell, and Molly made her own heart serve the purpose of one. She eyed Thorpe with something of the eye of the hermit crab who perceives its rapid growth will shortly make a change obligatory. To squeeze her soul into the Fanshawe shell would require mutilation, and to stay at home was the negation of all instincts. Criticism has self-justification for its child when disobedience becomes a duty.

In Molly's environment Miriam Thorpe, who partook of her brother's intellectual nature, would have been infinitely harder. But Mrs. Thorpe, to whom they owed their brains, had learned to move. She had given Miriam liberty in achieving her own. Molly had been cut back ferociously, but Miriam extended her branches to their tenderest twigs. She went to her mother with the problems which interest a child or a girl, and had never been repulsed. Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton's chief intellectual exercise was "sitting on" Molly. Mrs. Thorpe did not care for that form of moral cruelty, and preferred the open air to the hothouse. Molly's mind was in a state of angry fermentation, and Miriam's was at peace, or as near it as anyone can get nowadays. It is true she had her troubles and worries.

There was one that occupied her at times. As Molly had discovered, she loved children ardently. But she found her heart oddly cold to men. She had not been trained and forced into sex pure and simple. In many things she had the intellect and training of a man. She knew something of science, and had read much with her brother. It was easier for her to talk political economy with Sinclair Thompson than to discuss his hopes. And yet must she marry to have children? She spoke to no one about this. She would have been asked questions, would have had to submit to interrogation about things she had come to no conclusion upon. Owing to the disturbed shape civilisation had got into, she knew that there were tens of thousands of women who could not marry for lack of men. Out of these there must be thousands who cried at night for children. Men knew it, and refused to speak of it; speaking of it was criticism of morality, and criticism of morality was criticism of Christianity; and Christianity was dead, though the live spirit of charity, maimed as it was, had nursed at its dead heart, which now lay in state in many churches. She believed the older women, those who had children of their own, or else were atrophied, were worse than the

men. The only chance of life or liberty lay with the courage of those who suffered, as it always had done. The spirit of revolt is the little lamp in prisons, and every solitary heart is a gaol.

When Miriam went home to Wimbledon, where she and her mother lived, she told her about Molly.

"I 'm sure you 'll like her," she said.

And Mrs. Thorpe, who was a sweet, white-haired woman, said she was perfectly ready to like anyone of whom she and John approved.

"I 'm sure it 's time he ceased to lead the irregular life of a bachelor," said Mrs. Thorpe.

She added presently:

"I should like to have some grandchildren, you know."

"Yes," said Miriam, quietly.

CHAPTER VII

Introduces the Honourable Edwin Fanshawe, Who Can't Play Polo With Molly. Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton Gives a Display in the Field, and Molly Criticises the Game With Fortescue.

FROM constant association with horses, a large proportion of the aristocracy of England resemble stud-grooms in appearance. But just as the drivers of taxicabs are more intelligent than the drivers of horses, the motor car begins to exercise a favourable influence even upon the peerage. There is an air of alertness about many of them which is surprising; they no longer suck straws and try to talk horse; their higher cerebral centres are awakened to the beauty of science as displayed in sparking plugs and carburetters. Had Edwin Fanshawe been influenced by the new movement to keep our ancient nobility abreast of the times, he might have had a better chance with Molly, even without the assistance of her mother. But he remained entirely unemotional in the presence of

the most powerful car in England. It was only a polo pony which roused him from his native air of gloom; he kept Hayes' *Points of the Horse* by his bedside, together with a book on polo and a prayer book, which his conservative instincts held to as a relic of childhood. He was not religious, but he could not part from anything without pain; he had a huge cupboard full of ancient books, and a press of trousers that his man scorned to look at. Edwin, or Gloomy Fanny, as he was called by some of his intimates, would rather have given away a sovereign than an old pair of slippers. He sometimes wondered, not without alarm, what Molly would do with these quasi-ancestral possessions if he ever induced her to set up house with him. That she should do so he was determined: he let no obstacles appal him. To learn to play polo and to capture her were the two ends of his life; they were, indeed, one. His noble parent kept him very short of cash, and the money he anticipated with Molly would be very useful in buying the kind of pony he desired. He was tired of playing and coming to grief on the discarded crocks of richer men, and he felt sure that when he was properly mounted the applause of Ranelagh and Hurlingham would at last be his own. He had

ceased to rely on his brother Bill's left lung. It had at one time looked a ten-to-one on chance of his immediate succession to the courtesy title of the heir, but some time ago Bill, who was equally gloomy, but poetical, had taken a turn for the better, and Fanny had consequently gone back in the market. Open-air and St. Moritz, and a firm determination on the part of Bill not to let in that ass Edwin, did wonders for him and his apex. Gloomy Fanny had ceased to hope, in spite of the encouragement of Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, who regarded the open air as her enemy and St. Moritz as a disaster. But he hung the more on Molly, with something of the fine mournful persistence with which a mastiff bays the moon when he is sad, he knows not why. It was his idea of courtship. He sat down in her presence as if he were a wet army in front of a nice dry fortress, and hoped for the keys before the winter came on. His love was a kind of beleaguerment or blockade: he rarely fired a shot or moved out of the trenches, and the notion of bombardment or assault alarmed him more than the enemy. Nevertheless, his prospective mother-in-law now urged him on. She saw him in the library for a few minutes before he went to the drawing-room.

"You have got to be more persistent, Edwin."

"What, more persistent? Ain't I persistent? I 'm ridin' for all I 'm worth," said Gloomy Fanny. "Who's this other chap?"

"No one, a nobody," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, "but he happens to be a writer, and Molly thinks him interesting."

"So would Bill," said Fanny. "I 've seen Bill in a bath chair with six books of poetry: six, I give you my word. And once he had a poet down to see him."

"Well, never mind that, Edwin. The thing is that you must propose at once."

"What? Not to-day?"

"Yes, to-day, Edwin. This very afternoon."

Long and gloomy Fanny sat all over his chair as if the seat were hot.

"Won't that be hurryin' it, you know? Many a game 's lost by bein' in a hurry."

"Not half so many as are lost by being too slow," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton very firmly.

"Suppose I punched this other chap's head," said Fanny. "What 's his name?"

"Never mind his name. And as to punching his head, that is nonsense. Besides—"

"Besides what?" asked Fanny.

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton had been about to say

that he might get his own punched. Gloomy Fanny was long and thin and weedy, and Thorpe looked made of steel and india-rubber, as a good engineer should. She refrained from saying what was in her mind for fear Edwin might get cross about it.

"No, you must speak to Molly."

"I'll bet she'll keep me out," said Edwin, "but I'll have a shot for it. You ain't sayin' you *know* she'll take me?"

"My dear boy, I can't say that. I hope she will. It will be a grief to me if she does n't. I can't say more. You don't know the trial that modern girls are to us poor mothers."

"The modern gal is a corker," said Edwin; "they ride too reckless."

"Do they?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"Into you and over you in a minute," said Edwin. "There was a screamer from the Gaiety—"

"My dear Edwin, I am not interested in screamers from the Gaiety or elsewhere. Nor is Molly. Let us go into the drawing-room."

He uncoiled himself and rose with gloomy resolution.

"If she downs me—" he began.

"Well?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"I shall take it as the end of the chukker," said Edwin, "and wire in again when the bell rings."

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton patted him on the shoulder.

"That is the proper spirit for our modern girls. They admire persistence."

"The modern girl is a screamer," said Edwin. He entered the drawing-room as if it were the consulting room of a physician, with the air of one who felt that if he had to die it was best to know it at once and get it over. A moment afterwards Molly came in and greeted him cheerfully. She was dressed so plainly that her mother knew as well as if she saw the girl's mind that Edwin had his work cut out.

"Been playin' polo, Mr. Fanshawe?" asked Molly, dropping her "g's" as if born to it. She said she hoped to be able to leave out an aspirate or two presently in order to keep in with the highest form of the best circles.

"So long as my crocks will stand it," replied Edwin gloomily.

"There's no game like it," said Molly.

"I'm glad you think so," said Edwin less cheerlessly.

"Except croquet," said Molly.

Gloomy Fanny stared.

"Croquet?" he replied with unutterable contempt, "why, that 's a curate's game."

"It 's played with mallets and balls, you know. I think they 're both lovely games," said Molly fervently. She loathed croquet, of course, as every properly constructed mind does unless it is croquet golf.

"Humph," said Edwin, "it 's all very well likin' polo, but croquet—"

Words failed him to express what he thought of that miserable game. He was surprised at Molly; her bracketing it with the king of all games almost made him hostile. Perhaps Molly knew that.

"It 's Molly's joke," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, hastening to the rescue. Fanny brightened.

"Oh, I see," he said. "I thought she could n't mean it."

"What 's on at the Gaiety, Mr. Fanshawe?" asked Molly, going to his other subject. "How 's Miss Smith?"

"Who 's Miss Smith?" asked her mother.

"Tottie Smith," said Fanny with his mouth full of tea-cake. "She 's a screamer."

"Oh," murmured Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"She's goin' strong," said Fanny; "the bettin's even now."

"What betting?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"That she'll catch Tommy Burke," said Fanny.

"Who is he?" asked his hostess.

"The one who plays polo," said Fanny; "the other Burke is his cousin and plays golf; I don't think much of golf."

"Who is this Miss Smith?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, with distaste for the subject but with a view of keeping things going till she could leave the room.

"She's a screamer," said Fanny, "but a nailer for propriety. That's how she's ridin' off the others. Tommy's turned over a new leaf since he's met her. We all own that. Billy Russell is very sick about it. They used to run together."

"Who's Billy Russell?" asked Molly.

"He plays tennis, real tennis," said Fanny, holding out his cup for more, "not lawn tennis, which is a miserable game."

"I rather like it," said Molly.

"It's all very well for girls, I own," admitted Fanny. "My brother Bill used to play it before he crocked up. You should hear Arthur Pon-

senby on it. He's awfully funny, I can tell you."

"Who is Arthur Ponsenby?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, wondering what game he played.

"He plays squash rackets," said Fanny. "I don't think much of squash rackets."

By this time Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton hoped no other games would be mentioned; the whole world, as it appeared to Fanny, was one of people playing games which he did n't think much of, and this view of life was not hers. Molly, however, was still unsatisfied.

"I saw Mr. Finley in the Row yesterday," she remarked.

"Which one?" asked Edwin. "The one who plays lacrosse? I don't think—"

"Are there two?" asked Molly, interrupting him.

"The other plays chess," said Edwin with bitter contempt. "I've known him sit and play chess for three hours!"

Evidently the other Finley was the fine flower of fools.

"Good heavens!" cried Molly.

"You may well say so. I'd as soon play draughts. I hear there are men who play that."

"What do you think of bridge?" asked Molly.

"I think very little of it," replied Edwin, "although it's all right on a very wet day."

"Oh, Edwin, I like bridge myself," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"Well, it's a woman's game," said Edwin gloomily. "I don't run it down. As I said, it's all right when it's too wet. It's like readin'."

"What do you read, Mr. Fanshawe?" asked Molly, who was thinking that Thorpe would enjoy this conversation. She saw his eyes twinkling with intense appreciation of Gloomy Fanny.

"*The Field*," said Fanny. "They're puttin' pictures in it now. It always wanted somethin'. It's a great paper, though there's not enough about polo in it."

"Or the theatre," said Molly.

"It don't deal with them at all," said Edwin. "There's the *Era* and the *Sketch* for that. There's a picture of Ethel Swan in that this week."

"Who is she?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, who was horribly drawn on by this style of conversation. She felt like a fascinated bird. She feared fate, and could have yelled to see it coming.

"She's a screamer," said Fanny.

"Ah?" sighed Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, "is she?"

"She's looking after young Essex," said Fanny.

"You don't mean the duke, do you?" asked his hostess, brightening.

"That's the josser," said Fanny. "But he's a shy bird, and is n't taking salt."

"What does he play?" asked Molly.

And Fanny looked absolutely thunderstruck. He stared at both of them.

"Now, ain't it extraordinary? You'd hardly believe it, but I abso-loot-ly don't know what he plays," said Edwin. "I'll find out for you, though. Burke can tell me. Burke knows everyone's game and his form at it, too. And, do you know, he knows the boots of almost everyone in London!"

"How wonderful!" said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. "The—boots?"

"The boots," nodded Fanny. "We tried him with a couple of dozen of us in the club, we goin' behind a screen that did n't reach the floor, you know, and we showed him our feet, and he named the lot of us."

"How *did* he learn that?" asked Molly.

"He don't know," said Fanny. "And he was quite bucked to find it was a peculiar gift. He

thought everyone knew as well as he did. Oh, he *was* surprised."

This ended Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton's endurance. But, regardless of her own exceeding anguish, she was prepared to inflict Fanny on her daughter for life. She rose suddenly.

"Do you know, Edwin, that speaking of boots you remind me of something I must n't forget. I'll be back presently."

She rustled from the room, and Fanny, who had been greatly cheered up by relating Burke's magical powers with regard to boots, relapsed into horrid gloom.

"Have some more tea?" suggested Molly, after an interval of silence.

"No, thanks," said Edwin.

"Another piece of tea-cake?" said Molly, after another interval.

"No, thanks," said Edwin. Then he uncoiled his legs and rose up.

"Are you goin'?' Won't you wait for mother?" asked Molly.

"I ain't goin'," said Edwin. "I'd—I'd like to stay for ever."

"Dear me," said Molly, "how extraordinary! You'd find it very dull."

"Not with you," replied Edwin, firmly.

"Look here, do you know what I 'm playin' for?"

"No-o, not exactly," said Molly.

"Well, it 's you," said Edwin.

"Me, Mr. Fanshawe?"

"You, and no other. Look here, you 're a nailer, Molly."

"Am I?" asked Molly. "What 's a nailer?"

"It 's—it 's a screamer; it 's bein' top hole, and all that sort of thing," said Edwin. "The fact is, to ride into the thick of it, I want to marry you."

"Please, don't," said Molly.

"It 's no use sayin' 'don't.' I 'm dead set on it. Look here, to marry you I 'd—I 'd give up polo, dashed if I would n't!"

Molly remembered what Sydney Smith had written to his little daughter about arithmetic.

"Without polo, life would bè a dreary waste for you," she said.

"I don't care," replied Edwin, desperately.

"Say the word, and I 'll do it."

"I 'd much rather you did n't. But I can't marry you, Mr. Fanshawe," said Molly.

"First check!" said Edwin. "But I 'm very determined, though you might not think it. I 've played through a game with a bone cracked in my left arm. Fact, though I don't like to brag

about it. You ask Burke; he 'll tell you. Think of it again. I don't like to brag about Bill bein' a lunger and not likely to last out, but I may be a bally earl some day, and it's quite a useful thing to be, in spite of the new taxes and the bally House of Commons. Say you 'll think of it?"

"I'm afraid I can't," said Molly, who was really sorry.

"I'm pretty rotten at this kind of game," said Fanny; "the right words don't come. I dessay Bill, with his poetry, would be better at it; but there ain't a man alive more in earnest. And if you stick to it's bein' 'no,' I shall stick to tryin' till someone else lifts the cup, Molly. I may n't be the nailer at polo I'd like to be, but I'm a stayer."

"I'm so sorry, but it is 'no,'" said Molly, as she rose.

"Let it go at that," said Fanny, much less gloomily than might be expected. "One game don't decide the championship. I'll try again and again and again."

"I'm afraid it won't be any use," said Molly. "But it's awfully sweet of you."

"You're the prettiest girl in London," said Fanny; "they may say what they like about the

Gaiety, though I own some of them are screamers. I'll say good-bye now, but so long as the ball is n't dead, the *chukker* is n't over."

And with that he seized Molly's hand, kissed it, and departed just in time to escape Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, who had not expected so rapid a finish.

"He's really an awfully good chap," thought Molly, "but I could n't—I could n't. I wonder what mother will say? If she's very bad, I'll tell her about Jack, and have done with it."

It was a mere fashion of speech to use such words. Things were never done with in that house till they were settled on Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton's own terms, and even then she was apt to excite hostilities in a conquered country by such flamboyancies as the German Emperor employs to soothè the susceptibilities of Poland. She came in a moment later with the air of a newly-inflated dirigible. She looked round for Gloomy Fanny, and, not seeing him, steered pompously for Molly.

"Where is Edwin?" she demanded, shortly.

"Gone," replied Molly. She was not anxious for war, but knew it would be forced on her, and, if so, the less said the better, till the actual declaration of hostilities.

"You—you sent him away?"

"No; I asked him to stay till you came back."

"You've—you've refused him?"

Had poor Molly been bowled out in the only form of immorality which the middle classes think immoral, her mother could not have used words with a more awful air. Her very attitude was a commination service; her glance the regard of a Victorian clergyman's wife when misfortune of a technical kind has overcome the resistance of a maid in her service.

"Yes," said Molly.

Her mother sat down before her.

"You wicked girl, you wicked girl!" she exploded.

"Wicked?" asked Molly.

"Monstrous!" panted Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"You—you shall marry him."

There had been a hundred contests between them, and almost invariably Molly had succumbed to her mother's superior weight of metal. A parent always has the weather-gauge of her offspring; it usually requires the worst of seamanship to fight even a drawn battle. But the matters at stake had hitherto not been serious, save to Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"Oh, no," said Molly.

"You shock me! What better match can you expect? Such a family, ancient, aristocratic, and Edwin with—with prospects."

She could have dwelt with horrid exultation on Bill's affected apex.

"A—a countess!"

"I don't want to be a countess," said Molly.

"Not want to be a countess!—not want to be— Just heavens! was there ever such a daughter?" demanded Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton of the decorated ceiling. She held up her hands to the imitation of Reynolds which stood for an ancestor. Mr. Fletcher-Mytton had bought it in the City on account of a likeness he traced in it to his own Amy. By now he believed it was an original of her great-grandmother. He gave it and her a pedigree. Amy almost believed in it herself.

"No, I don't want to be," said Molly.

"There is something behind this," whispered her mother. "What can it be?"

Molly gave her no assistance.

"Is it—? No, it cannot be. I won't believe it!" said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. Already she had Thorpe in her mind. Had not Molly pertly

declared he was perfect, after the gross insults he had heaped on poor Mr. Simpkinson?

"You shall marry no one else," she said.

"I am of age, and can do as I like," returned Molly.

"Not in my house," said her mother; "not in my house!"

"Then out of it," said Molly, desperately.

"You would— Oh, go to your room, girl!" panted her mother. "I shall acquaint your father with your conduct. He will be shocked, disgusted, horrified."

"Because I don't choose to marry a fool?" asked Molly.

"No, but because you wish to marry someone else," screamed her mother, who had never felt so keenly as to-day that Edwin was a fool. Molly coloured angrily.

"You are going the right way to make me marry anyone else but Edwin Fanshawe," she said, bitterly. "I don't want to quarrel with you—"

"Quarrel with your mother! Good God, what are we coming to?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. "Has a mother no rights, no respect nowadays, no love?"

Even a parent has to earn respect, and Molly knew it. And love is given to those who help; it cannot be collected like rates on a demand note.

"I am not a child," said Molly.

"Far, far from it," assented her mother, as if not being a child at twenty-three was a moral crime of the darkest blood-red, and something that a girl should blush for.

"And when I marry it will be with someone I want to marry," said Molly, hotly. "I—I shall choose my own man."

Possibly this was a reflection from one of Thorpe's books. There is certainly a passage in one of them which employs an analogous phrase. It must be allowed that the use of the word "man" in this way would have sounded grossly indelicate to the prudes of the past. It implies maleness, the opposite and complement of woman, and a reference to this subject, however guarded, has always been regarded as a sign of native wickedness. Even yet there are finely tinctured creatures of the diviner days of old who faint to hear such phrases. Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, by that grasp on the morality of the best lower classes which constitutes the moral strength of the middle-classes, was one of these.

"Your—your own—man!" she gasped.

"Yes," said Molly.

"Do you understand what you are saying, girl?" demanded her mother.

"Of course I do," said Molly, who certainly at first did not follow the fine workings of her mother's mind.

"You don't, you cannot! I should die if I thought you did," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. "Some vile creature has been influencing you."

"Good heavens!" said Molly, rising abruptly, "you will drive me mad. I don't in the least understand you."

But by now she did, though she would not have acknowledged it for worlds. To her the view her mother took was intensely repugnant, in a way the older woman could never have comprehended. The good people of a decayed morality cannot understand that their most sacred opinions stink in the nostrils of the new world. Their morality is immorality; their virtues have ceased to be of good report.

"You said 'a man,'" repeated Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"Yes, not a fool who classes all the world as those who play a game he likes and those who

play games he does n't think much of," said Molly, "a man with brains."

Her mother glared at her.

"Whom do you know with brains?" she demanded with dark intensity, as if to know men of high intelligence was unpardonable.

"Very few," said Molly.

"Name them," said her mother shortly.

Molly sniffed, but held up her head and confessed her sins.

"There's Mr. Forster."

He was Grannyducky's solicitor.

"Yes," said her mother.

"And Dr. Ridde."

"Yes?" said her mother.

"And Mr. Sinclair Thompson."

"Ah!" said her mother. They were coming near to Thorpe.

"And there's Mr. Thorpe. I think that's all," said Molly; "it's four."

"Mr. Thorpe!" said her mother. "Mr. Thorpe, ah!"

She stared at her daughter, and in spite of herself Molly coloured. So did her mother, and she did it most unpleasantly.

"Has this—Thorpe—made love to you?" she demanded.

Molly hesitated. Thorpe's methods of courtship were not easily classed under the ordinary term "love-making."

"I suppose so," she said at last. She rather wished at the moment that Thorpe had been more vehement, more fierce.

"You suppose so! Don't you know, girl?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. "Tell the truth."

"I should have thought you believed me too young to be able to tell," said Molly, "or too young for it to be proper for me to know. But—yes, he has. There!"

"Don't say 'there' to me," said her mother. "How far has this disgraceful affair gone in secret?"

"It's not in the least disgraceful," replied Molly stoutly, "and I'm not ashamed of it. He asked me to marry him."

"When?" demanded Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

Molly blushed.

"At the dinner," she replied, hoping her mother would think it was at the notable feast of which the Simpkinsons were the great spirits.

"At *the* dinner? What dinner?" asked her mother.

"The dinner we met him at," said Molly desperately.

"Good God!" said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

An offer of marriage implies a recognition of sex a little deeper than mere clothes. It was naturally awful to Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton that a casual stranger had dared in a short hour or so to progress to a point that should only be reached after an approach in form to a virgin fortress. It was, in fact, an assault, an outrage, a vile and unmanly surprise.

"He ought to be flogged," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, breathlessly. "Flogged! Fortescue ought to thrash him. And he dared to come here after that! You allowed me to have him in the house; you, my daughter!"

"Why not?" asked Molly. "I like him."

"You refused him," screamed her mother, for there is no doubt—she screamed.

"No," said Molly, "I did n't refuse him."

Heaven, or protecting physiology, prevents most shocks from having their full effect. Had it been otherwise, Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton would have had an attack of hemiplegia. She was of a full habit of body, and given to keeping up her strength.

"You did n't refuse him!" she repeated almost feebly. "You did n't refuse him!"

"I said I'd think of it," said Molly.

Her mother's eye wandered over the room, and came back at last to her daughter.

"She said she'd think of it, think of it, think of it!" she murmured.

Then partial recovery ensued.

"Did you think of it?" she inquired with the curious air of one who has been stunned but is now at least partially conscious.

"Yes," said Molly, "and at our dinner I said I would."

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton rose from her chair.

"At our dinner you said you would! You shall not, while I am alive. Go to your room and—and pray," she said.

"What for?" asked Molly.

"For reformation," said her mother. "I would rather see you dead than married to a man of that character."

"Do you know anything of Mr. Fanshawe's character?" asked Molly.

"Go to your room, girl," repeated her mother. And Molly went, seeing that further conversation was useless. She retained enough grace not to shrug her shoulders till she was outside. Her mother's attitude might be preposterous, but it was only what she had expected. The thing which really surprised Molly was that her own

attitude towards Thorpe had sensibly changed. An hour ago, though she had been ready to marry him if it could have been done without an uproar, her thoughts of him had been mainly those of gratified pride, and pleasure in his being a notable person among the infinite dullness with which she was surrounded. Now she felt sure she really loved him. Though she had been sorry for Edwin Fanshawe, she had felt some of the power of sex in him and shrank from it. She discovered she did not shrink from it in Thorpe. And her mother's folly put her on his side with a curious definiteness. The gulf between them had widened hugely; she and Thorpe were on one side together, while her mother seemed more alien than half the indifferent world.

"Oh, it's silly," said Molly, "and, of course, father will say what she tells him to. But Forty won't."

She had always been fond of her brother, and now her heart warmed to him.

"He's not a fool," she said as she went upstairs. She occupied two rooms on the upper floor, having chosen them herself because they were out of her mother's range. The previous tenants, over-blessed with children, had made them into nursery and play-room, and shut them

off with double doors from the rest of the house. Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton rarely climbed up to them, and when Molly entered her own den she felt tolerably safe from any intrusion but that of Fortescue. It was there that he had taught her to smoke the mildest Turkish cigarettes, and when he did not fly to his club at such times as his mother pursued him, he mounted to what he called the ark. Molly expected him before dinner, and he came up in his dinner-jacket a quarter of an hour before the last bell rang.

"What ho, kiddy," was the salutation. He kissed her casually on the top of her handiest ear and burst into laughter.

"Let's have a look at the creature," he said, taking hold of her and twisting her round to the light. She blushed and put her arms about his neck and said:

"I'm glad you're not going to be beastly about it, Forty."

"Great Scott," said Forty. "The old lady was on me the minute I came in. 'What ho!' said she, 'that female daughter of mine has r-r-refused to marry Edwin.' 'One more for Gloomy Fanny,' said I; 'another biff for Calamity Ned.' That's my new name for him. 'Silence,' roared our lady mother, 'she shall marry him, or I will

have her imprisoned in the deepest dungeon of the Castle moat,' or words to that effect, Moll. So I said it appalled a cove to know the filly he 'd put his boots and shirt on had chucked it when the tape went up, and she requested me to speak English, or she 'd fetch me one on the boko, or words to that effect."

"You're a silly dear," said Molly, "but, of course, you see I could n't possibly marry Mr. Fanshawe."

"Damfino, as they say in the select circles of the backwoods," said Forty, taking a chair hind-side before and riding it on two legs. "There's worse than poor Fanny, and, of course, it would be a lift for the family of the F.-M.'s. How did he take it?"

"Very nicely," sighed Molly; "that's to say, he said he 'd keep it up until somebody else lifted the cup. And I said it would not be any good, and he said maybe he 'd be an earl some day, though he did n't like to brag about Bill's left lung, and that it would still be useful in spite of Lloyd George, or something like that. He said I was a screamer or a nailer. I'm very sorry."

"Well, well," said Forty, "I suppose it's no use, seein' that the other cove got his work in ahead of Gloomy Fanny. But I own it outed

me to hear how quick at the take-off this new pal of yours seems to have been."

"Ye-es," said Molly, "but—but things like that do happen."

"So it seems," said Fortescue, "and are you really stuck on him?"

"O Forty, there are much nicer words in the English language than those you use," said Molly reproachfully. "I suppose you mean am I going to marry him."

"That's near enough. Are you?" asked her brother.

"Yes," replied Molly; "but I can't bear to have everyone against me. What will father say?"

"He's been bankin' on you bein' a countess. It'll jolt the old boy a lot," owned Forty, "a whole lot; I should say."

"And you, Forty?"

She put her arms round his neck.

"Well, I'd rather you married Calamity Ned if you could make up your mind to it, but if you can't, I'm not goin' to chase you into it," declared Forty honestly.

"And you like Mr. Thorpe, you know you do. Say you do, darling."

Forty nodded.

"I like the blighter well enough, but it rather jolted me to hear he'd asked you to marry him the first time he saw you. And if you do take him, Molly, you'll be a deal poorer than you'll like. It's rot bein' poor, you know."

"I must put up with it," said Molly. "And as to his asking me at once, is n't it just a matter of making up your mind? Some people do it quick, and some don't, and he said an engineer had to get into the habit of being ready for all emergencies. So that's all right. I was a sudden emergency. Besides, he thought about it a long time before he spoke; a whole long, dreary speech."

"Bless you, my child," said Forty, "you'd charm the horn off a brass rhinoceros and persuade everyone but the old lady, that black is crimson at the least. Was n't there a persuasive bloke in the Bible who put his head out of a window and said, 'Who is on my side, who?' You must be descended from him. I'll be as much on your side as I can."

"I knew you would be," said Molly triumphantly. "Mr. Thorpe wondered about it, but I said you were a dear brother, and so you are."

The dinner bell rang.

"Are you coming down to take your beans?"

asked Forty, releasing himself from her cajoling arms.

"I must," sighed his sister, "but it will be a beastly dinner. It's only on such occasions I'm very glad we're rich enough to have Redway. If it weren't for butlers and footmen mother would talk about it all feeding time."

Redway and his satellites made a very present help in times of trouble. Grannyducky was the only person in the house wholly unmoved by his majesty. She treated him as an equal, and had on one dreadful occasion been seen to wink at him. But she mostly dined in her own room with Filkins in attendance. Had she come downstairs on this particular night some disaster might have occurred. Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton presided with an air of inspissated gloom. Egyptian darkness was bright to the shadows of her wrathful aspect. She never opened her mouth save to put something into it, and it must be owned that the threatened loss of Gloomy Fanny as a son-in-law took away her appetite, which was no small thing to do. Mr. Fletcher-Mytton looked as if such a panic had struck the City that gilt-edged stocks were unsaleable. He avoided Molly's eye, and ate as if the best efforts of the *chef* were sent in by a bun-shop. Only

Fortescue survived the frost, and even he subsided into silence after murmuring "What ho!" three times in more feeble accents on each occasion. When the joyous function was over, Molly escaped without molestation, and Fortescue following her into the hall made it appear to Redway, who happened to see him, that he wept on his sister's shoulder. They were cheerful and curious downstairs, but made guesses very near the truth. Gloomy Fanny's nickname and hopes were well known below, and his exit that afternoon seemed, to the observant eye of Redway, more than ordinarily tragic.

"Mark me, Miss Molly 'as given 'im the chuck," said Redway, "and Lord Laxton with such a promising cough, too. It will be very disapp'intin' to the missis."

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, sublimely unconscious of her indiscretion in being so gloomy, followed Edward into the library.

"Something must be done about this, Edward."

"What *can* be done?" demanded her husband.

"This Thorpe is an atheist, a scoundrel, a low blackguard," said his wife. "I 'm sure of it."

"Being sure of it won't do any good," said Edward savagely, "and saying so will only make

the girl worse. If you could prove it, I dessay it might do something. Nowadays some girls are less particular and some more. And you never know which it is."

This was perhaps the acutest remark Edward had ever made about women in his life, though he did not know it.

"I *will* prove it," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton; "the wretched girl shall know the worst—and then I shall discover whether my training, my devotion, and my ceaseless care have been in vain or not. Yes, I will prove it."

Naturally, it did not occur to her that what she thought an atheist, a scoundrel, and a low blackguard, might not seem such to Molly. If the elderly guardians of religion and morals knew as much as that, they would know more and the world would be rather more pleasant than it is.

CHAPTER VIII

Thorpe Dwells on His Past and Dines With Fortescue.

IT cannot be imagined that Thorpe, a man of restless energy, was doing nothing all this time. On the contrary, he was writing a book which he fondly imagined would make all reactionaries' hair curl, and even produce another fit of epilepsy in the *Grandmother's Gazette*. In addition to this he had a pot-boiling short story on hand somewhat less revolutionary in character, and an essay dealing with the impurities of steel, which was highly technical. Although he had given up the practise of his profession for that branch of meliorative ethics known as novel writing, he retained a warm interest in engineering, and indeed, in all science. By dint of memory and a logical faculty somewhat out of the common, he was able to keep masses of details in mind and yet order them logically. His aim was to ask intelligent questions about everything

and to have a not unintelligent theory to suggest about anything. Thus he could talk finance with Sinclair Thompson; science with anyone who came by; and even theology with Henry Quest, a clergyman engaged in a church on the northern borders of the City, who had a sincere liking for this erring and atheistic pagan. Thorpe held any day wasted in which he did not learn or unlearn something, and he maintained that a fool on his own subject was far more fruitful than some wise men at large in the fields of knowledge.

If Thorpe was prepared to render to Molly an edited edition of his own past, with notes and glosses, he was by no means ready to do the same to her prodigious parents. To Grannyducky, that amazing creature, he would have given his history unexpurgated, if it had been necessary. But such an ancestress is rare. He feared Edward Fletcher-Mytton a little and his wife much. Molly might be lacking in many of the middle-class virtues, but she betrayed, not unnaturally, a dread of trouble with her people. This might have been no more than nerves. She compounded for her inward criticism by outward respect.

"I'd rather they did n't know anything," said

Thorpe, when he discussed the matter with Sinclair Thompson. "I don't care a hang what Molly knows."

"I thought you always said you did n't care what anyone knew," commented Thompson.

"No more I do, theoretically," replied Thorpe, "but practically one does n't increase obstacles. There 's no need to spur a wild horse that 's hard to ride already. But I won't tell lies. From what Molly said I know there will be trouble. Old Simpkinson will do his worst for me, and there 's enough in my books for the godly to lay hold upon."

"By Jove, yes," owned Thompson, "there are nuts to crack there for the unsympathetic."

They were then in Thorpe's chambers, and at that moment the postman knocked. They heard letters fall upon the floor. Thorpe rose and brought them in.

"There 's one from Molly," he said. He sat down and read it, and whistled once or twice as he did so.

"What 's the news?" asked Thompson curiously. Thorpe in reply read him the substance of the girl's letter. It was only the third one she had written to him, and in form it was

curiously stiff. She had not yet got over the coyness natural to the virgin heart, and showed it more when she wrote than when she talked. She talked a good deal and wrote little. She told him she had refused Mr. Edwin Fanshawe (she could not have called him Gloomy Fanny, it would have seemed cruel to do so) and that she had informed her mother she was engaged to Thorpe. Her account of the result was not humorous. She saw no humour in it. The essence of the letter lay in the report of her mother's statement that she would rather see her daughter dead than married to a man of Thorpe's character. Furthermore, Fortescue had told her that her mother said Thorpe was an atheist, a scoundrel, and a blackguard, and she meant to prove it if she could. Molly informed him that she, personally, did n't believe it for a moment. She said, "Forty says her idea is that if she can prove that you are irreligious and wicked from her point of view I shall give you up. She had our clergyman, Mr. Mallow, here this morning, and Mr. Simpkinson, too. I know they were talking about you and me, for when I went into the drawing-room they looked very uncomfortable. I went away as soon as possible,

and they stayed an hour after that." She signed the letter "Molly," and added as a postscript, "Forty will be all right."

"You're in for it," said Thompson, "for you are an atheist in spite of having a pal like Quest. And if you are not a scoundrel from that dear lady's point of view, what in the name of thunder are you?"

"What can they do?" asked Thorpe, defiantly.

"They can dig up your spotted past, and, by a skilful mismanagement of your most sacred opinions, make your own hair curl," replied Thompson, "to say nothing of Molly's."

"It curls deliciously already," said Thorpe. "D'ye think they'll fire this Mallow at me?"

"Should n't be surprised," replied Thompson. "Let me be here if he comes. I'd ask Quest, too, if I were you."

"Dashed if I don't," said Thorpe. "But it is n't likely she's done more than ask his advice."

He did not know the Reverend Mr. Mallow. He belonged to every society for the suppression of vices other than insolent curiosity. His mind was foul with suspicion; all opinions not his own were improper; he was reported to write with relish views of the so-called prurient novel. He found what his mind supplied, as the over-virtu-

ous, leaning towards the vices they condemn, always must. In addition to these excellent qualities he possessed an infinite zest for meddling; he was prepared at the shortest notice to interfere in any one's business. There are such parsons. They are abhorred by their less zealous brethren, to whom they set so noble an example.

"You really don't think the old lady would go so far as that, do you?" repeated Thorpe.

"It's only a notion. But you never know. They'll make you out a horrid person. That's their only chance."

"I don't believe it will work with Molly, not worth a cent," said Thorpe. "She's read pretty well all I've written without a kick, and besides, she and Miriam had lunch together the other day. Miriam says she quoted me all the time."

Thompson filled his pipe and sighed.

"It's devilish odd that I should feel as I do about your sister, and she does n't seem to care a hang; while you propose to a girl, owning that you are not yet passionately in love with her, and she takes you on. What's the trick?"

Thorpe shook his head.

"There is n't one. It's intuition. The moment I saw Molly across the room I said 'Hallo' to myself, and I had not taken half my soup

before I knew I should be indiscreet and not be rebuffed. Besides, I knew I should be in love with her soon, and I am already. There's not a doubt of it. Only I'm reasonably and healthily in love. This raving, crazy, mad love business is worse than immoral; it's unhealthy. If I lost Molly now I should be pretty bad about it for a long time, but I don't pretend I should cut my throat from ear to ear."

"You're a queer lover, Jack. A lot of the girls would turn you down if you talked that way," said Thompson.

"Well, some would n't, and Molly won't for one," replied Thorpe.

"Not even if she heard about Lallie and her various predecessors here and in South America and China?" asked Thompson.

Thorpe shook his head.

"Not even if she knew more than any of that gang can find out if they dig for years. Out of American story-books the modern girl does n't go round looking for gilt and plaster saints; and even there they only find 'em once in a while when some confounded idealist has worked up a gaudy specimen of snow-white purity from childish joy in dealing with the impossible."

"Make a note of that; it's quite pretty," said

Thompson. "And what about this atheism of yours?"

"Rot," said Thorpe; "what's that got to do with a girl? If the folks who go to church have n't found out that a man can be religious without believing in a God, the sooner they learn it the better."

"What a rotten idealist you are, Thorpe," said Thompson, "and you go about swearing you're a gross materialist, or something equal to it, without an uplifting of soul, and all the time you're eating and drinking ideals."

"Bosh," grumbled Thorpe, "I'm not a materialist. All I know in this silly universe is energy, and I don't like to see it wasted in bad theological and social machinery. And just now I'm going to use some of my own brand of energy in writing, so clear out, old chap. If that infernal cleric comes, I'll let you know. I'll talk to him like the Dutch uncle one hears of."

"Do get Quest to come," urged Thompson as he rose. "He's the only religious Johnny I ever met who seems to know the material he deals with."

"He's a good sort," said Thorpe, "but there are lots like him. I know several, and some of them really seem to like me, even at my worst."

Don't fall into the belief that a man is necessarily a fool, even if he is a Christian."

"I never went further than to say it was n't in his favour as a man of intellect," said Thompson laughing; "some are a deal better than their dogmas."

When Thorpe was alone he wrote pretty hard for an hour on Steel, and by the end of that time had the table covered with open books. Coming presently on a knot that required a technical library, he made a note of the difficulty and stopped work on that subject. Then he wrote a short letter to Molly. He thanked her warmly for what she said and all its implications. As for Simpkinson and Mallow, he defied them. "You don't think I've always been a saint, and a spotless character with the approved morality, and the established religion, so I don't see what harm they can do me. But, of course, they think that if they can show I'm not worthy of being a churchwarden, you will give me up. If they really think at all, that's their notion. But perhaps nothing will come of it. I'm glad your brother is n't vicious against me. He and you and your great-grandmother seem to monopolise the brains of the family. I wish I could see you now. Could you ask Fortescue to call on

me here? I'm always in during the mornings."

He added something warmer. What he said about the passion of love he really believed, but it did not prevent him gradually falling a victim to it. He had a certain reserve which is very powerful in some men and women, and found it difficult to open his heart. Nevertheless, day by day it grew easier to do so. That is why he wrote now:—

"You must n't think me hard. I'm not hard really. I just love you, Molly."

He almost blushed as he wrote it. Not even Thompson, who knew him as well as any man living, was aware of the fact that Thorpe was sometimes intensely shy. And, of course, this softness masqueraded in a protective hardness, as it always does. He kissed Molly's letter and placed it in his pocketbook, which he put near his heart, changing his usual pocket in order to do so.

"Silly fool," said Thorpe to himself, "jack-ass! But she is a dear!"

He put on a decent coat, took his hat, and opened his door to find Fortescue Fletcher-Mytton outside.

"What ho!" said Fortescue with an amiable grin.

Thorpe was much pleased to see him; his coming without any kind of notice was by itself a sign of friendliness, even without taking into account that Molly had said he was all right. There was bound to be enough hostility in the family as it stood.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Fletcher-Mytton," said Thorpe; "won't you come in?"

"If you were n't goin' out, I will," said Forty.

Thorpe explained that he was not going anywhere in particular, and Forty came in and took a look round.

"Wish I had a place to myself like this, you know," he said with a sigh. "I'm tired of bein' at home."

He sat down and Thorpe offered him cigarettes. He took one and lighted it.

"Rummy go, all this, is n't it?" asked Molly's brother.

"You mean—"

"Molly and you," said Forty.

"I hope you are not displeased," said Thorpe, leaning against his book-shelves which lined one side of the room.

"No-o," said Forty, just a little doubtfully; "if Molly's all right, it suits me. Only there's goin' to be the devil of a fuss about it."

"You don't say so!"

"The devil of a fuss," repeated Forty. "The old lady is rampin' mad, mad enough to lock up Molly and keep her there."

"Humph," said Thorpe. He had hardly thought of such extreme measures. "And how would your sister take it if she did?"

"Dashed if I know," said Forty. "But are you sure this is all fixed and settled? Between you and me, if it was n't I'd just as soon she married Gloomy Fanny."

Thorpe had never heard of Mr. Fanshawe under this name.

"Gloomy Fanny! Who's Gloomy Fanny?"

"Why, Fanshawe! That's what everyone calls the cove. He's that melancholy you'd weep to see him. But he's all right bar his polo, which he can't play worth a cent. His polo would make you laugh."

"Would it?" asked Thorpe. "But your sister does n't seem to care for him."

Forty nodded.

"That's about it. But it's a great smack for the old lady. She was bankin' no end on his bein'

an earl by and by. You see his brother is crooked up, and the gov'nor and the mother banked on his croakin' no end. However, if you and Molly are set on this, I ain't the cove to push her on to Fanny, let alone that she 's a hard 'un to push, as they 'll find out in two twos."

On the whole all this was very encouraging to Thorpe.

"Well, I 'll do my honest best to make your sister happy," he said with some feeling. "I know I 'm poor enough, but I may be richer some day. And if I know her at all, she would rather have a poor man she liked than one she did n't, if he was a duke."

"Yes," said Forty, sighing a little, "but you have to own that bein' a countess is somethin'. In fact, it 's a whole lot, as a cove I know says. However, if it can't be, it can't, and Molly don't seem to think much of it, or the chance of it with Fanny thrown in. So barrin' that I don't want to quarrel with the old 'uns, I 'm with you."

"Thanks awfully," said Thorpe; "I do believe you 're a good chap; she seems awfully fond of you."

Forty said he got on with her first-rate, and that she was a rippin' good sort.

"Gals are a queer crowd," he said, musing on

their peculiarities, "and in the end one has to own up that one's sister is a gal the same as the others. Some coves seem to think that their own women ain't like the others, but some sort of especial security, gilt-edged, with a double guarantee like Egyptian Unified. However, they ain't. Gals are just human women."

"That's a great discovery," said Thorpe, laughing, "and I'm not chaffing when I say so. There's a lot don't know it."

"A whole lot don't," said Forty; "but were n't you rather quick about proposin' to Molly?"

Thorpe shook his head.

"Not a bit of it. I'd been looking for her for years, and I thought I'd never find her. When I saw her I said, 'This is the one I want.' You see how it was."

"Yes," said Forty thoughtfully, "I suppose I do. I remember I once nearly proposed to a gal myself in a dark conservatory. You see I thought she was someone else."

"Devilish awkward," said Thorpe.

"Devilish," agreed Forty, "but in the nick of time some blighter came in and struck a match and I saw the gal; fit to frighten a fellow, even after dinner. I said I'd left my handkerchief in my overcoat, but when I came to that coat I

put it on and bolted. I owe the cove with the match one."

Thorpe said he certainly owed him one, but inquired as to the other girl with an earnestness of interest that entirely captured Forty.

"Well, she was an after-dinner sort, too," said Forty frankly, "and the shock sobered me up. It was a lesson to me. I've never taken half enough since to make me lively with gals, and I never will."

Thorpe agreed that this was a sound plan to go on.

"However, I proposed to your sister when I was rigidly sober. In fact, I had n't touched alcohol for a whole week. I do that sometimes."

"Do you?" asked Forty; "ain't it a great strain? And talkin' about that, will you come a grub with me somewhere? After last night's dinner I can't face another at home. All your fault, old chap."

Thorpe said he was awfully sorry, but he could n't help it. To dine with Fortescue would be a joy to him, and he said as much. Forty then raked out Thompson, and the three of them went to the Café Royal, where Forty, who had all the makings of a gourmet, did them most ex-

cellently. By the end of the dinner he was wholly and utterly on Thorpe's side, and gave him some valuable information.

"The general scheme is to show Molly that you 're an awful blighter," he said with much earnestness. "Their notion is that she 'll kick when she knows what you really are."

"What did I say to-night?" asked Thompson. "I suggested that, Forty."

"Well, you 're dead on the bull," said Forty, "and if I 'm givin' 'em away it 's only revealin' what would come out of itself. You know Mallow, Sinclair?"

Thompson had met him.

"He 's a lop-eared blighter," said Forty elegantly, "and I loathe him. I ain't down on religion; I would n't deprive those that like it of what they like, not for worlds, but he slobbers on our doorstep for contributions, and toadies the governor and my mother till you 'd think they kept the whole Established Church. There 's not a rotter in the parish with a title that he don't trot out in talk, till I 'm sick, and the only time in his life when Gloomy Fanny filled me with holy joy was when he was beastly rude to him. And when Gloomy Fanny is rude he 's very rude. But what was I sayin'? Oh, I know.

The old lady let on that Mallow was goin' to interview you, Thorpe."

"Let 'em all come," said Thompson.

"The devil," said Thorpe; "how shall I treat him, old chap?"

"I hope you 'll be beastly rude," said Forty, "same as Fanny. I wish I could remember what Fanny said; you could say the same."

"Thorpe's quite good at abuse," said Thompson, and Forty said he should n't be surprised.

"But, of course, you ought to show him you're awful pi', and all that," he added rather sadly; "do you think you could? It'd be a setback for 'em, and Molly would be joyous."

Thorpe promised to do his best, but Fortescue, after a good look at him, shook his head.

"I begin to be sorry for Mallow already," he said, "but there, I leave it to you. If he comes back and makes you out an atheist my mother will try it on Molly. And it's my opinion it won't work. The modern gal, so far as I've seen, is straight enough, but don't bank much on religion when the curate is married."

Thorpe and Thompson said he was an observer, and Fortescue owned to observing all he could.

"If it was n't for all the blighters about, life

would be a very good show," said the observer. "Even Mallow is worth threepence to hear him crawl at the gates of heaven on Sunday morning. I believe he thinks providence is a duke."

After that they went to the Empire together, and enjoyed themselves pretty well. As they came out and Forty got into a taxi, he turned to Thorpe.

"I forgot to ask you about Socialism. Are you a Socialist?"

"Yes," said Thorpe, "but I can't help it."

"I don't suppose I understand it," said Forty, "but to me it seems rot and robbery."

"What's going on now?" asked Thorpe, and Fortescue stared. Then he laughed.

"I dessay you're right, and anyhow if you *are* a Socialist I don't care a damn," said Fortescue with his hat over his left ear.

And Thorpe and Thompson went back to the Temple together.

"If I and Quest are n't there when Fortescue's lop-eared blighter of a Mallow calls I'll never forgive you," said Thompson.

CHAPTER IX

Shows What Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton Undertook to Prove to Molly.

BECAUSE everything is not duly narrated after the manner of the ancients, some of whom still survive for the delectation of the more benighted public, it must not be imagined that Molly and Thorpe did not meet during this period. The ordinary love story would be strong in these scenes. They, indeed, contained much interesting matter. But neither time nor reasonable space, Euclidean or otherwise, could contain the talk of lovers who meet like mountain torrents and flood their banks with sparkling and radiant words. Thorpe drew Molly out, he inspired her, gave her thoughts, and listened to her comments, often apt and luminous. There is an uncommon sweetness in the sense that one is an inspiration, but to see the glory of a thought reflected and reinforced as from the golden roof of a sacred temple is even sweeter. Thorpe loved Molly for her wisdom, so he thought; and

she, worshipping his intellect, yet warmed her chilly hands at the brave fire of his appreciation. Subdued in her own home by the preposterous domination of her parents, who by some blind decree of fate had not half her admirable brains, she felt his love was liberty, his narrowest path freedom, such as she had never dreamed could be. She grew hourly, while he, full-grown and the sport of no educational topiarist, flowered beautifully. The resentment that he felt against the regiment of fools paraded hourly to protect dead gods and extinct shrines left him when he was with her. She leapt at his thoughts, surprised them half-born, and sometimes phrased them for him. He swore he was nobly proud of his own instincts that chose her so suddenly, and, being accustomed to these things in himself which seemed miraculous to her, he became more humble in her presence.

Yes, though they talked of all things, they ever came back upon such pathway to reality as there might be. Those things are real, say the Pragmatists, which man must take into account. To some extent Molly's parents existed, and so far as their authority, which had but a natural warrant outdated, they must be thought of. By this time Molly owned she had lived beyond the

hour when she would deny her lover anything if they resisted her wishes over-long. And therefore Thorpe was bolder. The very next day, after Fortescue's unexpected visit, which had pleased Molly mightily to hear of, he wrote with her consent to Mr. Fletcher-Mytton, explaining his hopes, his position, very civilly and modestly. And Edward took the letter to his wife.

"The scoundrel!" said Amy. "She meets him, I'm sure. I'll stop her going out."

"You can't do that, my love," said Edward.

"Can't I?" Amy retorted. "You don't know me."

Perhaps he did not. Perhaps at times he regretted he knew so much. The appalling matron, for whom her household are but slaves, needs a slave-owner as mate. There were, in spite of his visions of Park Lane, better qualities in Edward. Had he not married his cousin, who possessed the worst qualities of his race, he might have grown other flowers and fruit, and have seen beyond the walls she kept him in.

"Write civilly and say it is impossible," she directed; "we had better be civil, I fear. No doubt he has acquired some influence over this misguided girl."

Edward was obediently courteous, and, in-

deed, was quite pleased not to receive orders to be very rude. There was something about Thorpe which he liked. Had he not known that the man was a Socialist, he would have found him very agreeable. Thorpe had a way with men which was quite pleasing. It was only the distorted females that he hated. He knew they were the creatures of men, their crimes made visible, the realisation of their acts and jealousies, but still he abhorred them as if they were partly his own making. Men made slaves of themselves to the gorgeous styes they called their homes, but, even so, resented later the loss of their natural liberties. Women such as Amy Fletcher-Mytton, of which the world is still full, though happily they are mostly over forty-five, hugged her chains, and loved her distorted mind as much as her distorted waist, which she proudly believed almost virginal. Socialism was horrible to her; it meant all things evil, such as free love, which must for ever be horrible to those who prefer to buy it in the open market with hard coins of the realm. But Edward cared nothing for the imaginary social side of Socialism. To him it meant sheer robbery. It was sufficient to know that these evil idealists imagined a State without rich men. He saw himself as poor and comparatively power-

less, and shivered. To be happy without more than others seemed impossible. To dream of being nobly regarded without power to ensure humbleness was mere folly. It was, in fact, a damnable doctrine, and altogether against the Bible, as every stock-jobber knows.

"It's quite impossible," said Edward. Yet he sighed a little about Molly. He had never known paternal joys; they are really impossible where such matriarchy as Amy's rules the house and home. He could have loved Molly dearly, but since her early childhood she had regarded him as an ally of her mother's rather than her refuge. No wonder her father sighed. Nevertheless, he did firmly what he three-quarters believed to be his duty. There is nothing that deserves more scrutiny than duty; it is parent of more cruelties than religion. But it is characteristic of the good people that they do it regardless of the cries of the wounded, and follow up their vivisection with the warm pleasure of the true seeker after physiological truth.

When Thorpe received Mr. Fletcher-Mytton's letter, he felt that another step had been accomplished. He had expected no other answer. He had hardly desired it. To marry Molly with her parents' grudging consent would have im-

plied almost certainly some compromise. They would have made Molly an allowance; they would have insisted on some respectable house with a good address. There would assuredly have been a tacit assumption on their part that he was to be at least as respectable as the quarter he lived in with their daughter. His books would be canvassed before they were written; they would expect them to be dedicated to Mrs. Grundy, that savage institution greater than the gods. Such an attitude on their part would have meant endless friction, and must have inspired him to be even needlessly offensive in everything he put on paper. It could but postpone the inevitable quarrel, and a quarrel postponed is a quarrel embittered.

"I'm glad of it," said Thorpe, as he put the letter in his desk. "Now we begin to see how we stand."

He imagined that, in a measure, he understood Molly's mother, and he looked for the usual undignified squabble when a daughter is recalcitrant. But he looked for no more. After some weeks of unpleasantness Molly would no doubt run away with him when he had bought a licence and made all the usual arrangements. Molly would be visited by her brother; her

father would come to see her later, and Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton would forgive her in the end. Able as he was in many ways, his democratic tendencies blinded him to the natural feeling of a middle-class woman of Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton's type when she saw a good chance of having a peer for a son-in-law and a peeress for daughter. He himself lacked the climbing instinct, and had no taste for aristocratic blood, though some of it flowed in his own veins. He had some natural right to the name of Montague, though to speak the truth, it came to him illegitimately. He had not been named out of a novel by an ambitious mother. An indiscreet ancestress had named her natural son Montague with the consent of his father. This son was Thorpe's maternal grandfather, and the only child of his father. Had such a fact been known to Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, it would have influenced her in his favour; she had no morals where the nobility were in question. But Gloomy Fanny had more than descent; he had a good chance of the succession. She tasted blood like a tigress, and knew her nature. The story, as Thorpe planned it, was tame indeed, and had she known his mind she would have smiled unpleasantly. Nevertheless, she had

some caution combined with her obstinacy. She had said to her husband, "We had better be civil, I fear," when she could have had Molly whipped and Thorpe hanged without a quiver. She kept her head for a time, and spoke to Molly without visible temper.

"You must understand that we have told Mr. Thorpe this is impossible," she said; "and I cannot believe you will be so undutiful as to do anything that would hurt your father and mother so deeply."

Molly said nothing. From her point of view there was nothing to say, or certainly no good in saying it. She was in no violent hurry to get married so long as her home was not made impossible. She was conscious that her love for Thorpe had not been born full-grown; it increased daily, but she retained her self-control, being by no means the weak and emotional character so dear to man, if the novelists are to be trusted. It was, indeed, a sense that she had a firm hand on her emotions which partly attracted Thorpe. In the future she would make a shrewd and calm woman with wise eyes, a wonderful creature, the true mate of man, wife as well as mistress, equally balanced, divine, but of the earth and rooted in it securely. When

women have to forgive and understand so much, it is well they should be wise, and Thorpe, rendered daily more unequal by the devotion to his work, foresaw that Molly must have much to forgive and many failings to condone. Even though he now preserved his balance by keeping up his scientific work, he perceived that his artistic bent would more or less master him in the end. No writer can be lord of his own soul while he is in full flower. In his undeveloped youth he may be serene as the clear morning which often ushers in a gale, and age may calm him. But the great year in between is rarely peaceful. Experience is the gift of a full life. He judged Molly well, and she, wise before her time, saw in him a child infinitely interesting, and not less so for his extravagancies and faults.

The proposition that Mr. Mallow should intervene in the matter and prove Thorpe's essential villainy was for the time put aside. Her mother, though she did not misinterpret Molly's silence as consent, considered that it was best to leave her alone. She did not ask whether the girl corresponded with Thorpe, and as he always posted his letters to reach Molly in the morning, her mother, who breakfasted in bed,

never saw them. Gloomy Fanny was not mentioned, and was bidden to bide his time. Mr. Fletcher-Mytton made money as usual, and ceased to look as if Rothschilds had failed. But Fortescue developed an amused grin, which marked his sense of the play staged before him. There is something inherently malicious in man's nature; the frustrated expectations of humanity are the bitter-sweet base of life's tragi-comedy. Forty had the gifts of the onlooker oddly developed, and they were marked by the desire of the practical joker to comment and intervene. He had felt somewhat ashamed of having "given away" his mother to Thorpe, but when he saw the renewal of her hopes he laughed consumedly. She sat at the table as though she wielded the very thunderbolts of Zeus, when the power of the gods was in the quiet hands of his sister.

"The old lady thinks you've chucked him," said Forty, one morning in the hall, when he handed her a letter from Thorpe.

"That is n't my fault, Forty," said his sister.

"Never said it was, old gal," replied Forty; "but it's better than a play, and almost equal to the dinner-party when Granny snorked old Simpkinson. Biff! And what ho! said Simpkinson. How long will peace last? Tell me

in time, and I'll sell a bear of Fanny, poor blighter. Did you hear the last of him?"

"No, what?"

"Bust his collar-bone again! Your only hope of peace is the chance he'll break his neck. Laxton's in the stable again with a cough. The old lady knows it. I saw a far-away look in her eye, a look of holy joy. And then she saw a coronet upon your fair, white brow, Molly mine!"

"Bosh!" said Molly. "I wish you'd talk less nonsense."

"I can't and live," returned Forty, making for the breakfast-room. "You don't know how the governor and I steal money for you in the City. If some thirty jokers died in that locality the rest would all cut their throats. I'm one of the sacred thirty."

He was certainly a cheerful spirit, and without him Molly would by now have put on her hat and gone to Thorpe, requesting an immediate marriage. Her mother did not know what she was doing when she tried to suppress him, vain as the task was.

As it stood, the situation might have lasted a long time. Thorpe was not unduly impatient, though he discovered at times a restlessness not

unpleasing in a lover; Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton believed time on her side, and Edward blessed the peace which had descended on the house. But the calm was the proverbial one before a storm, and the clouds upon the horizon grew no lighter. Two days after Forty had told Molly that Lord Laxton was in the stable again with a cough, he came in to dinner late, holding an evening paper in his hand.

"Laxton's dead, mother!" he said, and Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton appeared as if at last all was glorious within. She forbore to look at Molly, and endeavoured without success to impart something of decent sorrow to her countenance. Her mind assured her swiftly that no girl under the sun, whatever her vagrant fancies, could resist the assured attractions of a title, with the even sweeter savour of an earldom to come.

"Good heavens, how did it happen?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Went out with a broken blood-vessel," replied Forty.

"I feared there was little hope for him," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, and Molly's lip forbore to curl. If her mother had ever truly prayed for anything it was for the death of this young man. Her husband knew so much, and said

nothing. He objected to death on principle; it was revolutionary; he shared it with the lower classes. As a matter of fact, he never said that anyone ever died. They "passed away" into a better world, which he hoped was organised on sound principles and a gold standard.

No more was said during dinner, and that night her mother kissed Molly with an air which seemed to the girl in some extraordinary way to partake of respect. She was, in fact, kissing Molly as a countess, as a chosen creature robed and coroneted, with access in due season to the sacred shrine which lies between Victoria Station and Hyde Park Corner. To be the mother of one who might some wonderful day sit at the dinner-table of royalty was most amazing. For the first time in her life she seemed to feel that maternity was indeed sacred. Tears of joy and fear rolled down her cheeks; she felt as if she were sanctified, the blessed of heaven.

"Molly can't be so cruel as to refuse him now," she said.

She wrote an agitated note to Gloomy Fanny, a mixture of condolence and congratulation which struck at once a note of joyous gloom and of gloomy joy. She tried to be sad, and

happiness would keep breaking in. She implied that Molly was, upon the whole, rather sorry than not for her entanglement with an undesirable. As she hoped herself, so she bade him hope, and was his affectionate Amy Fletcher-Mytton. As she superscribed the letter. "Lord Laxton," tears rolled down her face. It was the first time in her life she had written even to a courtesy lord, and she was conscious that of this sacred occasion, at least, nothing could deprive her. Her origins were as far from her as the Captain Commandant, who was the first of the Hohenzollerns, is from the Hohenzollern Emperor. Heaven and the peerage opened before her entranced gaze.

"And now you'll cop it," said Forty to his sister. "If there was trouble when you gave Gloomy Fanny the kick, it won't be a circumstance to the drayma that will be on the boards of this Gaiety Theatre of ours when you chuck Lord Laxton."

"Oh, I know it," said Molly. "Do you think I don't?"

In his innermost heart Forty, loyal though he was to her, would have been happier if she had shown any signs of repenting Thorpe. That pious sense of the beauty of organised

and graded rank which is the basis of snobbery and its one logical excuse was deep within him, after all. Conservatism is an instinct; it is common to savages and boys; only resentment can overcome it when reason fails. And Forty, though he often felt cramped in the City, had sufficient joy in life to prevent him feeling anger with things as they are. Certainly it would be rather a fine thing to have a sister a countess.

"Of course, it would be *rather* a fine thing, you know," he said somewhat shamefacedly.

Molly flared up instantly.

"Do you think I would now if I would n't before?" she demanded, more like a fury than he had ever seen her. Her eyes sparkled; her colour was splendid; she clenched her hands.

"No, of course I don't," said Forty, with much haste, "but I wish Thorpe was goin' to be an earl, anyhow. Don't strike me for that."

And Molly laughed. She was not perfect, nor was she as democratic as her lover. She, too, rather wished he was going to be an earl, and was mightily vexed at the motions of her own mind, as girls often are at other instincts.

"Jack's good enough, too good for me," she said, throwing up her head.

"Not by the largest jugful that ever was,"

said Forty, who naturally retained some respect for the conventional good he lacked and found so rare in his fellows. "Don't you think your Thorpe's a saint."

"I'd hate him if he was," retorted Molly. "I'm not that sort of fool."

"Mother will set out to prove that he's the most abandoned wretch on the face of the earth," said Forty; "see if she don't."

"Let her prove that, and I'll marry Lord Laxton," said Molly.

When his father asked him very anxiously what he thought Molly would do, Forty said he didn't know. So far his honour rooted in dishonour stood. When the gov'nor said that Thorpe was a designing scoundrel, an ancient and hoary phrase direct from his wife's armoury of *clichés*, Forty said that if anyone could prove Thorpe was all the old lady said he was, Molly would certainly give him the boot. This information was carried directly to Amy, and, armed with it and the desperate courage of her hopes, she was strengthened to tackle Molly on the following morning.

"I wish to speak to you in my room," she said; and Molly went to her boudoir, which was choked with immoral *bric-à-brac*. All useless

ornament is wicked, and Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton seemed to rejoice in inutility. Molly, whose tastes ran to brown wall-paper, black-framed etchings, and bronzes, got the shivers in her mother's room even when things went pleasantly. Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton began with a statement of fact which Molly could neither affirm nor deny.

"I am your mother," she said, firmly, as if prepared for contradiction.

"Yes," said Molly, with an expression which was inscrutable.

"And your welfare is inexpressibly dear to me. I cannot see you hurrying to disaster without raising a hand. I do not imagine you can comprehend my feelings, but there they are."

She made a gesture as if she laid her feelings out for inspection and approval.

"I cannot believe you would marry a man whose character would not bear the closest inspection—"

Molly lifted her eyebrows.

"Would Lord Laxton's character bear it?" she asked.

"It has borne it," replied her mother. "I have made every inquiry. I find he is a Churchman; he has a prayer-book at the side of his bed every night! He is a sound Conservative,

though I lay no stress on that, for I understand that some quite moral though misguided people are Liberals. His name has never been smirched by a scandal. I have Mr. Mallow's word for this."

"What does he know about him?" asked Molly, who had heard a good deal about Gloomy Fanny from Fortescue.

"He has made every inquiry," said her mother. "It is n't a question I can discuss with you, but if a good clergyman is satisfied, you should be."

"Humph!" said Molly. "If Lord Laxton were an Archbishop I would n't marry him. What is the use of talking about it? I won't marry anyone I don't love."

"And you think you love this Mr. Thorpe?" asked her mother, angrily.

"I know I do," said Molly.

"In spite of his character?"

Molly fired up.

"Who has anything to say against it?" she asked.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton; "but do I understand you to affirm you would marry him if he were what I believe him to be?"

"What do you believe him to be?" asked Molly, defiantly.

"An Atheist."

"Yes," said Molly; "and what else?"

"A Socialist!"

"Yes, and what else?" asked Molly.

"Most highly immoral," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, lifting up her chin and looking over her daughter's head.

"I don't believe he's highly immoral; I don't believe it for one instant."

She had her own notions about morality. There is little doubt they would have seemed more shocking to her mother than Thorpe's, and Molly, who had never discussed them with anyone, knew that they would.

"He's a low blackguard!" said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, suddenly hot. It was a rash statement, but she felt it was the whole rounded truth of the matter. And, rash as it was, it gave her a respite. Had she kept her temper she would have discovered in five minutes that Thorpe's atheism was not particularly repugnant to Molly, while the lip-service her mother rendered to her deity was increasingly distasteful. Molly was a healthy pagan by nature, and such religion as she had was the joy of life.

Socialism she knew little about, but, suspecting from the abuse it received that it threatened those she had little admiration for, she was not adverse from hearing that her lover was a Socialist. She had progressed so far that mere abuse inspired not acquiescence, but inquiry.

"Oh, a low blackguard, is he?" she said, very quietly. "Prove it, and I'll not marry him, mother."

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton believed she had won a victory. Molly had set her an easy task. Atheism was awful; Socialism was criminal; and morality differing from her own was worse than both together. She rose and kissed Molly tenderly.

"My dearest daughter," she said, almost with tears.

And Molly smiled as she went away.

CHAPTER X

*Which Introduces Two Parsons of Different Types, and
Relates a Moral Conversation in the Temple.*

AS it happened, the Reverend Henry Quest came to see Thorpe next afternoon. He was a great big fellow, as dark as much tropic travel would make one of an originally sallow complexion. After ten years of Africa he came home a little the worse for wear, and a bishop with an eye for real men gave him a church in the city. There he had little enough to do, but he found more in a big organisation which trenched on social work. He was something like the parson who knocked the insolent navy down, and was told by his floored opponent that he was a gentleman and that if all parsons were like him it would be just as well. So far as Thorpe knew, Quest believed pretty simply in church dogmas. But he rammed them down no one's throat, and showed a genial simplicity in all things. He had the kindly, natural heart of a good priest, which is, in all essentials, little different from the heart

of a good, straightforward man with pity and help in his nature. There is more in the priesthood of the laity than many might think till they are forced to service, and it was an odd conversation on this subject which brought Thorpe and Quest together. Thorpe felt Quest was a man as well as a priest, and his essential religion was no bar between them. For Quest on his side was immensely interested to find an atheist, a perfectly frank one, who believed all religious observance, ritual, and dogma, were savage survivals from the immemorial past of magic, who was yet religious in many ways. Thorpe, in fact, had the religious emotions towards mankind without any belief in God or immortality, and Quest, who believed he got his own emotions through his beliefs, at least understood Thorpe's view that these social emotions were the only essential parts of religion. They were, he knew, the part which kept every religious man human, and the selfish individualism of too many was hateful to him. Thus Thorpe and Quest could fight over dogmas without quarrelling. They discussed theology as they might have played chess, and if Thorpe was often victorious by means of logic he owned laughing that dialectic was wholly incapable of caging the spirit of man,

and proceeded to worry Quest with views of truth according to Pragmatism.

When Quest came up Fleet Street he usually turned into the Temple. He found Thorpe like fresh air, and in his turn was always welcome to the writer.

"And never more welcome than now," said Thorpe. He held a letter in his hand.

"Why especially now, you Sufi?" asked Quest as he dropped into a chair and reached out for Thorpe's tobacco jar.

"Because a parson is coming to see me this afternoon," said Thorpe. "A very religious parson, who is going, so I presume, to put me through my paces and discover my awful character. You shall stay and hear it."

Quest lighted his pipe.

"Explain," he said.

And Thorpe explained the whole situation.

"Infernal cheek," said Quest. "I don't see how they can do it."

"You don't know this God's good man, my son," said Thorpe. "My Molly has told me about him. And my dear girl's letter is a powerful lamp to show him up."

"I'd kick him out," said Quest.

"Not for worlds," laughed Thorpe. "Forty

(that 's Molly's brother) says it 's worth sixpence to hear him crawl at the gates of heaven on Sunday morning. He 's an oily interferer. Have you never seen one?"

Quest snorted.

"Just one or two. But really there are n't many of us like that."

"I never thought there were," said Thorpe. "There are many asses on the road to Jerusalem and I love them all, but Mallow must be rare. Would that such Mallows died and did not return, while we, the strong and brave and wise men, came back out of our very long, endless, unawakening sleep."

"Shut up, Moschus," said Quest, "and tell me what he says in his letter."

"Read it," said Thorpe as he threw it over; "there 's nothing in it."

In fact, Mallow said nothing but that he would have the pleasure of calling. "Doubtless my name is known to you, as I am a *very* great friend of Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton's."

"Blighter," said Quest. "He 'll be here soon then?"

"Any minute," nodded Thorpe. "I 'm going to fetch in Thompson. He says if I don't he 'll never speak to me again."

"Perhaps I'd better go when this Mallow comes," said Quest.

"Do and I shall hate you and think you're afraid," said Thorpe. "I want you to see this parson."

"I'll stay," said Quest. And Thorpe went out to call Sinclair Thompson. They came in together. When Thompson and Quest had shaken hands there was a knock at the door.

"Now we shall know what kind of a man Thorpe is," said Thompson. And Thorpe opened the door to the Reverend Mr. Mallow.

"Mr. Thorpe?" he asked.

"Yes," said Thorpe, "and you, I suppose, are Mr. Mallow. Come in."

The reverend gentleman entered the passage.

"Pray come this way," said Thorpe. "I've two friends with me. But that won't matter, I'm sure."

Mr. Mallow was not so sure of it. It looked to his suspicious mind as if Thorpe had secured two friends to prevent any serious conversation. However, he had met Sinclair Thompson once, and remembered him graciously. Then Thorpe introduced him to Quest.

"A great friend of mine," said Thorpe.

"Rather," said Quest warmly.

No doubt it was an awkward situation for the reverend busybody. And it was made no less awkward by the presence of a parson who was Thorpe's friend. Quest showed no intention of going, and he had exhibited none of the signs of freemasonry among holy augurs which might have helped Mr. Mallow. On the contrary, he looked rather satiric in aspect, and somewhat grimly humorous as he smoked steadily. Thompson pulled out a cigarette-case and laid it open in front of him, as if he was preparing for a long sitting.

"Take this chair, Mr. Mallow," said Thorpe; "it's pretty comfortable."

Mallow sat down. He was not happy, and did not look happy. The atmosphere was distinctly hostile. Quest eyed him critically. He disliked the type. Mallow was plump, white-handed, and exceedingly carefully dressed. His manner was a combination of the bedside and death-bed manner: the ancient physician and the professional soul-saver at the crisis of death. His voice was oily and managed. He had taken lessons in elocution, and exaggerated the teaching. Oxford had never seen him, Cambridge knew him not. He came direct from a theological training college, and had all the faults of a

seminarist. His people were tradesmen. He never spoke of them, though they rejoiced in his lofty station, as Irish peasants do when they have produced a priest.

"Will you have a whisky and soda?" asked Thorpe.

"No, thanks," said Mallow.

"Then let's get to business," said Thorpe. "I presume you have called upon me at Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton's request."

This was horribly direct, and Mallow lifted a white hand.

"Oh, no; not at her request," he said. "It was, if I may say so, my own suggestion. . . But do you not think I might call some other time when you are—if I may so phrase it—less occupied?"

"I shall never be less occupied," said Thorpe. "I'm always frightfully busy entertaining my—friends. But don't you mind them. They know all about it. Have you come to inquire into my character with a view to ascertaining if I am a fit and proper person to marry Miss Fletcher-Mytton?"

Mr. Mallow seemed to protest before he spoke.

"I should not put it in that way, Mr. Thorpe. But since you are so exceedingly direct, I may

say it was suggested that I should have a talk with you. For I gathered from others that you were inclined to views which my friends, as members of my congregation, regard with—with much distaste. And I thought that a little conversation might put this matter right.”

“And thus enable you to report that I was fit to marry the young lady?” asked Thorpe.

“If everything was entirely satisfactory I should, I imagined, be able to make such a report,” said Mallow.

“Well, now we know where we are,” said Thorpe; “and let me say first that I’m rather glad to see you here. I’ll speak just as frankly as you please. Mr. Quest won’t like all I say, but as he’s my friend, he’ll put up with it. What would you like to take first, my religion or my morals?”

Thompson chuckled audibly and Quest smiled. They were both quite a little sorry for Mallow. But there sat Thorpe, with his lean strong hands on his knees, facing the parson and staring at him quite earnestly, without a glimmer of humour apparent in his face.

“Are you not making it rather difficult?” murmured Mallow.

“I want to make it easy,” said Thorpe. “So

let's take religion first. I was brought up in the Church of England."

"I am pleased to hear it," said Mallow.

"And at the age of sixteen I refused to be confirmed and became a Unitarian," said Thorpe.

"And are you a Unitarian now, sir?" asked Mallow. "I understood you had no religion."

"On the contrary, I am very religious," said Thorpe. "Quest, you know my opinions. Am I religious or not?"

"In some ways, remarkably so," said Quest.

"Then what church do you belong to?" asked Mallow.

"To none," replied Thorpe.

"I do not understand how you can be religious and belong to no church," said Mallow.

"I did not for an instant imagine you could," said Thorpe drily.

"I understood from your books, some of which I have read, that you do not believe in God," said Mallow reddening.

"I don't," said Thorpe.

"Then how can you be religious?" asked Mr. Mallow with visible horror.

"I suppose it never occurred to you I might ask you how can you be religious and yet believe in the God you preach of?" asked Thorpe.

"It certainly never occurred to me, and I think it blasphemous," said Mallow warmly. "It appears to me that I have not been misinformed. You own you are an atheist?"

"A very religious one," said Thorpe firmly.

"A gross misuse of words, sir," said Mallow angrily.

"I don't think it is," said Quest suddenly. "I don't in the least agree with Mr. Thorpe's views of dogma, but a man can be religious with none."

"Your bishop would not agree with you, sir," retorted Mallow.

"My bishop is not asked to agree with me," said Quest; "I agree with him quite sufficiently."

"A churchman is bound to believe the creeds of his Church, and to believe others must believe them for salvation," said Mallow.

"But a man can be religious without thinking or desiring his own personal salvation, can he not?" asked Thorpe.

"Hear, hear," said Thompson.

"Such a view is absurd," said Mallow hotly. Indeed, it did seem utterly absurd to one who had been taught that a man's personal salvation was his chief business on earth.

"Absurd to you as a Christian?" asked Thorpe.

"Certainly," said Mallow.

"Not in the least absurd," said Quest, who was rather enjoying all this.

"Were there no religious men before the Christian era?" asked Thorpe.

"Certainly, but now we are in the Christian era," said Mallow.

"I have been told so," said Thorpe pensively.

"This is a vain conversation," said Mallow. "I refuse to continue it. You say you don't believe in God, and are religious—"

"Very religious at times," said Thorpe firmly.

"But if you don't believe, you can't be religious. An atheist is the negation of religion. I consider your opinions horrible, and your plausible air, both here and in your books, makes you dangerous," said Mallow. "And to see one of my own cloth backing you up—"

Quest bent forward and laid down his pipe, as Mallow hesitated.

"Go on," said Quest.

"I say that is horrible, too," said Mallow. "I can't understand it."

"No one would suppose you would," said Quest. "Let me tell you I don't agree with Mr. Thorpe in his anti-dogmatism, which is only prevented from being violent because he knows I don't like it, but that I would rather believe

what he believes and take my chance than be the kind of man you are."

"Good God!" said Mallow.

"You understand nothing. That's the matter with you. Do you think your reputation is n't known among us? You are the kind of parson who ought to be the private chaplain of some purse-proud woman of the middle classes. I know Thorpe, and don't think he's what most of us would call extraordinarily good; but he's a deal better than a man who toadies the rich people in his own congregation and starves a curate who looks after the few poor in the parish."

Mallow rose.

"You insult me," he panted. "I wish to have no conversation with you. I came here to see Mr. Thorpe."

"Then leave me out of the talk," said Quest. "I tell you that you don't know what religion is."

"Who does?" asked Thorpe. "But there, pray sit down, Mr. Mallow, and let us understand each other. I suppose you are satisfied as to my religious views, and can report on them?"

Mallow looked vicious, and refused to sit down again.

"I can and will," he said venomously.

"But what about my morals?" asked Thorpe politely; "will you have fulfilled your commission if you go away without knowing something of them?"

"I don't believe you have any," said Mallow.

"I have n't," said Thorpe, "not from your point of view."

"From your books I should say you don't believe in marriage," said Mallow.

"Not as a permanent institution," owned Thorpe.

"You would destroy the home?" cried Mallow.

"Most of them—with joy," said Thorpe.

"The family?" ejaculated Mallow.

"It's the last refuge of tyranny," said Thorpe.

"Why, you are an enemy of society!" cried Mallow.

"Of course I am," said Thorpe.

"And of property," said Mallow.

"Especially in women," said Thorpe.

"You're a Socialist and Anarchist!" said Mallow.

"It's difficult to be both, but I contrive it at times," said Thorpe.

"You seem to be an apostle of licence and the gross indulgence of all the evil passions of mankind," said Mallow.

"If it was worth while to explain anything to you, I would try to make you understand how I came to think that men like you are apostles of the kind you mention," said Thorpe.

Mallow seized his hat and went to the door. He tried to open it in vain. The doors of the Temple usually require knowledge of their peculiarities.

"Allow me," said Thorpe, very politely. "I'm sorry you must go. Come again. I am always in about noon, and shall be very glad to see you."

Mr. Mallow made no reply, and went out hurriedly. Thorpe went back to the others and picked up his pipe. His hand shook a little. He would have enjoyed throwing Mallow downstairs.

"What a bounder!" said Sinclair Thompson. "What do you think of him, Quest?"

Quest sniffed.

"I've met men like him before. It's not the least use trying to make them see anyone's point of view but their own."

"And Thorpe's point of view is n't easy, I suppose," said Thompson.

"It took me six months to understand it, and even now it horrifies me at times," said Quest.

Thorpe smoked hard for a minute.

"That's only when you forget one does n't think in mere years, but in centuries," he said. "The common fool is bound to believe that any moral change one dreams of is going to be introduced by main force or the London County Council to-morrow."

"It must be rather surprising to hear the Home, the Family, and Property disposed of in three short sentences," said Thompson.

"He has got a nice report for that lady," said Quest; "but what did you mean, Thorpe, by saying that such as Mallow were really the apostles of licence?"

"Exactly that. And you, my dear chap, are nearly as bad. None of your lovely schemes of morality and virtue and purity will work. You want to lop and trim nature, and she refuses to be lopped and trimmed and cut. You pile up artificial barriers and dams, and when water trickles over, hurry there with another spadeful of prohibitions. And, by and by, there comes the deluge."

"I'm not quite what you think," said Quest, "nor do I agree with the Psalmist that the heart of man is desperately wicked."

"It's really desperately good," said Thorpe.

“My morals are physiological. No prohibitions should be carried so far as to damage the organism or to make any individual think about the things better not thought of. Work that out, and add that no one should be cruel to himself or anyone else, and you have the natural basis of ethics.”

“Our present system would fall to pieces, would n't it?” asked Quest.

“What the devil else are we all working for?” returned Thorpe.

CHAPTER XI

Which May be Omitted by the Idle, the Incurious, and the Unintelligent, as it Has Little to do With the Course of This True History.

THORPE said afterwards that it was a little unfair to come with a theologic blunderbuss and cry "Stand and deliver!" to him. No man can discharge his soul of his opinions and their reasons and causes in five minutes by any clock, Shrewsbury or another. However, he protested to Thompson that Mallow had the brain of an anæsthetised rabbit, and could never have understood a word of real reason, pure or practical. Nor did he expect fairness from a theologic clerical parasite. Like Quest and thousands of good fellows in the Church, he loathed the Mallow type.

"Explain Socialism to such a man!" exploded Thorpe. He vowed it could n't be explained to the unsympathetic, to say nothing of the fool. Such as Mallow believed their deity made the present everlasting, and bade it remain "just so"

under pain of an infinite term of penal servitude in hell. But the man who can't see that the whole social system is run with the maximum of waste and the minimum of efficiency is blind.

In fact, as Thorpe always said, Socialism is a frame of mind, a way of looking at things, a point of view, not a system. To make pretty systems is good street-corner propaganda, and a likely method of producing argument. By it men may be induced to look round the next corner. The means of Socialism was organisation, its end universal health. Better a paid Established Church of medical doctors than the illuminati of a moribund theology. He said that the prize pigs of society, with their ribbons and medals, might believe they were highly commended by their deity, but they were only prize pigs all the same. They were not disturbed or made unhappy by the unhappiness and misery of others. They were parasitic; they were fat saprophytes on horrible decay: their glow and glitter meant but the phosphorescence of death. He pointed somewhat gleefully to the two great Socialistic elements in the State—the Army and Navy. They had once been run on individualistic lines, and the State had been obliged to take them over. It had taken centuries to elim-

inate corruption from them, and even yet there was waste. For corruption was but waste and friction. But the interested howling dervishes of the present economic system seemed to think that a municipality or a little village council was damned at once if it was still corrupt after a few years of work.

“Personally, I should prefer a tyranny which made healthy citizens by force to our liberty, which is but liberty to cozen and coerce our fellows for our own mean advantage,” he roared. “There’s such a thing as enlightened selfishness. It’s a godlike thing compared with that which can fatten on others. I can’t be happy for thinking of the sweated trades, if of nothing else. I’ve been in a Belfast spinning factory and seen the wet spinning rooms, where the women worked in wet steam, and died at an average age of eighteen, seeing that they began as half-timers.”

People would not believe that. Nevertheless, the manager of the mill had told him the facts, and lamented them. Such as Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton would have refused to hear or believe, especially if her money had been invested in the flax industry. Millions were being half-starved, and she grew fat comfortably. Had a hundred of her so-called inferiors been burnt alive in de-

fence of property, she would have dined that day.

He had told Mallow that he was an atheist. So he was; not being cowardly enough to say he was an agnostic. From his point of view, there was no sign of God in the universe. Not having the internal conviction which helped such as Newman to his beliefs, he felt as the Cardinal owned he would have felt without this conviction. The notion of deity was a savage survival, often beautiful, but still a survival. Men should help themselves and others. Religion was for the weak, and Thorpe sometimes said he was a Neo-Nietschean; he wanted the world full of Over-men. The Christian, or so-called Christian, virtues ought to die out. No one should need pity—save for the inevitable strokes of fate. We should all be able to stand up bravely and face the storms of the universe, if not always without some fear, yet mainly with courage and brave laughter.

“Let’s have men who speak truth,” he said. “I’ve three little human gods on my mantelshelf: Rabelais, Machiavelli, and the late Samuel Butler. They tried to speak the truth, one with laughter, one with cold severity, one with irony and satire.”

But the one thing the ancient British (still surviving) would not face was the truth. They prayed for truth-proof garments. Truth made them cold and ill and very revengeful. They established Censors to keep the sky clear. A tale was told of the men of Gorran Haven that they put up a tarpaulin to keep the moonlight off the sea so that the herrings would stay near the surface to be caught. The English were all men of Gorran. The belief in immortality was also a survival. The ancestors of man did not believe in natural death. It was, they thought, caused by evil magic, by enemies, by medicine-men, shamans, wizards. This belief endured even when they found death could not be avoided. It did but take a new form.

"Let's have this life decent," said Thorpe. So some wretched South Sea Islanders prayed to the alien missionaries for the beautiful old life they knew before the white men's diseases of mind and body destroyed them.

"I'm against fetiches," said Thorpe.

The family, according to him, was the greatest fetich among the modern savage Briton. Now it only existed as a shell, a dead form, larval, monstrous. Once it had been a living institution, in which the father hunted or fished, and

with him his sons took the trail. The mother and her girls cooked and baked, and spun and cleaned the cave or hut. Nowadays modern commercialism and economics had cut away the feet of the family; it sprawled lame in its native muck; it grew lazy, sterile, useless. The very gravest ambition of the climbing Briton was to found a family with a capital F. That is, he desired to perpetuate a parasitic growth on the body corporate of the State. Such families usually justified themselves to the satiric skies by the possession of one inept landowner, proud of being too foolish to understand his own business, one flatulent politician not worth two pounds a week as a clerk, and one bad soldier with the brains of a lance-corporal and the responsibilities of a general. If they were good sportsmen all was well with the world.

“But the very keynote of the age is revolt,” said Thorpe; “let them howl ever so, they will not last. ‘All things tend to an end,’ says Rabelais, ambiguously. No, of course Socialism will not last either. Why should it? Perhaps in the end we shall reach a wise state of castes. Sufficient for the day is the good thereof.”

As to marriage and the home, also two mighty fetiches, he could have said much, and usually

said little. But we bred from the worst and complained of the falling birth-rate with half a million marriageable unmarried women forbidden to have children. It was a tragi-comedy if there ever was one. He enjoyed relating the history of some Australian tribes whose exogamous morality threatened at last to extinguish them. At this point nature broke out, and the youth and young women "knocked morality endways," and to the rage of the religious elders, perpetuated the race in spite of them.

On the whole, it seems probable that Mallow would not have liked Thorpe's views much better if he had given the Revolutionist time to explain them.

CHAPTER XII

Molly Visits Mrs. Thorpe and Considers the Maternal Spirit. She and Miriam Talk of a Forbidden Subject Which is Close to Women's Hearts.

WHILE the oily Mallow was engaged in her lover's chambers, Molly was on the way to Wimbledon to see his mother and Miriam. At five o'clock Thorpe was to come to take her home. Miriam had arranged it all, for Mrs. Thorpe was very anxious to see her son's sweetheart, and Miriam felt that she might help Molly by her essential motherhood, which never lacked sweetness or charity. To have a mother like Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton was to have been born an orphan, as more than statistics can show. It is not sex, but sympathy, which makes a woman, and Miriam knew it. She was sorry for Molly, and already loved her. In the deep recesses of her heart, those scented gardens of the soul that were almost secret from herself, she conceived the thought of loving Molly's children, if she had none of her own at last. Thus she was jealous of Molly and loved her, and gave her

maternal gifts strangely, as women may if they are barren by nature, or by strict marriage, or by the sterile law of chastity, which sees no grace in a noble child unless its father is proclaimed beforehand. But to some this seems a violation of the natural law.

The two girls shook hands when Miriam met Molly at the station. They did not kiss in public, not having kissed each other yet. There was still a little stiffness between them, though more on Miriam's side than Molly's.

"She can love; she loves Jack," thought Miriam. "If I—" she checked her own thought.

"It's sweet of you to come, Molly. Mother will love to see you."

"I shall love her, I know," said Molly.

"*She* is a mother, you see," said Miriam. "So many are not, it seems to me. Jack says too many are who should n't be, and too many are not that should be, and so the world gets wrong."

Molly smiled a little sadly.

"I always wanted to love my mother," she said.

"Wanted to! How strange," said Miriam. "Why, our mother is a dear; you could n't not love her if you tried. She's warm air, one breathes her even now."

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton had been an east wind,

hard at her best, bitter and searching at her worst, without the gift of fertility.

"She's the southwest wind," said Miriam. "That's Jack's word for her sometimes."

Molly told her that she believed Mr. Mallow had gone that very day to see Jack.

"Poor dear," said Miriam, "Jack will talk his little head off, and confuse him and send him away believing he has seen the devil. And yet Jack rather loves parsons, and some of them love him, in spite of his awful opinions."

Molly sighed.

"Of course, I don't want him to deceive anyone, but I hope he won't be too hard on Mr. Mallow," she said. "Mother is bad enough already. You see, I said I would n't marry Jack if they could prove he was an irreclaimable scoundrel, or something like that."

"They can't do it," cried Miriam loftily.

"Not to me, of course," said Molly, "but they'll think they have if he's too open. However, I don't care now. I'll marry him if he murders Mr. Mallow. You know I sometimes think some people ought to be killed. Painlessly, of course."

It was a concession to her feelings about Mallow to allow him painless extinction.

“Don't let 's talk of him; here we are, dear,” said Miriam, and they entered the house which lay not far from the Common, and from some windows commanded a view of it and the old windmill.

Molly's first thought of Mrs. Thorpe was that she was old. For her hair was white, not with the whiteness of snow, but rather with the whiteness of cream or of old ivory, something with deep warmth in it, the faint remembrance of ancient colour. Yet she was not old, as years go, for she had married very young, and Jack was the child of her youth, and Miriam late born, the last gift, came to her after her husband died, when she was twenty-seven. So even now she was but little past fifty, and it is no brave modern who yields utterly to age at so early a time of life. Indeed, her skin was pink and soft, and her eyes blue, and though she was thin, she possessed grace as well as graciousness, and at the very sound of her voice Molly knew why her son called her the southwest wind. For she looked at Molly and her eyes lighted to see her, and she said no more than “my dear” and took her in her arms and kissed the girl's cheek tenderly, so that Molly's heart went out to her in a kind of passion. And with it was mixed in-

extricably a deep and bitter sense of what she had lost in the years of her own childhood, so that her heart was hard within her for a moment. But then she melted utterly and said, almost inaudibly, "mother." For this was her new mother, who had no hostility in her.

"My dear, I am glad to see you," said Mrs. Thorpe.

A blind man might have known she was a beautiful maternal spirit. Molly took her hand and pressed it, for it was hard to speak with tears in her heart. Deep within the girl was a well-spring of tenderness; but few knew it, and her mother least of all. And Molly was surprised at her own emotions, for she was pleased to think she was a little hard and wise. But shrewdness and wisdom should come later, hand in hand with love.

"I 'm glad you like me," she whispered.

"Love you, Molly," said her new mother, and they did not speak for a little, for speaking was difficult. But peace fell on Molly, or rose up about her like cool waters.

"Is n't Jenny sweet?" said Miriam suddenly.

"Who 's Jenny?" asked Molly, looking about her as if for some household pet.

"She 's mother," said Miriam. "When she 's

good we call her by her Christian name, and when she's naughty we call her Mrs. Thorpe."

"I shall call her 'dear,'" said Molly. "I never do that to my own mother. I can't."

"That's strange," said Mrs. Thorpe. "Have you had much trouble lately, Molly?"

"Only about—Jack," she murmured, "and someone else they want me to marry."

She began to tell them about Gloomy Fanny, and very soon they were all laughing, for Molly had a gift for narrative and characterisation, and got the right word of humour very often.

"However, he's quite a dear if he was n't so silly," said Molly, "and he's very persevering just as he is about polo."

They talked about everything for nearly an hour without touching at first more than lightly on the objections of her family. As Molly would have imagined, Mrs. Thorpe seemed to think such objections were of little weight if she and Jack thought so too. In this she was, no doubt, influenced by her motherly belief that her son was pretty nearly beyond criticism.

"It will all come right in the end," said Mrs. Thorpe, stroking Molly's hair, "or as right as anything can."

Miriam laughed.

"Mrs. Thorpe, you are talking platitudes. There will be fearful trouble about it, and we all know it."

"I don't see why there should be if they take a reasonable view of things," said Mrs. Thorpe.

Miriam rose.

"Dear Mrs. Thorpe, it is time you lay down before tea. You are evidently tired, or you would be more sensible. Molly shall come to my room while you lie on the sofa."

They saw that she did so, and Molly kissed her.

"Now you are good, Jenny," said Miriam, "so go to sleep and wake up full of wisdom."

And she and Molly went upstairs together.

"She's a dear," said Molly.

"Of course she is," said Miriam, "but when she's Mrs. Thorpe she's very like other dear good people. Just now she's not very strong. When she's very much Jenny she's wonderful."

"What would happen if I called my mother 'Amy?'" asked Molly.

"What?" asked Miriam.

"I give it up," replied Molly.

Miriam's room was infinitely simple. The floors were stained, there was a bed, two basket chairs, a shelf of books. An enlarged photo-

graph in a dark-oak frame, and an engraving of the Sistine Madonna were on the walls. Molly went straight to the photograph.

"This is very like Jack," she said.

"It's my father," said Miriam. "He died before I was born, but I seem to have known him very well."

"Tell me about him," said Molly.

"They say he was wonderfully clever—an architect, you know. I saw a church he built in Manchester. It was melancholy being in it. But he was very wild and strange. I don't know all about it. Jack does. But I know he was n't at home for months before I was born, and one day he came back looking very ill and said to mother, 'Jenny, my dear, I've come back to you to die.' And mother was very good to him. She could n't be hard; oh, never! Of course, I guess something about it. Jack told me once that while he was away he wrote letters to her every day and never sent them, and she found them in a box after he died."

"That was strange," said Molly.

"I don't know," replied Miriam. "Women always go about saying men don't understand them; but I'm sure we don't understand men, not even when we marry, if we do."

"Your brother says no one understands himself," said Molly, "and that life's like going exploring."

"If you go exploring with Jack, heaven knows what you two will find," said Miriam, looking out of the window.

"I—I don't care," cried Molly.

"I shan't marry, I know," said Miriam. She went across the room and stood in front of the Sistine Madonna with the child.

"This is my picture," she said. "I love it. She's the Mother, and that Child is all children."

Molly came behind her and put her hand on her shoulder.

"You will marry," she said, softly.

"No, I think not," said Miriam. "I can't imagine it. But—but I—I love children."

"Don't you want some of your own?" whispered Molly.

Miriam nodded.

"I—I cry about it at nights," she said.

"And you can't love anyone?" asked Molly.

"There are thousands who can't, and yet love children. I know it," said Miriam. "There are many, oh! many who can't bear being shut up in a home (it sounds like a place of reformation, does n't it?), and yet they love children. I

can't talk about it. Mother understands, but I can't talk about it with her. I know Jack understands, too. I've seen it in his books. I—I suppose I horrify you?"

Molly shook her head.

"It would have horrified me months ago, but now I think I understand," she whispered. "Don't most of us understand more than we did?"

Miriam nodded.

"It's true these things are in women's hearts. Why should we be the slaves that we are? There's something about the everlasting surrender of marriage that kills me to think of. You don't feel that?"

Molly shook her head.

"You might meet someone."

"I'm twenty-six," said Miriam.

It seemed very old to her, for she had nursed dear children in her heart since she was eighteen, lamenting the unborn who tugged at her bosom.

"I dream about children," she said; "my own."

They stood together looking at the picture of the legendary virgin, calm and sweet and infinitely maternal.

"Don't let's talk of it," said Miriam. "You

will have children. I give myself two years to fall in love—”

“And then?”

“I ’ll—adopt one,” said Miriam. She twisted Molly about and looked her in the eyes.

“Will you speak to me then, Molly?”

“Yes,” said Molly, with a strange, dry voice. But she kissed Miriam with tears in her eyes, and they went downstairs together. And presently they saw Thorpe at the garden-gate.

“Will you let him in, Molly?” asked Miriam.

“Yes,” said Molly, blushing; and she went to the door and let her lover in.

He took her by both hands, drew her to him, and kissed her.

“My little girl!” he said; and she wondered about Miriam, for it was sweet to be loved.

They did not go into the drawing-room at once, for Thorpe took her into the breakfast-room instead, and closed the door triumphantly.

“It ’s the first time we ’ve been alone, Molly,” he said—“the first time! There never can be another first time for that.”

He took her in his arms, and she put her head back, looking him in the eyes searchingly.

“You do love me, Jack?”

"Yes, my dear."

"Very much, Jack?"

"Indescribably, my child. I get more wonderfully foolish every day."

There is a paternal instinct in the lover as there is a maternal instinct in the woman. She laid her head upon his shoulder. He took her hand and kissed her fingers separately, and then the palm. It was the first time he had done so. It was a sweet and dear familiarity that made her tremble.

"Do you like my mother, darling?" he asked. Now she was on his knee, with her head hidden on his shoulder.

"No, I love her," said Molly.

He stroked her hair with his right hand.

"That 's as it should be. If I can't love yours, you shall love mine double. She 's a mother, a real one, absolutely genuine, Molly. What a frightful thing it would be to think of if she had n't been."

"Why, Jack?" asked Molly.

"I should n't have been here, my darling."

"How absurd you are, Jack."

"I love to be. It's peaceful being absurd, and so restful. Kiss my ear, Molly."

"Why, Jack?"

"Somehow it would soothe it after what it heard from your friend Mallow to-day."

Molly sat up and stared at him with big, serious eyes.

"Did he come? Oh, tell me what happened."

"Kiss my ear first. That particular ear demands to be kissed urgently. The other ear can wait."

"You know you are an absurd person, Jack."

"Of course I am. But quite delightful to the right girl who is on my knee. Have you kissed it yet?"

Molly did kiss it.

"I'll kiss your left ear, too," said Thorpe. "And after that your right one. And now the back of your neck, where the little curls are, is very jealous. There! Now we'll go and see the others, and I'll tell you all about Mallow."

They went into the other room, Molly with a heightened colour, and Thorpe with sparkling eyes. She sat on a stool by Mrs. Thorpe, and when Jack had kissed Miriam and his mother, he began about the intruding parson and Quest.

"Of course, I could n't be very rude to him, so I was pleased to have Quest there, who did the rudeness for me. Sinclair sat and smoked cigarettes, and just loved it all, but hardly

opened his mouth. But now all the fat is in the fire, Molly."

"Do tell us what he said and what you said," insisted Molly; "and why is the fat in the fire?"

"Because I told the interferer that I was everything that was bad. He said that he understood from my noble works that I was an atheist, and I owned up to it boldly, but said I was a very religious one, and he shook his head feebly as if I'd hit him very hard. Then he got angry and said I misused words. But old Quest, who is a trump, and really understands more than any parson I ever met (though I love them, the dears), chipped in and said it was easy to understand. And Mallow said the bishop would n't think so, and Quest sneered. And I told him that I thought looking chiefly after one's own personal salvation was a mean little business when there was so much else to do. Then the blighter said such a view was absurd."

"What is a blighter, John?" asked his mother, innocently.

"Blighters, my dear mother, compose about 17.5 per cent. of the population," said her son. "They are divided into two kinds, the wet-blanket blighter and the Shirt of Nessus blighter. If they could be exterminated the world would

be a much more cheerful place. If you don't understand now, I'll explain later. But I'm sure you must know many. Wimbledon can't possibly be the only district in London without them. But to go on. The reverend blighter said he could n't understand it, and grew hot, so Quest chipped in again, laying his pipe down, and he said he did n't agree with me about dogmas, but that he'd rather take his chance of hell with me than be the sort Mallow was. So Mallow said 'Good God!' or something like it, and then Quest got hot, and told him he was a dirty toady who kept a half-starved curate to do the real work of the parish."

"Served him right," said Molly. "It's quite true. But we never ask poor Mr. Smith and his wife to dinner. What happened then?"

Thorpe laughed.

"He got up in a holy, righteous rage and made out to go, but I stopped him, and said that he'd got my religion, but didn't know anything about my morals. Then he said furiously he did n't believe I had any. I said he was right, and informed him that I did n't believe in marriage as a permanent institution. No doubt he thinks I want to abolish it to-morrow! Then he indulged in the usual piffle about the Home, as these

blighters call it, thinking of their own, which they probably believe decent, though I should like to hear other evidence on the subject, and entirely ignoring the hideous and miserable brutality and dirt of the usual English home. Then he introduced the Family, again with a capital, and I said it was the last refuge of the tyranny of man, where the parents exercised their savage instincts of rule which are not permitted outside. You should have seen the dear man's face. Finally, he suggested I was against the great and immortal safeguard of society as it stands, Property; and I said I loathed it, especially when it was property in women. Whereon he foamed at the mouth and hurled the final word of middle-class fury at me. I was a Socialist and Anarchist! I told him he didn't know what he was talking about, and he went away. But I ended by being very polite, and asked him to come again. However, I don't think he will."

"Probably not," said Miriam. "Wasn't your politeness a little late?"

"Perhaps," replied Thorpe; "but, when you think of it, where did his come in? Anyhow, Quest, who is a duck, said it served him jolly well right. What do you think, Molly?"

"I think he's perfectly loathsome, and de-

serves all you gave him," said Molly, hotly; "but, of course, I know what will happen when I get home."

"What?" asked Thorpe.

"Mother will come to me and say that of course I can't marry a man such as Mr. Mallow describes you to be. You see, I said if they could prove you to be an irredeemable scoundrel, I would n't; and she'll think she's proved it."

Thorpe laughed, but his mother did not see the humour of the situation.

"You are awfully unjust to yourself, Jack," she said. "It took me years to understand your ideas, and even now I don't quite; and you expect a man like this to understand you in a minute."

Her son shook his head.

"Dearest Jenny, he would n't understand in a lifetime, and he did n't come there to understand. Men of that sort don't want to comprehend anything. They think they know everything. We've just got to face the situation, Molly, and I believe we're quite equal to it."

"There'll be an awful row, though," said Molly, dolefully.

"If you don't want to go home, you can stay here with us," said Mrs. Thorpe, suddenly.

"Jolly good idea!" said Thorpe. "Let's get

married at once. Jenny is as rapid in an emergency as a fire-escape."

"If it was n't for my father, I believe I would," said Molly; "but I think he 's really very fond of me, in spite of business. No, I must go back."

Miriam pressed her hand.

"I think you ought to, dear," she said.

"Wretch!" cried her brother.

"Yes, I must," said Molly. "Is n't it time now?"

It was after five, though Thorpe pretended all the Wimbledon clocks were wrong, and Molly rose from beside his mother, and went with Miriam to get her hat.

"She 's quite lovely, John," said Mrs. Thorpe.

"I am glad you think so," said her son. "She says she loves you, dearest Jenny mother. Her own mother is a tartar, and no mistake."

"I 'm glad I never was," said Mrs. Thorpe, thoughtfully.

And presently Jack took Molly almost to her very door.

"Don't keep me waiting very long, Molly," he said.

"I hope not," said Molly. "I—I won't!"

CHAPTER XIII

The Reverend Mr. Mallow Tells Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton all About it, and That Lady, Later in the Evening, Learns That an Ounce of Smiles is Worth a Pound of Rhetoric.

IT is one of the most humorously pitiful facts in life that those whom Thorpe vulgarly called "blighters" think themselves the salt of the earth. But to bores and "blighters" the ordinary man who is neither must inevitably be cruel if he is to save himself alive from their appalling ministrations. And yet in other conditions they might have been decent citizens. A hard public school and three years at the University might have made Mallow almost possible. After such a training he would not have attacked Thorpe in the way he did, and exposed himself to justifiable insult. He went away raging, and feeling a fool for the first time in many years. But he was sure that after his report to headquarters, Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton would be able to exert the proper influence on her daughter. Thorpe would

be punished both for his opinions and his conduct.

He found Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton at home, and eager for his news.

"Appalling, appalling," said Mr. Mallow. "My dear lady, give me a cup of tea and I will tell you all that has happened. I have been most grossly insulted by this Thorpe."

"Ah, I expected it," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton darkly.

Mallow came near to saying crossly, "Oh, did you?" but he restrained himself.

"You are right; the man is a scoundrel of the deepest dye, an awful atheist. He denies the divinity of Christ!"

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton held up her hand in horror. Neither she nor Mallow had ever seen divinity in anything.

"No, no!" she said.

"I say yes, yes; he acknowledged it, gloried in it, and to add insult to injury, said he was a very religious atheist."

"Good God, a religious atheist! Who ever heard of one?" she demanded.

The world is full of them, and grows fuller yet.

"He denounced marriage, my dear lady; said it was n't a permanent institution!"

"He will certainly not marry Molly. Oh, even an infatuated girl cannot stand that!" said Molly's mother.

"He jeered at the English home, the fountain of Christian virtues, the envy of all Europe, nay, of the world," said Mallow, unctuously.

"The—the devil!" said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton viciously.

"He heaped scorn on the family, and said it was the last refuge of tyranny. That is the way, he characterised the sweet authority of parents, the sanctity of home love, my dear madam!"

"Nothing you tell me is unexpected," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. "Nothing, I swear it."

"He denounced property, the bulwark of society, and he acknowledged with evil glee that he was both a Socialist and an Anarchist."

"I wish Molly was here now," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton; "a Socialist is a robber."

She believed it firmly. In a state of Socialism she could not have exercised her charitable instincts sauced with bitter advice. These were her good works; without them what was man or woman? She had no real sense of indignation at wrong. The society that helped her to climb was well organised; true pity was not hers, nor could it be, nor was the service of man noble.

"What do these people complain of? The station of life to which God called them—"

"True! He understands nothing of this. He is a revolutionary. He would make us all equal," said Mallow. "His influence is poisonous. I regret to say he had a clergyman in his room who appeared to be a friend of his. This man, one of my own cloth, was exceedingly insolent to me. I don't know what things are coming to when a clergyman is friendly with a man like that and actually supports him against me with insults."

"Dreadful!" said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. "We must stand together and defy the forces of evil. I should like to burn Keir Hardie and Lloyd George."

She meant it; it was no fashion of speaking with her, as it is with many. Tertullian as a theologian would have pleased her. To see her enemies frying in the pit, or at the immediate stake, would have delighted her soul.

"I will see if Molly is at home," she said. "You must tell her this before me."

"I will," said Mallow. He rang the bell for her. The footman who answered it said that Molly had just come in.

"Ask her to come here at once," said Mrs.

Fletcher-Mytton. "Be firm, Mr. Mallow. I mean, do not minimise things."

"I won't," said Mallow.

And Molly came in, still with her hat on. She shook hands with Mr. Mallow, doing it with obvious reluctance. Her mother noticed it and raged inwardly.

"Mr. Mallow has seen this Mr. Thorpe," she said, and Molly said to herself, "He kissed me, he kissed me." She looked very beautiful; she was as full of colour as a rose. Her eyes gleamed strangely; passion was in them unseen. They were going to talk about her lover, whose knee she had sat on, whom she had kissed.

"Yes," said Molly; "yes!"

"I regret to say he is not a fit and proper person," said Mallow.

"No?" said Molly; "for what?"

"For you to marry, my child," said her mother.

"He acknowledges he is an atheist," said Mallow, with both hands uplifted.

"Is he?" asked Molly. She cared nothing. In a little while, a very little while, he had become a divinity to her. Their hatred of him was blasphemy, and their every word gave him great qualities of defence against them.

"Marry he will not! He's against marriage!"

He does not believe in it," said Mallow; "he denounces it as not permanent, my dear young lady! Think of that! What are his ideas concerning—you, if he says that?"

"Aye, what?" asked Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"He wants to marry me," said Molly in a very clear voice, "and I wish to marry him."

"You shall not," said her mother.

"Dear Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, let me speak," said Mallow.

The elder woman restrained herself. But her hands were clenched, her knuckles white.

"If this man was worthy but poor, I think I may say none of your family would raise insuperable objections," began Mallow.

"They would," said Molly.

"But he is an atheist, a Socialist, an opponent and destroyer of every good thing—"

"You don't understand him and are incapable of understanding him," said Molly clearly.

"Molly," screamed her mother, "don't dare speak like that!"

"It is true, mother," said her daughter, "and I think it was wholly without justification for Mr. Mallow to go and see him."

"He did it in your best interests, you wretched girl," said her mother.

"Then I had much rather he did n't," said Molly rapidly, "and I don't want to hear any more about Mr. Thorpe. I have made up my mind about him, and nothing that Mr. Mallow says will alter it."

"You shall not marry him," said her mother, furiously.

"I will not marry Lord Laxton and I shall marry Mr. Thorpe," said Molly.

"Oh, not without your mother's consent," cried Mallow, "surely not without her consent."

"She shall not have it. I would rather die than give it. Go to your room, girl; go."

Molly rose.

"Mother, I am not a child any more, and if you don't consent, I shall marry him without it."

"My dear young lady, honour your father and your mother—" began Mallow. Molly turned on him.

"Don't speak to me, I beg, Mr. Mallow, or I shall say what I think of you," she said, breathlessly.

"Good God!" said her mother, "good God!"

She had never struck her daughter since Molly was fourteen, but in another minute what self-restraint she had would have given way. Molly

knew it, and now was as pale as death. She held her hands by her sides.

"If you do, I shall leave the house," she said, in a whisper, "this moment, this very moment!"

Mother and daughter stood opposite to each other for a full half-minute, and then Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton spoke in a strangled voice.

"Go to your room. I shall consult your father about you."

And at that moment the door opened, and ancient Anti-Climax entered in the fragile person of Grannyducky.

"Ow, it's that Mr. Mallow!" she said, in her penetrating whisper which no one was supposed to hear. "That Mr. Mallow" grimaced and bowed stiffly. He was well aware that the old lady loathed him. But on the whole, he was relieved by her entrance.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Mytton," he said.

"Eh?" said Grannyducky, "what does that Mallow say, Molly?"

"He says, 'Good afternoon,' Granny," replied Molly, in a clear voice that her great-grandmother always heard.

"Ow, good afternoon," said Mrs. Mytton, viciously. "What's he a doing 'ere, Molly? I wish he did n't come so often. I do so 'ate 'im."

This was very cheering and joyous for Mallow, even though it had happened before. And he thought he had better go. On the whole, he had not been a success, either with Thorpe or Molly, and now old Mrs. Mytton gave the final touch to his discomfiture. He and his hostess left the room and spoke together in the hall.

"Pray do not mind her," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, throatily.

"I don't," said Mallow. "But I regret we have not been more successful. If I can help you in any way—"

"She shall not marry him if I have to lock her in her room," she said.

"I fear she is very obstinate," said Mallow, rubbing his hands.

"So am I," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"Locking her up would be an extreme step—"

"I am capable of an extreme step," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, shortly.

"The legal position—"

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton did not damn the legal position in so many words, but she felt as if she could. She had always abused her power, and so far no one but an occasional servant had refused to submit to it. She could not face the notion that Molly had any rights, moral or legal,

and she occupied the position of the enraged donkey-owner who wanted to know what the world was coming to if he could not larrup his own jackass.

"I recommend a diplomatic attitude," said Mallow; "work on her natural affection for you."

But Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton could not endure the thought. It would be to take an attitude of supplication.

"We shall see," she said, shortly. Then she added, rather more graciously, "I thank you for what you have done."

Mr. Mallow was gratified to have been able to do anything for so dear a friend. But he went away feeling rather mean. Perhaps Thorpe had done him good after all.

In the meantime Grannyducky, whose eyes missed nothing if her ears missed much, had discovered that Molly was in distress and nigh to tears.

"What's that granddarter of mine a-sayin', now?" she asked. "Is it all about your nice young man?"

Molly owned that it was.

"They say he's very wicked, Granny, dear."

"So much the better, my love," cried Granny-

ducky; "I 'ate good young men. They 've nothing to repent of, and get so 'aughty about it. But the wicked are always repentin', and then they give you things, and are lambs for weeks together. Don't I know 'em? I love your young man and I 'ate fools. You marry him quick. Don't lose a young man like that, my love."

"I mean to marry him, but I hate rows, Granny, dear," said Molly, dolefully.

"I don't," squeaked Granny, "if she would n't make me shake so and get my wig crooked, I'd tell that woman what I thinks of 'er. Don't you worry, my dear. I've left you all my money. It ain't much, but it'll be a 'elp."

"You're a darling," said Molly.

"I didn't mean to tell you, because I 'ate anyone to know what I'll do with it," said Granny, "but I 'ad my new will wrote out a month ago, arter Amy shook me. And she can't make out I'm mad. You look here, my darling."

She produced Dr. Ridde's certificate of sanity with great pride.

"'E says I'm 'ighly intelligent. Read it out, Molly."

And Molly read it out.

"So when I die, which won't be long, you 'll 'ave money of your own. 'Owever nice your Thorpe is, you 'll find he 's close with money, my dear," said Grannyducky.

"I don't believe it, Granny."

"They all are, my pet," affirmed the old lady; "they 'ave awful trouble in makin' it, and 'ate to part with it. The best man alive don't see the necessity for payin' for what 'e don't use 'imself. They mostly think they 'd be poor soon if they give it away, and they always 'old on to their old boots and trowsers for fear of not bein' able to buy more.

"Do they?" asked Molly.

"Oh, yes," said her great-grandmother, "even them as would give away their 'eads, 'ang on to their trowsers, and if their wives did n't give 'em away to beggars the 'ole 'ouse would be full of them. Don't you pay no attention to your Thorpe about 'is old trowsers, my love."

Molly promised that she would n't, and presently went upstairs to her room.

She did not dress for dinner, and declined to go down to it on the ground that she had a headache. Filkins, whose gloomy ministrations she shared with Grannyducky, brought her a plate of soup, which was all she would take. And

dinner downstairs was certainly a function to be avoided.

"Where 's Molly?" asked her father. However little he showed it, he missed his daughter whenever she was not there.

"In her room," replied Amy, with a brow like the rugged rims of thunder brooding over the storm-hid plain.

"Ain't she well?" asked Forty, whose instincts told him there had been a row.

"Perfectly well," said his mother, "perfectly well."

Even Edward, whose mind was full of a new company that he was connected with, recognised that there was trouble, and his face darkened. It was true he was worried and disconcerted by Molly's refusal to live up to her opportunities, but he loved peace, and, man-like, he attributed her waywardness to Amy's lack of skill in managing her daughter. Had he not managed Fortescue admirably? Like most English boys, Forty had wanted to go to sea, either in the Navy or out of it, and had stuck to the notion till he was fifteen, and after that he pined for the Army, and only steady pressure had prevented him from enlisting when Sandhurst was negatived.

"And Amy can't manage a girl," thought Edward. "Here I am makin' heaps of money and I can't get peace with it."

It was a pitiful cry, but natural to a man of his kind. He ate his dinner without appetite, and felt, possibly as the result of some gout, a wild desire to throw his plate through the window and go out in a rage.

"Seen Gloomy Fanny lately, mother?" asked Forty, by way of introducing relief into an otherwise bald and trying dinner.

"I have not seen Lord Laxton for some days," replied Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, "and I desire that you will not call him Gloomy Fanny in my presence; I dislike slang intensely."

"Do you?" asked her son; "why, Gloomy—I mean, Laxton, never uses anythin' else. Never was such a cove for misusin' the beauties of the English language; I'm not in it with him. I've known him to have a slangin' match with a 'bus driver and use words that paralysed the bloke."

"I desire to hear nothing about the incident you mention," said his mother. "In my presence, at any rate, Lord Laxton uses language to which no one can take exception. He will be an ornament to the peerage."

"He'll teach 'em somethin' to say about Lloyd

George," said Forty. "Has he ever said anythin' to you about him?"

"Not to my knowledge," replied his mother. "But on that subject I could pardon a great deal of heat. When he is in the House of Lords I have no doubt whatever that he will adopt the tone of that great assembly."

"He 'll make 'em sit up till he does," said Forty. "And, by the way, where 's old Simpkinson?"

"He and his wife are in Switzerland," said his mother, "and I beg you will not call him old Simpkinson in my presence. He is a man you ought to reverence."

Fortescue made no more attempts to enliven the proceedings, and the dinner came to an end in silence. When he got into the hall Fortescue whistled.

"Would it be unfilial of me to describe the mater as a perisher?" he asked himself. "I think I 'll run up to Molly and put it to her."

He found his sister sitting at the window, from which she could see a little of the park through the pilasters of the parapet. It was a glimpse of freedom seen through bars.

"What ho!" said Forty; "what 's the woe now?"

Molly smiled almost wanly.

"Oh, my dear, you know. That Mallow went to see Mr. Thorpe."

"Did he now? Tell me about it. Was it very joyous for him?" asked Forty eagerly. "If it was n't I'll never forgive your bally Thorpe."

"Can I trust you, Forty?" she asked.

"Of course you can, old girl," replied Forty. "Did n't I say I was on your side now? I'm not a Laxtonite any more. I renounce climbin' and thrustin'. I'm goin' to remain a simple business cove. So go ahead and tell me all."

She told how she had spent the afternoon, and all that had happened at Thorpe's rooms afterwards.

"I came up to ask you if it was wicked to call the old lady a perisher," said Forty, when she had finished, "but I believe she is."

"Oh, what's a perisher, Forty?" asked his sister.

Forty explained that "a perisher was a very active 'blighter,' " one who destroyed things rapidly rather than suffocated them slowly.

"The woods are full of 'em," concluded Forty; "but what's goin' to happen now? What's the next act in this great domestic drayma, and am I to have a front scene in it? The old man is

gettin' very savage about things, and I think if you were to make a piteous appeal to him he 'd cave in, and perhaps swear at our lady mother. If the gov'nor were to have the pluck to do that it 'd do her heaps of good, a whole lot."

"But, you know he, too, wants me to marry Lord Laxton," said Molly.

Forty nodded.

"Of course, my duck; but you don't savvy the gov'nor. I know him inside and out. In business he 's a snorter, and will cut a throat like any pirate, but he loves peace so much that he 'll fight for it. He 'll put up with a lot for peace, but if it ain't to be got by lyin' down, the old man will get up and swear. He 's as weak as water up to a point, but when water boils it ain't weak provided there ain't a safety valve. Now, the old lady has fire under him, and stirs it with the safety valve screwed down. Another dinner like the one that has just safely come to an end, and the gov'nor will do somethin'."

"Oh, what?" asked Molly.

"Blow me if I know," said Forty; "but I should n't be surprised at anythin'. You women folk don't half know us poor weak men, nor do you savvy how often we get to explodin'."

Molly smiled.

"Don't we?" she asked.

"Do you?" asked Forty.

"Yes, if we 're wise," said Molly, rising.

"Then the old lady is n't wise," said Forty.

And just at that moment they heard, even at the top of the house, the front door slam violently. There was no wind, so carelessness on the part of the footman could not account for it.

"Someone slammed the front door," said Forty, jumping up.

"No," said his sister.

"By the Lord, they did!" said Forty. He looked quite excited, and turned to her.

"Molly, I 'll bet you a box of gloves to a mean Manilla cigar that the old 'un has exploded at last," said Forty. "I felt it comin' on durin' dinner."

"Oh, go and see," said Molly; and Forty went downstairs. He met his father's valet on the landing. He had a kit-bag in his hand.

"Where are you off to, Mason?" asked Forty, lightly.

"Just goin' to pack Mr. Fletcher-Mytton's bag and take it to him at Victoria for the ninety to Brighton, sir," said Mason, without a sign of such a thing being unusual.

"Humph!" said Forty. He was much pleased with his own acumen.

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton had pursued her husband into his own den, ignorant of fate, and without that wisdom which Molly had spoken of to her brother. She was accustomed to domineer, to imperial rule, and could not believe in any kind of revolt.

"Molly tells me she *will* marry this Thorpe," she said.

"Let her marry the devil!" said Edward, crossly.

"Edward!" cried his astonished wife, "how dare you speak so to me?"

"Can't you manage your daughter without givin' me indigestion?" asked Edward, looking as black as thunder. "For the last month I've not had a meal in the house that has n't made me ill, with you glarin' at the other end of the table."

"That girl has been talking to you and has got round you," cried his wife, furiously. "Do you know he's an atheist, a Socialist, and a scoundrel? And now you dare to speak to me like this when I'm only doing my duty! I am astonished, I am confounded, Edward!"

Edward lighted a cigar with trembling hands. She saw they trembled, and thought herself acute

to notice it. But Edward threw the cigar into the grate. It was worth eighteenpence at the least.

"Have I nothin' to do but listen to your failures with Molly?" he roared. "I can't make the girl marry Laxton, and you can't either. Do you think I do business by gettin' mad if I have n't a pull? The way you go about lookin' black would make a girl marry the chimney-sweep to get out of it."

"I am your wife!" said Amy, white to the lips with rage.

"Yes, you are; and, by God, if you were n't, you would n't be!" roared Edward. With that he rushed across the room to the bell, and stood with his finger on it till a footman came.

"Send Mason here," he said, savagely; and in less than twenty seconds Mason appeared.

"Pack my things, and meet me at Victoria for the nine-fifty," said his master. "Look quick, now; do you hear?"

All the house heard, or all those not at the top of it.

"I 'm goin' where I can have a meal in peace," said Edward Fletcher-Mytton. "If I can't have it in my own house for five thousand a year, I 'll try it at an hotel for a sovereign a day."

He marched into the hall, put on his hat, and went out, slamming the door behind him, and leaving his wife absolutely speechless.

“What ho!” said Forty; “I begin to think I’m a remarkably clever cove. I will retire upstairs without meeting my lady mother, and will acquaint Molly with the bare facts of the horrible explosion.”

CHAPTER XIV

In Which Forty Follows His Father's Footsteps for Three Days, and, Being Left Alone With Molly, Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton Makes Her First Essay as a Law-Breaker. The Game Grows Serious, and Granny-ducky Takes a Hand in it.

TO say that Amy Fletcher-Mytton was astonished at her husband's sudden outbreak would be to use an extreme meiosis. She was, in fact, thunderstruck. The very ruins of heaven fell about her, and for a moment they struck her not unfeeling. It was as though some lamb had charged with the ferocity of a wounded lion. The inexplicable for ever causes alarm. A bone moved by a piece of unseen thread will sometimes make a brave dog turn tail and hide under a chair; and though Amy did not know it, Edward was like that bone, moved by gout. And that gout was caused by eating good dinners where love was not. Her husband's sleep at Brighton was disturbed at two o'clock in the morning by a sensation as of someone pouring

boiling water on his left big toe. Before dawn he forgot everything else. With a man's first attack of acute gout he will forget even impending bankruptcy. A mustard poultice of the fiercest description is a joke to it.

His wife's sleep was equally, if less painfully, disturbed. She felt that she had lost an ally in her battle with Molly. From the military point of view, even the poorest reserves are better than none. Edward, she felt, was, after all, but a poor climber. He yearned for distinction, but would not take trouble to obtain it. Money was nothing without push. One may get to China with bread and steel, but brains and brass are required to achieve the Flowery Kingdom she yearned for. The way was open; Gloomy Fanny was the guide, the light, the door, and only Molly was recalcitrant.

"I have tried everything," she said, "and Edward has failed me. I will not give in."

The horse is a noble animal, but, as the school-boy said, "if you irritate him he will not do so." Man, or woman, is also a noble animal, but, irritated, he will do so even less. This Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton did not understand. Her sense of authority was hypertrophied in proportion to the atrophy of her powers of love. Molly

must be made to do as she was told. She declined to ask herself how she was to be coerced in these days. Liberty grows hourly; for, indeed, liberty is growth. Minors themselves have rights; and even society begins to see it owes bread to its hungry children. The only real differences of opinion are based on the belief that someone else shall pay for the bread. Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton felt that to make her pay was robbery. She had no sense of citizenship; her individualism was monstrous. She would be alike the fountain of honour and authority in her own house. She fell asleep at last in the belief that she would remain so.

She woke up, saying:

“She shall not see that Thorpe again, if I have to shut her up.”

Molly came down to breakfast with her brother. She had slept well. She was not only very healthy, but she had her mind made up, and nothing is so conducive to rest. She had but to oppose a resolute negative to her mother, and nothing could move her.

“Mornin’, old gal,” said Forty. “How goes it?”

“I ’m all right,” said Molly.

“You can stick it out?”

"Oh, yes," said Molly; "and if I can't—"

"Dashed if I blame you," said Forty. "Can I do anything?"

Molly shook her head.

"D'ye mind if I sling my hook and camp at the club?" asked Forty, with a shamefaced air.

"Not a bit," said Molly. "I don't want you to have a row, too."

Forty sniffed.

"I should have one in two twos," he said, presently. "Look here, I say, why don't you write to Gloomy Fanny and ask him to chuck it?"

It was not wholly a new idea to Molly.

"It would make matters worse," she said.

Forty was n't so sure of that.

"She could n't make you marry him if he was off, you know."

"There would be just as much trouble about me marrying anyone else," said Molly. "However, I 'll think of it."

At that moment a telegram came, addressed simply "Fletcher-Mytton," and Forty opened it.

"By Jehoshaphat! the gov'nor has got acute gout. 'Shall be here for a week at least,' he says. That's what made the old boy so wild yesterday. Bar that, there'd have been peace. Moses and I must run the show together."

He sent the wire up to his mother, and rose from the table.

"Have my bag sent down to the Club, my ducky," he said; "and if you want any help, call me up."

She went over to him.

"You 'll back me, Forty?" she said, affectionately.

"To the last drop, old gal," said Forty, hastily, fearing she might cry. There were certainly tears in her eyes. She was very fond of him.

"You 've been a jolly good brother, Forty," she said, softly.

"Rats!" said Forty.

And he went away whistling, glad to get away before his mother came down, but feeling rather mean about leaving the house when things were absolutely coming to a crisis.

Molly knew they were, and, following fate, prepared herself for everything but the actual event. She went up to her room and packed a bag and her dressing-case. There was no knowing what would happen now that she and her mother were alone. Then she went downstairs again into the library to get a book which she had left there. It was *Castle Rackrent*, a gift from Thorpe. She sat down at the desk for a

moment, wondering if she should do what Forty had suggested. She had already written a letter to her lover, saying what had happened on the previous night, and telling him that if things became intolerable she would go to his mother and ask to be taken in. But this seemed so decided a step that she hesitated to post the letter, and kept it in her pocket.

"Yes, I'll write to Lord Laxton," she said at last. It was difficult to do, and she tore up several sheets of paper before she got going. And, in the meantime, her mother was up and about, at least an hour before her usual time. The telegram from her husband had not in the least disturbed her. She had no sense of pain in others, and if gout was painful, as she had heard, it served Edward right for his dreadful behaviour.

"Where's Miss Molly?" she asked; and the maid said the young mistress was downstairs.

For some days past Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton had spied out the land upstairs, and had found nothing. Molly carried Thorpe's letters about with her, and left her little desk open. But, truly, she had never thought of her mother up there without her knowledge.

If she had done so she would not have actually

packed her things, or such of them as she especially valued and needed, till it was absolutely necessary. Her mother, hearing that she was downstairs, went up to the girl's rooms, and the very first thing she came on in the bedroom was the packed and locked dressing-case. She lifted it, and found it was full.

"Ah!" said Amy, "I thought so."

It was not true that she had thought Molly ready for an immediate flight, even though their last interview had nearly ended in actual blows. Nevertheless, it pleased the elder woman to think she had foreseen so much. She looked about the room and found the other bag. It was also locked, and obviously full.

"Good God!" said Molly's mother. "I was, then, just in time—just in time! She is going to bolt with this scoundrel who will not marry her!"

She knew better, but declined to know it.

"I will stop it at all costs," she said. As she spoke, she heard Molly's voice on the landing below. She went out and listened.

"Get Mr. Fortescue's bag packed, and send it down to his club this afternoon. He will be there for a few days," she heard Molly say. And her eyebrows rose high. With Edward away

and Fortescue out of the house, there was no one to interfere with what she did. She sat down by the door of the sitting-room and waited. The next minute Molly entered, holding her two letters and the book in her hand. She had taken a step past her mother before she saw her, and then she made an exclamation of surprise. It was also one of fear, for her mother looked dreadful. She was very white, with a pinched look on her fair and florid face which suggested illness. But rage is illness, and the elder woman was rabid, capable of more than she knew even then, though she suspected much within her. Yet her anger was righteous, and who shall impeach the satisfied soul?

"Mother!" said Molly. Sin comes by the law, and the evillest law can create the sense of sin. It comes also from authority, for authority is the natural law of power, however wickedly exercised. By breaking the laws which were indeed her mother's will, the girl stood impeached by authority, and her defence was hard. For liberty is not born full-grown; nor has it the gift of tongues at first.

"Why have you packed your things, girl?" asked her mother.

Molly, too, was white, even to the lips.

"Because I thought I might need them," she replied.

"You would go—run away?"

"If I am forced to."

"Great God, forced! Am I not your mother?"

Molly stood mute.

"Answer!"

"Answer what? Oh, yes; you are my mother," said Molly, wearily.

She remembered the motherhood of the dear woman whose child was her lover. There is maternity and maternity, as there are different infinities with infinity between them. There are many barren mothers, and many with children are but barren.

"To whom are those letters?"

"One is to Lord Laxton, and the other to Mr. Thorpe," said Molly.

"Give them to me."

Molly looked at her straight.

"No," she said.

"Will you make me take them from you by force?" asked her mother. She looked capable of using it, or of attempting to use it. But though Molly was very strong, she had a sense of dignity.

"You can read them if you care to open letters not addressed to you," said Molly. "But if you prefer not to do that, I will tell you what I have written in them."

She held them out, and her mother took them.

"What have you written?"

"I have told Lord Laxton that I am engaged to someone else, and that I am sure he will see that there can be no question of my marrying him."

"And to the other man?"

Molly hesitated.

"Speak, girl!" said her mother.

"I said that if my mother was cruel to me, I would go to his mother," said Molly, in a low, clear voice. She was sorry now that she had not sent it.

"You would leave this house? You—you shall not," said her mother, "nor shall these letters go."

She spoke steadily, and she was still cruelly white. Everything she had built crumbled about her.

"I can write others," said Molly; "and you cannot keep me if I want to go."

"Can I not, can I not? You—you defy me?"

Molly did not answer, and her mother flushed.

She rose at last, and put the letters in her waistband.

"You will stay in your room to-day."

"No!" said Molly.

She too was no longer pale. The blood came back to her skin.

"And to-morrow—and till I let you out!" said her mother.

"Do not think it," said Molly. "Will you drive me away, then?"

"You shall not go! You 'd go to that man!" Molly blazed.

"Yes," she said. "Oh, I can't endure this!"

"A low hound!" hissed her mother, furiously.

"My—my lover!" said Molly, quickly.

"A scoundrel, an atheist!"

"And the man I love," said Molly. She burst out with, "Oh, don't you understand?"

"I understand too well. You shall stay here."

"No," said Molly, suddenly, "that I will not do. I'll go now!"

Her mother was before her at the door. Obviously she would fight rather than let her daughter go. It sickened Molly to see her expression, and she turned away. With an averted face she spoke:

"Understand, I shall marry Mr. Thorpe, and nothing you can do or say can prevent it."

"We shall see!" said her mother. She was beyond herself, and wondered why she did not strike Molly. She felt she restrained herself wonderfully, and gave her soul credit for it, when she was giving herself wholly to her desire for authority. She went out and shut the door of the sitting-room. Outside there was the door on the landing which shut off Molly's apartments from the rest of the house. She took the key and locked the door from the outside. She went downstairs, saying, "We shall see."

There is such an infinite satisfaction in the exercise of unlimited power that it becomes like a drug habit. The mere practising of authority gave Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton an actual physical pleasure as well as a mental one; it made her very blood warm. She did not foresee that a defeat now would be a disaster. Molly was her chattel, and Thorpe could be ignored and fooled. She opened her daughter's letters to him and Gloomy Fanny, and without reflection wrote to both of them. Her letter to Fanny was one of encouragement to wait; but that to Thorpe was in the third person. Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton requested Mr. Thorpe to make no further at-

tempts to communicate with their daughter, as any letters of his would be returned unopened. In this decision her daughter fully concurred. She posted Laxton's letter at once, but kept Thorpe's to think over, for she cooled a little in writing to Laxton. It might not be desirable to let him know or suspect anything for a day or so. Perhaps after twenty-four hours of seclusion Molly would be more amenable to reason. If she were not, she should remain locked up. On that point she was determined.

No doubt she showed some little sense in not alarming Thorpe at the moment, and more sense than she knew. He was not the kind of man to take the mother's word for her daughter's decision. But as Molly by no means wrote to him every day, he might have remained without knowledge of the latest developments for a whole week had it not been for a further indiscretion on the part of his future mother-in-law. She believed that Grannyducky was little better than an idiot. This belief was founded on the knowledge that the old lady really thought Mallow and Simpkinson absolute fools. To Amy, Mallow was a pulpit genius and Simpkinson an artist. Anyone who thought otherwise was lacking in all intelligence. And even if her

grandmother had a flicker of intelligence, she was wanting in all initiative. So when Grannyducky wandered into the drawing-room half an hour later she learnt what had happened.

"Where 's Molly? I want Molly," piped the old lady querulously.

"She is in her own room, and will remain there," said her granddaughter coldly.

"I want 'er; send Filkins for 'er," said Grannyducky, not in the least understanding why Molly should remain there.

"You can't see her," said Amy.

"Eh, not see Molly!" squeaked Grannyducky; "but I will see Molly. What 's this 'ouse like without my great-granddarter?"

It was obvious something must be told her, and Amy decided to do it. The old woman's wig was nearly off by the time the sad recital was over. But her eyes sparkled viciously.

"Oh, you 've shut 'er up on account of that Thorpe, 'ave you?" she said bitterly. "Well, Amy, I always knew you was a wicked woman, from the time my poor darter give up tryin' to 'ave a say in 'er own 'ouse, but I never thought you was a fool before."

"Mind your own business," said Amy angrily, "and I 'll attend to mine."

Grannyducky got up, shaking very much. She went to the glass and tried to put her wig straight. Every touch she gave it was a sudden and excessive dig which sent it over on the other side. So she retired defeated as to her toilet, but undefeated in her mind, and went out saying, "Oh" and "Ah" in strange little squeaks. When Filkins came to her and reduced her head to order for the seventh time that morning, she bade the fatigued one to sit down.

"Now, Filkins, 'ave I been a good mistress to you?" she piped.

"Yes, but very tryin', ma'am," said Filkins gloomily.

"What money 'ave you saved, Filkins?" asked Grannyducky with her head so much on one side that Filkins feared for the wig.

"Not a penny, ma'am."

"I knowed as much, Filkins. Your love of 'ats 'as been a disaster to you. If it had n't been for 'ats you 'd 'ave been rich for the likes of you."

"One must 'ave 'ats, ma'am," replied Filkins tartly.

"Yes, but not seventeen 'ats," said Grannyducky; "only that's not what I wanted to talk about. If I was to die, Filkins, you know you 'd

get notice from my granddarter and be throwed out of work, would n't you?"

Filkins owned gloomily that it was very likely.

"'Owever, I 've left you a hundred pounds in my will, Filkins, and all the rest—to someone else," said Grannyducky.

"Thank you, ma'am," said Filkins, brightening up a little.

"And if you don't do what I want I shall not leave it to you, Filkins. There 's a lot of spending in an 'undred pounds; a year's board and lodgin', and 'ats quite regardless," said the old lady.

"Oh, ma'am, I 'll do anythin' in reason," said Filkins, who already had her eye on several hats.

"And out of it, I 'ope," said Grannyducky, "and what I want I 'll tell you by and by. But first I want the London Directory. And you ain't to let my granddarter see you bring it. Do you 'ear?"

Filkins nodded and went away, presently returning with the big red volume in both hands. Grannyducky put on her glasses, and after much labour, which Filkins could not relieve, she discovered the object of her search and crowed triumphantly. She turned to Filkins.

"Now, Filkins, you mind what I tell you," she said, darting her finger towards her.

"Yes, ma'am," said Filkins.

"I 'm agoin' out this arternoon and my granddarter ain't to know it," said Grannyducky.

"No, ma'am," said Filkins.

"So you and me will slip out arter lunch when she 's in 'er room and take a keb. I ain't been in a taxi-keb yet, so I 'll 'ave one," said Granny.

"It will shake off your wig and make you scream, ma'am," said Filkins; "they go at an 'orrible pace. I don't like 'em."

"You 'll 'ave to like one this arternoon," said the old lady, "for if my granddarter finds out where I 've been I shall pay for it. And to go in a taxi-keb is my ambition. If I squeak I squeak, and if my wig 's crooked you can put it straight."

"Very well, ma'am," said Filkins.

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton took up lunch to Molly with her own hands. She gave the household something to talk about with a vengeance, and her casual remark to the butler that Miss Molly was not well received no credit. She stayed in the room a minute and Molly, who was seated by the window reading, neither moved nor spoke. She did not even look at her mother. Nor did she eat the lunch. She did not refuse it out of

obstinacy, but for the very simple reason that the morning's proceedings had not given her an appetite. Her mother's actions were so preposterous that Molly began to wonder whether she thought the twentieth-century part of the middle ages, or of those Puritan times when parents flogged grown-up men and women, and were treated with hideous and unnatural respect. Once or twice Molly thought of breaking the outer door open. She could have done it easily enough with a heavy oak stool. But as she kept her temper she refrained from doing it. However much her father was under control, he would not endure this, and Molly knew it. She knew nothing, however, of acute gout, and thought it was no more than some stiffness or tenderness, of which Mr. Fletcher-Mytton sometimes complained. She composed herself to wait with dignity. For not yet had she measured the outrage put upon her. Things happen in some households, held to be patterns by their rulers, which are as monstrous as a nightmare. And one is rarely indignant in a preposterous dream.

It is characteristic of the short sight of human beings that she did not look for help from Grannyducky. That wonderful old person was

bitter in comment, but so far Molly had never seen her in action. If she had put her head out of her bedroom window (the bedroom was in the front of the house) at a quarter past two, she would have viewed Grannyducky's trembling head, and Filkins' unseemly hat, go down the steps together.

"Think better of it, ma'am, and 'ave a four-wheeler," said Filkins seriously.

"I'll 'ave to pay for this with my granddarter, and I'll enjoy myself 'ow I like," said Grannyducky. "Tell that taxi-keb to stop, Filkins."

And next minute she and Filkins were speeding towards the Temple. Some who passed the taxi wondered at the strange little squeaks made by the machinery. But it was Grannyducky enjoying herself.

CHAPTER XV

*Grannyducky Calls Upon Thorpe While He is at Work,
and Surprises Him so Greatly That it Requires a
Writ of Habeas Corpus to Calm Him.*

ON the whole, Thorpe was as happy as he could be, though he naturally looked forward to greater happiness and a settled order of things. Molly was undoubtedly a darling. Nothing she said disappointed him, and sometimes when her native humour, which she shared with the bubbling and slangy Forty, came on top, he roared with laughter. He had made no mistake at the wonderful dinner. He loved her more and more every day, and often rebuked himself for those signs of inordinate passion which he believed in philosophical moments to be morbid and the unhealthy results of racial restraints and taboos in sex. Nevertheless, a man has to reckon with his ancestors and the follies of the past, and Thorpe owned to Sinclair Thompson that being in love very seriously had its

charm. Whereon Sinclair sighed and said nothing.

It had been a great pleasure to Thorpe to find that his mother took so to the girl. Miriam absolutely adored her. She did not even regret what she had said to her about children. Much as Molly might have been amazed she was modern. She could understand. She had passed the age when a young girl believes she understands everything, and is sure she knows it right. Young ducks are tender, but the feminine flapper is hard indeed. And Thorpe knew how soft Molly was if she was taken in the right way and approached sympathetically. He found himself using her in his next book. She was an inspiration. He also used Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton as a model, and enjoyed the slaughter.

As a rule he wrote only in the morning, but sometimes when in the vein he went on into the late afternoon and did not stop till his hand gave out. Such work was, he felt, highly immoral, and he meant to let Molly know that part of her wifely duties would be to restrain his ardour. In the meantime he let himself go, and on the afternoon that Grannyducky determined on a jaunt to the Temple he was writing a difficult passage on the sacred family. He did it after

his usual manner, which so shocked the *Grandmother's Gazette*, and in a light conversation. It is sad to think that so able a young man had new ideas, or even old ones, which looked new, and might again be put into circulation after a little polishing. And it is even sadder to think that he made revolution seem amusing. Every good thing became a bad one, according to Thorpe. The family had to be abolished. It still retained awful savage traces of the savage primal law, as developed by a notable anthropologist called Atkinson. In thousands of cases the prosperous father was little better than his most savage ancestor. He drove away suitors for his daughters; he kept off males with coldness when he would have liked to use a waddy. His wife and daughters, and all his female relatives, belonged to him and to him only. Thorpe depicted a rich Surbiton savage, with a round dozen unmarried daughters, keeping off the amorous young Surbitonian males with brandished etiquette and insults. The secluded virgins of his gorgeous cage, at a rent of a hundred and eighty pounds a year, raged vainly for mates. The abiding jealousy of the male, which every woman knows and loathes, inspired their savage father, though he only knew it dimly and hid it under a thousand

excuses which never touched the reality of his exclusive instincts. The mother, eager for the perpetuation of the race and for the satisfaction of her female offspring, deluded him at every turn, and gave social corroborations of her own whenever he went off into the wilderness to slay game or drive little balls along the ground. This humorously and savagely caricatured family of Thorpe's afforded him infinite pleasure. One does not kill gorillas with pea-shooters, and Cyclops need sharp arrows. He was just proceeding to develop a scheme of society in which the mothers were wards of the State and paternity a wonderful secret, when he was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"By Jove, it's just as well," said Thorpe. He rose and answered the knock. Outside he found beneath a hat which would have been much more suitable to a girl thirty years her junior, "a person" whom he had no recollection of having seen before.

"If you please, sir, Mrs. Mytton wants to speak to you," said Filkins.

Naturally enough Thorpe believed that Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton had called on him. The ancient lady whose company had charmed him at the famous dinner was not in his mind. No

doubt Molly's mother had determined on some final appeal to him. So magnificent a mistake with regard to that amiable lady's character showed that Molly when talking of her had minimised her mother's faults.

"Ask her to come up," said Thorpe coldly.

"You 've got to come down and 'elp 'er," said Filkins. "Those stairs is very tryin'."

Thorpe looked at Filkins in some amazement.

"Help her? Does she want help?"

"Yes, sir, she's very crooked and contrary. Them taxi-cabs are jolters," said Filkins.

Even yet Thorpe, who was still half-subdued to his writing, did not gather in the truth. But he nodded in acquiescence and went downstairs, with Filkins after him. He found an ancient and shaking dame seated on the steps at the entrance of his stairs.

"By Jove, it's Grannyducky," he thought; "what's up now?"

He saluted her and she turned.

"'Ow, it's Thorpe, is it?" she said. "'Ere, 'elp me upstairs, Mr. Thorpe. I want to tell you all about it. Them new kebs are very surprisin', and most sudden in their ways. Am I crooked again, Filkins?"

"Yes, ma'am, very crooked," said Filkins, as

all three toiled upstairs, with the old lady in the middle.

"Is anything wrong, Mrs. Mytton?" asked Thorpe while they rested on the first landing.

"You wait till I 'm a-settin' down, young man, and I 'm put straight," piped Grannyducky. "Whatever 's wrong will get put right. But the way them kebs shoot round the corner and try to throw you out is most surprisin', is n't it?"

"Very surprising," said Thorpe, "but Molly—"

"I 'll tell you about Molly and my granddarter when I 'm a-settin' down," said Grannyducky, and having recovered her breath she achieved the rest of the way. She took the first chair in the room.

"Now, Filkins, put me straight," she commanded, and Filkins did as she was told, while Thorpe stood and looked on uneasily.

"There, you 're as straight as I can make you now, ma'am," said Filkins.

"Won't Miss Filkins sit down?" asked Thorpe.

"Sit down, Filkins, and anything you 'ear you need n't repeat, or I shall alter my will," said Grannyducky, "not but what you 've got 'old of

it in the servants' 'all already. I 've come to tell you about Molly, Mr. Thorpe."

"Yes," said Thorpe eagerly, "what is it?"

"And about my granddarter's wickedness. For she always was wicked, as I told 'er this very mornin', and drove 'er poor darter into 'er grave by domineerin'ness, and nothin' but it," said the old lady.

"Yes, but Molly; please tell about Molly," urged Thorpe.

Grannyducky wagged her hands and head.

"Ain't I tellin' you? Oh, Lord, 'ow 'asty young men are, and old ones too, as I know well. But as I was sayin', she 's shut up."

"Good heavens, who 's shut up?" asked Thorpe.

"Don't speak so sharp or I shall go crooked," squeaked his visitor; "why Molly is, of course."

"Molly shut up? Who has shut her up?" asked Thorpe frowning.

"'Oo should but my granddarter?" said Granny. "She 's locked 'er up so as to make 'er marry that Laxton and give you up."

Thorpe looked black as thunder and nodded.

"Oh, indeed; is that so?" he asked. "And when did this happen?"

"This very mornin', young Thorpe, that's when it happened, and I 'm not to be allowed to see my Molly that's my only comfort," crowed Grannyducky in great agitation.

"You 're goin' crooked again, ma'am," said Filkins.

"I don't care a damn if I am, Filkins," said the old lady angrily. "I want this nice young man to get my Molly out. Shut 'er up, indeed; what's things comin' to, that's what I want to know."

Thorpe sat down by her.

"Come, ma'am, are you really sure this is as you say?" he asked.

"Now, young man, do you think I 'd come 'ere all the way in a taxi-keb, which is worse than the wildest 'orse, to tell you the story of the Cock Lane Ghost?" asked Grannyducky.

"Certainly not, but it seems impossible," said Thorpe; "no one has a right to do such a thing. Molly is of age."

Granny laid her skinny finger on his arm.

"Yes, young man, and so am I, but that granddarter would shut me up in a minute if I 'ad n't been thoughtful and made Dr. Ridde write me a character that I was sane. And I dessay she 'll do it now."

"It's illegal," said Thorpe.

"My granddarter don't care two pins for that," said Granny. "Do you think she does, Filkins?"

"No, ma'am," said Filkins, "not at all."

"Any'ow, there it is. Molly is locked up in 'er rooms at the top of the 'ouse, and if you don't get 'er out she 'll stay," said Granny.

"Oh, I 'll get her out," said Thorpe, "don't doubt that."

"When? Now?" asked Grannyducky.

"I shall have to think it over and get advice," said Thorpe. "By Jove! I 'll make Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton repent this."

"Give it 'er 'ot," said Grannyducky; "send a policeman to 'er. She would n't like a policeman on the steps, I know. Would she, Filkins?"

"No, ma'am, not at all," said Filkins; "certainly not."

Thorpe walked up and down the room, thinking. It was an absurd and almost impossible situation in modern times. And yet it no doubt happened often enough. He wondered what Sinclair Thompson, who was a barrister, would say about it. Thorpe's next notion was that it might be absolutely necessary to get a writ of

habeas corpus to restore Molly to liberty. He had some little knowledge of the law, and remembered *Regina versus Jackson*, the case in which a husband had been compelled to release his wife, thereby reducing the order for the restitution of conjugal rights to a legal nullity, save as a preliminary, in the wife's case, to obtaining alimony.

"Can you give Molly a letter from me?" he asked, when he stopped walking up and down.

"I can put it under 'er door, sir, when the missis ain't about," said Filkins.

"To be sure," said Grannyducky. "So write it, young man, and make it comfortin' to 'er."

"I will," said Thorpe, as he sat down to his desk. Granny began to talk of him as if he was notoriously stone-deaf.

"Ain't he a nice young man, Filkins?"

"Ye-es, ma'am," replied Filkins, uneasily.

"So good-lookin', too—so bright and clever. This Thorpe is n't a fool, is 'e, Filkins?"

"No, ma'am," said Filkins.

"But Simpkinson is a fool, and that Mallow is a fool, and Fanshawe is a fool, but this Thorpe is n't, and Molly knows it. I just love clever young men, and always did," said Grannyducky, jerking her head like a bird on a bough.

"Do you like men, Filkins? Did I ever ask you that before?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Filkins, "often, ma'am."

"And do you, Filkins?" demanded Grannyducky.

"Sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't," replied the blushing Filkins.

"Well, I always do when they ain't fools," said the unblushing Mrs. Mytton.

And Thorpe finished his letter.

"She shall be out in three days, or I'll break into the house," he said, as he entrusted the letter to Filkins.

"Oh, do break in," implored Grannyducky. "Oh, young man, if you'd only do that I should love you."

"I hope you do already," said Thorpe, with an enchanting smile. "May I have the honour of saluting you?"

Grannyducky giggled prodigiously, and submitted with joy. She turned to Filkins.

"There, I ain't been kissed by a nice young man for nearly sixty years. Oh, what a waste life is, ain't it, Filkins?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," said the obedient Filkins.

"There's no time to lose. So I'll get you a cab and see you into it," said Thorpe. And

when he did so, Grannyducky, kissed her hand to him.

"Shut up, eh?" said Thorpe. "We'll see about that."

He went upstairs again, and finding Sinclair Thompson, told him all about it.

"I've written to Molly that I'll have her out in three days, or break in," he said. "But what shall I do?"

The legal mind is at once the ablest and the emptiest of all human minds. It derives its amazing capacity for immediate assimilation through its equally amazing faculty for forgetting on the very shortest notice almost all it has learnt. Perhaps the lawyer obtains his eminence in modern society from his profession being the only one for which the cramming system, which is universal everywhere, is really suitable. He retains nothing but principles and the knowledge of where to go for knowledge and the power of turning it quickly into sudden energy. Thorpe had often noticed this, and he knew pretty well that Thompson would know nothing about the subject. This would not be due to the fact that he did not practice, for he kept up his legal reading in spite of his financial journalism.

But Thorpe knew that his friend would know how and where to find things out.

"Locked the girl up?" said Thompson. "Why, I never heard of such a thing."

"Such things must happen, and it has happened to her," said Thorpe. "Is it a case for the police?"

"Humph!" said Thompson. "Suppose you persuaded a magistrate to send a policeman to the lady, and she said it was a lie. What then?"

Thorpe shook his head.

"Hanged if I know!"

"I suppose her father is in it?" asked Thompson.

"No doubt," said Thorpe. He took it for granted.

"What about Fortescue?"

"He would n't be, I'm sure," said Thorpe.

Thompson nodded.

"No, I'm sure of that. Can we get him on the 'phone? If we can't, I'll look up the *habeas corpus* procedure," said Thompson. "She'll never stand that."

He rang up the firm of Fletcher-Mytton and Moses, and found that Fortescue had gone away already.

"Golf, of course," said Thompson. "When the end of the world comes, the last Englishman will be found practising short putts on the eighteenth green. Well, there will be no turf in hell. Let's go and see our saturnine friend Bramwell. He's got all the books, at any rate. Don't be so disturbed; this is the twentieth century."

"We are still savages," said Thorpe. "I never see a butcher's shop but I'm sure of it. In any decent civilisation they would be hidden. Shut up my Molly!"

They found Bramwell in his chambers, busily pretending to be busy till he knew who they were. Then he lighted a cigarette, and asked what the devil they wanted. Thompson explained matters from the first down to the visit of Mrs. Mytton to Thorpe.

"This is joyous!" said Bramwell. Thorpe's latest pet adjective had spread. "I like this. We'll make the lady much too famous if she's obstinate. I don't for an instant think she will be."

"What's the procedure?" asked Thorpe. "Might I make a forcible entry?"

"I don't quite know why not," said Bramwell. "But could you?"

On consideration it seemed that there were three male servants, not including a boy in buttons, in the house.

"Negatived, I think," said Bramwell. "Not that it would be a felony, there being no felonious motive. Still, it would be a misdemeanour. I think a writ of *habeas corpus* will cheer up this dear mother. Have you got a letter from Miss Fletcher-Mytton stating she's locked up?"

Thorpe shook his head.

"I can get one through the old lady, though," Bramwell's clerk put his head into the room. "Can you see Mr. Locke, sir?" he asked.

There is no time that a young barrister will not see a solicitor, even when he is not a friend. He and Thorpe both knew Locke. Things must be changing fast when a barrister and a solicitor are Socialists, and Locke and Bramwell were most distinctly such.

"To be sure," said Bramwell. And Locke, a strong, chubby, and jovial man, came in smiling. He shook hands with his two friends, and was introduced to Thompson.

"You're the very chap we want," said Bramwell. "Thorpe's got a pleasing job for you. It is n't every day you have to apply for a writ

of *habeas corpus* to release a sweetheart from private custody."

"By Jove!" said Locke, "what's up?"

They told him the situation, and he laughed.

"What, Thorpe asking for help from the law! Why don't you break in, old chap?" he demanded.

Again they explained why that was contra-indicated, as doctors say of drugs.

"Then I'd better get your affidavit, and another affidavit to swear to the young lady's writing, and we'll make an application to Mr. Justice Spurling in court to-morrow," said Locke. "You'll be the counsel, Bramwell?"

"Rather!" said Bramwell. "I suppose it will be an order *nisi*, won't it?"

They looked up an encyclopædia of the Laws of England for the procedure, for such writs do not issue every day, and the situation had no late precedent.

"Perhaps old Spurling will refuse an order," said Bramwell, "if he gets it out that one of the reasons Thorpe is not a *persona grata* with the mother-in-law is that he's an atheist. He's a perfectly savage Christian."

"Well, we can go from one to another if he

does," said Locke. "I expect your dear mother-in-law-to-be won't dare have it argued. And even on the *ex parte* application the Judge may direct an order to be drawn up for the prisoner's discharge. I see that here."

Locke demurred.

"That won't be in this case. That's a prisoner in legal custody, I should think," he said.

"Maybe," replied Bramwell. "Anyhow, I'll start it, and Thorpe can bring a dozen journalists to report the case."

Thorpe listened to all this quietly, and nodded.

"And, in the meantime, I shall go and see this woman and tell her what's going to happen," he said at last.

"You will do her good," said Locke. "But might she not take your sweetheart abroad somewhere?"

Thorpe sniffed.

"I'll be on her tracks. If Molly's out, it will be all right. Just put things into shape, Locke, the affidavits and so on, will you?"

"Won't I?" asked Locke. "It will be fun if the old girl has it argued. Our Thorpe's opinions will be ventilated properly."

"An argument is impossible," said Bramwell. "The girl's of age."

"Oh, they may say she's not sane," replied Locke. "You're altogether too legal, Bramwell."

"Insanity about our dear Thorpe is so excusable," said Bramwell, laughing. "But love is n't legal insanity. She must be a fool, this dear woman, Thorpe."

"She's a savage, one of the worst modern savages," said Thorpe. "Is n't she, Thompson?"

"A perfectly loathsome person," agreed Sinclair Thompson.

"Call on me when you like, Locke, and let me know when I'm to tackle the Christian Judge," said Bramwell. "And now if you'll all go, I'll try to do something. At any rate, I'll look up the authorities."

So Thorpe and Locke walked together to Locke's office, while Thompson went to the City. Locke took notes for Thorpe's affidavit at once, and Thorpe wrote a letter to Granny-ducky, asking her to get a letter from Molly to say she was being kept a prisoner. Locke wrote Mrs. Mytton's address on the envelope, as no doubt Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton knew Thorpe's hand. It was also arranged that he should write

direct to Molly's mother, acquainting her with the fact that proceedings were to be instituted at once.

"All the same, I'm surprised you have n't burst the front door in yet," laughed Locke, when everything was in train.

"Wait a bit," said Thorpe. "I'm first going to see my friend the enemy. I'm not so violent a person as you think, but I can easily be violent over this, if violence is needed."

"By Jove, yes!" said Locke. "But, by the way, she'll be surprised you know anything about it so soon, won't she?"

If Grannyducky and Filkins had escaped interrogation or evaded any questions with skill, it certainly would be a surprise for Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. It had not occurred to Thorpe, and he owned it.

"However, surprise is half the art of war," he said, as he shook hands with Locke and went back to his rooms. At half-past two he took a taxi-cab and gave the driver the Fletcher-Mytton's address.

CHAPTER XVI

Thorpe Pays a Call on Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, and is Turned Out of the House. He Has an Interview With a Policeman's Wife, and Develops the Theory of a Night Attack With the Policeman Himself.

WITH a view to an excuse for being out, Grannyducky went to a milliner's in Regent Street on the way home and came back with a new bonnet. The excuse was not needed, for Amy did not know that she and Filkins had been away, and they got back without having any awkward questions to answer. The old lady sang a quavering song of triumph when she was safe upstairs, and even Filkins was pleased. The only person in the house who was not "trying" was Miss Molly, and Filkins loved her next to her hats. Indeed, they all did in the servants' hall, and the second footman, of whom the butler believed nothing serious could ever be made, was with great difficulty restrained from having it out with the mistress. The butler assured him that if the situation did not clear up

very shortly, he himself would give notice on the ground that he could not stay in a house where such things were done. The cook agreed with him, and so did all the others. The lower classes are wondrously conservative, and if a thing has never been done it is an outrage on their sense of propriety to do it. Though they felt that Miss Molly really ought to marry a lord if she had a chance, as such a marriage would raise their own status in society, they were not prepared to admit that her mother might lock her up.

In the meantime, Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, finding Molly quiet, began to think victory could not be long deferred. She had her letter to Thorpe posted, but it had not been in the box more than a quarter of an hour when he came to the door in a taxi-cab.

"I knew 'e'd come," said Filkins, who was almost bursting with forbidden knowledge. All the others were all very much surprised, but Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton was more astonished than anyone. Thorpe asked to be allowed to see her for a few minutes on business. He made no pretence that she would see him on any other grounds. She could not think what it was that had brought him. Not for an instant did she imagine that he knew what had happened, until

it occurred to her very suddenly that someone in the house might have telephoned to him. Yet this, she knew, was very unlikely. Nevertheless, she felt nervous and curious. Her first inclination was to refuse to see him at all, to have him ejected with contumely, but she repressed it. It might be as well to know what he had to say. So she went down to him in the library, and found him standing in the middle of the room with his hat and stick in his hand. She made the stiffest inclination, and he returned it even more stiffly. There was trouble in the air, like darkness visible.

"To what am I indebted for this visit?" she asked with an acid mouth.

"I wish to see Miss Fletcher-Mytton," replied Thorpe quickly.

"That you cannot do. No doubt you have not yet received it, but I have posted a letter to you saying that her father and I do not wish to continue your acquaintance," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton with clenched hands.

Thorpe raised his eyebrows.

"I do not desire that you should," he said; "what I said was that I wished to see your daughter."

"My daughter concurs in my views and her

father's," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton with a rising inflection in her voice.

Thorpe had a very unpleasant sneer upon occasion, and he sneered now.

"With every wish to accept your word, I must decline to do so on this point," he replied. "Will you be so good as to get Miss Fletcher-Mytton to tell me this herself?"

She coloured darkly; her breathing was tumultuous.

"You shall not see her. She does not wish to see you," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. "In fact, she is not in the house. She is in the country with friends—with friends."

And Thorpe laughed.

"On the contrary, she is not with friends," he said sharply. "She is upstairs at this moment. She is on the upper floor, madam, and I can tell you more even than that."

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton started.

"What, sir?" she demanded. "Pray, what can you tell me?"

"You have locked her in her room, madam," said Thorpe.

"It's a lie," said Molly's mother; "it's a lie!"

And Thorpe laughed again. He felt under no obligation to be civil.

"It is the absolute truth, and I know it, and you know it," he said, "and as soon as I found it out I came to tell you that I am not the kind of man to put up with her being treated so."

Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton choked.

"Good God, sir, in my own house—to talk to me so in my own house! I'll have you thrown out."

She fairly screamed this at him.

"Pray let us be calm," said Thorpe contemptuously. "Perhaps you don't understand that what you are doing is illegal. You cannot keep a girl who is of age locked up. I have already seen my solicitor—"

"I don't care who you have seen," she screamed. "My daughter is my daughter, and I'll not see her marry an atheist and villain. You cannot oblige me to endure that."

Thorpe lifted his hand and smiled.

"Pray be calm, madam," he said. "To-night you will receive a letter from my solicitor, and to-morrow we shall make an application in open court for a writ of *habeas corpus*, which must be granted on the affidavits we shall bring. I have many journalistic friends, and I shall see that the application is reported in every London paper. And you will be compelled to produce

Miss Fletcher-Mytton in court. If you do not do so at once you will be committed to prison."

"Then I 'll go, if this is true," she said. "I 'll go!"

She was nearly black in the face as she spoke, and she shook like a jelly.

"Permit me to suggest that you will not be able to take Molly with you," said Thorpe. "And I may tell you that Mr. Fletcher-Mytton will be joined with you in the suit. Do you not think it will be wiser to submit in private rather than be compelled to submit in public?"

"You are a low scoundrel," whispered Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. She collapsed into a chair.

"That is a matter of opinion, madam," replied Thorpe drily. "Do I take it that you will release your daughter?"

She rose from her chair and going to the fireplace rang the bell.

"No," she said hoarsely; "no! I 'd rather die than do it, you villain!"

"You are, if you will allow me to say so, extremely unwise," said Thorpe. And then the footman replied to the bell. He was very red in the face, probably from bending down to the key-hole.

"Show this—person out. And never let him in again," said Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton.

"Your young lady is locked in 'er rooms upstairs, sir," said the man, when they got into the hall. "And for two pins I'd go and bust the door in and go for a soldier this very afternoon."

"Thank you, my man," said Thorpe, "but I knew it already."

And when he got outside he drew a deep breath and then shook his head.

"We'll see, my dear madam," he said; "we'll see."

He looked up at the house from the other side of the road. The upper storey had, perhaps, been added to the original house, and the windows behind the parapet must be Molly's. She was there now! He walked down the street a little way, and taking out a cigarette, lighted it. In spite of his steady nerves his hand shook a little; that unpleasing conversation had disturbed him. It was a consolation to know that it must have shaken Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton more. There was no getting over a writ of *habeas corpus*, and he felt sure she would never dare attempt to have the case argued. And yet he knew, none better, the savage instincts of ownership that still survive. A child is still a chattel;

the reluctant intervention of the State is an outrage on the authority of the parents and of the family.

He stood smoking for some minutes, not knowing quite what kept him. And suddenly he found himself saying, apparently without rhyme or reason, "To let, apply to Messrs. Bankes and Ripley." The brain plays odd tricks with a man, and most writers know it well.

"By Jove!" said Thorpe, suddenly.

If the brain plays mischievous tricks, it also plays trump cards sometimes. One may solve problems in one's sleep or in a half dream, or get useful notions apparently out of nothing. Thorpe walked up the street again. Next door to the Fletcher-Mytton's house was an empty one. On it was a board with the legend, "To let, apply to Messrs. Bankes and Ripley." Thorpe stared at the house. It was the fellow of the Fletcher-Myttons, even to the last story. After all, the houses might have been built so originally. And Thorpe stood wondering what he was thinking of. He was still in a kind of dream, and rubbed his chin thoughtfully for a full minute. Then he woke up and laughed.

"It's worth trying," he said. With that he

went across the street and rang at the bell of the empty house. There was a card in the window, "Caretaker within." The bell was answered by a nice, bright little woman, who did not seem subdued to her awful occupation. Nor was the house subdued to the usual fate of houses to let; the hall actually looked clean.

"May I see the house?" asked Thorpe, smiling. Little as Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton might have acknowledged it, he had at times a fascinating way with him. Strangers of all classes took to him at once: perhaps because he had lived long among Latin races and had lost the intolerable air of the undefiled Englishman. When he smiled at the little caretaker with a subtle air of approval, she smiled in return.

"Oh, yes, sir. Have you an order, sir?" she asked.

Thorpe acknowledged he had nothing of the kind, and the woman said it did n't matter. She would be glad to show him the house without it, and began with the dining-room. There was a kind of window-seat in the room, and Thorpe sat down on it.

"By the way," he asked, "do you know the people next door?"

They were very rich people, she said; and be-

gan to give him an account of the whole family. He nodded.

"Do you know the young lady there?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir, quite well by sight," said the caretaker; "she 's very pretty."

"She is," said Thorpe; "and, what 's more, I 'm going to marry her."

"You don't say so, sir!" she said, much surprised.

"But her mother has locked her up and won't let me see her," said Thorpe, coolly. The caretaker lifted her hands.

"Oh, sir, why is that?" she asked.

"Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton does n't like me, and wants to force her daughter to marry someone else," said Thorpe. "It 's an odd situation, is n't it?"

It was most romantic, and the little woman felt that it was. Nevertheless, for an entire stranger to come in and tell her this story was even more out of the common. Thorpe saw by her eyes that she felt so.

"I 'm telling you this because you can help me. I must speak to the young lady," he said, smiling easily.

"How could I help?" she asked, doubtfully.

"Have you a husband?" asked Thorpe.

It appeared that her husband was a policeman, and was even then in the house asleep.

"Do you dare wake him up, or does he bite if he's waked at the wrong time?" asked Thorpe. "I should like to see him. I want you and him to help me, and I'll make it worth his while to discuss the matter with me."

"Then you really don't want the house?" asked the caretaker.

"Why, no, I don't," said Thorpe. "What I wanted was to speak to you and your husband. Go and fetch him."

She shook her head in bewilderment, and did as she was told. In five minutes she returned, and was followed into the room by a sleepy-eyed man who stood still and stared at Thorpe.

"This is my husband, sir," she said. "George, this is the gentleman I told you of."

On further inquiry, Thorpe found that his name was Smithson. Smithson was very curious when the case was laid before him. He woke up gradually.

"If the young lady's of age, it's agin the law," he said, gruffly. "She could be took up for doin' it."

"It's a horrid shame," said Mrs. Smithson, who was much taken by Thorpe.

"It is," said Thorpe; "and my solicitor is applying for a writ of *habeas corpus*."

The constable nodded.

"Ah, I've 'eard tell of '*abeas corpus*,'" he remarked, "but I never 'ad no joodishul experience of it."

"The difficulty is that we want a letter from the young lady to say she is locked up," said Thorpe. "Now I have a plan by which I could get that. Only I shall need your assistance, Mr. Smithson."

"Joodishul or private?" asked Smithson, who seemed to think he occupied for the time being the position of a judge.

"Both," said Thorpe, who had the gift of flattery when it was needed. "As an officer and as a man. I'll tell you what my idea is."

He did so very briefly.

"Oh, 'ow very romantic," said Mrs. Smithson.

"But very illegal, I fear, my love," said Smithson. He shook his head, and turned to Thorpe.

"Now, sir, I won't go for to say I don't believe you, for I do; but I could n't take my oath

you are bony fied. I put it to you, as man to man, 'ow am I to know you ain't a burglar?"

"Oh, George," said his wife. But Thorpe laughed.

"Your husband is quite right, Mrs. Smithson. But I may say that if I am, I am the first burglar who ever asked an intelligent police officer, with whom he was not acquainted, to help him."

"That 's so," said Smithson.

"Now, supposing I was to call a taxi-cab and take you to my solicitor's and get him to tell you all about it, would you still think I was a burglar, Mr. Smithson?" asked Thorpe.

The constable shook his head.

"In that case made and purvided, I would n't," he said, firmly.

"And you 'd help me?" asked Thorpe.

"I would in that case," said Smithson.

"If I see the lady it will be worth five pounds to you," said Thorpe.

"Oh, George, five pounds; think of that!" said his wife.

"It makes me think very 'ard," said Smithson, smiling.

"Then come on," said Thorpe.

They went to Locke's together. When they came out Smithson turned to Thorpe.

"Then it 's to-night at eleven, and you 'll bring this Mr. Thompson you spoke of with you: him to sit with me and the missis while you does it," said Smithson.

"And here 's the sovereign on account," said Thorpe.

"To be sure," said Smithson. "Oh, to lock a young lady up, that 's of age, is 'ighly illegal. I 've never known it done afore, not in all my experience."

CHAPTER XVII

Molly, Being in Prison, is Yet Comforted, For Even in These Days Love Laughs at Locksmiths. Romance Breaks in Through Heavy Bars Even Where a Realist is Concerned, Which is Pretty to Observe, as Pepys Would Have Said.

IT was not till the evening that Molly really recognised what it meant to be locked up in her own rooms. At first she had been stunned by the entire unexpectedness of her mother's action. It was incredible that any woman should behave so. It was, in fact, so incredible that Molly felt that all she experienced was only a dream. But as the day went on she missed exercise; she began to feel choked. At first her sensations were so physical that she opened all the windows to their widest, as if it were merely air that she needed. It was only when the rising wind, which threatened to become a gale from the southwest, blew right through her part of the house that she knew her feeling of breathlessness was a bitter sense of indignation and

of shame. By now the whole house must know she was in disgrace; the servants must be talking of it; presently the neighbours would learn it. Once more Molly considered whether she should attempt to break the locked door. And once more her native dignity and self-restraint prevented her from doing it. To use such violence was to acknowledge, in a way, that she had been worsted mentally.

"When Forty comes back, or my father, there will be an end to this," she said, as she walked to and fro. "I hate mother. I hate her! It's because I will not marry a man I do not love."

She even hated poor Gloomy Fanny. And then she thought of what Thorpe might do if he learnt what had happened. No doubt her mother had suppressed her letter to him. It might be days before he suspected that anything was wrong. But when he did, what would he do? Her instinct told her that he would act promptly. But she knew nothing of the law. For all she could tell the law might support her mother. She had been wholly accustomed to submission till Thorpe came into her life and gave her courage and freedom.

"But he will do something. I know, I know!"

At seven o'clock she heard the key in her outer

door. She felt that she could not endure to see her mother. If she did see her she would lose her self-control. She retreated into her bedroom and turned the key. The next moment her mother entered the sitting-room and brought in a tray with dinner on it. It had been brought upstairs by Filkins, who chuckled secretly.

Molly heard her mother move in the other room. Presently she knocked at the door of the bedroom. Molly did not answer. She could not. A dumb devil of anger possessed her. She heard her mother go away, and then she came out. She ate a little without sitting down, and then tried the outer door. It was still locked. But she heard steps on the stairs. As she stood there she knew that someone was outside, and wondered who it was. Then she heard a timid knock.

"Who 's there?" she asked sharply.

"Grannyducky, my darling," said her great-grandmother, with her lips to the keyhole. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes, darling," said Molly.

"I wants to tell you I 've told your young man my granddarter 'as locked you up," piped Grannyducky through the keyhole. "I went in

a taxi-cab along o' Filkins. He 's been 'ere to-day to see your mother. 'E 'll get you out, my dearest."

Molly's eyes filled.

"You are the dearest old darling that ever was," she said; "but go away before she finds you."

"My pore lamb, I 'm a-goin'," said Granny-ducky shakily. And Molly heard her go down the stairs.

"He knows, he knows," said Molly. . . . With that she laughed aloud and then ran into her bedroom, and going to the window climbed upon the sill and looked over the parapet into the road. Even now he might be outside! She stared down into the street, and saw no one but casual passers-by.

"But he knows," said Molly; "he knows!"

She could not tell what he would do, but she felt an infinite trust that he would do everything that could be done. The feeling of suffocation went out of her; she breathed easily once more, and stepped back into her room.

"Why, I 'm actually happy," she said. She looked at herself in the glass, and saw that she was flushed and joyful.

"My dear love," she murmured. Then she

climbed again into the window and viewed the all-embracing night.

She stayed for a long time there upon the sill, feeling the wild wind in her hair. The gale was warm and strong; dark clouds, still rainless, flew overhead. She saw the lights in the park, and beyond it, across the opposing houses. As the darkness fell and the clouds thickened London grew magical to her. She saw the colour of the night and its glories, and her imagination fed on all she beheld. She had often watched night come out of her misty eastern cave, but never any night that had been so sweet to her. Her lover was in her arms; his arms seemed about her neck, and her soul and body woke wonderfully.

Her agitation, which she hardly comprehended, deepened, and presently she left the window. The air was very warm. She heard a clock strike nine, and wished that it was later. To-morrow might be a wonderful day, a day of days to remember.

“He will do something to-morrow.”

Presently a drowsiness came upon her, and she felt heavy. Yet she was happy, and did not wish to sleep. Perhaps her lover's mind was in hers, speaking with her, urging her towards some strange action, blessing her with love. She

thought of his sister, and bent her head wondering. Her colour came and fled, and suddenly she turned the light out. There was the gleam of a half-moon in the skyey rack to see by. She breathed again at the window, and in the darkness slowly unclad herself, and stood nude in the swift warm air that rushed through the room. Then with her nightdress on and a thin dressing-gown, she climbed to her seat in the window and let the wind bathe her neck and bosom. Stars shone through the sky and again were hidden; the half-moon gleamed and then dived in the ocean of cloud, and the wind sang such sweet songs as the sirens sang.

“I ’m happy, happy.”

So she sat and dreamed of life that was to be, of days and deep nights, of bright white love and secret passion, of songs and of laughter and deep tears, and of her lover’s heart and lips and of the lips of dear unborn children. So divine a thing is humanity, and even in its trodden garden, lilies may grow and hold their scented cups to the thirsty air and the overarching nights and dawns.

But an hour later she sighed and came back to the world and lay down to sleep. She kissed her hand as if it were her lover’s lips, and said

aloud, "Good-night, my dear one." For he had kissed her hand, and it was the dearer to her and his forever.

And for more than a long hour she slept peacefully, still with the wind about her, and her windows wide open. But soon after it struck eleven she woke suddenly, and did not know why. Yet there was, it seemed, some reason for her waking. Even as she looked across the room to the open air she believed something in a dream had wakened her. In her ears and mind was the strange melancholy music of Rubinstein's slave:

Täglich ging die wunderschöne
Sultanstochter hin und nieder—

a favourite song of Thorpe's, that she had promised to sing to him some day. Now it wailed in her mind; she knew he sang it himself, and whistled it, too, for he had a just ear and much love of music, if little knowledge of the art. He loved Bach's Fugues for their pure reason, their splendid pattern, and exact adequacy; but loved melancholy songs as well. She was the "Sultanstochter," and he a slave, made one in war, who would yet be an emperor. So she loved that air too, and walked by the fountain where the white water splashed.

And even then, being awake without a doubt, she heard the air whistled softly. It came like a call, faint and far. It was a gift, it was magic, a benediction. She sat up suddenly and trembled, and leapt from her bed and ran to the window, and climbed up and looked through the parapet's pilasters into the street. But she saw no one there, not a soul. A cab-call rang out suddenly, and two lovers, it might be, came by as she looked, but her lover was not there.

"I did not dream it," she said.

Again she heard the notes; they seemed to float about her like thistledown in a soft wind. She thought they came down from the very sky.

"He's near me. But how can he be near?"

There was the sound of something on the next roof as if a little piece of slate gave way. And once again she heard "Sultanstochter" whistled lightly, yet with trembling lips it may have been. She clung to the window trembling, doubting and believing, full of fear and joy and hope.

Was that a voice she heard? It seemed to her that she caught someone whisper. And then she knew, knew in her heart that he was indeed near her! She steadied her lips and tried to answer him, and could not. And then at last she whis-

tled very lightly the first six notes of the same air. Even as she whistled them she saw the figure of a man upon the party wall that divided the parapets of the two houses, and again she trembled violently. Oh, if it was not he, after all! But who but her lover should call her with song? And who but her lover should accept her answer? She tried to speak and could not, and slipped back into the room, and stood there in her white garment, wondering at the strange wild world her soul was in.

She saw him at the window.

"Molly," he breathed, "my darling!"

She could not answer, her lips trembled so. But he saw her white figure in the room. The moon gleamed through a cloud; its light touched her.

"Dearest!" he said.

And then she said, "Jack, Jack!" and wept a little. And he leapt lightly into the room, and, finding her on her knees, knelt by her and took her soft, strong body in his arms. She wept again, and laid her head on his shoulder, and he kissed her, trembling.

"How wonderful to be here!" he said.
"How wonderful!"

"Oh, you are wonderful," she whispered. "I

—I love you so. I've been so unhappy all the day."

"But now I've come to you."

"It's magic, dear. How could you?"

"Love laughs at locksmiths, Molly. Should they keep you from me? Never!"

"How did you come?"

"On a magic carpet, child. I flew! I dived from the brink of the moon. I've come gathering lilies."

"Dearest!"

He kissed her shoulder.

"Dear prisoner, they shall not keep you. I've set an engine going, an engine that is often cruel, but now is kind. They call it the Law. I've no respect for it whatever, Molly, save that it can run over one at times. But now I love it. I'm very wise, my lily, and I prophesy that your gaoler will release you to-morrow."

"To-morrow you'll not be here, Jack."

He trembled, and she was glad.

"Don't speak so. Here in the night, with the white of the moon and you so white—"

He felt the blood in her cheek. Half had she forgotten where she was and how clad.

"Child, this is romance. And so many know it not. I bless your mother. I'm in the hostile

camp, a secret lover. She has given me this. White face in a cloud of hair, I love you!"

"Are you a poet, too, Jack?"

"Who would not be now and here? You love me?"

"Oh, yes, Jack."

"I never laughed at love, dear; I said it was made cruel and evil by restraint. Lock up divinity and see it become diabolic. Love should be simple and joyous. We should meet it in green forests and laugh together divinely. Here's our forest; kiss me."

Again her arms were about his neck.

"What shall I do?" she asked.

"Do nothing. If you're not free to-morrow I'll come again and take you from here and run away with you, Molly. You shall climb a little wall and enter another window, and go down magic stairs into freedom. Oh, let's be wise. I'm too wild."

"You promise you'll come to-morrow if she does not set me free?"

"I swear it!"

"Then I'm happy, happy."

She leant against his heart, the moonlight bathed them, the wind sang about them and was

warm. It was a paradise, an oasis, a garden in Eden.

Yet in every garden there is a snake, or some alarm, or sudden fear. Happiness is not yet a human right. Fools destroy it, and name it evil names. Even as they spoke dear words to each other, and the inarticulate blessings of lovers, they heard an alien sound, and Molly wrenched herself from him and sprang to her feet.

"My mother!" she said, breathlessly.

"Is your door locked?" he whispered.

"Yes," she said. There came a knock at the door.

"What shall we do?" she breathed. There was such pride in her and such rage, divinely helped, that she could have thrown the door open on her garden, even with her lover there.

"I 'll go for a moment," he whispered. "But I 'll come back. Get rid of her quickly."

He went lightly and silently. And again her mother knocked.

"Who 's there?" asked Molly, as if from the bed.

"Your mother. Let me in."

And Molly let her in and went back to her

bed. She trembled but triumphed. There's tragedy in love, but he's divine and joyous when he rises like the sun. She was bathed in light, a naked flower that drank the divinest dew. Her heart sang to her. The Sultan's daughter walked by flashing waters sweeter than any river of paradise. And here again came pain. Yet she could endure it now. And strife perhaps. But victory was already hers.

"I could not sleep," said her mother. She had had her letter, the letter from the Law, and saw her own folly like a tower. Yet it was not that letter she carried in her hand, as she stood by the door and turned up the light.

"I have to go away," she said; "abroad, I mean. I must. Emma Simpkinson is very ill at Zermatt—"

To hear of Emma Simpkinson, here in Paradise! Oh, the absurd earth it is. These Emmas trample flowers wherever they go.

"I want you to come with me."

Molly looked at her. She was very white. Her daughter suddenly pitied her. She had given her child pain, but had given her birth. She had put her in prison and had sent her lover there. Had not Jack said, "I bless your mother." And yet—

"I cannot go. I—I will not," said Molly.

How could she go without hearing what he would say? Whether she went or not depended upon him, and he was outside the window even now, hearing all that was said.

"I tell you my old friend is dying, it may be, and wants me. I cannot go alone. I ask you to go with me," said her mother. It was a bitter humiliation to ask her daughter anything. And Molly knew it. Her heart softened and yet was hard.

"I will tell you to-morrow morning," she said, and she added: "if you will—"

She hesitated.

"If I will what?"

"Unlock my door again, and give me the key," said Molly.

Her mother's face darkened: her lips trembled.

"My undutiful daughter," she said.

What, then, is duty? Molly smiled bitterly and her mother saw it and turned away.

"I shall not lock you in again," she said. And then she turned the light out, and shut the door behind her. Molly sprang from her bed again, and listening, heard her shut the outer door upon the landing. She followed and took out the key.

and locked the door on the inside, and ran back to her room.

It struck half-past eleven as she did so. She called her lover again and he came back to her.

"You heard?" she asked, when his arms were about her.

"Every word, dearest."

"Shall I go or stay?"

"Poor woman, I'm sorry for her, she misses so much. Look now, child, I think you may go. You will be free, at any rate. I'll come after you."

"You will? Promise!"

"Will I not, my dearest one? You shall come to Italy with me and we'll get married there. But before you go, see that you know where she is taking you. I'll come by the next train. We love each other and understand all things, don't we?"

She put her head on his shoulder again as he went on speaking.

"You will be able to write to me. Post your own letters. I had one from her to-night which said I was n't to come here again, and that you agreed with her decision."

"Oh, that was wicked."

"Let it be. It was natural. She's beaten

and we are victorious. You don't know Italy?"

"This is Italy," she murmured.

"The land of romance is where two lovers are, madonna mia. Must I go, Giulietta adorata?"

"Must you?"

"In the next castle to this sits Sinclair Thompson, piccinina mia, and also a policeman who was my magic carpet. They smoke cigarettes and await me."

She laughed deliciously.

"Oh, poor Mr. Thompson. Is it morning or midnight? There's no time at all. Oh, yes, I love you."

She held his head in her hands.

"Why can't love speak? Where are the words, Jack?"

"Poor little words, I'm sorry for them. Can one fly with words and scale Olympus and dispossess Zeus? My dear, my dear, I must go, I must."

They held each other in a long silence, while the moon looked down upon them out of a clearing sky and the wind fell light and lighter still.

"I learn much," said her lover.

"Teach me everything always," she answered.

"Teach *me!* A man's a child, my darling."

“My child then,” she murmured. And her heart was now most divinely full as he held her to him once more and kissed her lips.

CHAPTER XVIII

Describes How Sinclair Thompson Plays Another Small Part and Goes on an Unexpected Holiday. On the Following Day Thorpe Makes the Acquaintance of a Man Who Does n't Think Much of Mountaineering.

IT is the lot of some to suffer and to serve, and they are happy if they get but a small return. Such was Sinclair Thompson's fate, though it must seem a strange one for a financial journalist, who is a creature invariably suspected of ulterior motives. He had sat a full hour up aloft with Smithson, while Thorpe was with his beloved, feeling somewhat like Leporello, who sang "Il e dentro colla bella Ed io far la sentinella." Nevertheless he truly loved Thorpe, and found some entertainment with Smithson, who related his experiences, "joodishal" and otherwise, till Thorpe had finished his roof climbing and returned triumphant, as one who fought not without glory. Smithson received the balance of his five pounds, and was happy that the illegal venture had finished without Thorpe fall-

ing into the street. Yet how can a man die better than facing the fearful gods of Mrs. Grundy? It would be a noble end, better than being suffocated by that savage Shiva of Kensington on her altar steps. So Thorpe and Thompson went away together, actually and sympathetically triumphant over many of the ills of life. Thorpe related much of his adventure, but was reticent of details. Sinclair shivered at the dramatic event of Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, and in his mind crawled under the bed, feeling a sense of cowardly cousinship with such as Panurge, when that lady rose upon the horizon.

"Yet I think you are foolish to let her go to Switzerland," said Thompson.

Thorpe sighed.

"I could n't quite bear to see her savagely hard on her mother, and I would n't egg her on to be," he grumbled. "That's where one's weakness comes in."

"Amiable devil," grunted Thompson.

"I suppose they'll go by the eleven o'clock continental from Victoria," said Thorpe. "I can't travel by the same train, can I?"

"What a happy journey," said Thompson. "I can see you three in the dining car."

"In fact, I can't get away to-day," groaned

Thorpe, "positively I can't! I forgot all about it till now, but I've got to do something for my mother, and I must get some money from my bank and arrange for an overdraft too. I say, will you go for me on the same train as they do and see Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton plays no tricks! You want a holiday, old chap."

"Won't it be joyous for me?" asked Thompson, who was quite ready to give up his head for Thorpe.

"You'll simply show lovely surprise at seeing them," said Thorpe; "can you get away?"

"I daresay," grunted Thompson. "Oh, yes, I'm sure I can."

"Good chap," said Thorpe. "I shall stick in the Temple till I hear from Molly, and we'll arrange it. Now for a little sleep."

Molly was asleep by then, for the tension was over and the victory won. She dreamed of her lover not at all, or not to remember her dreams, but she smiled as she drifted into sleep, and even when she woke again. He had sought and found her, staying at no absurd obstacles. She could not measure her love for him now. He grew like a great rain-cloud over a thirsty land. Oh, so sweet a place the world was and would be. She pitied her mother, was sorry for Emma

Simpkinson, and even blessed old Simpkinson. Why, it was through him that she had met this divine Jack of her own particular bean-stalk! Might Simpkinson's royalties increase even beyond their present absurd amount! And as for Grannyducky, she promised her a wig-shaking hug on the morrow. Divine and active Granny, splendid and immoral Granny, was there ever such a youth of ninety before? Her ethics might be indeed appalling to the savages of the neighbourhood, but her heart was as sound as a silver bell. Might she live just as long as she desired life!

There was little sleep for Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. Yet she had more than she deserved, and far more than would have come to her shaken little soul if she had known who had listened to her humiliating colloquy with her recalcitrant child. The letter from Locke had been a bombshell, even though Thorpe had said it was even then being fired at her. How Thorpe and his friend came to know of Molly's enforced seclusion was a miracle to her. It seemed like horrid magic. And that they should know at all was to put her in the dust. She bit her lips with rage at her own folly and her daughter's unimagined hardness. Even as she

cursed Molly and herself and Thorpe and his legal friends, she had in front of her another letter still unopened. When she read it a little light came to her, a way to save her face, as they say in the Flowery Kingdom. Truly she had a sort of affection for Emma Simpkinson. None can exist without some friend, real or imagined, and the stolid Emma had served as such. She was, at any rate, a receptacle, a mental slop-basin for her dear Amy. Now this useful article was ill at Zermatt and requested help. Or Simpkinson did for her.

“Yes, I’ll go and take Molly,” said Amy. Even if Molly absolutely refused to budge she would go herself. She could not face a Court and have the case reported. And if she went, Molly must, of course, be released. It was a way out: if not a dignified way, about as dignified a one as might be.

“And once out there who knows what may happen?” she said. Even after this lesson in wisdom she retained her own views and clung to Gloomy Fanny. To see him recede like a waning moon was awful. She climbed on a mountain of conjecture to retain her view of him. That very night she wrote a letter to him saying that she and Molly were going to Zer-

matt on the following day to see an old friend who was ill? Perhaps he might come out? It could do no harm. She wrapped herself in foolish hope and slept uneasily till dawn.

At seven o'clock in the morning Molly, who had set her outer door open ere she slept, was awakened by Filkins' knock.

Filkins seemed quite joyous for so gloomy a personage. She felt she had had a fine hand in her young lady's release.

"Good morning, miss," said Filkins. "I'm very glad to see you and not to 'ave to leave the 'ot water outside no more. Which I did think an 'orrid shame."

Molly did not encourage her, but asked her how her great-grandmother was.

"The dear is a-sittin' up in bed chucklin', miss," said Filkins, "and she'll chuckle more when I tells 'er we worked it. It was 'er and me as did it, miss."

"Thank you," said Molly. "Please go to my mother's room and say I'll go to Switzerland with her.

Filkins shook her head.

"You don't say so, miss; I would n't if I was you."

"Please do as I ask you," said Molly gently. And Filkins retired grumbling.

Molly went to see Grannyducky as soon as she got down, and found her having her morning tea in bed.

"You 're an absolute wonderful darling," said Molly, kissing her rapturously. And she gave her a kiss from Thorpe too.

"Ain't I?" chuckled Grannyducky. "I may be old, but I'm that 'igh-sperited I wonder I be'aved as well as I did when I was young. I went to see your young man—me and Filkins did it in a taxi-keb. Oh, they 're very surprisin', ain't they? They shook me crooked in two jumps. So Amy 'as let you out? I knew she would."

Molly sat on the bed.

"It was all your doing, Granny darling."

"Oh, but I 'm a wise one, I am," said Granny; "but what 's this I 'ear from Filkins that you are goin' to Switzerland with your mother?"

Molly told her all about it, and Grannyducky shook her shaking head.

"I 'm disapp'inted, Molly. I thought you 'd run away with your Thorpe this very day," she squeaked sadly.

Molly shook her head.

"I'll do it in Switzerland," she whispered. And Grannyducky lighted up.

"You will?" she cried; "promise you will, Molly. Don't lose no time, my dear."

Molly promised faithfully, and Grannyducky chuckled.

"Don't you worry too much about gittin' married, my dear," she squeaked. "That Thorpe's all right. You run away with 'im sharp. The woman that 'esitates is lost; I mean she'll lose 'er lover, as like as not. Don't I know that, my dearest? Oh, I know a lot, quite a lot."

"Don't be so sad, Grannyducky," said Molly. "I'm sure a nice lot of young men loved you when you were young."

But Grannyducky shook her head dolorously.

"I know they did, my pet," she said; "but what makes me sad is that I did n't love enough of 'em. To think that I made more than six nice young men sad, that's now dead and done for, is a great grief to me."

Molly said that a thing like that could n't be helped. But Granny still shook her head as if she doubted it.

"And what's more, don't you forget that your

Thorpe will go on fallin' in love all 'is life till 'e 's quite old," said Granny.

"Oh, will he?" asked Molly.

"If 'e 's a man 'e will," said Grannyducky. "And you 'll be a wise woman and let on not to know nothin' about it. And 'ome 'e'll come crawlin' with di'mond rings in 'is 'and. Which you 'll take and be sorry for 'im. And you must n't sniff none or be too 'aughty, for your Thorpe will be sore inside about it. They all is, don't I know 'em?"

"There 's not much you don't know, darling," said Molly, who hoped all this would n't come true.

Grannyducky said that was so.

"But knowledge comes too late, my love. I don't think there ought to be no marryin' at all. If I was young and 'ad a 'ouse of my own I 'd never marry; no, not a duke," piped Granny.

"Why, then you 'd have no children, darling," said Molly.

But Grannyducky sniffed.

"That 's all you know about it," she squeaked. "But there, Amy would say I was a wicked old woman. I ain't though. Your Thorpe says everythin' is wrong, and so it is. Oh, ain't we all silly!"

The entrance into the room of Filkins stopped her saying anything more. And Molly hugged her and went away. But it was wonderfully strange to Molly that Grannyducky and Miriam seemed to have the same ideas about things.

"However, I don't want to think," said Molly; "I've had enough of it."

There was, indeed, little time for thought. She and her mother were only just ready when it was time to drive to Victoria. Even then there was a short conflict between them about the tickets. Molly asked to have her own, and Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, feeling that she was not to be trusted, bitterly resented her daughter not trusting her. At last she yielded, and they drove to the station in silence. Molly had not only written to Thorpe, but had telephoned to him as well. Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton's letter to Gloomy Fanny was posted at the very station. It was as well Molly did not know it.

And just as they got into a first-class carriage she caught sight of Sinclair Thompson getting into another. Thorpe had told her to look out for him. Sinclair was to express immense joy and surprise on seeing them. He played the part assigned to him when they were on board the boat. However little his real pleasure at

meeting Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton, it was much more than hers at seeing him. She associated him with Thorpe, and truly enough believed that Thorpe was the superior spirit. She was particularly short with Thompson until she became sea-sick, when his assistance was valuable. She found him useful in the Custom House on the other side, for he talked French a great deal better than Molly. He professed his readiness to do anything for them. It was, he said, a remarkable and joyous coincidence that he, too, should be going to Zermatt for a short holiday. He almost winked at Molly when he said this, and she smiled to make up for her mother's frown. Thompson and she understood each other admirably; she wondered how it was that Miriam did not love him. This seemed most strange to her when he spoke of Thorpe with affectionate admiration. From Thompson's point of view he could do no wrong: his wildest opinions had something in them. He repeated Thorpe's phrases with a chuckle and wild laughter when Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton was disrobing in her compartment, in which a wise administration forbids any to go to bed with their boots on.

"He's really a joyous character," said Sin-

clair Thompson; "he slings the English language about in the unholy way when he gets mad. I don't mean swearing, though he can swear wonderfully. You've not seen his new book, have you?"

Molly said she had n't seen it.

"He read me a chapter the other night, and I roared. He's Rabelais in the robes of Savonarola, and divinely diabolic," said Thompson. "But what I love him about is that he's not only a student and a writer. I believe he could earn a decent living as a cook, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, or a low comedian, or anything you like to mention."

With such childlike and friendly comments on his friend's varied character he beguiled the way to Zermatt.

And in the meantime the variegated Thorpe made ready to follow them. He saw his mother, borrowed money from the bank, packed his own things, including an ice-axe, and with the aid of Miriam got together the necessary portions of a woman's gear in case he bolted with Molly all of a sudden. He had his own notions of what he meant to do. They were sufficiently romantic, but not so romantic as to make him neglect details. When everything else was ready, includ-

ing his tickets for the journey and the sleeper, he rang up the firm of Fletcher-Mytton and Moses and found that Fortescue was in the office.

"I'm going abroad to-morrow," he said; "would you come and call on me at the Temple this evening?"

This was, of course, the evening of the day that Molly and her mother had left for Switzerland, though apparently Forty knew nothing of this. In fact, his mother had not tried to communicate with him. She had written a severe note to Edward, whom she had by no means forgiven for his gouty explosion, to tell him where she and Molly were going, but had told no one else, with the single exception of Gloomy Fanny. So when Forty turned up at the Temple he was entirely ignorant of all that had happened.

"What ho!" said Forty, "here I am again. What's the news?"

"Have you had any about things?" asked Thorpe, offering him a cigarette. He knew from Molly how Fortescue had fled from home.

"I'm not stayin' with my joyful family just now," said Forty. "Between you and me and Cleopatra's Needle, I was full up to the back teeth with the pure joy of the Home, so I

skipped for a little rest. Is there any news?"

"To use your own pet phrase, there 's a whole lot," said Thorpe, laughing.

"Pour it out," said Forty; "you can't jolt me any more. I'm beyond it."

He miscalculated his own capacity for surprise, even at the beginning of the tale.

"Well, I'm dee-double-dashed," said Forty; "you don't say so! Locked up Molly, did she; turned the key on her? Tell me all the whole lot."

Thorpe told him the "whole lot," with the exception of his moonlight visit to Molly's prison. Even without that Forty found it sufficiently entertaining.

"I'd like to have seen the old lady's face when she got that solicitor's tender appeal to her best instincts," he said. "This is highly dramatic, Thorpe; this is a Gaiety piece, and no mistake. I'm glad the gov'nor was out of it. If the last pleasin' episode gave him gout the rest would have brought on apoplexy. And now they've actually gone to Switzerland!"

Thorpe nodded.

"And I'm going out to-morrow morning myself," he said.

"The villain still pursued her," quoted

Forty. "Well, have it your own way. I'm a benevolent spectator. But don't you think for a moment the old lady is quite licked. She's sure to be up to some little game. I daresay the Simpkinson has no more than a cold."

Thorpe shrugged his shoulders.

"What can she do?" he asked. "If there's more trouble, Molly and I must bolt across the nearest pass. In fact, that's my idea. I wanted to tell you so."

Forty rose from his chair.

"Well, I believe you're an honourable josser and all of it," he said lightly, "so I trust you to do the square thing."

"That's all right," said Thorpe. "I believe we're friends, old chap."

"Oh, yes," replied Forty; "you may be a writin' cove, but you don't seem to wear frills, like a lot of 'em. I never could stand frills. I don't mind a cove bein' cleverer than ten performing monkeys, but why should he brag about it? That's what I want to know."

They shook hands warmly, and Forty went back home that night and dined alone with Grannyducky in great splendour. Thorpe had Quest and Bramwell and Locke to dinner in his chambers, where they discussed law and theol-

ogy till after midnight. Locke was quite unhappy to think that after all he and Bramwell were not to tackle the savage Christian judge for a writ of *habeas corpus*. Quest was very anxious to perform the religious marriage ceremony for Thorpe and Molly, and sincerely trusted that no registrar would get the job; and Bramwell suggested that marriages ought to be performed before a judge in chambers. The judge should have power to rescind the contract, or vary it on the payment of penalties. On the whole it was a great evening, and everyone looked on it as Thorpe's last dying speech and confession before he fell off the precipice into the hazardous gulf of wedlock.

"But it's an odd thing for him to get married at all, when he's always inveighing against marriage in his books," said Locke.

"Not at all odd for Thorpe," said Bramwell.

"Read Kant on the 'Antinomies of Pure Reason,'" said Thorpe sententiously. "Everything on earth, or out of it, ends in a contradiction. These two contradictions get married and beget the pleasing absurdities by which we live."

They drank his health, and Molly's too, and left him, as Quest said, to say his prayers in the Chapel of Pure Reason for the last time. For

when a man gets married Transcendental Dialectic gives place to the natural reason of the domestic understanding. Or so the humorous and philosophic Quest put it.

At eleven o'clock the next morning Thorpe left Victoria on his way to Dover. At Calais he found himself companion in the sleeping compartment with a long and somewhat sombre person, who showed a thoroughly English disposition to say nothing very completely. Thorpe, though by nature a cheerful conversationalist, could hold his tongue when silence seemed indicated, and he never opened his mouth till Paris was left behind them. By that time he and the gloomy one had dined, and Thorpe at least felt very happy, as he smoked a good cigar.

"Going far?" he ventured at last.

"Switzerland," replied the sad one.

"So am I," said Thorpe; "d' ye do any climbing?"

Thorpe's ice-axe was visible in its leathern covers on the rack.

"No," said the other gloomily, "I don't think much of climbin'."

"It's all a matter of taste," owned Thorpe, "but it's a great change, you know, from one's ordinary life."

"I suppose you play golf," said the other man.

"No, I don't," replied Thorpe.

"No more do I. I don't think much of golf," said his companion.

Thorpe looked at him and began to think hard. Something seemed to tell him he had heard somewhere of someone who did n't think much of golf. And all of a sudden a brilliant light came to him.

"Ah!" said Thorpe to himself. "Now I see.

"No, golf's a pretty rotten game," he said, "and so's lawn tennis."

"Absolutely putrid," said the sad man.

"But there's one game that I've never played that I should very much like to try," said Thorpe.

"What's that?" asked the other.

"Polo," said Thorpe.

The gloomy man's face lighted up like a ball-room, and he fairly beamed.

"Ah, that's the game I play," he said.

"By all that's holy," said Thorpe to himself, "this is Gloomy Fanny, or I'm a Dutchman." Then he added aloud, "Oh, you play it, do you?"

"Rather," said Gloomy Fanny, for it was indeed he. "I should think I do. All other games are putrid compared to it."

"I suppose it's very exciting?" asked Thorpe.

"I should n't think much of it if it was n't," said Fanny eagerly; "why you might break your arm or leg or neck at any moment! With a good pony under you and the ball in front of you the feelin' is amazin'! One chukker of polo is worth a year of all other games put together. Oh, I think a lot of polo!"

Thorpe encouraged him to talk, and all the time that Gloomy Fanny related his polo history he was wondering why the narrator was going out to Switzerland. And yet the solution was easy. The more Thorpe thought of it the easier it seemed. Without a doubt, Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton had asked him to come! It was the last chance, small as it might be.

"He's not at all a bad chap, I'm sure," thought Thorpe; "she's played it very low down on him."

He wished it was possible to tell Gloomy Fanny who he was. For a moment he was strongly inclined to do so, but on the whole he decided to let things work themselves out. If Gloomy Fanny was really going to Zermatt they would meet there, and Molly would have the task of telling him everything. It would come more graciously from her.

After a full hour of polo, interspersed with

casual references to games he did n't think much of, Gloomy Fanny condescended to inquire graciously about mountaineering. What were its attractions, and why were some awful decent chaps gone on it? Thorpe explained that it was very exciting, and that often for hours together a man did n't know whether the next moment would be his last or not.

"I suppose there must be somethin' in it, then," owned Gloomy Fanny.

"There's quite a lot in it," said Thorpe. "How would you like to hang over a four thousand-foot precipice on the end of a rope, with another chap holding the other end of it?"

"I should n't be surprised if it was fun sometimes," owned Gloomy Fanny doubtfully.

"And then there are avalanches," said Thorpe. He explained the nature of avalanches vividly, and his companion owned that a moving avalanche on an open slope or a steep couloir seemed to offer moments of joy.

"So, you see," said Thorpe, "that you may fall down a precipice all roped together, or you may be smothered by an avalanche or slip into a *crévasse*, or have your brains knocked out by falling stones, or you may be smashed by *séracs*, or frozen to death in a sudden storm, or you may

escape the lot and get home after twenty hours of it."

"Humph," said Gloomy Fanny, "you *do* put another kind of face on it to what I thought. I dessay it 's nearly as good as polo. At any rate, I think more of it than I did."

"I believe you 'd enjoy it," said Thorpe; "I really do."

After they talked quite agreeably together, and abused every other kind of game—games, other than polo, were, so Gloomy Fanny averred, destroying England—Thorpe told him some adventures in Bolivia and Peru, and long before the conductor made up their beds the two rivals were as thick as thieves. Nevertheless, at intervals Fanny relapsed into gloom, and Thorpe could n't help believing that he was then thinking of Molly. When they finally retired Gloomy Fanny took the upper berth and Thorpe the lower one. When Thorpe turned the light out Gloomy Fanny said:

"I've quite enjoyed your talk about this climbing game."

"And I your talk about polo," said Thorpe.

"And the main thing is to play the game, whatever game it is," said Fanny out of the darkness.

"To the last ounce," said Thorpe.

And when they woke up they were already east of Lausanne.

CHAPTER XIX

Thorpe Makes the Further Acquaintance of Gloomy Fanny, and Crosses the Théodule Pass in the Beginning of a Snowstorm. When on the Other Side, He Undertakes to Consult Molly on a Point of Some Importance.

ODDLY enough, it was only when he was getting up that Thorpe developed a new sense of anger against Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. Possibly his dinner had disagreed with him a little, and a man is ever at the mercy of his metabolism. Conscience connects itself with chemistry; the over-good are probably debauched by morbid secretions, just as the very bad are. Thorpe considered the woman was absolutely treacherous in bringing out Gloomy Fanny; she lacked common decency. And he was sorry for Fanny, who seemed what the modern schoolboy calls "awfully decent." He might be a bit of a fool, but he was, at any rate, a gentleman, and Thorpe was sorry for the position he must inevitably find himself in at the end of the journey.

"But I'll soon see to her," said Thorpe. What savageness was in him settled on Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. He was studiously kind to Gloomy Fanny, kind with an air of detachment which shows no sign of desiring to please. He knew too well that to be kind to an Englishman abroad invites suspicion of ulterior motives. The travelling Briton suspects a kindly countryman of wanting to borrow money, and if he talks foreign languages well, he is much more than merely doubtful.

"How d'ye like the scenery?" asked Thorpe, as they ran up the side of the lake between Lausanne and Villeneuve. It appeared that Gloomy Fanny had never travelled on the Continent. Nevertheless, he showed no enthusiasm. Everything was new to him, and he regarded new scenery as an old-fashioned wine merchant regards a perfect Australian or Californian wine. It may be good, but it's neither claret nor bur-gundy. The head of the Lake of Geneva on a summer morning when there is atmosphere about it is one of the most lovely places in the world, but Fanny could not see any likeness to Sussex or Scotland in it.

"It seems all right," he said, cautiously. He stared at the Dent du Midi steadily.

"Is that the sort of thing you go up?" he asked.

"Yes, that 's a small one. But there 's one of the peaks pretty dangerous. What do you think of it?" asked Thorpe.

"It seems steep," said Fanny. "Is that snow up there?"

"Yes," replied Thorpe.

"It looks like whitewash," said Fanny.

Before they were half-way up the Rhône valley he declined to look at any more mountains. He said they were monotonous. Give him Surrey every time. He smoked steadily.

"You 've not yet seen a big peak or a first-class mountain," said Thorpe, who felt that Gloomy Fanny grew somewhat heavy.

"Tell me when one comes along," replied Fanny.

Thorpe subsided and said no more. There was not an inch of the way up to the Visp that he did not know like the inside of his hat. He loved it all, even the intolerable heat of it when the sun was reflected from the rocks and snow. He felt that Molly must love it. They would see it all together, and Italy as well. He knew that he might have taken her away across the roof that night of the great adventure. There

would have been romance in that, but to take her away across the mountains would be a better memory, an abiding one, something to think of with joy, and not with mere laughter. It's well to be romantic in one's youth at least. What else should one remember in the days that rise on labour and end in grief but those that waked to love and slept in happiness?

"There's still youth in me," he said.

He walked by himself in Visp while waiting for the train, for Gloomy Fanny developed a more sombre air, and looked at the ring of hills with some hostility. They oppressed him visibly. He said so when they were in the cars for Zermatt.

"You want to be on the top of one," said Thorpe; "then you could breathe. This is a wonderful valley, with the most wonderful thing on earth at the end of it."

Molly was at the end of it as well as the Matterhorn.

"What's that?" asked Fanny, doubtfully.

"The Matterhorn," replied Thorpe.

"I seem to have heard of it," said Fanny.

"Is it steep?"

"It's just the Matterhorn," said Thorpe.

"Just that!"

"Humph!" said Gloomy Fanny. He remarked that it was "a slow biz" getting up there. They came to St. Niklaus, and Thorpe shouted to a man on the platform, and shook hands with him. He called him Joseph, and Joseph seemed much pleased to see him. It appeared that the season so far had been bad. Herrs had been scarce. Nothing would please him better than to do something with Mr. Thorpe.

"It's something quite new this time," said Thorpe, smiling. "Come up to the Monte Rosa to-day."

"Who's that?" asked Fanny, as the train moved on.

"An old guide of mine," said Thorpe.

And presently the train swung round the corner, and there was the giant wedge of the Matterhorn thrust wonderfully through clouds.

"I say, what's that?" asked Gloomy Fanny, almost eagerly.

"That's It! That's the Matterhorn," said Thorpe, as proudly as if he owned it. Everyone is like that with the Matterhorn, and always will be. For a moment he forgot Molly. The mountain is a great magician, a master of the divine. Strange spirits dwell there, and oracles,

and oreads; wonderful winds are its voice; its robes are fire and ice.

"Do—do people go up it?" asked Fanny.

"Oh, yes," said Thorpe, even then doubting whether they did so, so far beyond the earth it seemed.

"Damned if I believe it," said Fanny; and Thorpe smiled at him.

"Perhaps you 're right," he said.

And the next moment they were in the turmoil of the station, and lost each other. Thorpe went to the Monte Rosa Hotel, and Gloomy Fanny to the Mont Cervin, for Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton and Molly were there. Not for one instant was Thorpe jealous of poor Fanny being in the same hotel. He knew he had but to lift his finger, and Molly would come to him.

As he had not wired to Sinclair Thompson, he was not surprised to find that his friend was out. The weather was wonderful; no one with less than a broken leg would have stayed indoors. And this was the first time Thompson had been in Zermatt.

"He was splendid to come," said Thorpe; "but it will do him good, anyway."

He looked out of his window in the street, and saw Joseph's brother Alois, and presently went

down and beckoned to him. The guide, who, of course, had not known he was in the village, was greatly pleased to see him. Though Thorpe was by no means a great mountaineer, he got on with the guides as if he were their brother. From Alois he learnt, among other inconsiderable matters, that a certain Mr. Simpkinson was up at the Riffelalp Hotel with a badly sprained ankle.

"You're sure it is n't a swelled head?" asked Thorpe, gaily.

"No, Mr. Thorpe, I'm sure it's his ankle," replied Alois, earnestly. He talked very good English, but irony was beyond him. And at that moment Thompson came in.

"Good old man!" said Thorpe. He introduced Alois.

"One of my old guides, and a ripping good chap," said Thorpe. So Thompson shook hands with Alois, and the three had some beer together. Then Alois bowed gravely and withdrew.

"Any news?" asked Thorpe eagerly, when the guide had gone.

"They're at the Cervin; Mrs. Simpkinson is very seedy, and her husband is up at the Riffelalp in bed with a sprain," said Thompson. "I came out with them all right."

"And I came out with Gloomy Fanny," said Thorpe. "He may be an ass, but he's quite a good chap."

"He did n't know you?"

"Not from Adam," said Thorpe. "How is Molly? I want you to take her a note. Does the old lady regard you with suspicion?"

There was no doubt of it. Nevertheless, Thompson saw Molly got the note. It was a plain, straightforward invitation to visit Italy, immediately.

"Oh, he's here then," exclaimed Molly.

They were in the busy hall of the Cervin Hotel, and might have been alone for all the notice the quick, chattering world took. For Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton was with the exigent and complaining Emma Simpkinson.

"Rather," laughed Thompson.

"So's Lord Laxton," said Molly with a frown.

Thompson told her what Thorpe had said about Fanny.

"I don't know. He ought not to have come," said Molly. And with that in her mind she sat down and wrote hurriedly to her lover.

"Mother has not been fair to me. She has brought out Lord Laxton. Mr. Thompson

says you know him now. I'll do anything you like, dearest. He says will I come a walk or ride with him to-morrow? If I do I shall tell him the exact truth. Shall I? I'm sure he's an honourable man and will go away. Tell me what I am to do? I said I'd go out with him."

The obedient and serviceable Thompson took the note to the Monte Rosa, and Thorpe replied to it very briefly, and sent his good friend back with the letter. The pith of his note lay in a very few sentences.

"Say you'll ride with him to the Schwarzsee Hotel, and I'll be there. Go directly after breakfast. Put on your strongest boots. Have some nails put in them at once. Yes, I met Laxton in the train, but he didn't know me. We'll talk to him together. He's a good chap, I'm sure. When you come down in the morning bring your dressing-bag at any rate. But I hope to see you to-night later."

And when Sinclair came back once more, he and Thorpe and Alois and Joseph went for a walk up to the Findelen Glacier. It is true

Alois had a Herr, but his Herr had just done the Weisshorn and was, as he said, Weisshorned and wanted a rest. They sat together on the rocks at the southern edge of the crackling dragon-like glacier till the sun went down behind the high snows of the Ober Gabelhorn. Once more the world seemed a very wonderful place to Thorpe, and life its great enigma; and his heart softened strangely, as it will among the mountains when there is peace in the sky and the stars at last begin to glitter above the icy peaks. Neither he nor Thompson nor Joseph said much till they were well on the way back and the lights of Zermatt shone beneath them. In the woods there was the smell of fresh-cut pine, a clean mountain odour full of memories and sweeter than flowers. And the silent air was clean and chill with the breath of the glaciers.

"What of the weather to-morrow, Joseph?" Thorpe asked as they came down to the village.

"Some time it may snow, I think," said Joseph. "This will not last."

"Nothing so splendid can," said Thompson. And Thorpe sighed. And yet there should be something sweeter yet. Molly was close to him, and to-morrow would be even nearer.

He and Thompson walked in the crowded narrow main street for an hour, for Thompson knew Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton was safe with her exigent Emma. But at eleven o'clock Molly slipped out, having seen that Gloomy Fanny, who was tired by an unaccustomed journey, had gone to his room.

"My dear," said Thorpe. Thompson stood aside and the lovers went a little way apart. Though the main street was noisy, there was peace in every path that led away from it. The stars overhead glittered sharply, though the full moon lay over the peak of the Matterhorn. The world was a place of light and shadow, fear and joy and wonder; the mountains rose like the future; there were again deep homelike valleys beyond them.

"I love you," said Thorpe.

"It is all so wonderful here," whispered Molly. She rested her head on his shoulder.

"It's divine here! And the mountains! What can be better?" he murmured.

"It is, then, to-morrow?" she asked timidly.

"To-morrow," he affirmed with passion.

"Am I wrong to come?"

"To follow me and nature?" asked her lover.

"Trust us both and yourself."

"Am I not cruel?"

She was thinking of her mother, that misshapen creature of old convention.

"I'll make her love me some day."

She nestled to him.

"Are you so wonderful?"

"At this moment I'm stupendous and brilliant," he affirmed, laughing. "I can stride the Matterhorn, and knock the sublime heads of the Rothhorn and the Dom together."

"I believe you can! But I must go!"

He held her for a moment.

"They say I believe in nothing. I believe in Molly," he whispered; "in Molly and her heart and in her lips."

He kissed them. Then they went back and found the faithful Thompson sitting on a fence surveying with joy the circle of the hills. They made him forget Miriam for a while. There's such healing in them, more than in the Hieron of Asclepius, hard by Epidaurus. In silence they took her to the hotel and left her. The eyes she lifted to them both were dewy bright with sudden tears.

"You perpetually lucky man," sighed Sinclair.

"You dear old chap," said Thorpe. Even

yet the village was alive. They spoke to a dozen guides. Thorpe shook hands with all he knew, with two of the Bieners, with the Pollingers, with a Sapersaxo from Saas, with a Lochmatter and a Burgener. He introduced them to Thompson, who really loved them and the world they lived in. Then they went to the hotel, and Thorpe said good-bye to his friend.

"I shall be up and away before you are up. Alois and Joseph will bring my traps up to the Schwarzsee. There I shall see her and the gloomy one."

"Be nice to him," said Thompson.

"I'll do my best. Thanks awfully for coming."

"Oh, that's all right," said Thompson.

They shook hands with that air of indifferent affection which appeals to the race and parted whistling casually.

In the morning Thorpe rose early and went off up the path by the turbulent Visp.

"Molly comes," he said, and he wondered at the days before he loved her. Even to philosophers and revolutionists these things come, and happiness keeps breaking in through the clouds that mostly cover up human life from the sun and stars.

"The world might be so happy with a little wisdom."

So he thought, pitying the world.

And Molly rode towards him and the Matterhorn. With her was Gloomy Fanny, who still remained gloomy, since she had received him with evident surprise and want of pleasure. Her mother had bidden him not to lose heart, and with that devotion to commonplace and the *cliché* which marked her in her ordinary moments, she reminded him that faint heart never won fair lady. This he received sullenly and in silence. Not even Molly's consent to ride with him gave him any hope. The most devoted sportsman in the world at times has to own that some games cannot be won. Nevertheless, the sun and flying clouds and the keen air pleased him. He was in a new world, the giant Matterhorn was overhead, with the Mischabel over against him.

"It's all pretty steep, ain't it?" he said to Molly as they paused half-way up to the Schwarzsee.

"It's wonderful," said Molly. "I'd like to climb some of them. Would n't you, Lord Laxton?"

"I would if you asked me to," said Gloomy

Fanny. And Molly rode on. She was not very happy. Unkind and unjust as her mother had been to her, she was still her mother. But Thorpe called to her, and she had to go to him, even if the world was between them.

"I ought to speak to Lord Laxton," she kept on saying to herself. She did so at last, when the Schwarzsee Hotel was in sight. She reined in her horse, and so did her cavalier, thinking she wished to look up at the great peak overhead.

"I want to speak to you, Lord Laxton," she said presently.

"Yes, Molly," he said, "what is it?"

Yet he knew.

"It's—no good; I can't," she said. "Oh, don't you understand?"

"I never give in," said Gloomy Fanny.

"Not if—"

She paused, and he looked at her.

"Not if I say there's someone else?" she asked, colouring almost painfully.

"Somebody else who loves you?" asked Fanny.

She nodded.

"Everyone must," he said; "that's nothin'."

"But if I love someone?" she murmured.

"When you get married I stand out," said Fanny, gloomily. "Till then I'm on hand."

"I'm so sorry," she said. "You're so kind and good. Will you hate me?"

He shook his head.

"My little girl, why should I? It can't be helped, you know. Who is he? Is it still this Mr. Thorpe?" he asked. "Your mother as good as told me that was all over."

"Then it's not true," she cried. "I want you to see him, Lord Laxton. I—I believe you'd like him."

Gloomy Fanny stared at her.

"Ain't that askin' a lot?" he demanded, unsteadily.

"Not—not from you," she said. She reached out her hand to him, and Fanny grasped it. Molly spoke rapidly:

"I want you to see him. He's here now very close."

"Where?" asked Gloomy Fanny, staring about him and up at the Matterhorn as if Thorpe might be there.

"Up at this hotel," she said. "He wants to see you, too. I believe you've seen him. He knows you."

"I never met him," said Fanny.

"Oh, yes, you did," she replied.

Even then she saw someone coming down the path from the hotel, and wondered if it was her lover.

"Let us go on," she said. And in another minute she knew that Thorpe came to meet them. He drew near, and she saw his smile, a very grave one. Then he lifted his cap, and stood with it in his hand. She reined up her horse and held out her hand as Laxton ranged up alongside her. She turned to him hurriedly.

"Lord Laxton, this is Mr. Thorpe," she said. "I'd—like you to know each other."

"We do a little already," said Thorpe. And Laxton dismounted.

"So we do," he said. He offered his hand to Thorpe, who took it instantly. The two men looked each other over as if they estimated the qualities of each once again. Thorpe's blue eyes seemed very honest to Laxton, and though he almost hated him, he saw that he was a man. And Thorpe knew that his unsuccessful rival had something in him, something more than a passion for polo.

"Pretty steep that!" said Fanny, nodding at the Matterhorn. "The nearer you get, the steeper it looks."

"Yes," said Thorpe, "I suppose it does."

Molly rode on ahead.

"She's told me," said Gloomy Fanny. "The old lady played it low down on us."

"On you, Lord Laxton," said Thorpe.

"I'll have a little talk with her when I get back," said Gloomy Fanny.

Thorpe was of opinion that this "little talk" would be very unpleasant to Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton. He remembered that Forty had said that Gloomy Fanny, when he was rude, could be very rude indeed. Had he not said something particularly beastly to the impossible Mallow, something that Forty greatly regretted not to be able to remember?

"Has Molly told you that she locked her in her rooms?" asked Thorpe.

"The devil she did!" said Fanny. "I believe she's up to any low game. I always said she was no sportswoman. I'll have a little talk with her when I get back."

They followed Molly in silence to the hotel. Outside it sat Alois and Joseph, smoking. They lifted their caps to Molly, and she smiled at them, for she seemed to know they were with Thorpe. Her lover helped her from her horse, and drew her aside.

"You 'll come across the pass with me?"

He pointed towards the Théodule and the hither side of the vast northern face of the Breithorn, scarred and seamed and frowning. She bowed her head, and he took her hand.

"Italy is over there," he said. "Italy!"

They went back to where Gloomy Fanny stood, biting his short moustache and staring at the dome and wedge of the King of the Valley.

"Lord Laxton," said Thorpe.

"Yes," said Fanny.

"We're going across the Théodule together, Molly and I—across that pass."

He pointed to it, and Gloomy Fanny nodded and paused before he spoke.

"I—I don't blame either of you," he said. "I'd do the same in your place. You'll—you'll play the game, Thorpe?"

"Oh, yes," said Thorpe, quite simply, understanding clearly what he meant. They stood together in silence for a minute.

"Tell me where you want your things sent," said Fanny at last. "I'll see she plays the game, too. I'll have a little talk with her when I get back."

Thorpe wrote on a card, "Thorpe, Hotel Isotta, Genoa," and Gloomy Fanny looked at

it, twitching his eyebrows as if in pain, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Good-bye," he said. He shook hands with Thorpe, and kissed Molly's hand. There were tears in her eyes; the sunlight danced before her strangely.

"You've been very good to me," she murmured.

"I ain't blaming either of you," said Gloomy Fanny; "not a bit. Someone had to win and someone had to lose. And as I was sayin', I'll have a little talk with your mother."

He turned away and beckoned to the man with the horses to follow him. He never turned round.

"He's a good chap," said Thorpe gravely.

But Molly was in tears.

Before they left the hotel she wrote a short letter to her mother. And then just at noon they crossed over the Glacier and climbed towards the summit of the pass. For a very long time Molly could not speak. For this was a strange and great adventure, and even in her joy there was grief, and the world seemed no less sad than beautiful. But presently the keenness of the air, its bright qualities of strength and

clearness and the majesty of the mountains drew her from herself.

"It 's magical," she said.

In truth it was divine. On their right was the huge pyramid of the Matterhorn, a wonder and glory, with the Dent d'Herens, and on the left the vast dome of Monte Rosa. Behind them when they rested she saw the broad, feathered lance-head of the Weisshorn, the treacherous cornices of the Ober-Gabelhorn, and away to the northeast the spear of the Täsch, the high uplifted crown of the Dom and the starry summits of the Oberland. And far away to the east was the white cirque of snow that stretched from Monte Rosa to the Alphubel and beyond it. Alois and Joseph named each peak for her, and said that on this one and on that they had been with Mr. Thorpe. And Alois especially showed her the Rimfischhorn, because he said it was like a "rimpf," as everyone allowed. And when she asked what a "rimpf" might be, he said it was like the mountain, fluted, you know, just like that, which was very satisfactory and a joy to everyone.

And presently they came toward the summit of the pass and the wind blew suddenly, and before they knew it the sun went out. So they

hurried and came to the pass in a little snow-storm. Out of it and beyond it Molly saw Italy shining, and she cried out, as all folks must when they see the Graian Alps and a glimpse of the Plains of Piedmont. She clung to her lover, and rejoiced with fear, and then hastened, for the wind roared till the sun came again. Yet below them was the Val Tourmanche and easy safety, and Breuil like an egg in a basket. And soon the snow was again above them, whirling in dun clouds, and rain fell. But once more the sun very suddenly conquered, for such storms are born in the mountains, and below no man may know of them, though their brothers perish where the great wind is.

So they came down to Breuil, and Alois and Joseph bade them good-bye. And Thorpe promised to return soon and bring his wife with him to learn some of their craft and the mountains which were already very dear to her, as dear as they were wonderful.

Then Molly and Thorpe took horse and rode down to Valtourmanche, out of the great hills. And the night came down at last, and there was peace about them, though the snow fell on the slopes of Monte Rosa, and on the

Théodule, and on the rocks of the Matterhorn, until midnight.

In the morning there came a telegram to Thorpe from Molly's mother. It had been sent from Breuil, perhaps because of Joseph or Alois, who had heard of it and had sent it to Valtourmanche on the chance of its finding Thorpe. It said that she hoped Thorpe would be honourable and marry Molly at once. And almost before he had read it there came another to the same effect, sent direct to Valtourmanche, and the post office there found him. And Thorpe smiled, perhaps not without some joy. Molly looked out of her window and saw him walking to and fro in the sunlight, and was glad to think he looked so happy, and that she had made him happy. And he kissed his hand to her.

Then a carriage came to the hotel for them to go to Chatillon. She heard the inn-keeper speak to Thorpe.

"Shall I tell Madame the carriage is ready, Monsieur?" asked the inn-keeper.

"Yes, please do," said Thorpe. But before they went he walked to the post office and sent Mrs. Fletcher-Mytton a telegram. It was brief but had point in it:

“With reference to the subject mentioned in your two telegrams shall consult Molly.”

THE END

