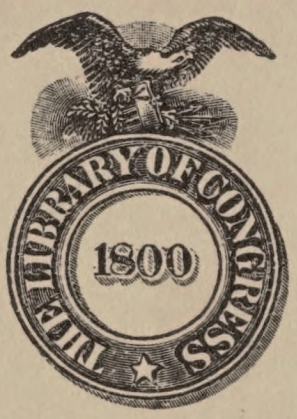
# Bellamy

Elinor Mordaunt

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BELLAMY

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BY

ELINOR MORDAUNT

Author of "Simpson," "Lu of the Ranges,"
"The Garden of Contentment," etc.

"IT IS ILL WORK ENDEAVOURING TO MAKE A
SILK PURSE OUT OF A SOW'S EAR"

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BELLAMY

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## CHAPTER I

NOT many miles from the smoke-blanketed Potteries — which lie panting with a foul breath night and day, winking strained and bloodshot eyes, seeming strangers to sleep, wallowing there, in the midst of that beautiful country, like Sly the Tinker in the Duke's bed — there is another sort of town: grey where they are black: austere and aloof: spreading itself out over a hill-top, set in a wide valley among other and greater hills, with all the inviolate air of a mountain town.

For despite the fact that one looks down upon Edge, from the broken rocky moorland and wooded heights which encompass it, yet still it seems to soar; holding its very skirts aloof from the polluting breath of Burslem and Stoke, Stockport, Newcastle and other unredeemable places.

In the higher parts of the town, around the market-place, the streets are irregular, bearing all the charm of age. A charm which finds its focus in the old grey church, with its sloping disused churchyard, at the lower corner of which — against what is now called Little France — a handful of French prisoners are laid to rest; the officers, with all the decorum of the eighteenth century, some little distance from their men.

Those were troublesome days. But now the dead, French and English alike, lie at peace beneath the crowded grey stones; while the living — who sit each evening on the circular seat beneath the ancient lime tree, and look away across the valley to the sunset — seem as blankly peaceful as their neighbours. Being, for the most part, people who have already grown to that age when there is a curious feel-

ing of companionship for the stationary inhabitants of such places.

But further down the hill, and more particularly towards the south and east, one reaches a different world. Here are narrow streets of unredeemed ugliness. Row upon row of little houses with no single jutting gable or porch. Squatting there in silence all through the day, while the people are at the mills and the children at school: thin lipped, narrow and appallingly decent, close one against the other as the slats of a Venetian blind. So alike that one could not imagine a diverse thought in any one of them.

There may be crimes in Edge. But they are of the silent, the inward order; like the quiet, insistent socialism, which is — for the most part — more felt than heard. But there is nothing desperate: none of those frantic tragedies of love and hatred that one may meet with in any little Italian town, with just such struggling, rough-paved streets, climbing just such a little hill among other hills.

Almost at the same proud apex as the market proper, with its grey stone and black and white timbered houses, is the cattle market. And at the top left-hand corner of this, splaying out of it like the fingers from the palm of a hand, are more of these narrow streets; while at the angle formed by two of them — fronting the cattle market and backed by the towering edifice of one of the largest mills — there once stood a small general dealer's shop: with a window at either side; one looking down North Street, the other into court number five; a little triangular living-room and scullery being packed in at the back, along with an apologetic stairway, which squirmed its way almost unseen, to the upper story.

Here was the best bedroom, fronting the court, and the parlour fronting North Street. And above these the attics; one used as a sort of store, and the other — at the time of which I write, and since he topped his fifth year — as Walter Bonnet Bellamy's bedroom.

One side of this attic was so low that, even at his first promotion to it, he could not stand upright; while before he was fourteen the highest side missed the top of his head by a bare four inches: which left him at five foot one and a half.

But this was measuring him by his actual bodily height at that time — and he did not attain to his full growth till later in life than most young men of his own class, who seem to get nipped off, as it were, at sixteen or seventeen — for Walter Bellamy's spirit soared far above the entire house, while as yet it was only necessary for him to lower his head the merest fraction, in order to stand upright at the lowest side of the attic.

It had soared first when he discovered the joy of making people "believe things" by transmuting the commonplace and punishable pain of green apples — eaten surreptitiously and hurriedly before evening service — to the stirring of the Spirit. And of not only imposing on his mother, but so nearly imposing on himself, that one-half of him was present, as a wildly enthusiastic audience, while the other was wrung with supplication and prayer: to the wonder and edification of the congregation who entreated the Lord, to "come down —'ere, come right down 'ere"— and behold this second infant Samuel.

Walter never quite forgot the fashion in which that one-half of him still soared, palpitating and triumphant, as he was led home by his mother's hand, stared at in wonder as one who had testified, while the other half applauded and laughed, doubling itself up with unholy glee.

"That ain't nothing," Willie Clarke declared next morning in the school yard, when young Bellamy's boasting became unendurable. "Any 'un could do the like o' that; yer shud just 'ear me testify."

"Do it then," shouted Walter, very red in the face. "Do it then." And "Testify, testify!" yelled the other pupils.

But Willy merely stood on one foot; rubbed the heel of the other up and down the calf of his leg and said nothing. For the Infant Samuel could both fight and testify, and Willy could do neither.

The second step upwards was when he realised the power of a stare. A stout old lady had run into him in a crowd in the market-place one Wednesday evening, trod on both his toes and then abused him; to be met with a stare of such cold contempt that she actually apologised.

Another child might not have realised the reason for this sudden change of front, but little Walter Bellamy had felt

the widening of his eyeballs, the sudden stiffening of his entire face. He could not have put it into words, but he knew how it was done: did it again and again and tested its powers. It was a particularly unchildish achievement, but there was never anything really child-like about him. When he was a baby he was as enigmatic as an infant Buddha. When he lengthened out in slim boyhood he was like a faun; wholly pagan in his impulses, his reservations, his sudden abandonments to the sheer joy of life, his utter conscienceless.

His third step upwards was achieved when he realised the value of silence. He was only just eight when this occurred.

It happened that he was having his tea, in the casual way in which meals were taken "up at Bellamy's"— where the most intimate and private things of life were split by the clang of the shop bell — while his mother busied herself making a pair of knickerbockers, of which he was in urgent need.

She had got them cut out and tacked all ready, and had just started one seam when the needle of her machine broke.

"Why couldn't it a' gone an' done that a'fore; all this while?" she enquired bitterly, as though the machine were sentient and self-propelling, and might in common decency have worked off its ill-humour before she touched it. Then — still complaining of "things," which seemed to have a peculiarly nagging way of treating her as they treated no one else — she inserted a fresh needle and started the machine again, finished a whole seam, regardless of the rasping hiccough with which it progressed, and drew out her work to find a black welter of heavily looped stitches.

"If that ain't like my luck? I'll never not get 'em done, and fer yer to wear them ter-morrow; with all I 'ave ter do an' all. Did yer ever see the like o' that?"

She appealed to Walter who regarded the garment held out for his inspection with cold distaste. He hated the acid smell of the cheap serge, and the unbleached calico with which it was lined — each seam stitched in one and each a torture. He did not want the knickers finished, he preferred his easy rags: he could always boast of his "best" at home, but with his "best" on, he could make no show whatever.

Despite this, however, his pride of knowledge triumphed over all else.

Without a word he dropped from his chair; knelt down beside the machine, and began to loosen the screw which held the needle.

"What art thee arter now? Dwarn't thee go tamperin' with that machine," interposed his mother.

But without taking the faintest notice of her words the boy removed the needle. Turned it round and round in his fingers examining it carefully; replaced it, screwed it tight, and returning to his place at the littered table, dragged his lesson books towards him, remarking:—"It'ull go now."

With a sniff of incredulity, merely to show him his mistake, Mrs. Bellamy ripped out the loose stitches, raised the foot of the machine, slipped the work under it, turned the handle; and followed in dazed surprise, the smooth, humming progress of the needle.

At the end of the seam she cut the work loose and carried it to the door that she might see better, hoping for the worst. She liked Wally to appear as a genius before all the world — including the Lord — and a fool before her; feeling that it made him more completely her own. For with no power of winning affection she was eternally famished for it.

But there was no fault to be found. The stitch was regular and unbroken.

"What didst thee do ter it?" she demanded in amazement.

"You'd got the groove at the wrong side, that's all," answered the boy without raising his head.

"How dis'st thee knaw?"

"Oi knawed."

That was all.

Later on he heard his mother telling some one over the back-yard fence:—"The things that there child knawed, without any telling, was past natcher;" and hugged himself, knowing of whom they spoke.

It did not seem necessary to tell any one that only the night before, playing in Jane Irwin's kitchen, the same thing had happened, when Jane's father had been appealed to — wrested away from the giddy delights of leaning against a post, outside the public-house at the corner — and had,

naturally enough, sworn at his wife, or " any danged 'ooman as doesn't knaw which side ter put the groove o' th' needle."

Walter did not know *which* side. He merely jumped to the conclusion that, as Mrs. Bellamy had undoubtedly set it in the wrong side, the reverse must be right.

Next week he was put in a hole by some other woman, right off at Battle Green, sending her little boy to ask him to come and set her machine right for her also.

Merely as a means of gaining time, he said he didn't understand any but Singer's machines, and by some happy chance it was not a Singer. On which he declared no other machines were worth bothering over, and so went his proud way, with his glory no wit diminished.

He even got over the obvious commonness, the palpable home-madeness of his new knickers.

" Ma says as 'ow they're good enough fur Edge, an' I'm ter save mer tailor-mades till I go ter Stoke ter me gran'-mither's."

Walter's father and mother were both orphans. But once he invented a grandmother he had to stick to her. Though even then having created her himself, he was better off than other children with real grandparents, in that he could do as he pleased with her. Make her what he liked. Cause her to keep the biggest sweetie shop in Stoke, and wear purple roses in her hat; and have a little boy who had grown up to be a big mill-owner, " same as Morrison up street." If he had known of any higher rank, the fictitious uncle should have had it.

Morrison, the original founder of the firm where Walter's father worked, was the wealthiest, and the oldest mill-owner in Edge, and used this fact as a sort of battering-ram, a species of steam-hammer, or punching-machine against all humble folk. Not that he really meant unkindly — as long as the workers kept their place, and he seemed to have a private understanding with the Almighty as to what that was — but because his very kindness was of such a quality as to cause the recipient to writhe with shame.

## CHAPTER II

BELLAMY senior was a weaver. His father and mother were both of French origin, and it was from his maternal grandmother that young Walter got his second name of Bonnet — pronounced Bonné. Hardly any one in Edge can speak French, but when a name is French they keep the accent of it pure: which they would not, or could not, do in Stoke. Just before young Walter left school, however, the study of that language was added to the already gorged curriculum; and he took to it like a duck to water. But he did not tell his parents that he was learning; he simply stuffed himself with words, or short sentences, and shot them out at the most impressive moments: regardless of the sense, which did not matter, for nobody knew what they meant.

"Comment vous portez-vous? La sœur a mon bon canif, le tasse est sur la table. Le chat, le chien, le beurre, la maison." And such like, all in a breath.

When asked what that "bletherim" was about, he replied that it was French; and on being further pressed to know how he learnt it, merely answered coldly — with that odd lift of his chin, that blankly indifferent look in his dark eyes: —

"Oh! it just cum."

The extraordinary part of it all was that no one ever doubted it was French as he said, though for all they knew it might have been absolute gibberish. But few people ever did doubt Bellamy: that was what made his pretensions so fatally easy.

Only Jane really knew and understood him. She learnt French in the same class. But for all that she would not give him away: though she happened to be walking home from chapel with the Bellamys, when the conversation which I have recorded, took place. For Walter had no fear of being betrayed by Jane; clearly as he realised that she saw through him.

Later, however, she took him to task.

He was loitering about with a group of other boys at the dip of Little France, quite a long way from his own home and possible calls to Sunday school, when Jane passed him on her demure way back to tea: paused, looked back and called to him.

"Walter Bellamy! I want ter speak ter yer."

"A'right," answered young Bellamy and joined her, not the least afraid of being laughed at for "goin' along o' a soppy girl;" his last boast being that he had learnt Ju-Jitsu from a Japanese nobleman who boarded with his grandmother in Stoke: an assertion which he was never called upon to prove, the name being enough.

"Why didn't thee tell thwar mither as thwart learnin' French at school?" she demanded.

At that time Jane was a slim person of eleven with her hair done in two tight plaits turned up and tied with a black bow at the back of either ear. If some impish hairdresser had done it thus while she slept on Saturday night it could not have been better; for the whole of her face tilted upwards, from the small creamy chin, the ridiculous nose and the dark lashes to the softly pencilled brows with the odd little twist at the ends of them. It was a face of which every curve said, "kiss me;" and was then given the lie by the gravity of the wide grey eyes.

Jane's eyes burnt like two steady, never waning moons in her delicate, pastel tinted face.

Walter Bellamy's danced like Will-o'-th'-Wisps: — that is, when he was not practising his famous stare.

"Why should I tell 'em?"

"Why not? 'Tain't honest."

"Honest, la!" That's the way he said it: where the other boys would have said "lor" or "Good Lord!"

"You'll burn in Hell, Walter Bellamy! sure as sure."

Jane stood facing him. Her small hands in their white cotton gloves clasped on the top of her umbrella, for it had threatened rain, her grave eyes full on him, her quaint little face holding both wonder and disapproval; and yet withal an unwilling admiration. That sort of admiration which rendered her never quite free of Walter Bellamy, then or at any other time of her life. For despite — or perhaps be-

cause of — her understanding of him she was ceaselessly fascinated: knowing that his complete marvellousness had nothing to do with Divine Inspiration but, more wonderful still — was the outcome of sheer cleverness of an almost diabolical and most perilous kind.

"Burn in Hell, all shrivelled up for ever and ever, without so much as a drawp of warter ter quench thwar thirst." She piled on the agony for her own edification and strengthening, for somehow Heaven seemed to have grown rather thin with no Walter to share it. But Walter scarcely seemed to be listening. He was swinging to and fro on his toes and heels, his rather prominent dark eyes raised to the rough outline of moorland which hung frowning above them.

"It's foine," he said dreamily: "with yer Sunday shoen on ter bend an' swing yer foot. When once I'm in work I'll never not wear clogs no more."

"But why did yer go fur ter say it?" persisted Jane; still firm on the subject of the French language.

"Oh! Oi dwarn't knaw. It's queer, Jane:" he turned to her with an air of engaging candour; "everything as is really an' truly, is that dull. An' things that one gets out o' one's head — oh they're different; they maekes 'un feel all a tiptoed up like these 'ere Sunday shoen."

"But why didn't yer say as the lady teacher taught you? — What 'ull yer do now if yer get a prize, as she said yer 'ud? Ye'll be fine an' caught there, Walter Bellamy."

"Oi warn't, I'll put 'un back o' chimney. Oi dwarn't care fur prizes, silly books as no 'un wants fur ter read," he answered loftily. Though the thought flicked him. What was the good of gaining a prize that one could not show? But for all that he had been right. It was a stupid thing for a boy who had once possessed a French grandfather and grandmother to sit down and learn the language out of a book like any one else. It was far more exciting to pretend that it had just "come" as a sort of divine influx, or was part of that something else which the French teacher had spoken of when Walter made one of his characteristic gestures with his hands. For a moment or two his mind fumbled for the word, and then he got it —"hereditary."

At first he thought of offering this new theory to Jane;

but at her next words:—"To say it comed! It beats me how folks believe yer!" he rejected the idea and returned to his original statement.

"It comed! I said as how it comed, an' it's gospel truth; lashins more comed than teacher ever learnt Oi, lashins an' leavins!" He swung himself joyously to and fro on his toes — during the week-days so tightly imprisoned in brass-tipped wood:—"'Side that it comed into yed o' Inspector ter send taecher, an' taecher comed ter Edge. If she brought the French ter me, it comed; anyways it comed." Jane's head was reeling:—"It comed as sure as that there fire comed when Abraham was shut off from offering up Isaac."

"Walter Bellamy! That there's the Bible, ain't yer 'shamed o' yer'sen!"

But the boy's eyes, which had been vaguely fixed on the heights, were suddenly filled with a purpose. It was the thought of Isaac bound upon the altar which did it; for, as always, he had seen the whole thing in a mental flash. There were altar stones still — not more than three miles away — on the height, where the Danes had offered up human sacrifice.

"Let's go for a walk up along the Hanging Rock."

"What are yer talkin' on? It's three miles good, an' it's gone four now, close on tea-time."

"Who cares for tea?" retorted Walter, and flung off across the lower path of the churchyard: then threw over his shoulder:—"you needn't come if yer afear'd. I don't want no silly ninnies wid me. There's kirk-grims up along the Rocks."

Jane knew this. Knew also that in addition to kirk-grims there were hell-horses and headless riders who made a horror of that wild moorland which overhung the peaceful town, with its thin film of Sabbath smoke. But for all that she followed.

Jane never forgot that walk; sensing, for the first time, something wild and terrible in nature: alien to the monotonous, toil-ordered life of the little town.

Walter Bellamy was touched by it also, but to a different tune: realising it as a setting to himself, a swirl of circling

wind-driven clouds in the midst of which he felt himself the hub.

It was a long pull, all up hill. At first a suavely winding road, then a rough track, then a scramble up to the top of the great overhanging rocks which edge the moor, menacing the valley.

By the time the two children topped them — Walter dragging Jane by the wrist, his chin high, his eyes ablaze, already living through all that he would have to tell to his schoolfellows — the west was a flame of scarlet and gold, and the remainder of the sky a piled mass of purple and leaden grey clouds, which swept great shadows, like the advancing battalion of a divided host, across the moors.

Walter had read the story of the struggle between Danes and Britains, in the history of Edge at the public library, and now his memory, snatching back at it, remoulded it to the present. The greater clouds, with their heavy massed shadows were the Danes, the light skirmishing shadows were the Britains — running low, skirling with the wind. And among these, now on one side, now on the other, the wild moor folk slid shrieking: the kirk-grims and goblins, the ghostly horse-men and hell-hounds, witches and war-locks: while one long hurrying shadow, heading straight towards where the children stood — poised upon the huge rock, beneath which lay an infinite stretch of mist-haunted valley — there was the phantom coach, which plies nightly across the moor, in search of just such belated wanderers.

"It wur Clowes the tailor as told me 'o 'un: he saw 'un with his own eyes, he did: fair awful it was too. 'Ee, that 'ud make yer yair stand on end fur sure, Jane Irwin. That 'ud make yer throw a fit, it 'ud!" cried Walter, sing-songing above the wind, the crest of his dark hair swept back, erect on his forehead. "'Un wur drawn by six horses, an' hound dogs ran along o' it. An' the man as draw 'un, he carried the reins in his one yand, an' his yead under t'other arm — all bluggy it wur; and his eyes glimming. 'Get 'ee up an' 'ave a ride,' he says ter Clowes: 'get 'ee up an' 'ave a ride.' What will yer do if he come an' says that ter yer, Jane Irwin? Clowes he be a mon, a grown mon, an' yet he throwed a fit he wur that skeered, an' there he lay till morn-

in'. Gummy — but don't Oi wish 'ee'd cum ter me, Oi'd not throw no fit, not Oi. If he'd come ter me now, and say 'ave a ride along o' Oi ——"

"Fool — Walter Bellamy! fool!" The chill wind beat upon little Jane: flattening out her white frock against her back. It was cold and strange up there on the height — just such a place as that to which Satan had led the Lord to tempt him — and there was something about Walter Bellamy which seemed terribly suited to the place, that crest of dark hair of his was almost a horn — but still her sense of logic held; and after all what devil had there ever been with but one horn.

"How could 'un talk ter yer, yer great fool, or ter tailor Clowes neither, if his yead was under his yarm? Such silliness!"

Walter Bellamy leant forward: either he had whitened from the effect of his imagination, or the gathering twilight had sapped all the colour from his cheeks: —"'Un talks out o' the yole whur — whur his yead wur chopped off," he shrieked; "'un makes a great round yole like this." He opened his mouth, and drew it into a circle with stiffened lips. Then suddenly flung round towards the downward path. "He's comin'! he's comin'! look behind yer, Jane, he's comin'," he cried. And, wild with fear, without even waiting to look behind her, Jane followed him: scrambling and stumbling, falling and bruising hands and knees, picking herself up and pushing on again.

It was only Walter Bellamy's foolishness; she knew it. But the minister had been preaching on Hell that very day — on the graves giving up their dead: and now — with the hurrying clouds, the wind, and gathering darkness — the moon seemed bursting with a fearsome pageant of past life.

And this was not all. Walter Bellamy was frightened too.

All at once his imagination had taken the bit between its teeth. The Death Coach was really there; he could hear the wheels, the panting of the horses, the short yapping breath of the dogs, and catching Jane by the arm he dragged her on; pulling her to her feet when she fell, his face white amid the darkness. For the whole moor was alive, and at their heels. The distorted thorn trees waving wild arms; the gorse bushes, hunched together, running low beneath their shields.

He was terrified, really terrified: yet with an exhilarating fear, which held in its heart a wave of triumph.

No other boy in Edge had ever braved such a foe — for even then, still running, he forgot that he ran — confronted the headless driver: dared him to his oddly placed face: "sauced" him, without even a thought of throwing a fit.

"An' Oi said ter 'un,"— Jane heard him next morning, holding forth in the school yard, to an admiring and awe-stricken audience: "Oi dwarn't want none o' yer dirty old coaches — Oi ain't got no time fur any o' yer broken down owd mokes; t'aint likely, when my own gran'maither, along at Stoke, has two motor-cars o' 'er very own."

"An' what did 'un say then, Wally? Tell us what 'un said then."

"He didn't not say nothing — he was fair sneeped. Him an' his rotten old coach!" answered Walter contemptuously. Then his expression changed; he gave one furtive glance round, as if half afraid of what he was going to say, and his voice dropped; "but the chap inside ——"

"Yer didna say that there wur no chap inside."

"Oi can't say everything all at once, can Oi, stupid?"

"Oi dwarn't believe there was no chap. It's all one o' Wally Bellamy's loys. Oi dwarn't believe that 'ee never wur up the Rocks at all," put in a scornful voice.

"Yer dwarn't then," Walter flung round with blazing eyes. "Well yer just ask my maither; an' ask owd Jimmy Clarke, an' Maester Irwin as was comin' out wid lanterns ter look fur us. Jest yer ask 'un ——"

"But tell us who was inside. Dwarn't mind 'im, Wally. Tell us who was inside," interrupted a chorus of voices.

"Oi'll not be talkin' ter folk as dwarn't believe what Oi seys."

"But us all believe. Dwarn't thee mind 'un, dwarn't yer listen to 'un, Wally. 'Oo was 'un inside?"

"Well, Oi didn't not see 'im over clear, he just spyed out o' window. But he had horns on' yead, all long an' twisty ——"

"Loike a cow?"

"No — them's straight, silly! All twisty like a ram's:" Walter gave a descriptive gesture with his hands as he spoke. "An' his face was all pale and shiny. An' 'ee seys ——"

"What did 'ee say? Tell we what 'un said, Wally."

"He said—'I beg your pardon, Maister Bellamy,' 'ee says—'moy mistake,' 'ee says, says 'ee. 'It wur another boy as Oi wur arter.'"

"Waat boy?" The little ring of listeners, glancing anxiously round at each other with a faint attempt to grin, gave a thin, tittering laugh of pure nervousness, as Walter paused—bent his head a little, raised his eyes, and stared gloomily round. Then spoke; the words dropping out of him slowly, one by one.

"A boy o' Edge—a boy who ain't half a mile, nor a quarter neither from 'ere."

"Which boy?" it was a mere whisper, as their eyes followed Walter Bellamy's from face to face: his very slowness setting them all on edge.

It was very well done—quickly and yet effectively thought out—for it was not until the dark eyes had scrutinised every face in the closely pressed ring of boys, that they reached that of the one who had dared to doubt him.

Then the stare fixed and hardened. And, raising his hand, Walter pointed for a moment in silence: flung round upon his heel, pushed his way through the awed circle, and marched, head in air, back to the schoolroom.

## CHAPTER III

IT was Anniversary Day, and the Primitive Methodist chapel — standing alongside the great mill which backed Walter Bellamy's home, permeating all he did and thought with its whirr and hum — was packed to suffocation.

The heat was stifling. The place reeked of humanity; the women in their tight best gowns, the men in broadcloth, diffusing that peculiar sickly odour which hangs about clothing which has been put away warm and kept from the air.

The back of the chapel, always dim, was as dark as though it were the evening service, for a heavy thunder-storm was brewing, and the sky outside black. From where he sat Walter Bellamy could see nothing but row upon row of ghostly white faces which might have been heads just cut off and balanced along the backs of the pews. Or rows of beads hung on a string; or merely blobs of candle grease.

Walter's imagination played round the idea. If they were cut off they were not beheaded, just sliced from the front; for there appeared to be no depth or back to them. At the best they were merely masks.

Oddly enough while the white-faced men showed out vividly, the red ones were scarcely seen. Indeed, if he had not known where they all sat he could not have believed they were there; for they had completely dropped out: breaking the continuity by their apparent absence.

To the right of the preacher's desk was the organ, to the left the choir. The light was clearer here and oddly livid, showing up the flowers in the girls' hats; warming the faces of the young men — already pallid and stooping from the looms — into an appearance of ruddiness; while full in the light, banked up in front of the preacher like a parterre of flowers, sat the children.

Little girls in white dresses, run with pink and blue ribands; the tiniest round and rosy, the elder delicately exotic;

true children of an indoor race, with fine pale skins and red mouths, thrown like a pomegranate blossom against their white faces. Fair hair — light brown, golden, flaxen, sandy, auburn — the whole punctuated by just one wistful dark face, and one pair of large dark eyes, shaded at either side by curtains of dark hair — and culminating — as though nature had run the gamut of golds, and reached, at last, something so fair that it was just not silver — in Jane Irwin; her hair a shade lighter than her piquant upturned face, with its grave, grey eyes.

On the same platform, to the right of the girls, were the boys. Upheld by the mere fact that they were boys: and by nothing else. With no pride of dress, no beauty or dignity. Self-conscious, and shamefaced; save for Walter Bellamy, triumphantly at ease in their midst.

He was wearing a ridiculous costume, which — in the cut of the open front, showing a white dicky embroidered with an anchor — had evidently begun by thinking itself a sailor suit: then debouched into a pleated tunic, which was an insult to any boy of ten; the whole thing being topped with a celluloid collar and plaid tie.

But no absurdity of apparel could make Walter absurd. He was too vital. It was as if his personality was a quivering flame which dazzled the eye, held the attention; and, even with the most trivial, left no thought for dress. But, after all, the whole congregation was absurd in its ridiculous lack of congruity. The angles of the women's hats at odds with their noses, and the disfiguring seams of the men's coats, the super-torturing of their poor bodies, already sufficiently tortured by the needs of civilisation.

From where he sat Walter could see Tom Rice, who was now forty, and who had spent the whole of his long day, since he was sixteen, in "picking": sitting on a little bench bent double over a stretched skein of silk, removing every morsel of loose fluff with a pair of tweezers.

His eyes were very red, showing the only colour in his face; his chest scarcely the span of an ordinary man's palm. Walter Bellamy carrying on the comparison of the blob of wax visualised him as similar to one of those nobbly, attenuated formations which run down the side of a candle, caricaturing just such a man naked.

His thoughts began to run wild into all sorts of grotesque imagery. A feeling of triumphant elation bubbled up in him like a geyser. The feeling — as he often declared to Jane, the one intimate he allowed himself — that he must do something or "bust." An impulse most apt to beset him when others were holding the front place on the stage of his little life: not because he felt hurt or slighted, but because of his immense sense of superiority.

Now it was the preacher — a speciality imported in honour of the day — whom he felt convinced he could better. A swart visaged man, with greedy mouth and thick lips which he smacked over the sins of others: mounting eternal damnation with a sucking inward breath. A long drawn "A — a — ah —" of relish. Walter's ire rose at every word, he could have shot the whole congregation for their groaning "ayes." To be taken in by such a poor performance.

"Cum — dwarn, oh Lord —" prayed the minister in a rasping Staffordshire accent. "Cum dwarn an' witness us poor worms how us doth writhe and torment oursen under the burden o' our sins; every mon an' 'ooman, every gurl an' lod among us, bound straight fer 'Ell excepting Thwar wilt cum down an' save us. Ter 'Ell where the wurm dieth not an' the fire be not quenched."

"Aye — aye — good Lord, cum down."

Walter squirmed. Let them pray. If the Lord were the sort to allow them to fizzle through Eternity — a mental picture of his mother toasting kippers on a fork flashed through his brain — then He was not likely to be touched by any of their "yowling." Rather to be pleased as Walter himself would have been. Saying as Walter would have said: —"I'll larn yer."

"We've gotten all us desarves, more nor us desarves; an' yet us goes a'whoring arter the scarlet 'ooman o' sin. 'Er as is dyed in a vat o' sin; crimson as blood: 'er we follows."

"Aye — aye!" cried the worshippers with a long-drawn moaning assent: swaying themselves from side to side, leaning forward with their elbows on their knees. Again it seemed to Walter that the pews were hung with strings of beads, of which someone had tweaked the end, setting them all a'swing.

It was getting very dark, but the minister's prayer was extemporary, and no one thought of a light.

"Purify us, dear Lord, purify us. Scour our yearts, dear Lord, that we may be purified o' our sins."

"Aye, aye, purify us, good Lord."

"That is all that us seeken. That yer come right down 'ere along o' we, an' purify we; even as th' yarn be purified in the washin'."

"Aye! aye!"

"We dwarn't ask fur riches . . ."

"Naw, naw ——"

"We dwarn't ask fur power."

"Naw, naw."

"We've gotten all we wants, more than we wants o' Thy bounty. We dwarn't ask Thee for nwart, dear Lord, as th' world can gie us."

"It's a loy!"

The children were crouched on the platform, bent forward like their elders — elbows on knees. Though the girls had been laughing at each other from among their falling tresses, and through their laced fingers, and the boys playing "footy" and fidgeting, it had all been outward decorum till Walter Bellamy's voice broke the silence, with its amazing declaration:

"It's a loy!"

"'Ush, 'ush! Yark at 'im!" The white faces swung forward each punctuated by an open mouth.

Walter thrilled. Once more he held the stage. He flung out his hands almost into the faces of the two boys who still crouched on either side of him.

"We ain't got what we want, an' we ain't contented, else we wouldn't not be tryin' fur better jobs. Us wants great foine 'ouses like Morrison's, an' motor-cars an' foine clothes an' ter go ter the picture pallises every noight. Gawd dwarn't give us all we wants. 'E don't do 'alf as it's up ter Yim ter do, so there! Why 'e even let's it rain a' Sundays!"

A sibilant hush swept through the chapel, broken by a subdued crackle of exclamations. "Lord a' mercy. The lod's daft. 'Oo is it? Walter Bellamy — Walter Bellamy." The high whisper of his name was like wine to Walter.

"The lod's daft! Turn 'im out. Where's 'is mither? Oh, Lord, oh, Lord — it's devil for sure. Devil's in lod."

The excitement roused by the minister's prayer had been merely mechanical to this.

Then suddenly when the tension was at its height the storm burst. There was a flame of lightning; a sudden crash of thunder and several women screamed.

Walter could see his mother's face illumined by the flash. It looked like a whisp of overwrung dish-cloth. What was the good of saying God gave every one everything that they could wish for; when the silk was so rotten that it broke at every stroke of his father's loom, and his mother was always complaining, and the shop was full of stench and flies; and Jane's brother had that sore on his hip, and his —Walter's — one penny had slipped down between the cracks of the Sunday-school floor.

"We dwarn't get nawt we wants, so what's the good o' yowlin' an' pertendin'?" There was another flash of lightning, another roar of thunder, following like a Greek chorus on Walter's words.

The choirmaster, who sat on the front seat to lead the singers, dived beneath the rail, and began to climb the temporary stand; pushing his way among the children who were too engrossed — turning in their seats and staring up at the rebel — to move aside for him.

There was still a clear moment. Walter Bellamy stood on his tiptoes swinging joyously to and fro in his Sunday boots.

"We ain't got nothing we want for all our yowlin' and prayin'. An' we won't get nothing we want. I've asked God scores upon scores o' times fur a bike. An' what der yer think 'E said? 'Go ter 'Ell — go ter 'Ell.'"

The boy's voice had risen to a triumphant chant, he was drunken with his own imagery.

At that moment the choirmaster got him. First by his leg, then by one arm; but he wrenched himself momentarily free, his bony shoulder, in its drab singlet, out between the sailor's blouse and the dicky.

"An' now Oi'm goin' fur ter ask Satan — Satan!"

The choirmaster had him. Tucked his head beneath his arm, nearly suffocating him: dragged him from the stand —

mowing down the parterre of flower-like children in his progress — then along the side aisle to the door.

But once there, Wally, by the simple process of biting his captor's arm, got his head loose.

"Satan. Three cheers fur auld Satan," he shrieked: and could be heard shrieking as he was propelled violently down the stone stairs and kicked into the street; where the sudden rain poured in a deluge.

Any one else would have ended their career as the Infant Samuel once and for all by such an exhibition. It was like young Bellamy to throw away all the patient work of months. But it was also like his luck that the performance merely strengthened, instead of weakening, his position.

All through that service the people had scant thought left for the preacher. They were immersed in terror: shaken to their depths by Walter's outburst. Possessed moreover by a fearful admiration and wonder at the thought that the devil had actually entered into one of their own: torn him, then and there before their very faces. They would never have put it into words, but it seemed to them that Walter Bellamy must be a person of exceptional importance to be thus distinguished.

The minister spoke of it in his discourse.

"For that one o' our members has been torn by the Devil — like the Gadarene swine, yurling dwarn a steep place into the sea — we offer, dear Lord, our prayer an' supplication; wrestlin' fur the soul o' this lod, clawed upon by Beelzebub."

It wasn't quite literal. Walter had not thrown himself down, the choirmaster had dragged him. But the honour was obvious; for few people were mentioned in the discourse until they were dead.

## CHAPTER IV

LATER on, between the afternoon and evening services, the minister visited the boy's mother; and interviewed Walter, who had been captured and locked in his own room.

Mrs. Bellamy, in the best parlour on the first floor, fidgeted to and fro; straightening her antimacassars: settling the curtains: pulling the blind up and down; while Mrs. Irwin, who was there to offer consolation, clung helplessly to Jane's cool little hand; and Mrs. Clarke with her bonnet-strings unloosed, her knees wide apart and her hands upon them, sat in massive crimson silence. Wally had once said he could carve as good a woman as Mrs. Clarke out of a beet; and he had not been far wrong.

They could hear no voices, only a trampling up and down, and an occasional muffled bang, which was the minister kneeling — carefully on the mat.

"He's wrastlin' with the Lord fur sure," breathed little Mrs. Irwin, her pale face twitching, the tears streaming down her face.

"Never mind, Mither. He loves wrastlin' does Wally," whispered Jane reassuringly.

"Ter think o' flash an' blood o' mine bein' so took," whimpered Mrs. Bellamy, raising the blind again. The storm, hardly sufficient to really clear the air, had passed, and the hard sun shone full into the room; revealing the threadbare pattern of the carpet, the saddle-bag furniture — hazed over with dust — the fly-flecked mirror, its frame swathed in yellow tarlatan, the sagging paper and silver cup that Bellamy had won for sprinting in his youth. "Ter think o' th' lod breakin' out like that, after all th' teachin' an' talkin' as I've given 'im. Never a moment yome but I'm sneeping on yim."

"It was Satan fur sure," ventured Mrs. Irwin.

"Yer right there. It wern't no ordinary naughtiness that

there. It was Satan as comed an' tore 'im. Ain't it just like my luck ter 'ave a son as Satan comes right down to?" She spoke with an air of proud pathos. "I shouldn't wonder if it wur all writ in print in the mag'zin' next month. Anniversary Sunday an' all."

"Them who God loves 'ee chastens," breathed Mrs. Irwin consolingly.

"I'd chasten 'im if 'ee were yon o' moine!" breathed Mrs. Clarke.

"Oh! yer would, would yer. Thank ye fur th' 'int Mrs. Clarke. But if it ain't a rude question," Mrs. Bellamy pulled down the blind with a jerk which expressed her feelings; "may I ask if the devil 'as ever directly concarned 'imsen aben any one o' yourn? Enterin' inter 'im, same as though 'ee were a carakter out o' the Bible: taeken 'im an' tearin' 'im a'fore th' yole congregation?"

"Aye it wur Satan fur sure," said Mrs. Irwin, her small face quivering afresh at the very thought of a quarrel. "'Twern't noways Walter's fault. I knew as something was goin' fur ter yappen; with the goose flesh all down my spine, fair awful it was."

"If it wur naughtiness, same as with other children," went on Mrs. Bellamy proudly; "it 'ud be different; naughtiness yer could deal with." She was standing on tiptoe before the paper-filled fire-place; and lifting her apron she pulled a corner of it tight over one finger, moistened it with her tongue, and removed one of the most prominent fly-marks from the mirror:—"But when the devil 'imself, loike a rampin' roarin' lion comes down to the only son of a poor 'ooman, as might as well be a widow —— Sakes alive, what's that?" she added sharply, as there was a terrific bump in the room above, shaking the walls, setting the glass lustres all a jangle.

For a moment they gathered in silence: filled with horrid pictures of the minister beating the devil out of Wally with his head on the floor. They had all risen, but Jane was the first to return to her place, the little beaded stool she had occupied at her mother's feet.

"It's only Wally," she said, then sighed. "It must be close on tea-time, an' it's drefful 'ot in 'ere." She knew Wally. Whatever happened Wally would be all right.

The bump had been Walter Bellamy dropping on his knees: bending to the powers that be. Generously, superlatively, testifying; calling upon the Lord. Confessing to sins that made the minister's hair stand on end. He had gloried in the "wrastling." Into no other boy in Edge had seven devils ever entered; he could feel them all capering round inside him.

As Mr. Drage wrestled with him he flipped them off one by one, as it were, from the tips of his fingers: could see them plain as plain in all their blackness and wonderful agility.

In the three-storied church of St. Francis at Assisi there is a fresco of the devils being driven up and out from the chimneys of the town where the Saint dwelt. Walter Bellamy might have painted just such another picture had he possessed the craft, for never did devils appear more real; though all the same his subconscious self was doubled up with laughter at the very idea.

He would have gone on "wrastling" if it had not been that he wanted his tea: while it seemed that the minister was getting things altogether too much his own way. So he dropped to his knees with a will — as he did everything else. Such a sudden drop that he fell forward upon his hands; and the last devil tore him and came out of him, and went up the chimney.

No wonder that the ceiling of the room below, the very walls were shaken. In a couple of days his knees were black and blue with bruises. But when Mrs. Bellamy proffered vinegar and brown paper, the Infant Samuel shook his head bravely.

"They don't yurrt, thank yer, Mither," he said, with a beautiful patience. And indeed if they had hurt ten times as much he could have borne it, for no other boy in Edge could show such bruises, such supernatural scars.

Presently they went down to the parlour, and Mrs. Bellamy brought in tea. And they all sat round and held their cups in their hands and spread their handkerchiefs over their knees — just like the gentry.

Walter was very pale; for the histrionic art took it out of him, as it will out of any one who practises it with such abandonment. But he allowed himself to be coaxed to eat

a good many slices of bread and butter and cake, and drank three cups of tea; while Mrs. Irwin was tearfully tender over him, the minister visibly yearned, and all Mrs. Bellamy's scolding served to bring out the wonder of the whole affair. Only Mrs. Clarke said nothing; while Jane sat silent on her little stool, gazing up at Walter with a sort of maternal indulgence.

Walter was made like that. He must seem to be very much better or very much worse than any one else. All men folk told lies. But Walter's lies were beyond the ordinary; it was wonderful how he did it. She was his one accredited friend and was proud of the fact; but though she understood him to the very innermost source of his being, his cleverness never failed to amaze her.

Presently they all went downstairs where they found Mr. Bellamy in the back kitchen, having a jovial meal with a cup of water and a piece of dry bread.

"So you've been tacklin' 'im, 'ave yer, the young varmint!" he said to the preacher, and pulling the boy towards him tweaked his ear. "A limb — that's what 'ee is," he declared with immense pride. "A bit o' a dwarf like 'is father was a'fore 'im. An' loike, as I 'ave no doubt, yer was too, Meyster, in yer young days," he added, and winked at the minister. "Though this 'ere beats creation 'ee do: chronic 'ee is."

"Such a way to go on," complained Mrs. Bellamy later, as she brought down the tea-things, and started on a perfunctory washing-up. "Such a way ter speak ter yer betters. An' that boy as 'as nearly worn the yeart an' soul out o' me. 'E won't respect you any more for all yer spoilin' when 'ee comes ter be growed up. Familiarity breeds contempt; there's no truer sayin' ever said nor that."

"Well, there's not much as is bred without it, me lass, that's sure!" retorted her husband. And lounging to the door he stood there with his hands in his pockets smoking and coughing and chuckling. For there was no doubt about it, he was still a bit of a dog, was Bellamy.

That evening Walter insisted on going to chapel again; where he was the observed of all observers, and made a fresh sensation by turning deadly white and fainting, so that he had to be dragged out once more.

"I'm just about full up o' that there Walter Bellamy," remarked some cynic; though for the most part the congregation were sympathetic, vicariously enjoying Walter's ill-health.

But there was nothing feigned about this second attack. Walter could not have been more wrung if the devils had been real; or he had truly believed them to be real. Besides the chapel was hotter than ever.

At the door he was given over to his father, who carried him the short distance to their own house, then lowered him panting:

"Canst thee walk upstairs, lod?" he asked anxiously.

Walter thought he could, and managed it; though his legs felt curiously heavy and limp. Once there, however, he was undressed by his father, and lying in bed with the cool night air blowing full over his face, soon revived.

"Is there anything thee'd fancy, lod?" asked Bellamy, bending over him.

"Pobs. Heppen Oi might be able fur ter tacke some pobs," breathed Walter.

"Oi doubt but the milk's a' gone, with a' them folks to tay," answered Bellamy sadly. "An' if it ain't it'ull be turned on us with the thunder an' all."

Walter lay back and sighed resignedly. But the next moment he spoke again, in a detached voice as though the matter were nothing to him. "Rouse's just down Buxton Road keeps cows," he said; "an' milk dwarn't turn inside the bastes."

After a moment's hesitation his father took the hint, and went off and got the milk; made the sop, far better and more quickly than his wife could have done, and brought it up to the boy in a blue and white striped bowl.

Walter submitted to have a coat wrapped round his shoulders and sat up in bed to eat the bread and milk with an air of gentle resignation. Then lay back and let his father cover him up.

"Ye'll stay with me, Feyther: Oi'm not to say over well," he pleaded. And Bellamy stayed, perched on the edge of the bed, one arm round the pillow and one hand clasped in his son's.

The warm food had been very comforting. Walter was

feeling that strangely peaceful feeling, as of a new birth, which comes to one after any great stress or faintness.

He stretched out his little body very straight with a sense of exquisite ease. The day had been well spent; filled with a glory which lingered in his mind like the clash of cymbals, the blare of trumpets. But now was the time of pleasant peace, and he had leisure to think of others.

"Be the stuff at the mill any better, Feyther?"

"Naw, naw, me lod, not ter say any better. But things moyght be wurse. Oh yes, they moyght be wurse; we moyght be dead for instance!" he declared cheerfully; as though his continued existence were something to be thankful for, though why it would be hard to say. Indeed it was marvellous to reflect what well springs of life there must have been in him that he could retain any semblance of "dogginess" after a life spent over, encompassed by, and running out with, an endless length of Prussian binding.

He had started in Morrison's at five, as a "runner." Then at eleven graduated to the weaving sheds; and the binding had got him. Drab and black and white and grey, so many gross yards each day, something like a yard a minute all counted.

Some of the men in his mill wove lettered coat-hangers. Their life was delirium of variety in comparison with his. But when once you get on the Prussian binding you are useless for the Jacquard looms; for it eats out your mind as a weevil will eat out a nut, you lose the habit of any thought of concentration beyond that needful for the replacing of the spools, knotting up the ends.

The only peace and quiet that a man got for thinking was when the warps ran out, and he had to wait — without any pay — two or three days, sometimes a week or more for fresh ones. And then his mind was engrossed with questions as to how to pay the rent and get the next meal.

Now they were on at a bad lot of mercerised cotton and poor silk "up Morrison's." Stuff which broke so constantly that Bellamy earned less than he had done in his apprenticeship. Besides, he was consumptive, and always coughing. But for all this, his good spirits were indomitable.

Walter took after him, but with all the pregnant difference of the newer generation. Bellamy senior was cheerful

because he made the best of a bad job. Walter because he was determined to rise above the bad job; to trample those who made it under his feet: to live and be happy. Not merely content, but joyously happy — by foul means if it were not possible by fair. He could not have put it into words; but this was really the secret of his declaration that he meant to ask Satan for a "bike" if God would not give him one.

After a time his father tiptoed away, believing him asleep. But when he had gone Walter opened his eyes and lay for a long while staring up at the open skylight and square of deep indigo sky, filled with an immense contentment.

Not for a single moment had he any sense of self-reproach for having deceived every one. To use his own expression he had "made them sit up." They enjoyed the stir and animation: if he was anything he was a benefactor. For never, at any time of his life, was Walter consciously immoral. He was simply non-moral. Or, rather, he was like an actor who carries every detail of his art into his own life: with such completeness that often enough he was honestly unable to distinguish between the true and the false. If there could be a charlatan by birth such was Walter Bonnet Bellamy.

## CHAPTER V

WHEN Walter Bellamy was eight he added to the family finances — which were low for they were still on at bad material "up Morrison's" — by taking out papers. He started to the station at seven each morning, in time to meet the train. Raced up the hill to the town: went his rounds: got back home at eight thirty, often later; and just had time to swallow his breakfast before the bell started ringing, when he had to bolt off, half across the town, to school. After school he took round parcels for his mother; not very big parcels; for people who got their stores at Bellamy's usually bought in half-pennyworths, but still with his home-lessons, it did not leave him much time for himself.

But from his mother he had inherited a big, strongly built frame, and from his father a Gallic wiriness, and an indomitable spirit. That is till he got what he wanted, when his mother's dust and ashes nature, which had not left his character entirely untouched, gained the ascendency.

Bellamy senior was a wonder. He had lived fifteen years with Mrs. Bellamy — who possessed a faculty for annihilating all signs of joy with a long drawn-out stream of complaints, like a dirty dish-cloth drawn over a plate — and yet he contrived to retain an air of blithe insouciance, along with a perfectly innocent habit of winking at every pretty girl he saw. His father had been absolutely English in appearance and thought, but James Bellamy himself had taken a light-hearted leap back through all the chill barriers of English blood. By rights he ought to have worn a big black tie and turned-down collar; and lived with a little gay mistress in a gay little apartment in the very heart of Paris. But it was clearly a case of thwarted reversion to type, and thus he lived — over a small general shop — with a wife who was almost terribly respectable, and drank very inferior beer instead of good red wine.

It is true that by the time Walter began to take round papers Bellamy was already dying, though only just forty. But that was not his wife's fault so much as the misfortune of the late Mrs. Bellamy in having to go out to work up to the very week that James — who was her eighth child — was born.

Moreover she had been working at warping, which is a twisting, straining sort of an occupation for any woman; and in consequence James' internal machinery had never been all it quite might be. Then, not long after Walter was born, he caught a cold which settled on his lungs; as colds seem to do in Edge; which despite all its charm and the clear moorland air which sweeps it, has the second largest death-rate from consumption of any town in England.

People are getting anxious about it. Already there is a sanitarium which will hold four men — and they are talking of one for women. Some time — in the golden age which is forever as far to seek as the end of the rainbow — they may think of starting things at the right end: preventing instead of patching.

When he was eleven Walter Bellamy lost his father. Neighbours said it might have been worse, because he had worked to the very end; and Mrs. Bellamy had managed to keep her weekly pennies paid into the burial club, right up to date. It was the one thing in which she had ever shown any real persistence. Then, there was the shop; though to be sure the mistress of it was struggling in a mire of debt and the wholesale people becoming more pressing each week.

But on the other hand, as if to balance things, Walter had just passed his labour examination, and put in half of each week at the mill, and half at school, while he still managed to take the papers round before breakfast.

It was not so bad in the summer but it was cruel in the winter, when the cold winds slashed their way up the narrow streets, and snicked at him round the corners.

However, it did not last long: for, having reached the mature age of twelve, he went into the mill on full time, as a runner — or "helper" to use the technical term.

And though this was not so bad in the winter: in the summer it was little short of hell.

Indeed running, the process by which hand-twisted button-hole silk is made, is not a pretty thing. I doubt if it has even been shown to any Royal Personages on their progress through a silk mill. The masters, themselves, make as if to disregard it; for they do not pay, or employ, the boys themselves: the twisters do this — though there is allowance made for it in their wages.

The business takes place in a very long room, or loft — commonly called "the shades"— where the twisters stand at one end, each with a wheel, rather like the steering wheel of a ship, set round with little hooks to which he fastens the double, triple or quadruple strands of silk; while his helper or runner, carries an equal number of spools threaded on to a wooden stick.

With this in his hand he runs to the far end of the loft and loops each silken thread over a peg, set in a species of low wooden screen — or cross as it is called — till both his screen and the twister's wheel are full.

Then the twister winds as if for dear life, letting his wheel — which has a grooved rail, of some three or four feet set in the floor so that it shall have some give, though twisting the silk very tightly — move slightly forward with him.

Directly it is taut, as it is in a moment, the boy runs forward with the loop in turn. And the twister, still winding, runs the silk on to big spools, set on a horizontal rod before him.

The boy must run very fast, just as fast as the twister can turn his wheel, and that is with a concentrated fierce rapidity. For it is only by doing this business at a tremendous rate that the silk will twist exactly as the best tailors like to have it.

If the boy does not run as fast as the man winds, the thread tightens too quickly and breaks. If he stops the man at the wheel must stop too: then there are words.

He runs with bare feet, for no one could run rapidly or surely enough with shoes. He runs in his shirt and trousers because the work is terribly exhausting: and when it is hot he runs in his trousers only. From six o'clock in the morning till half-past five at night, with half an hour for breakfast and an hour for dinner. Through all the long day he runs, panting like a dog.

Occasionally, if there is a slack moment while the twister is fixing his stands, he flies at a frame over which tresses of silk are stretched, divides them up and ties them, all with an incredible quickness of touch.

But there are not many such moments: he is there to run; and he runs. Ceaselessly to and fro: padding out the hours with his bare feet; the days, months, years, till at sixteen, or thereabouts, he is an old man; with bent and distorted legs.

At first Walter thought it was great fun. It is natural for a boy to run, above all to run barefooted. When his twister, Jimmy Clarke the elder — husband of the inarticulate Mrs. Clarke whom he had likened to a beet — cursed him, Walter shrieked back at him all the French words he had ever learnt: which did just as well as the best curses and made the men laugh. They were not a bad lot, but the whole thing got on their nerves; the tense rapidity of the winding, the pad of the running boys.

Walter ran well. His father had been a fine sprinter in his youth, and he took after him. Besides, if he runs for a twister a boy must run in good form, with his elbows and chest well forward. For should he dip or lurch there is no firmness in the pull; and the twist is slack and uneven.

He started on a June morning. The air was sweet with the scent of hay, for the fields enfold the town with dewy freshness. His mother had got up and made him a cup of tea and cut him a butty before he left home, carrying his clogs in his hands; feeling very much of a man, all alive with eagerness.

The glinting lines of silk drew him. He ran as light-footed, as full of promise and joy as the dawn; with his crest of dark hair erect above his brow. He essayed fancy steps when he danced back to the cross with the slackened strands. To do nothing but run, and run, drawn forward by a humming wheel and a gleaming thread of silk. What a gorgeous way of earning a livelihood!

As the sun rose he shed his shirt. Then, impelled by the very madness of joy, his breeches also, and ran naked; flashing through the golden lights and velvety shadows of the dusty place like a young Greek god, while the men laughed and applauded.

But by the time he got home to breakfast something seemed

to have gone wrong at the pit of his stomach. The wheel was turning in his head and he could not eat; only drink the tea which his mother had kept warm, over from the early morning.

He put his clogs on to walk back to the mill, for his feet were tender and burning. But still he went gaily, with a feeling of rather light-headed exaltation.

The hours till dinner-time seemed endless. At first he longed for them to pass. Then he grew to believe that they never would pass. Finally not to care whether they did or not. Once when he was a tiny child he had gone out with his mother for a day's charing, and seen her dress a chicken ready for cooking. She had put her hand inside the bird; found some tendon or sinew, and pulling firmly on it, drawn out the entire entrails.

Gradually it grew to seem to Walter as if Jimmy Clarke and the silken threads drew him in the same way.

When he ran to the far end of the loft to throw the slack loops round the pegs there was some relief; he felt as if he might be getting away.

But directly he started to run back the taut threads plucked him fair in the middle. Far away his legs were running — for he could hear the pad, pad of his feet — and his head was still upon his shoulders, for sometimes he caught the sound of his own voice, very high and shrill.

But for all that it was only his inward parts which counted, drawn forward as they were far before the rest of him; and again and again he felt like screaming for Jimmy Clarke to stop winding and let him go.

But always he reached the wheel and the thread slackened just in time to save him from disgrace. Though even then the relief seemed almost more than he could bear, and he trembled from head to foot while the sweat poured down his face.

But all the boys trembled and sweated, there was nothing new in that; while in addition to the sweat the breasts of their shirts, and the arm along which the spools were carried, were always wet with soapy water, for the silk could not be wound dry and must be soaked first.

This too was the runner's job. He had to get to the mill early and have his spools ready before the winder came.

The soapy water stood in a tub — stinking horribly, so that the atmosphere of the twisting room at dawn would make the stoutest retch. He dipped his spools into this and sucked the water up, drawing it through the silk with a horn and then spitting it out, back into the tub. There were helpers who vomited every morning of their lives over this job.

One of the boys, Billy Halford, was thirteen, but to look at him he might have been six. His bent legs and disproportionately long arms were like sticks. His peaked face colourless. But he did not seem to feel the heat, or to lose breath. The third runner, Mark Bax, was considerably older than the other two; older than runners usually are, for he was nineteen; a sure sign that he had tried many things and failed. Mark ran with an extraordinary air of desperation. Often he lurched forward and loosened the twist: he was always laughing and joking, or coughing and spitting. But the men let him go as easy as they could; cursing him more for the fun of producing a stream of vivid and highly coloured repartee than anything else. For, as they all knew, Mark was running a double race: and death was drawing him as surely as the silk thread; waiting there with his shears, almost as tangible as old man Brook at his wheel. Thus, more from a sort of superstition than from real pity, none of the men laid a hand on him. Though Billy's twister kicked him clean over his cross the second day Walter was at the mill, merely for breaking an over-dry thread.

During the dinner hour Walter — very vague as to how he had got there — sat in the backyard of the little shop, and endeavoured, with agonised intensity, to be sick; but without success. Doubtless Jimmy had got the better part of his "innards."

His mother did not want him to go back to the mill, though complaining bitterly that it was just her luck he should be "took so." He was the dead spit of his father and was going the same way; she did not need any one to tell her that.

But little Walter Bellamy already had a rooted objection to giving in when he seemed to be losing a game. And all that his mother could get out of him was an unfilial injunction to "shut up an' let a fellow be."

Back at the mill he suddenly began to feel better. His legs were still oddly detached, but the drag on his stomach had ceased. And he felt like laughing and singing, while his head seemed to dance alone upon the thick air, as he had once — in the course of a long-remembered trip to Blackpool — seen little glass balls dance on a tiny fountain in a shooting-gallery.

Mark christened him "little Frenchy" and he responded nobly: reeling off whole sentences, like, "Avez-vous le bon canif du petit garçon?" in a chanting voice as he ran: with such an air that he was universally acknowledged to be "a card."

Then — somewhere in the middle of the afternoon — he heard his own voice, very high and far away, remark, "*Mon Dieu,* but it's — it's ——" He struggled for a French adjective, but failed: then ended with "bloody 'ot" just as the floor leapt up and hit him on the forehead.

The next thing he knew was that he was on his back in one corner of the loft; and that his hair and face, and bare shoulders were wetter than ever; while a cup of water — actually held by the great Jimmy Clarke himself — was rattling against his teeth.

Also, and he grasped this fact with amazement, Jimmy was not swearing, but calling upon him to "taeke a sup." And addressing him as "moy doe."

They all wanted him to go home then. Jimmy Clarke said he would not mind knocking off himself if he could not find a runner. But Walter was not going to give in. He pictured himself creeping home just as the children were coming out of school, and knew exactly how they would point at him. For never, in his moments of deepest depression, did he ever think of himself as passing unnoticed.

"Went roight off, Oi did?" he questioned.

"Aye, that's so!" responded Clarke admiringly.

"All white an' cauld, as if I wur a real stiff 'un."

"Just the identical saeme."

"There ain't mony boys as faints complete off loike that, Oi reckon," he murmured proudly; and the fact sustained him through the rest of the afternoon — though he had sudden qualms as to the stability of the floor. For by tacit consent neither of the men, or the boys — and this needed

some self-control on their parts — told Walter that most, if not all, runners started off in the same way.

By the time he got home things had ceased to worry him. He did not even trouble overmuch about being a man, and let his mother help him straight to bed; though he could not face the thought of tea.

Later however, Mrs. Irwin, who worked in the mill herself — getting home each evening to what most women would regard as a heavy day's housework, for she had five children, and Jane the eldest was only eleven — came round to see how he had got through the day, bringing him some blanc-mange made from a patent powder, mixed with a little water; not particularly nourishing, but cool and sweet. And Walter let Jane sit against his pillow and feed him with a spoon while he told of how he had fainted, and how the men at the mill had thought he was dead, for his heart had quite stopped beating and he was as stiff as a board and white as China silk. All with such pathos that — and here was a crowning triumph — even the cold-hearted Jane was impressed, and a big tear rolled down her face on to the back of Walter's hand.

"A fly got in my eye comin' up street, an' set it waterin', so as never was," she said. But Walter Bellamy knew better, a tear so round and clear and complete came straight from the heart. He knew womenkind, did Walter Bellamy.

## CHAPTER VI

WALTER spent a curious night during which it was difficult to realise whether he was waking or sleeping. Though now and then, by some tremendous effort, he made himself realise that there were no wheels in his attic; while he was lying in his own bed, and therefore must have been dreaming that he was still in the twisting room: not only being drawn to and fro, but being actually wound up in a gigantic wheel: turned by a terrible old man with a beard and a high bald forehead whom he realised as God.

Jane was on the wheel too, and her little brother with a sore hip; even the baby and Billy and Mark Bax: all twisted up in innumerable threads of fine silk; being whirled round and round with a terrible velocity which it seemed that nothing could stop.

Then some one took him and pulled him out and smoothed him down; and he was very much distressed, because he felt that he was dead, and realised that he was actually going to Heaven without being given time to change his clogs, which would make a disgraceful clatter upon the golden floor.

But it was evident that the some one else had noticed it too; for after many fruitless attempts to struggle up and go and look for his boots, he distinctly heard a voice say:

"Get up! get up at once, you lazy louse!" And then somebody shook him.

He tried to explain that he could not get up because he was dead; while at the same time he was not a boy at all, but only a tress of heavily weighted China silk.

But it was no good. And still the shaking went on; until at last he was sufficiently wide awake to realise that it was his mother who stood by his bedside, that his clothes were on the floor, and that she was shaking him petulantly.

"Get up — it's toime to get up, Wally! — Oi never did

see a lod as slept so! Get up — get up now — or you'll be laete at the mill."

Each sentence was punctuated by one ecstatic moment, when he slipped back to sleep, and then by a shake.

But at last Mrs. Bellamy had him sitting up at the edge of his bed, with his throbbing feet on the floor.

" Now then, you get into yer things — double quick sharp. Oi've got the kettle on an' it 'ull be boiling by the toime thee's ready. Oi never see'd sech a lod! Bless us an' save us if it's goin' ter be loike this 'ere every marnin'."

Walter could hear her still complaining as she went downstairs, and he stooped for his breeches which had fallen on the floor.

But his head was so swimming and full that, having struggled into them — even before he could gather energy to hitch his braces over his shoulders — he felt compelled to lie down on the pillow again.

And so, five minutes later, after repeated calling, his mother came up and found him: curled round and fast asleep. Blissfully and dreamlessly asleep as he had not been during the whole night.

This time Mrs. Bellamy kept firm hold of him till she got him downstairs and into the backyard, with his head under the pump. Then left him with his shirt rolled round his waist, vigorously towelling while she cut him a " butty."

Walter ate ravenously. Never before in the whole course of his life had he felt so hungry. His head was still heavy; he ached in every limb, his feet were swollen so that there could be no question of getting them into his clogs. But the sickness had gone, and from that time to the end of his running days he ate all that he could lay his hands on.

It was this that saved him: left him some brains to formulate ideas with, to see ahead. For in this desperate hunger lies the one possible salvation for the runner. It shows that there is still some vitality left: that nature is strong enough to endeavour to recoup herself.

Little Billy lived on tea and pastry: there was nothing else he could fancy, unless it were a scrap of tinned fish over-layered with Worcester sauce and buried in pickles; while Mark seemed to sustain his hectic existence on little beyond sups of gin.

Walter's second day at running would have proved more endurable had it not been for his feet and the throbbing pain in his head.

The third was easier still from a physical point of view; for he was getting his second wind. But the fourth was mentally worse than anything he had ever known before. The dreary monotony of it was like a brooding thunderstorm; deadening thought, weighing him down, stupifying him. He was just at that stage when he might have gone on being a runner for three or four years, like Billy Halford. To find himself turned out in the world at last without any trade, with youth and hope and ambition all gone, were it not for an accident which happened, just toward evening on that fourth day.

Mark had been running more spasmodically than ever. Had he been helping either of the other men, instead of mild old Brook, he would not have been tolerated for a moment, despite their awe and pity. For he had to be paid and the twister and his family had to live.

It was not that he was unwilling. He was almost too willing. He started at the wrong moments: he overran himself. He was on the go the whole time; jigging from foot to foot if he was kept waiting for a moment, and sometimes old Brook was a long time setting his strands.

The only entrance to the twisters' loft was through an empty doorway with an embrasure, so deep that if any newcomer was not careful to peep round on either side before emerging, a collision was probable.

Mark was running blindly, with his head thrust forward, putting all the strength of his lank body into the effort. For it had been a long hot day, and he was at the end of his endurance.

Then, just as he was on the full swing of his return journey, running close against the wall, one of the warehousemen came in with a basket of spools.

"Look out!" shouted somebody. But it was too late and Mark was into him.

The man with the basket stood like a rock beneath the impact; though he put down his load and rubbed his shoulder where the runner's head had struck him. But Mark was down.

There was a shout of laughter — and old Brook rapped out a mild oath as the silk snapped — then a sudden silence, as, without stirring, they stood and stared at Mark; who had dragged himself into a sitting position and was coughing, with his arm up against his mouth, gazing in stupefied amazement at a deluge of blood which surged out over it, and down his bare chest, to settle in a dust-fringed pool upon the floor.

That was the end of running for Mark Bax. Walter only saw him once more: lying in bed in the cottage hospital very white and clean and eager-eyed as ever.

Incidentally it was the end of Walter's running, also. For in some curious fashion the sight of Mark's life-blood woke him from the torpor into which he was drifting; and he came to the conclusion that it was not the sort of game to go on with; as Billy was doing. Or to end as Mark has ended it; with what would have been a pauper's funeral, had not old Brook got up a subscription from among the other workers in the mill.

For he had never been saving, poor Mark! And had either forgotten or ignored the claims of the burial club, with its weekly reminders that: —"In the midst of life we are in death."

Walter had showed them all that he could run; and had run, with the best. So well that when he handed in his notice to Jimmy Clarke on Friday night, he was offered an extra sixpence a week to remain.

But he would not do that. He worked out his Saturday morning, then went home and for the first time told his mother what he had done.

She was full of complaints. "Just when thee wer't gettin' used ter it. Ter go an' chuck up a job loike that, thee'll never get aught pays sar well," she declared. Though all through the week she had lamented that Walter ate far more than he earned.

"Gawd only knows what I've done ter be burdened wid such folk — you an' yer feyther a'fore you. What's took yer ter go an' act so! That's what I want ter know." The question came like a sudden yap at the end of a dog's long-drawn howl.

"Oi didn't mean ter 'ave moy legs runned all warpy," an-

swered Walter placidly. And went on polishing his Sunday boots, which later on — having finished his dinner — he donned.

"Where art thee goin' now?"

"Ter lake, along with some other chaps."

"That yer ain't! Yer've just got ter stay an' wash up these 'ere crocks."

"Thet's wimen's work, not men's."

Walter spoke with such decision that his mother gave in, as he knew she would do. Though the next moment she was off again on another grievance.

"Thee's not goin' up lake in them boots."

But of this Walter took no notice, whatever. He was tying his tie in front of the glass which hung behind the kitchen door; for the day of the sailor blouse was over and he wore a jacket and proper collar and tie, like any other boy.

He missed his father. But there was this about it, he had a new suit for the burying. And he was "the only son of his mother and she was a widow." Somehow he liked the sound of that.

Thus taking all in all poor James Bellamy was not much missed. But then who is?

## CHAPTER VII

WALTER was not long out of work. On Monday he made a persistent tour of the mills, and by Tuesday he was in again; this time spooling for the weavers at Cluttons; work which always used to be done by women, and is now, save where the beckoning opulence of artificial silk has drawn them away.

Then the mortgagees and creditors swept down upon the little corner shop: the stock and fitments were sold, and the widow, having fortunately saved her furniture, moved down Compton Street — near to the mill where Walter then worked — and commenced the arduous combination of taking in lodgers and going out charing.

There was a big attic at the top of the house — almost the whole of one side of it taken up by a small-paned window — which had once been used for winding when home work was more common.

This was now divided up into two, and Walter shared it with a young fellow out of one of the warehouses: while Mrs. Bellamy camped amid black-beetles and dubious cooking utensils in the back kitchen; and the front kitchen and middle part of the house were occupied by lodgers, mostly single men.

It was the youth in the attic — undersized and unreliable, with a taste for dirty literature — who happened to be one of the small straws turning the current of Walter Bellamy's life. For he bragged so of the superiority of warehouse employees — who considered themselves clerks, and stayed at work late instead of going to it early — over other factory hands that Walter gave nobody any peace till he also got into a warehouse; and started wearing stand-up collars and smoking cigarettes.

But he was not a fool. The other youth's horizon — and he was four years the elder — was bounded by the chance of

an ultimate twenty-five shillings a week: more cigarettes, more ties; the Isle of Man for his summer holidays, instead of Blackpool. And later on marriage — though he would not have confessed to this — with some smart-looking girl of his own class.

Walter Bellamy saw much further than this. If his ambition possessed any boundary it was simply because he did not *know* how great, how wonderful, and above all how expensive things could be.

He meant to get on. To climb up and up. He felt in himself the possibilities of becoming a very fine, very important gentleman. But as yet his models were the mill-owners, and their sons: the former domineering, loud voiced and self-assertive, the latter, for the most part, as weedy and dissipated as are the sons of so many self-made men.

For the convert to gentility suffers, in the way that all converts do.

Being a gentleman consisted in making more money than other people: treading them underfoot till they had no breath left to dispute. That: —"I say so, and what I say must be right" sort of attitude, of which he had seen so much. To wear very bright brown boots, drive a motor and keep other folk under: without all this how was any one to know you were a gentleman?

In addition it was well to possess enough brains to impress other people with your cleverness. To make them see not only as you saw but as you wished them to see.

It was all part of the game of life and gave it an infinite zest. To practise the thimble trick, not with silly inanimate things, but with people's minds. To run with the hare and hunt with the hounds: to balance oneself — if needs be — on a rail, with no indication of wobbling either to one side or another. To perfect oneself in all the mental gymnastics of getting on.

Every one who had wit enough was doing it. The only thing was to try and do it better than anybody else. And at the same time never forget that a great part of the art consists: not merely in knowing things, but in knowing them just one day ahead of other people.

Thus, by the time he was sixteen, young Bellamy's religion was formulated. It was the religion of "Getting On,"

and not only of getting on, but of getting the very most that was possible out of life.

His self-confidence was amazing. His mind seized on an idea, digested it and turned it out — as some American machines turn out sausages — all in a moment. The sheer force of his individuality shot these ideas into other people's consciousness; while he fixed them there by his hard stare, his admirably timed and sudden silences.

For if Walter Bellamy so much as hinted a thing you were obliged to think of it: even though it were only with disapproval. If he stared you felt that he plumbed the depths of your craven ignorance; while if he kept silent you wondered uneasily what was going to happen next.

By the time he was twenty he had moved himself and his mother to a clerkly house in South Bank Street, where they occupied the entire first floor. At least Walter did, for Mrs. Bellamy was one of those people who are inevitably to be found in the back kitchen — somewhere between the copper and the sink — the highest wave of prosperity being powerless to raise them, to do more than just sweep them there with all their grime and litter and querulous incapacity; and then retreat, leaving them still stranded, like the ridge of refuse one finds along the seashore.

She would as soon have thought of sitting, or having her meals, in the front parlour as she would of having them in the chapel. So Walter fixed it up very comfortable for himself, with his books and papers — he was a voracious reader of anything which he thought might be of use to him, always new books; for literature as such he had no taste, he simply wanted to know what was going on in the world — while the upper part was let, and Mrs. Bellamy slept in a small apartment originally intended as a larder, and continued to rail at Walter — to his face — for all he ever did or was, and for all his father had ever been and done before him. At the same time singing his praises without ceasing behind his back: assuring every neighbour who had time to listen to her, every employer for whom she chared, that no woman ever had such a son.

This was really the way in which Mr. James Higgins' daughter — James Higgins being old Peter Morrison's junior partner — first heard of Walter: in a round-about way

from a friend of the daughter of the chemist in Upton Street whose shop Mrs. Bellamy washed out twice every week before her son insisted on her retiring into private life.

Meanwhile Walter attended book-keeping and shorthand classes at the Working-men's Institute: joined the gymnasium — determining on keeping fit, and attaining to a figure as near perfect as those of the superbly tailored noblemen shown in the advertisements of the *Drapers' Monthly*. In addition to this, he spent two nights a week in taking lessons from a little, half French, half Irish designer named O'Kelly, who taught French — Parisian with a brogue — for sixpence an hour.

*The Drapers' Record, The Silk World,* and *Textile Monthly* — which lay upon the tables of the Institute — taught Walter, not only how to dress with a discrimination beyond his class, but to keep abreast of the trade in which he was involved. The constant keen push of his mind — for there was not a day in which he did not search the money-market columns for every detail of the silk industry — sharpened and refined his face; while his vanity and his determination to keep fit saved him from the pit-falls which alike await the complete student and complete money-grubber.

There was no doubt that he was good to look upon: five foot eleven: broad shouldered and narrow hipped; his head carried high, his chin held with an upward and sidewards tilt. It was this trick of carrying his head which saved Walter Bellamy's face from a touch of coarseness; for the jaw was heavy and by nature somewhat blurred, the lower lip too full.

For the rest, the face was almost pure Greek. The head well shaped and covered with wavy black hair — which, for some years, he wore after the fashion of the other Edge youths, closely cut at the back and with a lock that waved above his brow. This, till one day in chapel he happened to notice the back of the men's heads in front of him, came to the conclusion that the bony close-shaved expanse behind the ear was particularly ugly; and insisted on the barber leaving his hair a reasonable length at the back. Though the love-lock still remained.

His eyes were not large, but very bright and fringed with

thick straight lashes which softened their lack of depth; his nose straight and rather thin, his teeth pointed and irregular, but very white. The whole appearance of the youth amazingly vital.

No wonder Rose Higgins watched from her window to see him go by; smiling and blushing, and only pretending to draw in her head if he happened to look up. She had seriously thought of marrying a title. But that would mean tiptoeing, and there would be something delightfully romantic in bending to a man of the people: her own people.

Rose was not the only girl who cast eyes at Walter Bellamy, but just twenty and already occupying a responsible position in the warehouse. However he had no time for girls. They were too fulsome in their admiration, his vanity had already outgrown them, and he preferred the applause of men; mature men, who looked on him as a smart fellow with a real talent for business. Some one who — for all his youth — was never at a loss, who kept himself aloof from the petty frivolities of the town, and studied the commerce, not only of Dutton and Wantage, but of the world: had been to Coventry and knew something worth knowing about artificial silk. Though he would never say quite how much; shaking his head mysteriously when any one questioned him: —

"When a fellow's in a thing, really in it," he would say: —"he finds he's got to keep his mouth shut. Oi can tell you that."

Walter had struggled persistently with the aspirate and learnt to keep it in its proper place — though he loved to talk French with O'Kelly, and just let it go as it would — but the broad vowel still beat him.

It was amazing how little the workpeople knew outside of their own special jobs. There were real-silk workers at Morrison's who had never seen a scarf or tie made; though they were turned out week after week by the thousands: who had never watched the artificial silk being wound, fingered it; even seen it. Men and women who had worked at the same thing — doubling or spooling — for forty years and knew nothing of any other branch of the trade.

## CHAPTER VIII

JUST before Walter Bellamy's twenty-first birthday there was a strike in Edge. A unique strike, for in it very nearly all the men workers came out in sympathy with the women; who in their turn were standing by a percentage of their fellows — the artificial-silk workers who had been threatened with a reduction.

These artificial-silk workers were the best paid of all the hands: earning far more than many of the men, who regarded them with jealousy, as did the "hard"— or real — silk workers, toiling for a miserable eleven shillings a week; a class who — as Higgins himself had said — were "used to starvation."

But in the face of trouble they stood firmly together. Wages must be levelled up to the highest, not down to the lowest; and all petty discontents and jealousies were forgotten.

The masters had been rash enough to publicly declare that the people would not come out: had believed it too, and were amazed and half frightened at what they had done. Even then more would have given in. But old Peter Morrison had bound them to a forfeit of a hundred pounds if they failed him and the other big owners, members of the Edge Chamber of Commerce.

There were some small, new firms who could ill afford to forfeit such a sum. On the other hand they could ill afford a strike; but King Morrison had got them between the cleft of a forked stick and meant keeping them there, as long as possible. He had a new boiler to put up. It was still a fortnight till the August holiday, which only lasted a week, and a week would not have given him time to get the job done. They might as well stay out as they had gone out. He was in no hurry.

However, in the end he was baulked, for the boilermakers refused to do the work till the strike was over, and

thus the whole time was a blank loss: though that did not make him any more amicably inclined.

There were constant consultations between the masters and representatives of the men. In addition to this huge mass meetings were held almost nightly at the Town Hall; for the people would know all that was going on, a fatal policy which prevented the possibility of the strike leaders springing any fresh move upon the masters.

Walter attended every meeting, at first merely as a looker-on at the game.

Fiery speeches surged through his brain. He was aflame with anger. Not toward the masters or the men, but towards fate, which had somehow ordained that the very position to which he had attained, the class into which he had wriggled his way, was a class without a Union. He was hung between the cold heaven of the masters and the earth — the dear familiar teeming earth — of the multitude, amid which he might have been recognised.

He had no right to speak. He had no right to lift his hands in the general show. As a matter of fact he had no right even at the meetings.

He had never envied any one as he envied the Trade Union Secretary, Burton. And during his whole life he never envied a better man.

Fresh detachments of police were drafted into the town. There was a good deal of rowdy horse-play; singing of songs — jeering, but no violence.

"A word from Burton's worth more nor all their bloody p'leece!" declared the men hanging about the street corners; with their hands in their pockets, miserably inactive. For they were not idlers, but steady workers who had been at it since they were eight or ten, and the long blank days bit into their souls.

Maybe the women felt the pinch the worst: but they indulged in orgies of housework such as they had never before had time for, besides there were the children for them to see to, and their time was full.

Not much to fear from the women, but with the men it was different. Those blank days, lengthened by the habit of early waking — might well drive them to kill or cave in. And Burton knew it. But somehow he kept them together.

By his personality, by the palpable suffering which he endured more than anything else.

"That fellow Burton seems pretty popular," Walter remarked one day, to a group of haggard-faced women standing outside one of the courts, who had just shouted a greeting across the road to their secretary.

"Popular!" ejaculated one scornfully; turning round upon him, her hands on her lips—"'Ee's worshipped, that's what 'ee is."

At the end of the two weeks very little progress had been made. The Union put forward suggestions which were mutilated till there was nothing of them left; while in return the masters pushed forward tentative offers to withdraw them next day.

Then a trick was tried on the workers, which had the effect of a staggering blow over the head.

Burton and his executive had suggested arbitration from the Board of Trade, to be based on profits. If the industry was really found incapable of paying the wages, less would be accepted.

The offer had been laughed to scorn. But a few days later the Secretary received a letter from the mill-owners' representative, offering arbitration on the basis, not of profits, but of the wages paid in other places.

That very afternoon notices were on all the mill gates, distributed broadcast over the town, informing the workers that an agreement had been come to; that the masters had determined to submit the matter to arbitration, pending which all hands would return to work.

They timed it well. It was late in the evening when the notices were sent out, still later when the news reached the Union offices.

But Burton was equal to the occasion. Within half an hour sandwich-men were parading the town with placards of a general mass meeting; and by eight the Town Hall was packed, while an overflow meeting surged into the co-operative hall.

Somehow Walter wriggled his way into the big building.

The other meetings had been more or less light-hearted, the people's stolidity gave them confidence. They had settled down with that courage which people, who have never

known what it is to possess capital at their back, show when things are at their worst.

But the new move had set all their nerves on edge. They did not know what was expected of them — who had failed; and the uncertainty told on them.

For once there was no shouting nor singing, but only an ominous whisper which ran through the hall like the on-coming of a storm through trees, the distant surge of waves.

Apart from this whispering there was an intangible brooding air, as if of thunder, a spiritual emanation from these hundreds of overstrained, under-fed, angry, and suspicious people.

Walter had climbed on to a window-ledge near the platform, and could look across the room. Here and there a girl flaunted a bright-coloured hat. But for the most part the assembly was drab.

It was a hot night: the close air hung like a palpable mist above the people, each electric light with its own reddish halo. The faces in Edge were always white with want of air. But now they were white with a difference. The workers had begun to feel the pinch, and this last trick had put them in an ugly mood. It might be that Burton had really made some agreement with the owners without consulting them. If he had they would teach him once for all that he was their servant. They loved him when he fell in with their demands — would take almost anything from him — but they were oblivious of all that now.

He was the only servant they had ever had, and they were not likely to allow him to forget the fact.

If it was Burton who had "let them in" they would "limb him." But then it might not be Burton, it might be the masters. There was no knowing.

Other evenings they had talked among each other; shouting questions and answers across the hall. But now each suspected his neighbour. Even the fringers — the most irresponsible of all the girls — were quiet, except for that sibilant whisper. They did not even giggle. It seemed as if they had grown suddenly old, their hard lips set upon some secret.

So tense were the assembled people that it was difficult to realise them as individuals. Divided as they were on many

points, suspicious of each other, they were yet like one inarticulate being, struggling desperately against its own want of knowledge.

The executive who sat upon the platform — men and women elected from every branch of the trade, in every mill — were late.

When they did arrive, ten minutes after time, there was none of the waving to, the shouted greetings from their friends in the body of the hall, which had usually greeted them. Nor did they speak among each other; but sat with folded arms, tightly closed lips and an appearance of utter weariness.

They were of all sorts. Old men from among the weavers — pickers and twisters; younger men — tattlers, machine fettlers, tenters. Elderly women — hard-silk workers and warpers, doublers and spoolers; and younger girls and married women — artificial knitters and winders and fringers.

There was one immense old woman all in black with her black hair drawn tightly from her nobbly forehead, and her arms folded high, over her massive bust; next her an exotic-looking girl with a rose-coloured hat and dazzling earrings; there could not have been two more different people, but their expressions were the same. Walter scanned every face, young and old. They were all the same, utterly wearied, but ennobled by determination and suffering. At the joint meetings the masters had juggled with them. Their superior knowledge of words, their education had given them some advantage; but they had got very little out of these women. They were native to the life; they had lived it since they were eight or nine. They could not say much; but they knew what they wanted, and that was the greater part of the battle.

For the hill women of North Staffordshire are delicate in physique only. In spirit they are the worthy descendants of the early Britons who found one of their last strongholds among those wild moors above Edge.

They have the quiet, far-seeing eyes of the women in our Colonies; women who, for all their gentleness, would not stick at killing were their homes or their children's lives at stake.

They had, most of them, borne children, had gone down

to the gates of death. They had always stood on the edge of a precipice: they were used to the look of it. The masters might make fiery rings round them with fine words that they could not understand. But they would not turn them.

Burton was even later than his executive. For no special reason — except to split up the ranks of the men, separating them from their women — the twisters had received a sudden offer of an extra two shillings a week, and had to be dealt with at the last moment.

For the first time no cheering greeted him when he did appear; and the chairman made his opening address amid a dead silence. He explained to the people that a trick had been played upon them. A trick such as he had never come across during his whole connection with the labour movement; which he could scarcely have believed that any body of well-educated men — men who pretended to be, and whom their workers regarded as honourable gentlemen — would have stooped to. He would leave it to his secretary to explain to them exactly what had occurred.

Burton was paler than ever when he rose: it seemed as if he had suddenly become an old man. In a level expressionless voice he read the letter from the Edge Chamber of Commerce offering the wages of other places as a basis for arbitration.

Then he read the reply — which was actually being drafted by him and his committee while the masters' notices were being sent round — absolutely refusing the terms.

Still there was a dead silence. The people were trying to understand. Their faces were oddly twisted in the greenish light, they were deadened by the effort of thought; so many people had failed them that they found it difficult to quite trust anybody.

Still in the same flat level voice Burton enumerated all the moves of the game, giving them a painstaking careful résumé of what had passed. Taking no sides, abusing no one. Any casual listener might have believed him almost as much on the side of the mill-owners as the workers.

A moment or two later they would have sworn that he was all on the owners' side, for he began to abuse the people.

Out of hundreds who had been served with those lying notices only some half-dozen had been sensible enough to

come straight to the Union and ask the meaning of it. They hung about like swarming bees, talking and talking; they had not the wit to realise how they were being tricked. They could not steer their own boat and they could not trust others to steer it for them.

"If I'd been able to count on your support, been sure of your having the sense to know what was good for you, I wouldn't have needed to wait to call your committee together," he said; "I'd have been able to send a point-blank refusal to the suggestion made; and all this trouble and expense would have been saved. You're not men and women, you're sheep; that's what you are — sheep."

This awoke the people from their apathy. They were not offended, they would take anything from Burton save his suspected desertion. A few moments ago he had seemed their enemy, unreal, uncomprehended: but here he was: the same as ever. They had been called sheep before, and anything familiar was a relief.

"Even now," he went on, "we are helpless till we have put the matter before you. And meanwhile every mill-owner in the place will not only know what decision we have come to, but know that you have no real trust in the people you have appointed to represent you. I don't speak of myself, I speak of your executive — fellow-workers of your own!

"I am now going to read the letter which has been drafted in answer to the masters' suggestion, and you can give your vote on it. But remember this, every master in the place will know what it contains before he gets it. However that's your choice, not mine. All I ask is that you give your vote as thinking men and women. I don't want to rush you. You have had, or will have, plenty of time to consider what you are about. But for God's sake do consider."

The motion refusing the suggestion of arbitration upon the basis suggested, or a return to work under such conditions, was passed without a single opposing hand; with enthusiasm and feeling, for the people were beginning to know where they were and the cloud was lifting.

A counter suggestion had been drafted by the executive:

but it was impossible to please all parties; and there was no getting it through.

The demands of the knotters and fringers were easy enough to settle: but the winding — where the conditions and the silk used differed in every mill — was more difficult. Again and again a definite programme was arrived at; then some shrill woman's voice broke in with an objection, arising from the peculiarities of her own particular job, and the whole thing was thrown out of gear.

Burton was extraordinarily patient. He did not mind what delays and difficulties there were, as long as the people showed some signs of tackling the affair in earnest, and used their brains as he had entreated them to do.

Apart from the winders, another burning question was that of the warehouse workers. Time after time the question of these people cropped up. If they were only engaged in packing and clerical work, as they declared, why had the engines been going in many of the mills; and why did they slip back to work at night?

The warehouse staff had always been disliked. They were as badly paid as any other branch, but they were too proud to join the Union. Now, during the time of stress, it was suspected — and in some cases rightly — that they were doing other people's work: keeping the mills going, and thus lengthening the strike with all its attendant miseries. Bribed by high wages to take over the knitting and winding which they had scorned.

"Up along Clutton's the worst," shrieked one woman: — "They go in at all hours an' out at all hours. They keep 'em there an' feed 'em."

"It's they as keep us out: doin' our work. Bloody blacklegs!"

"It's a damned lie!" shouted Bellamy.

"Who is it? Who's yon?" The question buzzed round the hall as, years before, it had buzzed round the chapel. Then came the answer: —

"Bloke on window. Walter Bellamy — that there Bellamy!"

"That 'ayporth o' treacle!" sneered a girl's voice, and there was a scream of laughter.

"Only a warehouser."

"A penny a weeker!" The crowd — half hysterical after the long strain — laughed again at this sally: harsh, broken laughter, the women's shrill treble on the edge of tears.

"A penny a weeker." This last taunt — meaning that he was one of those who would invest a weekly penny in the burial club, and was yet too mean to pay his threepence or fourpence a week into the Union — was more than Walter could stand.

"Is there any branch of the Union for the warehouse men and women? Tell me that!" he cried.

There were shouts of: — "No, no!" and reasons why were given, so loudly and profusely that again and again the chairman rang his bell before there was a hush, in which to make his voice audible.

"Any question must be addressed to the platform," he said.

"I addressed it to you and your Secretary," answered Walter coolly. "And I ask it again. Is there any existing branch of Union for the warehouse men and women?"

"No, there is not." It was Burton who spoke. "Several years ago there was a branch embracing the warehouse workers. But for some reason or other — perhaps because they were too intimately connected with the masters, or did not care to spend the money — they dropped out and the whole thing collapsed. But they have shared in the general rise of wages brought about by the Union, and it seems a pity that they hadn't spunk enough to hold to it: to help the rest of the people by coming out with them. Even now if they joined the Union solidly, showed what they were made of ——"

"Pap!" cried a girl's voice. Walter could see the speaker, a red-haired wench, with a round flushed face like a pink carnation. He would have liked to have slapped her, or kissed her: there was no half-way with such women.

The bell rang sharply, breaking into the jeer that followed the interjection. And Burton started again.

"The railwaymen are refusing to handle the stuff that is being turned out of the mill. The gasworkers are paying a shilling a week towards the strikers' fund. But the ware-

house hands — who have lived and worked side by side with their fellows in the mills, whose fathers and mothers were weavers and winders — have done nothing, except — Heaven forgive them — take the bread out of their fellows' mouths. If they'd join us ——"

"And by God they shall join!" cried Walter.

There was a shout of ugly laughter. With absolute calmness he waited till it subsided: standing balancing himself on the narrow window-ledge with one hand above him, gripping the cornice.

"They shall join," he repeated again, the moment he could make himself heard.

Burton was leaning a little forward, a dark squarely built man, with wonderfully penetrating eyes — the other men in the office declared that Burton's hand was in his pocket at any pitiful tale, and that he would have starved long ago if it had not been that people were afraid of his eyes, believed that he saw through them.

Walter Bellamy's glance met his fully: the young man's rather prominent eyes, very bright, eagerly self-confident. "I'll bring 'em out," he said; "they're men and women as much as any of you. They'll join — they shall join. I'll make 'em. Take my word for it, I'll make 'em!"

There was another roar of incredulous laughter. To talk of bringing out the warehouse hands: uniting them in anything but their invincible gentility! But still the young pup meant well — seemed to mean well.

"Bully for you!" cried some one; and there was a doubtful half-cheer.

But at that moment Walter's thoughts were not for the mass of the people, but for their Secretary, whom he envied, and yet partly despised.

He knew he would make a stronger leader than Burton, for he had no ideals to shatter; no disillusions to battle against. Burton believed in the cause and the people, and wore himself out over them. Walter on the other hand, knew that he never would, or could do more than pretend to believe; though his pretence would be so perfectly arranged that no one would be able to discover a crack in his armour. It was when people really felt a thing that they gave themselves away.

Burton was not in the habit of doubting his fellows — declared he would rather be taken in a hundred times — but the two men were so different that he could not feel sure of this new aspirant to his fold. There was something hard about Walter's confident, bright glance.

"I can bring 'em out," he repeated.

"Do it then," retorted Burton curtly. Turned and whispered a word or two to his chairman. Then put forward the last suggestion which had been made that afternoon.

Just as the people were moving, thinking it was all over — for the Secretary sat silent, bent forward, his elbows on the table, his head between his hands — Burton touched the chairman's bell and rose to his feet.

"One more word — and in a way this is a personal matter though it concerns all of us," he hesitated a moment or two, his eyes wandering round the hall, with an odd wistfulness, as if he was trying to gauge the mood of the people who declared that they adored him.

"At the meeting this afternoon, when no decision could be arrived at, I suggested to the committee that a particular proposal — already made by them — should be taken as a basis of settlement; and that I should be trusted to draft a scheme of detail and lay it before them. To this a woman replied — perhaps rightly — that I couldn't do it, as I'd been a weaver, not a winder. It was a small thing, but it shows the small spirit in which some of you are meeting this affair. You won't trust me any more than you trust each other. Oh, I know you've all come out together. But that's the fellowship of the flock, that's not the individual judgment of many people all turning one way. You believe that it is impossible for me to judge of work that I've never done. Yet the representatives you have chosen from among the winders are trusted just as little because you say: 'There's that there Mrs. Smith or Mrs. Jones, what right has she setting herself up?' You are not so much afraid of not getting what you want, as of other people getting more than you do.

"Yet if anything goes wrong all the blame will be laid on our shoulders — or rather on mine. I don't mind that — they're broad enough to bear it. But there's such a thing as hitting below the belt.

"Mr. Morrison said to me to-day: 'Well, Burton, if you will go on with it, you will; but remember that you'll have the blame of all the starving women and children on your shoulders.'"

Again his eyes sought the sea of uplifted faces: he was whiter than ever now: and showed deep lines of pain at either side of his mouth.

They would cheer him, laugh at his jokes. They were his people; he could do almost anything he liked with them: as long as he allowed them to believe him their servant.

Yet if anything went wrong. In a moment it would be the old cry again:—"Crucify him, crucify!"

They had bound the burden of all their needs, their weakness upon his shoulders; had no thought of the agony he endured.

He knew what it all meant, he had been in strikes before. It would be like this for years afterwards:—"My little Willy, he wur always rickety, no good; you see 'ee were born at strike time when I wur near clammed." "My man? Aye, I lost him after t'strike, he never seemed to pluck up spirit again." And:—"Our Nell, she started in decline strike time, five years back, when all our blankets was gone."

It was far-reaching indeed. Yet it had its limits of effect. To go on always at starvation wages, that was worse. War was worse, because it left the worst stock to breed from; and yet people took the risks of war for the mere greed of territory.

No strike in the world, let it last as long as it would, could do the harm which war did; while even worse than war was the resignation to underfeeding and overwork, to the Moloch-like rule of capital, that fatal patience of an older generation.

His own mother had borne eight children, worked in the mills all her life to supplement her husband's fourteen shillings a week and died in a lunatic asylum.

The sudden memory of her face — so harassed and loving, then so strange and wild — flashed like a photograph through Burton's mind.

The women and children had better starve at once — lie in peace on the quiet hillside and have done with it — rather

than live, and breed other inmates for that gaunt habitation of despair — to which a paternal government was, year after year, adding fresh accommodation — or spit and cough their lungs away in consumption.

"You men and women, boys and girls," he went on, the weariness gone from his voice, his head high. "Despite all that Morrison says, despite the fact that he has tried to shift the responsibility from his own shoulders — for he leads the other masters, if it were not for him they'd give way long ere this — I maintain that I'm fighting for the right, while he is fighting for the wrong."

"Aye, aye, good old Bill! Good old Bill Burton." There was a storm of applause — he knew how much it was worth; but it cheered him, as a child's careless, passing love will please.

"I, at least, am striving ter rouse yer up, you an' yer children, while he'd pull yer down ter degradation, an' keep yer there for his own ends. In the olden days the corner-stones of public buildings was laid in the blood o' some human victim. That great chapel yonder that he's so proud on. What is it laid in? The life-blood, not o' one, but o' thousands: children warped and stunted: stillborn, children jockeyed out o' life — and such a life!" he added bitterly. "The like o' that may fool the deacons an' the elders, but it 'ull not fool God.

"It's the owners and the owners alone, who are responsible for the conditions that led to this strike. And if I'm responsible for the strike itself I take the responsibility gladly — not lightly, mind you. For it's a weight that no man living could bear an' not feel, if he had any heart in his breast. It's a greater weight than any general bears in any battle. He's responsible for leading his soldiers, he's not responsible for starting the fight — though even then God help him if he hasn't his men's full confidence. No one will ever point at all the misery and desolation and say — 'That's his doin' an' only his.' He's not got to live his life out in the place, an' among the people where the fight took place!

"But there's one thing I have, which few enough generals do have, and that's the consciousness of a righteous

fight; while all I ask out of it is that you should trust me; an' trust each other.

"Let old Peter Morrison say what he likes. If you starve now — an' yer won't, for we're not fools enough to start a fight with empty coffers — it's not I who've starved you. You got the habit before I was born — half of you started on it before you were born. An' after all these years of short commons, isn't it worth tightening another hole in your belts to get something like a life for yourself and your children? You don't want them to start where you started — in 'the Shades.'"

There was a roar at the words. How many of those bent-legged, narrow-chested men had started there; where no man would willingly employ his own son.

"In this war — for it is a war — whatever happens, remember this: we are fighting for our rights; fighting to make life better an' cleaner for ourselves and our children. Morrison's fighting for his rights, too — in his own way, perhaps — but it isn't our way. He's built us chapels. Right enough! He'd save our souls and keep our bellies empty. It's his way — I don't want to abuse him or abuse any one — but again I repeat it's not our way. An' I'd rather take the risk I'm takin' than the risk he's takin'.

"The other day he was booed as he went through the town. I don't hold with that: you should behave as men and women, not as children. It's a free world. He can't make you work if you don't want to; and you can't make him pay the wages if he don't want to.

"But all the same one thing stuck, and still sticks in my mind. They say as how he was half broken-hearted about it and that he said he never thought to be sneeped like that in his own town. It minded me — and it'll mind you — of another man as we've all read of who: —'went very sorrowful because he had great possessions.'"

Suddenly Burton's face lightened, and he gave a short laugh. "For all the talk about us Trade Union secretaries, to look at things as they are now, I should say that's about the last thing I shall ever be given cause to sorrow over," he added, and laughed again; whilst the people laughed with him. It was like the breaking of a thunder-storm.

## CHAPTER IX

THERE is always an ugly interval between the time when the first excitement of any movement dies away, and people settle down to solid, everyday endurance.

This crook in the road was past.

Long lines of boys and girls — the two sexes curiously unmixed — still swept the streets at evening, singing "Rule Britannia," or rough strike chants, converted from hymns and set to hymn tunes.

But, for the most part, the men and women stayed at home: save when the handful of workers still crept in and out of the mills, while the pickets gathered in little dun-coloured groups staring contemptuously, though there was no violence and very little jeering.

The police stood by with idle hands; there were not even drunkards to arrest. The streets were empty and grey: as silent as though it were Sunday. "Different enough from the Collieries at strike time," they said.

But the idleness bit into the men; perhaps all the more for their quiet: while there was little enough left for the women to cook out of the five shillings a week strike pay. They kept the children in bed as much as they could, so they'd not get so hungry, and the empty hours hung heavily on their hands.

In some of the houses the blinds were always down: things were moved out and away at night. For the Edge people are not of the beggar class which displays its sores.

Negotiations went on. Negotiations which they could not follow.

They got into a stubborn, ugly mood. Suggestions came from the masters which Burton and the committee examined and placed before them: suggestions which with a very few alterations would meet their case. But they would have nothing in the way of a compromise even though, in

the end, it would benefit them. The harder life became the more dogged they grew: they were past reasoning, they could only hold on.

Walter was working hard with the relief committee. He had kept his word and brought out all the warehouse workers in his own mill and many besides: forced them into the Union, though he did not appeal to their honour or their manhood as Burton would have done.

Instead he explained to them that directly all the stock in hand was packed up, and sent off, there would be nothing for them to do; and a pretty position they would find themselves in. Hung in space, with no regular work or pay. None of the honour and glory of having joined in the general revolt: not even five shillings a week to comfort themselves with.

Some protested that the masters would keep them on; but in their hearts they knew better than that. They did not even pay them when they were on their compulsory week's holidays, and the mills were shut down. They were no more to their masters than so many shuttles in a loom, and easily replaced, for only too many young people were bitten with the idea of gentility.

Walter did not trust any one too much; but he had more confidence in an association than in any individual millowner.

He used burning words, flaming phrases: but there was never any propaganda with a cooler head, or colder heart at the back of it. The only time when he was really stirred to feeling was when the people cheered him, as he swept his proselytes in batches to the Union buildings to have their names registered.

Burton honestly tried to like the young fellow; recognised his use, the influence he had. But he sensed a motive that did not harmonise with his own, though the result was good and he gave him all the credit possible. Indeed it was wonderful how Bellamy could lead men and women, make them see as he saw — or seemed to see. Though an astute girl typist who worked in the Union office declared that his sway would never prove more than temporary: because it was backed by no ideal. That he led: that he did not inspire. Directly he grew tired of the game his influence

would be gone. And on that point she was right, for in a couple of years the warehouse branch of the Union had petered away to nothing.

Meanwhile the two men were as one on several practical points. They saw that there were many ways in which the owners might be met, without any loss. One big man had complained that the strike committee wished to "humiliate him," puffed out his cheeks and declared that he "would not be humiliated."

It was a weak thing to say. But it voiced the feelings of most of his party. They were willing to accept almost any proposals as long as they were couched in a different form to those to which they had — at the very first — given a blank refusal.

Walter — who attended all the meetings now, as representative of the warehouse workers, returning Higgins' heavy scowl with his sweetest smile — realised this even better than Burton, for his mind was more subtle: realised, indeed, almost every corner round which it was possible for the human intelligence to wriggle its way.

The masters hated him. He was more eloquent than any of them: tangled them up in flowery phrases. If they roared he cooed. It was no good trying to trip him up by quoting the Bible or the foreign Bourses, for he was before them. If old Peter Morrison rolled forth any one of his well-worn Latin platitudes, Bellamy responded with a French *bon mot*. His hard bright eyes were everywhere. One of the women declared that his tongue was like that of a lizard after flies.

The idea took: it was so apt. Besides his whole personality bore out the idea — his quickness, his bright eyes, his cold-blooded way of looking at things — and for years he bore the nickname of "the Lizard" or "Lizard Bellamy" in Edge.

All the owners were anxious to get their mills going again: pliable, ready to seize on any pretext that would save their faces. Trade was slipping away from them; the busiest season was at hand, and if they failed to get their supply on the market they would be pushed on one side. Several of the mills were really owned by companies, and their shareholders were getting anxious.

The threatened reduction in the wages of the artificial workers was considerable, but would it recoup them for the losses of the strike?

There was not one of them that would not have given way, but for old Peter Morrison and Higgins: and Higgins was the worse of the two.

He was a self-made man. He had climbed up regardless of whom he trod underfoot. And now he meant to keep up, and at the same time to keep others down.

At one meeting Burton pleaded the distress of the people.

"It's the way they've set themselves up to live," retorted Higgins. "They go ter work dressed as though they was goin' ter church. If they'd be content to wear clogs an' a shawl an' eat black bread, which is good enough for any working man or woman, we shouldn't be hearing all this fal-daddle now about better wages and poverty."

The words went the round of the town:—"Black bread Higgins" he was called; and they spat when they spoke of him.

Three more of the owners broke away from the combine, and now only eleven were left at the meetings.

Old Peter Morrison was very stout: he could not get up to the table, but had to draw his chair a little back; sitting always with his large fat white hands outspread on his knees.

"I'm fighting for the dignity of the Constitution, for the Empire. What you women really want's not more wages, but more modesty, to stay at home and look after your husbands and children; to live the life God appointed you to, instead of trapesing down the town, stirring up strife," he said, with disapproving eye on the women of the committee.

"Chances enough yer give us o' stayin' yome, with the wages yer pay our meysters!" retorted one of them bitterly: a worthy representative of the doublers, having worked at the same task since she was eleven.

"You think because we're your betters, because we own the mills, we're without troubles, that we've got nothing to put up with." Mr. Morrison's voice was always mildly reasonable, for the first moment or so a stranger might miss the cast-iron obstinacy at the back of it: "You forget that not only have we all the responsibility and risk, but are of

like flesh and blood with yourselves, heir to the same ills: money doesn't give us happiness."

"Likely not: but yer heir to summat else besides ills. An' whatever ills ye've 'ad in yer flesh, Peter Morrison, ye've never 'ad ter stand ten hours a day doublin' with an eight months' child in yer womb, I'll lay yer that!" shrilled Mrs. Street.

"Vulgar brute!" muttered young Clutton, who had been to Oxford and travelled on the Continent, returning to Edge to bewail the fact that he was the eldest son and must step into his father's shoes.

"Life's a vulgar affair altogether," answered another man, Rivers, Morrison's own son-in-law. He felt in honour bound to stick to the old man, who had helped him over a bad season; but for all that his conscience drove him towards the side of the workers.

## CHAPTER X

MRS. RIVERS was young and pretty, and so delicate, that it seemed as if her parents must have kept all their strength for themselves.

Her husband adored her. During the time that her two children were coming — her long and difficult labour, her slow recoveries — he had grown sick and faint to see women go to the mills in the condition they did. It was not pity for them; it was the personal fear of a just or jealous God who might revenge their sufferings through the creature he loved best in the world.

Elsie Rivers had felt for them too; and in much the same way. She was in terror lest her children should catch any of the infantile complaints which swept the town, or the still more fatal germs of consumption. If she heard that any child was ill she sent soup and jellies to propitiate her God: hung in fear, as though it were her own, till it recovered; or followed the little body to the grave in an agonised imagining of herself as chief mourner.

She was like a person who tried to conciliate fate by tossing scraps to it, as one might to some fierce dog.

But, for all that, the dog was at the other side of the wall; till the strike began, when it came nearer to her; with the result that — after her first panic — she began to realise the people as human like herself; with much the same affections and feelings, thoughts and reservations. It was these reservations which surprised her more than anything. She had imagined the working class as all on the surface: like pictures done in dead black and white. The white were those who saluted their masters' daughter respectfully when they passed her: the black those who scowled and looked the other way.

They had never been openly rude as they were during the strike. But in their rudeness she recognised humanity. Realised that these people were parti-coloured like herself,

only infinitely stronger and braver; taking risks — coolly, as part of their everyday life — which she would not have dared to venture on.

One day when Rivers got home from a meeting he found his wife crying over her household books.

"You silly child!" he said. "Fancy worrying yourself over those things like that. I won't have it — do you hear? I won't have it!"

Laughing tenderly he pulled her up from her chair; pretended to shake her. Then held her close and raised her face to his with one hand under her chin.

"Don't you worry your dear head over accounts; we'll pull through all right — keep the pot boiling and get a week or two in Scotland directly you're about again," he added; for at that time she was expecting her third child: —"Find something to put some colour into those pale cheeks of yours; never fear."

"It's not that, Arthur," she began hesitatingly. Then went on with a curious air of desperation: —"I've been looking over the milk bill." All the milk used in the Rivers' household was — for fear of contamination — brought in sealed cans, from a farm miles away over the moors.

Her husband laughed, a deep jovial laugh of sheer relief.

"Well I suppose we'll hardly go broke over a milk bill; not yet anyhow."

"Arthur, you don't understand; it's —— Do you know that it comes to more — just that alone — for us and the children — the servants hardly drink any — than the whole week's wage that those women are fighting for? Why baby's alone — now that the doctor's put him on whey and cream — is more than the strike pay which whole families are living on. Women — widows with four or five children. The thought came suddenly like a flash. I never realised it before — God must have opened my eyes, for some reason."

She had been brought up in the strictest Wesleyan faith. But religion — which her father wore like he had worn his Mayoral chain,— as an insignia of dignified respectability — was a vital thing to Elsie Rivers, as far as her knowledge went. "Think of it, Arthur! Rent, food and clothes —

everything! It will hardly bear thinking of; it's too awful. But there it is, it's got to be faced."

"I know:" Rivers left her, and moving to the window stood staring out with his hands in his pockets.

"What's to be done? Arthur, what's to be done?" His wife had sunk back in her chair: but now she rose and stood behind him.

"I can't bear it! I can't — everything I eat and drink, every penny I spend, I calculate how much it is out of some woman's wages. And now that piteous strike pay — five shillings a week! Five shillings! What's to be done? Arthur, don't stand there." Her voice broke off sharply. "Don't stand there staring out of the window as if it didn't matter to you — there was another woman yesterday died in child-birth."

"Yet it's the women who are holding out; won't let the men give in."

"Well, think what that means! That they'd rather die than live, if things are cut down any lower. It's got to be stopped. You men don't feel it — you don't know," she caught at his arm and almost shook him. "You don't care ——" she hesitated: then added slowly, "as I care."

"You know I care:" he flung round upon her sharply. "It's because you realise how I care that you turn upon me like this. It's getting on both our nerves. You're quiet enough with your father because you realise that there you're up against something that you can't touch or turn."

"Yet he's always been so good to me: given me everything I've asked for — spoilt me. Why, Arthur, you yourself have always said he spoilt me."

She spoke petulantly as though it were her husband's fault. He was the only one with whom she ever showed such a mood. She loved him so that what pained him doubled her own hurt, rubbed sore between them.

"Sometimes I think that people who are kindest, most indulgent to their own children, are hardest with other people," answered Rivers. "Look at Higgins now, and his Rose: the workers may eat black bread, but he was bringing home the very finest strawberries for her all the way from Manchester last week. Every good thing — even love

— seems capable of being turned to evil, Elsie. That's what makes life so damnably hard to live."

"I don't see why it should. Our children don't make us selfish."

"I don't know. If we had to go and live in one of those little red boxes at the south end of the town, year in year out, could bring ourselves to take our children there, to eat the same food, drink the same milk as those children do, we'd force things to alter: nothing else would matter. Now we're sorry — but we're safe and they're safe. That makes all the difference."

"It's the masters! The masters must be made to give in. Arthur, you have influence — you yourself. You must break away; go back to the old conditions: start your mill again."

"And what good would it do, unless the rest were with me? Alienate your father for nothing. I can't do it: the whole thing's practically run with his money now. After all it's he, and he only, who's keeping the strike going; and you know it, Elsie."

"It's his principles — he never could give in."

"Principles? Prejudices! With prejudices instead of principles and convictions instead of hearts. You Morrisons! I believe you'd let the whole world go rather than budge a step."

It was an unfair hit. But when two people care for each other they do hit in that way. They can afford to. "But mind this," added Rivers, turning round and taking her by her shoulders, with a sort of furious tenderness. "I'll not have you worrying! Do you hear? I won't have it. You ought to go away from it all; you can do no good and what's the use of risking your own life and the child's. By God, I'd rather the factory, the town, the people — aye and your own father too — were wiped out of existence, than that you should worry yourself as you are doing."

"That's what it comes back to — in the end. You and I, and our children."

"Well, after all, what else does it come to with any one? If the truth were known?"

## CHAPTER XI

YOUNG Mrs. Rivers had been ordered long drives; to get her out in the air as much as possible, and away from the town; which she refused to leave excepting for a few hours at a time.

Rivers felt that it would be more cheerful for her if she took the children; but gave in to her refusal, thinking that perhaps they got on her nerves.

But as a matter of fact she was ashamed of showing them; so plump and daintily dressed. It was like flaunting her jewels in the eyes of the people.

The drives themselves were a long drawn-out agony to her.

The well-appointed carriage and fine horses, which her father sent for her each afternoon, made her feel as if she could creep under the seat and hide her head in very shame.

Yet, with an almost heroic courage, she obeyed the doctor's orders. She would do all that was possible for the coming child, whatever it cost her.

One day they were returning to the town, when — half a mile out, round a sharp corner — they came upon a funeral procession just leaving the cemetery; spreading its whole width across the narrow road.

Elsie Rivers rose from her seat and leant across to the coachman.

"Can't you turn back and go another way?"

The man twisted half round and touched his hat. "It 'ud taeke us a matter o' three miles out, Mum. Just another quarter o' a mile an' I can turn off by the West Bank an' get home in ten minutes. The horses 'as been a fairish way already, you see, Mum."

Elsie did not insist. She was rather frightened of her father's old coachman; and it was true that they had taken a long drive.

All the same the horses were still fresh, or anxious to get

home to their stables. The man kept pulling them back; but they bored gradually on till they were right in the midst of the straggling tail of the procession.

It was very long: stretching as far as the eye could reach. Elsie saw it climbing up the bare hillside, one shabby mourning-coach and the empty hearse. Then a crowd of people, like a dingy ribband trailed across the green landscape.

Still the fretting horses pushed on, till they became part of it; and the people were thick at either side: their faces, unnaturally white, beaded with perspiration, their drab clothes thick with dust.

They stepped mechanically to one side and stared at Elsie as the carriage moved slowly forward.

Now and then she caught the words: "Morrison's wench!" But for the most part they were silent, regarding her with the same dull contempt which they showed towards the "blacklegs," who crept into her father's mill.

A criminal being led to execution could not have suffered from a more agonised sense of fear and shame. Yet with this feeling came a desperate desire to know who was dead. And at a sudden twist of the road, where the crowd thickened so that the horses had to be stopped, she leant over the side of the carriage.

"Who was it? Whose funeral ——?"

For a moment or two there was a sullen pause. Then a man answered.

"Missus Slade."

"Who ——?"

"A winder, as worked ——" the fellow hesitated. Then jerked his head in the direction of the great mill that topped the town. He could not have spoken the name without an oath.

"What — what did she die of?"

"Nothing you need be feared o' catchin', me fine Madam," broke in a woman's shrill voice: —"She died o' starvation; that's what she died on! Oh, God damn them as murdered 'er, seys Oi."

"It wur like this you see, Mum." The man, close against the carriage, spoke almost apologetically: —"She's gotten four children, and the strike pay wurn't much. She'd no strength not to speak on by the time 'er time comed."

"How do you mean?" Elsie Rivers' heart seemed to lie like a cold stone in her breast. She knew so well what was coming. "How do you mean? When — when her time came?"

The man flushed darkly, but he did not answer; and another woman in the crowd, Mrs. Street this time, took up the tale.

"She died in child-bed, if you want to know. But, as there's a God above us, it wur yer feyther, curse 'im, as killed 'er — an' that's the truth, Elsie Morrison; taeke it, or leave it."

"She was clemmed — yer see, Mum; clemmed for days a'fore," put in the man again, in his gentle, wearied voice. "The mattress was gone from the bed an' all. There weren't nothing left fur ter sell."

"Aye, what do yer think on that? You as is goin' the saeme gait, when nothing won't not be good enough for yer. Not as much as a mattress left fur she ter lie upon, when the pains o' 'Ell gotton 'old o' she."

"Horrible, horrible!"

With a feeling as if she must take it standing, Elsie sprang to her feet. At the same moment the horses moved on a step or two, and she lurched forward against the driver's seat; then fell back with a shrill cry. "It must be stopped — it must!"

But no one heeded her words, for the silent procession was suddenly alive with hisses and jeers, and cries of "Shaeme, shaeme!"

The carriage was right in the midst of it now, only a few yards from the one shabby coach.

Some of the younger men caught at the horses' heads. To old Burgess this was an act of desecration, and with a complete loss of self-control he leant forward and flicked at them with his whip: —"Let 'em 'orses o' mine alone! do yer 'ear? Let 'em alone!" he cried.

It was a fatal thing to do, like a flame to tinder, for they only caught more firmly at the heads of the rearing horses; surging close round the carriage, shouting and gesticulating. Individually there was not a man among them who would have insulted any woman in Elsie Rivers' condition; but the spirit of the mob seized them. They had been quiet so

long, now it seemed as if they didn't mind what they did or said.

As for the women, they had no pity. They had suffered too much themselves, and now hung, like flies, round the carriage. Those patient, hard-working women who had gone so punctually to work every day — each like a tiny cog in the vast machinery of the mills — speaking their mind out for the first time for years: telling her all that they thought of her and her breed, shaking their twisted work-worn fists in her very face.

"You fools! You damn fools!" Walter Bellamy's clear high voice broke in upon the babel. Pushing his way through the crowd, he put his foot upon the step leading to the box, swung himself up to old Burgess' side, snatched the whip from the old man's hand, and broke it in two pieces, then again in four, across his knee — Morrison's whip!

It was a sheer piece of theatrical bombast, but Bellamy knew his people. To them it seemed emblematical — the breaking of King Morrison himself; and for a moment they hung silent and staring.

Taking instant advantage of the pause Walter Bellamy swung round, one knee upon the seat, his right arm raised with the broken pieces of the whip faggot-wise in his hand.

"Now look here — you've got to drop this. Mrs. Rivers' ill — you can see it."

"That's nawt ter do wid thee, Lizard Bellamy!" retorted a sulky voice. But the rest hung silent, checked to sudden thought.

"No, it ain't! Yer roight there. An' it warn't be nought ter Oi if half a dozen o' you men an' women are set dancin' in mid-air with a rope round your neck. For if she dies it 'ull be murder — mind you, murder. An' murder's not a pretty thing!" he retorted in a broad, deliberate dialect.

"You've fought the fight with clean hands up to now," he went on. "What do you want to go spoiling it for, just at the end? You fools — you silly fools you!"

The crowd shrank away from the sides of the carriage. Elsie Rivers was huddled up in one corner, in a faint: so white and death-like, that Bellamy's words cut home.

For a moment he himself half believed that the woman

might be dead; then caught a stir among the laces at her throat, and seeing Jane Irwin's fair little face, uplifted like a flower among the crowd, called to her:

"Jane Irwin, Jane! Get into the carriage along o' Mrs. Rivers, Jane!"

The people parted, with frightened sidelong glances at the fainting woman. Some one opened the door, and the girl, in her neat black frock, stepped into the carriage; flung one arm round Mrs. Rivers, drew her head down low upon her shoulder, and began to unfasten the collar of her dress, cooing over her as though she had been a child.

For a moment Walter Bellamy regarded her: his eyes bright, his lips pursed up. One could always depend on Jane, matter-of-fact little Jane: she was the best second any man ever had, he thought; then seated himself at Burgess' side.

"Now drive, you fool!" he cried. "Drive for all you're worth, if that's anything."

Purple with rage the old man gathered up the reins — putting out one hand mechanically in search of the whip — then shook them, and the horses started forward, while the people fell back on either side.

They were near the corner by then: the next moment they were round it, and straight on the clear road for Rivers' house.

Glancing back Walter saw that Mrs. Rivers' eyes were open; that she was sobbing in hysterical gasps and that Jane Irwin was patting her — as one pats a child to soothe it — and murmuring over her:

"There — there — there now, don't thee taeke on, dwant thee — it ull all be roight now,— me doe, me poore doe."

At dawn next day Arthur Rivers' third child made its entry into the world — a miserable, tragic-eyed creature — which might have been the Scape-Goat for the starvation of the whole town — while two hours later his wife slipped very quietly away, out of it all.

"A sheer case of fright," said the doctor: "there was nothing really to kill her; nothing really wrong. She held up splendidly till she heard the baby was all right. Then it was like snuffing out a candle. Nothing could save her."

She and her husband were the only ones — on the master's

side — that really cared for the workers. And they were the only ones that suffered.

One by one the other mills gave way. The partners or directors came down from London and made a fuss. They wanted to get off to their grouse shooting, or yachting, in peace now that the London season was over.

Morrison was the last to give way. But Higgins saw that it was inevitable; he did not mean to lose any more of his hard earnings, and since Elsie's death he had been gradually elbowing old Peter Morrison to one side.

It was a great triumph for the people. The hard-silk workers went back with an extra shilling a week, and the artificial workers to the same rate of pay, for which they had fought so hard; while twisters kept the masters to their rash promise of an extra two shillings a week.

In addition to this at the last moment, with victory in his hands, Burton squeezed out a better rate for the weavers.

It was a victory all along the line. But it had lasted five months: had cost them dear. The Union coffers were empty. It would be years before the people got over the pinch, and there was a look in all the young babies' faces, which wrung Burton's heart. He knew he had been right — and yet he sometimes wondered.

Rivers' third child lived — in a fashion! Always flat upon its back, staring up at the sky with a heart-breaking air of patient enquiry, as if asking why such things should be.

Peter Morrison was often seen walking by the side of its long wheeled chair. He was not the man he had been; and on his wide flabby face, and on the child's peaked little countenance, there was much the same expression of hurt wonder; as if some toy had suddenly been snatched away, for no reason whatever.

## CHAPTER XII

THE progress of the strike fascinated Rose Higgins. Not that she had the faintest idea of what it all meant: its far-reaching issues: its suffering: its ironical humours.

For her, there were the masters: more or less well-regulated machines set up for the express purpose of supplying their children with money; and the common people. These latter interesting, merely from the fact that they formed a base to the flamboyant figure of Walter Bonnet Bellamy.

As a father James Higgins satisfied all requirements. Other people might, and did, both fear and hate him. But by a few sweet words Rose could reduce him to a condition so pliable that it was easy enough to twist him round her little finger.

All he asked of her was that she should be "the lady." Always beautifully dressed and completely at leisure. He hated to see her doing anything beyond playing the piano or reading a novel. Even the sight of sewing irritated him.

"What do you want to let my girl be spoilin' her eyes over the like o' that?" he would ask his wife angrily — it was always "my girl" and "your boy" though he was equally the parent of both. "Aren't there servants enough ter do it for her? Have I ever cut up rough at the dress-making bills, or anything you ask me for the wench's fal-daddles?" Fal-daddles was a favourite word of his. "I'll pay, an' I have paid, ter the tune of a couple of thousand, ter have her brought up as a lady. But there's one thing I won't do — an' I've told you that a'fore — pay a dog an' do the barkin' meself: or see her do it neither."

Mrs. Higgins was miserable in her gentility. She looked back on the Monday mornings when she used to get up at four and do a big day's washing before going off to the mill, as some women look back at love's young dream. Her only happy days were those when the servants left in a body —

as they occasionally did, for Higgins required a lot of barking for his money — and she could indulge in a debauch of housework.

She could never resist running her fingers along the ledges and shelves in search of dust; could scarcely bear to sit in the room while the parlour-maid laid the table. She feared her husband and daughter, and yet despised them both. The one was a pompous, tyrannical man; the other a spoilt, useless child.

She gave in to Rose's extravagance and idleness with a sort of ironical bitter pleasure: did her best to intensify it. "That's not the sort of thing for a lady such as you to have — or to wear:" she would say.

Only when the girl was ill, or in trouble, did she love her, realise her as human.

Rose did not love either of them. She was incapable of love. But she was hot-blooded and vain, and she loved love: its caresses and adulation. Though by the time she turned her attention to Walter Bellamy she was already a little clogged by what she regarded as her victories: mistaking men's easily roused lust for love, as many a woman has done before her.

Besides this, she liked what she had heard about him: that —"he didn't care a twopenny damn for any one." It would be a triumph to make him care; while everything about him, his swinging walk, his strength, and fine figure thrilled her flesh.

Clutton and Son was angry at the prominent part Bellamy had taken in the strike, the way he had led the other warehouse workers, and refused to take him back.

But as usual he fell on his feet. Old Sir Peter Morrison had heard the part which he played in that scene, the day before Elsie's death, and insisted that he should be given a good place in the warehouse of his own mill: much against the wish of Higgins who detested any one cleverer than himself, or cleverer in a different way; and was particularly distrustful of what he called "the gift of the gab."

But Walter got the position and kept it. And climbed up and up, despite Higgins.

Elsie had clung to Jane all through those dark hours, refusing to let her out of her sight. After her death Rivers

asked the girl to become part of his household: help look after the children and take special charge of the wizened baby. But Jane's mother was dead; there were several children not yet old enough to work, and a bullying, drunken father, so that her capable little hands were as full as they could hold between home and mill. She even took her meals as did the mothers: carrying a butty and bit of meat, or cheese, to work with her; and eating it on the way home so as to have more time for preparing the children's food, and making them clean for school.

Walter Bellamy thought that she had made a mistake. "Rivers is a young man: he'll be sure to marry again; and why not you as well as any one else? You're as pretty as paint, you know you are, Jane. And look what a lift it would give to the others — to all of us — if only you played your cards properly."

Jane was hurt, though she would not have shown it for worlds. Walter had always said that he wanted to marry her: would marry her when he could afford it — if she would have him. For, certain as he was about everything else regarding her, he was never quite certain how she felt towards him. And candid as Jane was on most points, she was yet woman enough not to enlighten him on this.

At this time Walter Bellamy was swept by occasional tornadoes of passion, greed and exultation: never quite off his feet, for he was always too conscious of his enjoyment. There were times when he liked to feel like a Turkish Sultan; intensely masculine, all compelling. He had many light passing loves, and devoured them, as it were.

But with Jane Irwin he scarcely remembered that he had a body. She was such "a rum little customer"; kept him so well amused; though there was always something between them, clear and hard as a sheet of plate-glass.

But, in spite of his affection for the girl, "getting on" was so much his real religion that he would have sacrificed her cheerfully, both for his sake and her own: delighted to have seen her in the position of Rivers' wife.

But Jane realised that the idea was ridiculous. She did not want to go where she would be "sneeped" either as wife or servant. Indeed she did not want to marry anybody; though she had plenty of suitors, for she was a hard-

working little body, and a wife is a valuable acquisition in Edge, where many of them earn more than the men.

But she did not mean to be married to be made use of; she was shrewd enough for that. If she married any one she would rather marry Wally, who regarded her as a "rum little customer," than those others, who wanted her for what she could make.

For all this, if any one made the suggestion she repudiated it with scorn.

"Marry Walter Bellamy! I'd as lief marry a tee-to-tum; allus on the whirl."

Rose adored the whirl, was dazzled by it. To her mind Walter Bellamy was not like a tee-to-tum, but like a fine humming-top, which spun in a mist of rainbow tints: so wonderful that she never had time to realise the real shape and colour of it.

About this time she was always finding excuses to go to the mill; penetrating to the warehouse to enquire whether her father was there.

She wore silk underskirts which rustled, and all her clothes were perfumed. She liked to see the girls and young men turn round and stare after her whispering; for she was as vain as any spoilt child, had no idea that they could experience anything but envious admiration; felt herself like a vision floating into the everyday orbit of Walter Bellamy's life.

There was no plate-glass here. Even if she did not actually touch Walter, it always seemed as if she was not only touching but enfolding. She would lean right over him and ask him a question; her warm breath on his neck as he bent above his work, in which she professed an absorbing interest.

But, so far, it was all on her side, for the young man had no intention of jeopardising his position; though he sometimes thought — coolly enough — that it might be a good thing to marry her; for she was an only daughter and Higgins was at daggers drawn with his son, who was as useless and pleasure-loving as Rose herself.

But in the boy's case it was all different. For the father regarded him with contemptuous antagonism; would have

ground him down to the desk, denied him every pleasure which he himself had not known.

"I did without an' you can do without," was his unvarying answer to any request.

For he forgot that during his youth work was stimulated by necessity: while he complained of his son's association with light women; regardless of the fact that, in the class of life where he naturally belonged, an early marriage was possible, almost inevitable. That he himself had been a married man and his own master at an age when he expected his son to remain a docile child, loving work better than play.

## CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Bellamy had been at Morrison's a year Rose reached her twentieth birthday, and insisted that she should be allowed to give a tennis party: not at her own home but at the Club, with a tent and hired waiters, and ices.

Of course she got her way: though her mother regarded the idea with bitterness. Rose had every chance of mixing with the best people; while Bertie — her Bertie — was kept so under that it was not surprising that he found his principal pleasure in billiards at the " Blue Boar."

She used to lie awake at night and think of it; of how she would put the matter calmly and precisely before her husband so that he must understand.

But the instant she broached the subject and Higgins roared at her she became confused and inarticulate. The boy was the same; he could not state his case, he could only complain: there are many people like that.

There was some discussion as to who should be asked.

" It's my party, and I'm going to ask who I like," pouted Rose, holding on to the lapels of her father's coat. " It's my party and I'm going to have what I like, and ask who I like, eh, Curmudgeon?"

" All right, my lass, only mind there's no cheese-paring. We'll show 'em what we can do, slap-up and no mistake. An' look you, all the bills in next day, an' a percentage off for ready money — that's business."

Rose and a girl friend wrote the invitations, filling them in on printed cards. One of the first was addressed to Walter B. Bellamy, Esq.

There was a great deal of giggling over it.

" I don't know if he'll come," said Rose doubtfully; " he's awfully stand-off and proud, is Walter Bellamy — I wonder what the other B's for — I think it's such a lovely name, don't you, Julie?"

"Bellamy — Rose Bellamy!" laughed the other girl, who was a confidante: —"That's a lovely name if you like! Oh, he'll come right enough, you'll see."

He did come, but he did the inevitably correct thing first. With fine candour he took the invitation straight to Higgins, choosing a time when he was with his senior partner in the office.

"I beg your pardon, sir: I didn't know Mr. Morrison was here," he said, hesitating in the doorway, his bright eyes full on Higgins.

"All right, my lad, come in, come in," said old Peter Morrison. And Walter came in; and stood before Rose's father, with an air of deprecatory frankness.

"I'm sorry, sir, to trouble you; but I received an invitation ——"

"Well?" The word was like a bark.

"Miss Higgins was kind enough — generous enough to send me an invitation to her birthday party; and I thought I'd better ask you whether you would care for me to accept."

"Very right. Shows a right spirit that, eh, Higgins?" put in Morrison.

"Of course it must be just as you like, sir," said Walter. He was a charming figure as he stood there between the two older men; old Peter Morrison fatter and whiter than ever, pompous and ridiculous; yet somehow pathetic on account of that oddly baffled look which had lain in his small light eyes since his only child's death, as though a feeble soul was struggling out from the mass of flesh. Higgins was rough and unwieldy; in corduroys with a red handkerchief round his neck he might have looked a fine man, but the smooth broadcloth had coarsened him into a bully.

Walter was, as usual, dressed in blue serge, with a white shirt, turned down collar and bird's-eye tie. He was leaning a little forward; but it was in an attitude of respect, for he never stooped or slouched: was as well knit, clean limbed a young fellow as one could meet with anywhere; glowing with vitality and health. Higgins felt puzzled what to do. Rose was a silly little chit to have sent such an invitation: girls were always getting fal-daddle ideas of being "kind to everybody": ideas that in a man might be termed socialistic. Still she would be very angry if he treated her as a

child, and annulled her invitation. Then there was the senior partner to consider.

"Oh, I suppose it 'ull be all right if my daughter's sent it — providing you can get off in time," he said grudgingly.

"It's Saturday, sir," answered Walter with great respect — Rose had taken care of that. "And thank you very much ——" He hesitated a moment, and glanced from one face to another. "It's immensely kind of — of — y — you ——" he almost stammered. Really he did feel very grateful and docile: a pleasant feeling as though he had been stroked down gently the right way; could almost have visualised himself as a dove, with very smooth feathers and bright eyes.

He respected both his employers, for had they not accomplished the great task of "getting on"? He respected himself too: loved his own nice manners. "You may depend on me not to take any advantage — presume on your kindness."

"Very right, very proper," said Morrison. "Mustn't allow yourself to become puffed up, young man. The — eh, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, you know."

"Indeed yes, sir," said Bellamy; bowed and withdrew.

"Nice, God-fearing young fellow that," remarked old Morrison.

"Umph!" Higgins drew down his long close-shaven upper lip: and bent closer over the books which he was examining.

"Quite the old stamp," added the other man.

Still Higgins said nothing. "King Morrison" was very old: he forgot things that had happened less than twenty years ago: forgot the daring, flashing young man, with his glib French, who had defied them all as an acknowledged representative of the warehouse workers in that ill-omened strike.

## CHAPTER XIV

ROSE, having done the daring thing and received a scolding from her father — leaving him with a guilty feeling that he, and not his daughter, was in the wrong, and that she must be made up to, conciliated somehow or other — was now in a panic lest Walter Bellamy should attend her birthday party minus the wedding garment of white flannels; that he might even disgrace her by his Sunday suit. For her infinitesimal mind could not face the idea of what she regarded as "the wrong thing."

In a mood of romance she might fancy herself in love with the young man, in a moment of exhilaration elope with him: but that any one should remark on any flaw in dress or gentility was a thought which she could not tolerate.

However Walter appeared, immaculate in his white flannel trousers, light grey jacket, grey silk socks — one of the latest achievements at Morrison's — and a hat with purple ribband; thus fulfilling all requirements of the most select Edge society.

He was a member of the St. Luke's Tennis Club and played well. The girls pronounced him a "darling": every one was asking who he was.

"Oh, half French — his mother's a widow, very retiring ——" Was it possible that Miss Higgins guessed at the insinuating attractions of the back kitchen? "*Émigrés* I believe"— she had no idea what the word meant —"noble French family. Oh yes, quite a nice boy — working at 'Morrison's'; my father's very fond of him."

It was a charming party; the only shadow upon it being caused by the fact that Higgins showed his "fondness" for his daughter's new friend by scowling, greeting and dismissing Walter with a curt business-like nod.

But Rose made up for it and their hands lingered at parting.

"You must come again — we must get up some fours.

Only I'd be frightened of you; you play so well, Mr. Bellamy."

"We must play together." Walter's voice was tender, he might almost have been suggesting that they should go through life together.

"There's my brother," hesitated Rose; "and my friend Miss Kelly."

"Capital, only you must send me a little note to ask me. I could not come without. Then there will be the double pleasure of seeing you and receiving your note. I shall begin to think my luck's changing," added Walter gaily.

"What, have you had bad luck?" Rose was all agog for picturesque woes, as emphasising her rôle of an angel from heaven.

"Bad luck! — I wouldn't like to cloud your birthday by any hint of the half of what I've been through," answered the young man with a bitter sigh: then laughed. "But I'm still alive, you see — and *here*. So it's no good crying over past troubles — follies and worse," he added softly.

It was difficult to say how Walter Bellamy had come to realise that nothing appeals to the average young woman like a hint of dissipation, but it seemed to be one of those many things which he knew without being told.

He went to the Club more than once after this and played tennis with Rose, her brother and friend. At first young Higgins was scornful, apostrophising Walter as "a cad." But gradually his superior play won him to a half-jealous admiration, then to an almost slavish worship, so that Walter Bellamy — with his fine physique, his self-confidence and mature knowledge of the world — became a perfect little god in the eyes of the narrow-chested, dissipated youth, with his piteous self-assertion.

Even Rose gained something in his estimation. The way in which Higgins treated his children left no room for fraternal affection; but Bertie began to think there might be something in this spoilt sister of his, if she could please any one so fastidious as Walter Bellamy. And when the cold weather put an end to tennis he carried scented notes from the girl to Walter at his work: arranged many a secret meeting, and maintained a rigid silence on the subject, even against his mother's questionings.

At this time Walter saw a good deal of Bertie Higgins, for the young fellow's adoration for himself kept him more punctual to business than he had ever before shown himself. He grew more upright in figure with emulating Walter at the gymnasium; more self-confident, less self-assertive. For the first time since his childhood Higgins began to be proud of his son, though it would have galled him had he known to whom the improvement was due.

"It is by what you do and don't say, that you impress the best sort of people," was one of Bellamy's favourite dictums. And Bertie endeavoured to imitate him, even to the famous stare; till his father pounced upon him with the injunction not to "stand there gorming like a stuck pig."

With Rose the stare was exceedingly effective; she talked so much herself that she could not understand silence, it puzzled her, made her feel uncomfortable, and strangely in the wrong.

She was passionately egotistical; would rail or cringe, lower herself by the most palpable ruses in her lust for praise, load Walter with caresses and endearments; and then, the next moment, embark on a wearisome stream of recriminations.

Perhaps she would never again be so nearly in love; for Walter Bellamy piqued her by his refusal to render homage to any of her tests of the devout lover, either by passion or jealousy; though his coldness was the source of many a scene.

"Go away; I never want to see you again. I hate you — hate you: heartless, cruel!" This was the termination to most of their stolen meetings.

But still it was always Rose who — having run through all the stages of self-pity, even to the extent of picturing Walter as weeping broken-hearted at her grave — would send round a little note expressing her repentance, signing herself "your broken-hearted Rose-bud."

And yet, it was not love, so much as a craving for excitement: a greedy desire to get at Bellamy; to pull him to pieces as a botanist does a flower, to possess all his thoughts and feelings, his past and present, to leave him nothing of his own.

If he had once made himself plain to her the spell would

have been broken, but he knew better than to do that. Still at times he was tender: picturesquely sentimental and demonstrative enough — though careful to keep his passion within bounds. And there indeed lay the danger; for Rose Higgins appealed to nothing if not to the senses; and, though she was too great a coward to give all for love, persistently endeavoured to induce Bellamy to lose his head, that she might attain to the triumph of repulsing him.

But he was wary and never committed himself. A better man would have fallen, but Walter Bellamy had other and safer outlets for his senses; for by now he travelled largely for Morrison's, and had twice been chosen — on account of his French — for some delicate business negotiations in Paris. Besides this, he had come to the conclusion that it really would be a fine thing to marry James Higgins' daughter — the very thought of it touched his sense of humour — and knew that his strength lay in holding back, till the girl became obsessed by the very thought of him; and he could play upon her feelings, her vanities, her desires as easily as he could finger the holes of a penny whistle.

## CHAPTER XV

IT was about this time that Walter Bellamy made an attempt, which later on — as he grew a little older and learnt to weigh and measure his own capacity to a nicety — he would never have embarked upon: he tried to run two affairs at one and the same time, a feat impossible to any one who concentrated on a single idea as completely as he did.

This double enterprise was what he always thought of as "the silk jacket splash," and "the flutter with little Rose Higgins."

The affair of the silk jackets had gathered to an actual head in the early autumn — almost at the same time as his courtship of Higgins' daughter began to take a definite form — but it was during his first flying visit to Paris that he first heard of them — though at that time they were only to be actually found in Germany — and had at once wired home asking for leave to continue his journey and reconnoitre.

Morrison's refusal to this request made Bellamy very angry at the time. But it did not put the idea of starting the new industry in England out of his head; indeed it only seemed to drive it deeper; so deep that he could not let the matter rest. For though they turned out woollen coats and jackets by the score in Edge, he did not approve of them; to his mind they were clumsy, ugly things.

A silk coat now — sleek and shining with all its delicate lights and shades following every line of a pretty figure — was a different thing altogether.

He lived with and by silk at this time: thought in deniers.

He could not let the subject drop. It seemed an affair of the utmost moment — that Morrison's of Edge should be the first firm in England to produce such a thing.

At the time of his second visit to France they were making them in a small, specially constructed factory just outside Paris. Of real silk, costing seven or eight guineas each.

Why not try artificial? The same machine would do.

He found out everything there was to be found out about them. It was a serious and engrossing affair, running all through that winter like a deep-voiced chant, with his courtship as a tinkling accompaniment.

At last he got round old Morrison, and Higgins was overruled.

Four Germans were brought to Edge, each with his own machine which he alone could work or set up. The machines cost a matter of eighty pounds each; then there were the heavy expenses of transit, and the wages of the men who could do nothing at all beyond their own job.

It was a great responsibility; but Walter Bellamy was borne upwards upon such a thing as upon air, his whole being sang with the joy of it, the thrilling uncertainty.

Then — that very week — one of the Germans had spoken of meeting a friend in the town, a man from his own district where the machines were made.

On further enquiry and investigation — during which numerous half-crowns changed hands — Bellamy discovered that the " friend " had come over with two others, in charge of as many machines exactly similar to those at Morrison's, which were even then actually in the course of being set up at " Clutton's."

True, Morrison's had got the start. Still the matter was a serious one.

Walter Bellamy was obliged to interview Mr. Morrison and Higgins and lay the case before them, though he was exasperated at the delay.

He had known in a moment what to do — or rather what it was possible to do — and could have killed the two elder men as they sat in solemn conclave, going back and back over the same ground. Chewing the cud of the past which had nothing whatever to do with the present.

In the end what it all came to was merely this:

Old Peter Morrison affirmed that he always had led, and therefore always would lead, the English market in the silk world; while Higgins maintained that he always had been, and always would be, against investing good money in such fashion fal-daddles as knitted silk coats.

Walter wasted a day over them. Then wrote round to all the travellers on his own responsibility.

Whatever else they left they must push that particular line. He mapped out a careful time-table for each. Between them they must interview every possible buyer that very week, and get their orders booked. Meanwhile he kept his Germans hard at work, sending out every coat, directly it was finished, to serve as a sample.

His imagination played with the idea of dynamiting Clutton's mill: drugging the workmen. In sober truth it might be possible to bribe them.

In the whole of England there were, so far, only two mills, which had the machinery for making that special thing: Morrison's and that one other.

What fools they had been "up Morrison's"! What penny-wise and pound-foolish idiots, not to buy up the English monopoly, pay anything for it, as he had begged and prayed them to.

Those knitted silk coats were going to be all the rage; Walter Bellamy was perfectly certain on that point, for he had a priceless knack of putting himself in another person's place, and knew just how a woman would feel in those sleek silken garments: how they would blend with the somewhat feline pose of the day.

As yet there were none in the open market. Only a month earlier the first marvellously intricate machine — with its hundreds of fine steel tentacles, sensitive as human nerves, curving inward, trembling like the fronds of a sea-anemone, had been set going; sloping and shaping and bordering, in a wonderful series of fine stitches, like a coat of mail.

The first machine was ready between six and seven one evening. The man who worked it was an enthusiast and loved the thing: —

"Talk of a woman," he said; "what is a woman to that? — A lump!"

All the machines at Morrison's were worked during the day by two big steam-engines, but at night electricity was used. The man would not go back to his lodgings, even for supper. Bellamy brought him some from his own

home, helped him connect his machine with the electric plant; and sat up all night watching it, fascinated by its cleverness.

The other Germans were not there: each man was interested in his own machine only, and slept with certain indispensable pieces of it under his pillow. But the ordinary workers, on the night shift in other parts of the mill, came up to look at this new marvel. There was no fear of them stealing the idea, it had taken the German six months to master its ways.

"It is more than human," he said, "it is wonderful as the stars in heaven." There was never any man in love as that stolid German mechanic was in love with that machine of his.

Between five and six, in the chill blank which comes before dawn, Bellamy slipped out of the mill and made his way to Jane Irwin's house.

The wind was racing up the streets, not boisterously, but low and quiet, like a dog that bites without barking. There was a damp smell in the air; the street lamps were flickering hazily, and lights were just beginning to show through the drawn blinds of the boxed-up houses.

It was all depressing enough, for the hills — which beckoned to the country, to the outer, wider world — were still invisible. Here was a place where people slept because they were too wearied to work longer, waking to more work and more weariness.

But nothing could have depressed Walter Bellamy; his blood ran warm with excitement. For close against his heart, buttoned safely under his coat, swathed in tissue-paper, lay a tiny parcel, not much bigger than his hand — the first silk coat.

He was going to show it to Jane. Jane was his first thought. He did not even remember Rose Higgins.

But then Rose would simply have regarded it as something which might be bought in a shop; delightful because it was new and expensive, and no other girl as yet had it.

Jane would realise all the brain wonders that had gone to its making.

The kitchen fire was lighted. The place was tidy and

quiet; for Irwin was waiting for more warps and could not get to work, so was still in bed, while the children were asleep.

Jane had her hat on; she was cutting bread and butter — some to cover with a cloth and leave ready for the children, so that she could lay her hand on it at once when she came home, some to take with her, to eat on the way back.

Three pairs of small much-worn boots stood, shining and clean, before the fire, showing that Jane had already been about for some time; while she herself stood by the table drinking her tea between the slices.

"Jane! Jane!" Walter slipped in and stood with his back to the fire: laughing: glowing: hugging himself round over the priceless parcel. "Jane! Jane! guess what I've got."

Suddenly he leant forward and, with one arm still across his breast, tweaked the pins out of the girl's hat and snatched it from her head.

He wanted to see her shining hair in the firelight; besides it was necessary for the full effect of what he was going to do.

He was feeling a little light-headed with excitement and hunger — for he had touched nothing since supper at eight the night before. Then the little kitchen was so warm and home-like: the hour so odd. Five past six: the table might have been set for afternoon tea.

Indeed time and place seemed to have vanished: this snug kitchen was home — because he and Jane were alone in it — while the time was at that inevitable hour in which Jane ought to be, must be, kissed.

She seemed to take it very calmly, though she flushed and trembled. "You an' your goin's on, Walter Bellamy! Thee ought ter be ashamed o' thee sen, a great lad loike thee!" This was her cunning way of pretending that he was not quite grown up, therefore not to be taken seriously. "At this toime o' mornin' too."

"With the whole day to go on kissing in," he retorted, laughing.

"Get off with thee." She gave him a push that was almost a caress: —"The buzzer 'ull be goin' in a minute, an' I'm not half through yet."

"Cold-hearted wretch — and you don't even offer me any tea."

"Get a fresh cup off the shelf then, thee grat limb."

"No, I'll drink out of yours; it's sweeter, you bitter-sweet Jane."

With one hand he filled up the cup and drank of it. The other hand was still across his precious parcel, for only half his thoughts were with the girl.

"A butty?" she suggested.

"No, no. I don't want to grease my hands. You've finished now, Jane, wash yours at the tap."

"Whatever for?"

"Do — do, just to please me — Flower-face."

"Such goin's on, but they need be washed anyway; you or no you." She went to the tap and rinsed them; always glad of an excuse to give in to Walter Bellamy.

Directly she had finished, and her hands were dried, he flung her round by her shoulders facing him.

"Even now you don't know what I've come for. Shut your eyes; quite tight, honest Injun. Are they shut?"

"Of course it's not Oi as cheats."

"Now leave your arms slack so I can fit something on to you," commanded Walter, engrossed by the affair of the moment, disregarding the snub.

Jane obeyed, and shaking out the coat from the folds of tissue-paper he slipped it on to her; pulled her firm little hands — which needed such care to keep them smooth and supple for the silk work — down through the shining sleeves: settled the collar at the back of the neck: smoothed in the waist and fastened the buttons across her deep breast.

"Now look!" he cried, his voice high with excitement.

Jane looked and admired; turned herself round, ran her hand over her sleek little figure; followed the lines and the spring of the coat with her fingers; noticed the way it curved in and out with no visible gusset or gore, and was unstinting in her praise.

"You've done it — really done it! The first silk coat in Edge! — My, how it hangs and shines! Is it but just finished — this very day?"

"Yes, we've been at it all the night. See, Jane, not a seam in it."

"It's lovely — fair lovely ——" chanted the girl. Then shook her head at Walter. "But it's the machine an' that there German as done it — no need for yer ter put on yer yat with a shoe 'orn, Walter Bellamy."

"But I brought them to the town. The idea was mine — I took all the risk! Jane, it's fine; it's just right on you; how it clings and yet falls loose."

He turned her slowly round; and stroked and patted the coat, scarcely conscious of the girl within it. Though in an absorbed sort of way he realised how its clear blue went with her fair hair, had taken off her hat on purpose to get the full effect.

The first buzzer went. There was only five minutes for her to get to the mill and she slipped out of the coat in a hurry; put on her own — that inevitable greenish fawn waterproof which all the mill girls wore — and pinned on her hat. Then hesitated by the side of Walter, who had cleared a space on the table and, with an absorbed air, was once more swathing the silken thing in its layers of tissue-paper.

"It wer nice o' yer ter bring 'un ter show ter me furst ——" she drew herself up sharply; "dear love," the term of endearment so common to the Edge women had been on the tip of her tongue. To her mind Walter was such a child.

But still she checked herself; and then — still with that air of treating him as a child, already a little spoiled by too much praise — added: —"It's a pity it's not real silk."

"There's no one would ever know the difference."

Jane sniffed as she folded her own butties into a clean handkerchief.

"Well, only them as is in the know, not ladies," amended Walter.

"Oh, ladies!" Jane sniffed again, and made for the door. "Better get along yome to yer mither, Walter Bellamy, or she'll think yer lost — though I've told her, toime upon toime, as 'naught never comes ter harm.'"

That was Jane all over. The first occasion on which Walter had tasted sherry and bitters, in the bar parlour of a commercial travellers' hotel, he had thought of her.

## CHAPTER XVI

SO much for the affair of the silk jackets. As to the other, and more personal affair, it had simmered on through the late autumn and winter, till, early in March, Walter Bellamy — now promoted to the regular position of traveller — paid his third visit to France.

Rose did all that she could to prevent him going. The last time he had come back distraught and apparently with scarcely a thought for her; even when they were together he seemed to forget her presence, to be engrossed with other things; and true to her class and kind she could get at no reason beyond a rival.

Coaxing, scolding and tears were all brought to bear. She forgot her looks and cried till her face was swollen and distorted with tears; raged and sulked, dismissed Walter and called him to her again. Forgave him; harked back to the old grievance and again dismissed him.

But at last there came a time when he did not return when he was called. Rose sent him several notes, graduating from reproach to self-reproach, but they remained unanswered: indeed unread, for the young man was engrossed in a new idea which loomed larger on his horizon than any love affair.

Bertie was prevailed upon to intercede. But his adoration was only deepened by Walter's reply to his pleading in Rose's name. "If I marry I want a wife who is a woman and not a spoilt child," he announced with dignity. "I cannot allow either your sister, or any one else to come between me and my duty."

"You're an ass if you let Bellamy go," Bertie declared to his sister; "by Jove, it beats me to know what a fellow like that sees in you."

As a last resort Rose pleaded illness — and indeed she was ill: sick with uncertainty and hurt vanity, terrified that she had, at last, gone too far and lost him altogether.

"I might perhaps be able to *crawl* down to the bottom of the garden this evening to see you *once* more," she wrote at the end of this letter: uncertain as to whether she meant before he left or before her own demise.

In answer to this she received a postcard from Paris:— "Received your letter just before I started. Regret to hear of your indisposition. Will certainly bring you the bon-bons you ask for from Paris: Yours faithfully, W. B. Bellamy."

It was the only written word that she ever received from him — even then he had not committed himself to a letter, had invented a completely fabulous commission.

But Rose was subdued. Walter was a whole fortnight away: and then so busied over his work, so tied by frequent consultations with his superiors that she hardly ever saw him. When she did she was yielding and docile, and for the first time practical.

Walter showed himself willing to forgive — always, so to speak, a step above her. They discussed the question of their marriage sedately enough. He determined that it had better be soon; if these clandestine meetings went on they would be sure to be discovered, and the whole thing put an end to.

It was useless to ask for James Higgins' consent. Rose was confident that once they were married her father would come round; that Walter would be made a partner in the firm — here his ambition ran with hers — and that she would thus combine a romantic union and prosperous future. Besides, she wanted an elopement; it would do away with the necessity of inviting Mrs. Bellamy to the wedding, besides none of her friends had ever eloped: all this was sufficient reason; the trousseau would have to come later, and could easily include a white satin.

The last details of the scheme were settled one Sunday in March — when the setting sun flamed red on the top of the hills — in a shaded lane, made for lovers, which runs down one side of the old churchyard.

It was not a very safe place; but they were getting to the end of their probation, and in these meetings Walter Bellamy derived half his pleasure from the risks incurred: always gleefully alert to catch Higgins' bitter scowl upon him;

though in his heart of hearts he knew that it would spoil everything if they were discovered at this juncture.

On this particular day Rose was all in brown velvet and furs, and wearing a little close brown turban edged with fur drawn down over her head, softening the effect of her rather wide cheek-bones, covering all but the tips of her ears; and showing no more of her dark hair than a few curls, which blew across her forehead.

The wind was cold: it whipped her face into a glow of colour, while her eyes were bright and softer than usual, for she was getting all her own way and was happy.

Her hands were tucked into a large pillow-shaped muff, which she held up against her breast for the sake of warmth; and Walter's were there too, one arm round her neck and over her shoulder.

He could feel her heart beat through the thickness of fur; her fully moulded bosom was warm and soft, she seemed altogether woman; desirable for other reasons than the mere fact of being Higgins' daughter.

"You really are a dear," he declared, rather patronisingly, and kissed the strip of white neck between cap and collar, at the back of her ear; "the sweetest — sweetest Rose-bud."

For a moment or so the girl leant back against him in silence, her eyes closed. Then came the inevitable question:—"You really do love me, really truly?"

"You know I do," Walter whispered, his cheek against hers glowing with health — for though Rose Higgins could boast no great intellectual or spiritual attainments, there was no question of her physical soundness, and this in itself was an attraction: there is nothing a selfish man dislikes and dreads more than the thought of a delicate wife. "Should I want you as I do, if I didn't love you?"

"Do you want me?"

"Yes, I do — Rose, I want you, I want you."

Their marriage was so near that for a moment or so he let himself go: holding her closer than he had ever done, his lips to hers.

She was silly and shallow; but once they were married there would always be the physical contact to depend on, apart from all else that he would gain by the union. Dur-

ing the last few weeks his ambition had been quickened to a fever; and now desire was added to it. He felt that he could scarcely wait for the six days which must still elapse before the arrangements for their marriage were completed.

Then and there — for fear that he should be sent away on any special errand during that week — they settled every detail.

There was a little passage which led down from Little France on to the Wantage road. They were to meet there at half-past three on the afternoon of the next Saturday.

Among Bellamy's many friends was a young man of the name of Thompson, who possessed a small motor-car, which he never used during the week-ends. Walter would borrow this: they would drive to Wantage and leave the car there for the owner to fetch on the Monday, when his business took him to that town.

In Wantage they could be married: a fortnight ago Walter had established a nominal residence there. After this they would go by train to Buxton for one night — Rose thrilled at the thought — up to London the next day; and then over to Paris — that wonderful wicked Paris!

Every detail of the scheme was repeated over and over again ere they parted. Rose calling her lover back more than once — though this time in love and not in anger — for a last embrace.

But by now the last gleam of sunshine was gone; her face looked a little pinched, her nose was red — but still the fact of her fortune loomed large in Bellamy's mind, as large as anything can loom in the mind of any man who has passed his tea-time by an hour or more.

## CHAPTER XVII

SATURDAY came flying round. Seldom indeed had any week passed so quickly. Curiously enough, now that everything was settled, there seemed no earthly reason to Walter Bellamy why he should elope.

Yet only a week ago it had been the height of his ambition to marry Rose: or rather the marriage seemed to promise a speedy elevation to that height.

But gradually all this had become overshadowed by the thought of the girl herself: her silliness, her greed; her overwhelming femininity, her stupid bursts of passion and jealousy.

After all, what would his position as Higgins' son-in-law amount to? Under the old man's thumb; tied to a wearisome little town and a brainless wife, there seemed little enough to be gained by such a marriage.

By Wednesday the reasons for desiring it had grown very misty. By Friday he could scarcely remember them without a great effort; though he kept totting them over in his mind as though he were learning a lesson.

By Saturday dust and ashes filled his mouth: he was sick and ill with boredom. Still he meant to have gone through with it; and might have done so if the morning had proved anything like a spring morning ought to have done, instead of miserably wet and cold.

The streets were running with water as he went to the mill, and everything smelt damp. It was a leaden and chill day, with none of those sudden squalls and bursts of sunshine which exhilarate rather than depress.

As he went home to dinner he still supposed that they were going to elope. But it was a nuisance for it was a wet day; and he was tremendously immersed in other things; things which had nothing to do with Rose, but a very great deal to do with his position as dictator to all " Morrison's " other travellers in this affair of the silk jacket.

The fact was he quite thought that he had covered the whole of Great Britain with a network of forerunners: arranged matters so that every single wholesale firm of any importance should be visited by one or other of his men.

Then suddenly, only that very morning, he had remembered Matherson of Manchester. None of the travellers had been given any special instructions regarding Matherson, and they might let him slip: the most important man in all the wide circle of buyers, head buyer for Barclay & Co., and possessed of almost unlimited power in the great firm.

He could have kicked himself. The only possible excuse was that he had been run off his feet. And now there was this silly business of the elopement. Walter tried to tie his mind down to the thought of it.

But it was all of no use. Matherson's name, the thought of the orders which might have been got from him cropped up through everything.

Again and again Walter wrenched his memory back to Rose and her affairs, which no longer seemed to be his.

He would have to buy a ring; and after all he had forgotten to wire for rooms in Buxton.

Then with a flash came the memory that Matherson had told him he always took his half-day off early in the week, because he liked to have the Saturday to himself for going over his account in the empty warehouse.

If only he could see him himself. He was an awkward man to handle, suspicious of anything new; any one of the other travellers might put his back up, muddle the whole thing.

Still Walter kept on reminding himself that he was to meet Rose at half-past three that afternoon; and that they were going to be married. That by the same time the next day she would be actually his wife.

But it was hopeless. The picture of Matherson alone and completely get-at-able in that great Manchester warehouse ousted every other thought.

After dinner he went into the little front garden and stared up at the sky: as though it could help him, or any one else, with its sodden drip.

Mrs. Bellamy had stopped in the middle of clearing away the dishes to wash the hall and passage. She was so damp

and dreary looking, and smeared herself over the floor in such a fashion that it looked as though some gigantic and invisible Fate had got her by the slack of her waist and was literally washing the floor with her.

"Nice thing ter come down ter, washin' floors on a Saturday afternoon," she remarked bitterly — and unjustly, for her son hated to see her doing it, was always willing to pay a charwoman: "a quarter ter three, an' all: just when other folks goin' off pleasurin'! That's my life, that is!"

Walter gave a gasp as the meaning of the words penetrated his absorbed mind. Suddenly he remembered that there was a train — an express which left for Manchester at three five. He might catch it and see Matherson himself.

The thought swept away every other memory; and Rose vanished.

Running into the house he almost jumped over his mother; raced up to his room, three steps at a time; caught up his bag, which he had packed that morning; seized hat and overcoat and gloves; flew downstairs again and kissed his mother a hasty good-bye.

"Wer'st thou goin'?" she demanded, quite involuntarily smearing the kiss off her face with the back of her hand — though she would have felt bitterly hurt had it been omitted.

"To Manchester — I ——" Walter flung the words behind him while the end of the sentence was lost in the slamming of the gate.

He just caught the train with hardly a moment to spare, and was past Stoke before he remembered that he had omitted to leave any message for Thompson in regard to the motor.

Though even then he never thought of Rose.

The memory of the bespoken motor only occurred while he was — almost involuntarily — jotting down expenses, and he wondered if he would have to pay for it anyhow. The next moment, however, his thoughts were again engrossed with Matherson; while he recited over in his own mind the exact words which he would use, the arguments in favour of a large purchase which he would put forward.

## CHAPTER XVIII

BY the day of the intended elopement it was fully a month since Bellamy had shown the first silk coat to Jane Irwin. He had never even thought of giving her one of her own; though she would not have been allowed to wear it if he had, for it was one of the most stringent rules in Morrison's that none of the operatives should wear goods produced by the firm. But a special coat had been knitted for Rose, to match with her name and vivid colour of her cheeks; he had packed it away in his bag that very morning, had meant to give it her on her honeymoon, with the lurking thought that even that would be an advertisement, for people would see her wearing it and ask where it came from.

He remembered the coat now; and as he neared Manchester, reached down his bag from the rack, took it out, and made it up into a separate little parcel, thinking that it would serve as a sample for Matherson.

At that moment he must have remembered Rose. But if he did it was merely as some one completely detached from himself: a girl for whom the coat had been originally intended, who must certainly be furnished with another in its place. Of the husband she had also lost, and of the blow to her pride it is certain that he never once thought, for at that moment his mind was engrossed by purely material things.

Men are curious in this way. A woman hugs a love affair, though she may disdain to touch the lover with the tip of her little finger.

A man, on the contrary, hugs the lover, and disdains the memory — or rather loses it.

Where a woman has once loved she always feels a sort of tenderness and jealousy. A man is never so little in love as when he has outgrown passion, or desire.

Rose had had her moments in Walter's feelings; though she fell curiously between his heart and his passion. But now she had ceased to exist.

The only wonder was that he should have run his love affair and the silk jackets so long together; but his ambition to make a clever, startling, altogether effective man of business was far greater than his ambition for the security of a rich wife, and the greater swept the lesser aside.

Rose Higgins waited by the tree at the end of the passage which leads from Little France, where Walter had arranged to meet her, from a quarter-past three to six.

At first she felt that anything might have happened; he might have been kept late at the mill, something might have gone wrong with the motor.

She stood tapping her foot haughtily. There was no medium in her way with a man: it was domineering or fawning — almost wanton.

When any one approached she moved up the passage and then down again, to appear as if she were not waiting.

She felt it her right that Walter should be there a little before the time and was huffed when it passed the half-hour; walking away right to the end of the passage, so that it should seem as if she was the one to be late.

When the clock on the old church struck the quarter she was angry. How cold and repellent she would be: as a matter of fact she was not sure if she would marry Walter at all after the way in which she was being treated.

At four she was strained between anger and fear. By half-past she was so hardened by anxiety that she stood openly in the road and stared up and down it.

Five o'clock struck, and half-past five. It had cleared a little in the mid-afternoon; but now it was raining again; a driving drizzle.

Already it was growing dark. Young couples, huddled close together under an umbrella, came running by on their way home from the skating-rink, laughing and talking, or clinging close in silence. Lights twinkled out in the cottage windows, warm red lights which showed that people had given up the pretence of its being spring, cleared out their neatly dressed grates and started their fires again.

Rose was wearing a dainty suit of pale grey, and a grey

motor-bonnet, with a flowing veil, the brim lined with pink buds.

She had covered herself with a light silky cloak, but it was soon wet through and she had no umbrella: there were dark patches of wet upon her pale tinted gloves: her thin low shoes were damp, her feet icy.

For the last half-hour she felt deadened, beaten down by fate. She was no longer angry, she only longed for the sheer physical comfort of Walter's arm round her. She wanted her tea: she wanted every one to be sorry for her, indeed she could hardly resist laying her case before the passers-by.

But now there were so few. The loneliness of the road terrified her, for the Edge people had gone to their tea as uniformly as in some countries they will go to prayer.

Suddenly, through the blank silence, the painful straining of eyes and ears, came the sudden thought that Walter might be ill — dead. Rose almost caught at the thought: anything to save her vanity.

There might have been a motor accident; there was a hill and a couple of sharp turns on the way from the garage.

Perhaps, even now, her lover was lying upon a bed of pain, tossing, calling upon her name.

A genuine fount of womanliness welled up in her at the thought. Almost for the first time in her life Rose Higgins forgot herself, that curious, shallow, greedy little self — which yet possessed so great a power, instinctive and blind, of perpetuating its race; bringing into the world immortal souls, of which it knows nothing as to whence they come, whither they go, or what they are.

Half blinded with tears, stumbling with fatigue, scarcely knowing what she did, the girl ran and walked, walked and ran — keeping as much as possible to the by-ways — till she reached Walter Bellamy's house.

As she opened the front gate the consciousness of self had returned, and she trembled, half with fear, half with a sort of pride that here at last was something really great come into her life; for the blinds were all down, the house in darkness. Without doubt Walter Bellamy was dead. She was almost a widow!

She touched the button of the electric bell which went

shrilling through the house, calling into being a feeble light that flickered through the glass above the entrance.

Mrs. Bellamy had opened the back kitchen-door. If Rose had known her habits a little better, guessed where the lady habitually lurked, she would have been less frightened at the darkness which reigned in the front of the house.

The light drew nearer. Mrs. Bellamy had lighted a candle and was coming to the front door, which she unbolted and opened; then peered out, keeping it still upon the chain.

"Who's there?"

"It's me," said Rose, then pulled herself together. "I came to see — if — if — is anything wrong?"

"Everything's wrong — always is," answered the mistress of the house, peering out suspiciously, through the crack of the door, "but that ain't any reason fur a' the draggle tail light-o'-loves in the town ter cum pealin' at my front door bell."

"I'm Miss Higgins ——" stammered Rose. "I was — I mean my father was expecting to see your son about — about something, this afternoon, and he did not come."

"Oh! I beg yer pardon, I'm sure, Miss; but the light's that bad, an' 'un allus expects the worst with strangers. Won't yer step in?" She slipped the chain and opened the door wider, though still with a grudging air, holding her soiled apron turned back with one hand.

"I was just doin' a bit o' cleanin' up; the girl's on a holiday." She was staunch to Walter and his expressed wish that she should keep a servant — though she would not give in to it.

"No, I won't wait, thank you — I only wanted — my father wanted," murmured Rose, as she turned and began to move away. She was cold within and without: Mrs. Bellamy had been scrubbing, she had not been mourning Walter: Walter was well enough. With sickening certainty the conviction came home to the girl — he had played her false.

She did not want to hear — she could not bear to hear — what had happened; she could have put her fingers in her ears and screamed "Stop! stop!" as Mrs. Bellamy followed her down the steps, and stood at her back while she fum-

bled with the latch of the gate: explaining and complaining.

"Yer feyther don't never seem ter think as the workers 'ave a right ter call their souls their own. Rushin' moy Wally off ter Manchester on 'is business when other young men is at their sports. An' then sendin' round ter ask if 'e's back when 'e's not two hours gone. Seems ter me ——"

But Rose had vanished. How she got home she never knew. The chill of disappointment and disillusion was swept away by a flame of anger. For a moment the thought crossed her mind that her father had really sent Walter Bellamy to Manchester; if so it was he with whom she was angry.

At any rate she was angry; so angry that she did not mind anything, felt no shame, cared for nothing save that some one must be made to suffer for all that she had suffered.

Once home she went straight to the dining-room where she found her mother sitting by the fireplace with her hands folded in resigned idleness, while James Higgins bent over a pile of account-books at the large table, across one end of which tea was still laid.

"Have yer had yer tea ——?" began Mrs. Higgins; but without answering Rose moved to the table and stood opposite her father, her two hands in their stained gloves pressed palm downwards upon it.

"Look here, did you send Walter to Manchester?" she began furiously.

"Eh, what's that? What Walter?"

"Walter Bellamy — did you, did you? Don't you hear what I ask you? Can't you give me a straight answer — did you? That's all I want to know." She snatched the papers from his hands as she spoke, for it drove her frantic to see the way he held his pen poised above them.

Higgins pushed his spectacles up above his forehead and stared at the draggled girl, with her hard bright eyes, uncurled hair and flaming cheeks: never had his Rose looked less "the lady."

"What's all this to-do? — What fal-daddle ——" he began.

"Be quiet!"—she gave a savage movement of impatience. "I want to know. Did you—did you? That's all—did you or did you not?"

"Did Oi what?"

His slowness maddened the girl. In despair she swung towards Mrs. Higgins. "Mother, can't you——" she began: then realised the futility of such an appeal, and returned to her father.

"Did you send Walter Bellamy to Manchester this afternoon?" She ground out the words with slow, bitter emphasis: tapping on the table with her fingers as she spoke.

"God in heaven, girl! What should I be sending any one to Manchester on a Saturday afternoon for? Go and tidy yourself—change——" he hesitated, at a loss how to express himself as to his daughter's appearance. "Go an' make yersen look loike a lady; Oi won't have moy wench——"

"You didn't send him then?" Rose spoke in an oddly blank voice.

Suddenly Higgins took off his glasses: his face whitened and hardened.

"What do you want to know for? What's that young sprig to you?"

Rose quailed, she had never been spoken to like that before, and for the first time in her life she was afraid of her father.

"Oh, nothing, I don't know—I—I——" she half turned to go.

"No you don't, you'll not leave this 'ere room till you tell me."

"Let be, father—I shall do as I like, I——"

"You'll not do as you like!" Suddenly he flung to his feet, leant across one corner of the table and caught her wrist. "Now then, tell me; what's that there Bellamy got ter do with you?"

"I won't tell you, so there!" The girl tried to wrench herself free, but Higgins held her tight.

"You will! By God, you will, or I'll limb yer." He spoke like a navvy, lifted his fist like one; and suddenly Rose broke into a torrent of tears.

"Mother, mother, don't let him! Make him let me go."

She was terrified beyond words of this man, whom she alone had always ruled.

"Let her be, James." Mrs. Higgins had risen; she too was trembling, but not with fear. "Don't you dare ter lay a hand on the girl. Loose go, do you hear me, loose go."

She could have flown upon him; she was not in the least frightened, for this was not a position which demanded ladyhood, and she was up in arms — not so much for her daughter, as for her own sex.

In sheer amazement James Higgins loosened his hold, and twisting herself free, Rose ran from the room, crying — noisily, like an undisciplined child.

For a moment her parents stood regarding each other. "Now then, we'll never get the truth out of 'er," remarked Higgins sullenly.

"Oh yes, we will; it's a long day a'fore you'll find Rose doin' any o' her own layin' awake at night," answered his wife decisively, and returned to her own place by the fire.

For some time there was silence. Higgins was bent over his books, his pen in his hand; but he did not turn the pages.

After a while he raised his head and stared at his wife. "Ain't yer goin' ter see what's wrong?" he asked resentfully; yet not in the bullying tone he generally used to her. "There's no knowin' what the girl will do — some mischief to hersen. How she looked! as if her heart were fair broken."

"If it was she wouldn't a' made so much noise about it; I can tell you that much, James Higgins, an' I know," retorted the woman, bitterly. "You leave her alone; we'll hear all about it soon enough."

She was right; for they had not been in bed half an hour when Rose came knocking at the door, then entered, wrapped round with a long fur cloak, shivering and sobbing. "I can't sleep; I don't know what to do. I could kill myself, I'm that shamed!" she gulped noisily.

Higgins lit a candle and — ever mindful of her own comfort — Rose climbed on to the bed; and sat at the foot of it, facing her parents, with their eider-down pulled up above her cloak.

Thus throned she recited her wrongs. One moment declaiming her love for Walter Bellamy, telling them that her

heart was broken: that she could never care for any one else — that she would go away and poison herself; that nobody loved her. The next moment, vindictive and bitter — calling him "a mean, common thing," entreating her father to revenge her wrongs — or inarticulate with self-pity.

They were a strange trio. The muffled girl flushed and coarsened with anger, her eyes swollen, her dark hair dishevelled. And facing her James Higgins in the incongruous innocence of his white nightshirt — his stubborn upper lip drawn down, his lower one protruding, his stiff grey hair erect — with Mrs. Higgins at his side, pale and plucked-looking, her scanty tresses strained to the top of her head and fastened there with one pin, her weak eyes red and blinking.

After a while the mother leant across the bed, reached for her daughter's hand, patted and smoothed it.

"There, there now. There, there, don't thee taeke on so, Rose, thee'll be doin' thysen a hurt." It was long since she had used the soft familiar "thee."

But the girl took no notice of the caress. Gradually it began to dawn upon her that her father was looking at her in a new, hard way.

Now and then he prompted, with "and then?" "what then?" or hurried her on. But he was different; and suddenly scared she tried her old wheedling ways, bent forward and stretched out her hand to him. "What should I have done without my dear, darling old curmudgeon to come back to," she sobbed. Then broke off, staring stupidly; for Higgins had shaken his hand free and drawn back, stonily upright against the rail of the bed.

"Is that all?" he asked loudly.

"Yes, yes, I've told you — didn't you hear? How I waited and waited — went to ask if he was at home, and then came back; straight back to you, you darling Dad," again she stretched out her hand; but Higgins took no notice of the action.

"Is that all? that's what I want to know," he reiterated stubbornly.

"Haven't I told you? Mother — Mother, what does he mean?"

The girl made as if to fling herself across the bed to her

mother; but Higgins put out one big hand and pushed her roughly back.

"Sit there, you damned slut. Now answer me; do as you're told for once. Is that all — do you hear, is that all?"

"I've told you."

"You've nai' told me. You spoke o' shame an' wrongs, an' Oi want ter know how much you mean by it. For, by God, if you've been playing the harlot — daughter or no daughter ——"

"Father, father!" With a cry Rose broke loose from his hold and clung to her mother.

But Mrs. Higgins was firm too; she held her close and patted her, but she spoke decisively, her voice sharp with anxiety. "Speak up, my girl. You've got ter answer yer feyther, the sooner the better!"

"I don't know what to say — I don't know what he means."

"Then I'll tell you what I mean!" shouted Higgins. "Has that there Bellamy done as he oughtn't by yer — are yer a maid or are yer not? There — is that flat enough fur yer ——? God damn yer! For if yer've shamed me out yer go. Now answer me, an' no lies, mind yer."

"Of course not, of course not! We were goin' to run away and get married."

"There was kissin' an' cuddlin' enough a'fore it came ter that, I be bound; was there anything else?"

"No, no."

"You'll give me yer Bible oath o' that?"

"I swear it — of course I swear; do you think I'd let him — lower myself?" Rose was aflame with virtuous indignation; quite forgetful of the many times when she had lured Walter on, piqued and irritated by his cool self-control.

"You swear it."

"I swear!"

"Well, then, go back to your bed like a decent 'ooman, an' let's hear no more o' it. Though mind this, you've taught me a lesson. I'd thought my daughter 'ud 'a had more sense of her position, than ter go taekin' up with any town pup."

Rose slipped off the bed, and stood sullenly gathering her cloak around her.

"He'll have to be sent away. He's behaved shamefully. I'd not stay in the same place with him!" she declared. "Most fathers would horsewhip a fellow as behaved so to his daughter."

"Most fathers 'ud keep their mouths shut upon it, if they had any sense, as I mean to do. An' mind yer, yer'll keep yers shut too, till Oi can speed yer out o' town. Now get off ter bed. Get out o' my room, do yer 'ear; Oi'm sick an' tired o' the sight o' yer."

Rose sneaked away; and blowing out the candle, Higgins turned round on his side, with his back to his spouse. "Yer've spoilt those childern o' yourn, that's what yer've done, spoilt 'em past all bearin'; an' now look what it's cum' to — a common fellow like that!" He complained bitterly.

## CHAPTER XIX

MATHERSON was in his office that afternoon, as Bellamy had anticipated.

But for some time he refused to attend to the repeated rings and knocks, which he heard at the outer door. He was deep in piles of papers; he had sacrificed the general Saturday's holiday for the sake of quiet and was ill-pleased at the disturbance, hoping against hope that the intruder, whoever he was, would give it up in despair and go away.

"Let them ring! Let them knock!" he muttered furiously and bent again over his work: a short square-built man, with bristly grey hair and beard and small, bright dark eyes, who irresistibly reminded one of a hedgehog — "Damn them! Let them knock!" . . . "The Institute of Silk Workers and Dyers beg to inform Messrs. Barclay and Sons —— What's this? Oh, damn it, let them knock! Go to hell with them — whoever they are!"

With a savage movement he dropped his pen; thrust his fingers in his ears, and endeavoured to concentrate all his faculties on the paper before him.

But it was no good. The persistent sound beat through everything; and after another five minutes of wasted effort he flung to his feet; passed through the outer office and vestibule to the front door and threw it open; wide as if in ironical welcoming of a host.

"Well?" Most people would have been utterly quenched by the monosyllable, the fierce stare of enquiry. Matherson knew Bellamy perfectly, but there was not a trace of recognition in his look.

Walter was too wise to approach him in any light or airy manner. Without attempting to advance he stood a little below him on the steps and looked up gravely; realising the almost religious force of an upward glance. "I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. Matherson."

"Disturb! Oh, not at all!" echoed Matherson bitterly.

"But it's an important matter."

"Oh!"

"May I come inside?"

"I'm very busy; can't you write — or tell me what it is now?"—"And be gone," Matherson's tone seemed to add.

"It will take a little time. I think I'd better come in. I ran up from Edge — at considerable personal inconvenience — for the express purpose of laying this matter before you."

"Oh, come in then," groaned the other man; and turning ungraciously enough led the way to his office.

It seemed an inauspicious opening; but once Walter got in he knew he had him.

He unrolled his little parcel and displayed the wonderful seamless coat: dilated upon its beauties, wishing that Jane was there to display it to advantage, upon her trim little figure: dwelt upon the fact that "Morrison's" was the only firm in England which could produce such a thing — drew forth the very soul of woman and displayed it, enraptured with the silken trifle; refusing everything else, devoured by envy languishing near to death if she could not get it.

The cleverest men — though perhaps not the most scrupulous — have something of the woman in their composition; this was the case with Walter Bellamy, and to this feminine streak he owed his fine taste, his quickness, his intuition, and much of his histrionic power.

He knew exactly how a woman would feel in one of those silk coats — snuggling his inner consciousness into them. In addition to this he was able to impress Matherson with his convictions: so fully that half an hour after his grudging admittance, he found himself speeded on his way with an order for five hundred; while Matherson stood upon the steps beaming, forgetful of the pile of work still waiting upon his office table. But even this was not all. For half-way down the deserted street Walter heard himself hailed; and turning saw the buyer running down the steps and beckoning.

"Look here," he said rather breathlessly, as the other man retraced his steps and they met again:—"Are you alone; no wife or anything?"

The question was jocular, but it gave Walter Bellamy an ugly jar, an odd feeling of being suddenly and unpleasantly reminded of something: though it was a mere sensation, too vague for definite thought.

"Oh yes, I'm alone." He answered slowly; and the next moment was diverted by Matherson's suggestion — why shouldn't they dine together, early, and then do a theatre? "Manchester's a dreary sort of place to be alone in, unless you know somebody," he added genially; having come to the conclusion that this young Bellamy was a pleasant fellow, a real good business man; and that it was as well to keep in with the representatives of the only firm in England able to supply Barclay and Son with this newest fad of fashion.

They had an excellent dinner — at Matherson's expense — followed by a bright musical comedy: plenty of pretty girls, plenty of catchy tunes.

Walter was whistling one of them as he undressed in his stuffy, drab-tinted bedroom at the Waverly Hotel.

Stripping, he threw all his clothes on a chair and rubbed himself over with a rough towel; sawing it to and fro across his back in time to the words:

"She's a dainty, dainty — dainty,
Little bit of fluff — fluff, fluff,
All in quaker grey, and prim!
Oh prim, enough — nough — nough!
But the twinkle
In her eye,
Gives the lie
To her sober little ways.
And it isn't what she says —
What she says, what she says,
But the way she looks
That hooks — that hooks ——"

By this time Walter was in a glow. Lifting one leg, he bent it sharply at the knee and felt the muscle swell up his smooth thigh, flecked his arm and ran his fingers along it.

How tremendously fit he felt, and what a deal this had been with Matherson!

Life was really a gorgeous game, as long as there was any difficulty to be overcome.

With a pleasant little shiver and yawn of healthy fatigue

— which meant nothing more than a desire for sleep — he turned towards the bed, and stretched out his hands for his pyjamas which the chamber-maid had put ready for him.

At that moment, and then only, did the sudden memory of Rose, as she really was — or should have been — of what he had done and what he had left undone — return to him. And ceasing to hum he gave a long-drawn whistle.

He had bought those pyjamas — silk, delicately striped in two shades of heliotrope — from a wholesale firm in Birmingham less than a month before. At that time the idea of marriage — or rather any definite date for marriage had been vague; but they were too cheap and good to be resisted and he had purchased them to keep ready as part of his wedding-outfit.

Since then his marriage with Rose had been very definitely settled. And this — this was his wedding-night!

It was the sight of the pyjamas that brought it back to him.

He slipped into them and sat on the edge of the bed ruminating. What would happen? It was a mercy he had got that order from Matherson to conciliate the firm with if there was a row. But would there be a row?

Would not Rose have too much pride to give him away. And even if she did — and she was silly enough for anything — would not Higgins insist on its going no further; conscious of the humiliating position in which his daughter had been placed, and the fine tale Walter could make of it if he liked.

But one thing was certain. If Higgins knew he would have his knife into him one way or another; Walter realised this with a wry grin.

As for Rose, he already knew what Rose's tempers were like, and he wondered what scenes were being enacted at Edge that night; more than half wishing that he could be there to see.

Anyhow, whatever happened, he was devoutly thankful for one thing; and that was his freedom.

It was nearly one o'clock when he got into bed: in ten minutes he was asleep, and — lulled by the Sabbath calm — did not even open his eyes till the church bells started to ring next morning.

## CHAPTER XX

THE first time Walter Bellamy met Higgins, after his return from Manchester, he realised that the elder man knew what had happened; also that he intended to say nothing, but would bide his time, awaiting the first chance to make him suffer for what he had done.

He still saw something of Bertie; but there was a wall between the two. And though the young fellow acclaimed every noble sentiment which Walter expressed — half fiercely as though trying to convince himself that his friend could do no wrong — the sense of restraint was there and they drifted more and more apart.

It was evident that Bertie knew something of the affair, but Walter felt sure that it had gone no further; for Rose's friends still greeted him with ardour and rallied him on his flame's absence; while Miss Higgins had gone abroad with some friends, leaving him supposedly desolate.

Most people would have felt some embarrassment at the position. But to Bellamy it appeared to be full of humour; he liked to see the way that Bertie's pleading glance and Higgins' scowl hung upon him, to play Sir Peter in their presence. For the senior partner and originator of the great firm was failing rapidly, and took an almost senile delight in the young man, and the innovations which he introduced.

Indeed there was some reason for his satisfaction; for the fashion for silk jackets, both of artificial and real silk, rose to a craze; while many more machines were introduced and set up by the four Germans, who taught the sharpest among the women operatives how to work them.

By this time there were several more working at "Clutton's," but this did not harm "Morrison's," which had more orders than it could possibly carry out; indeed it strengthened its position, for the two firms had joined forces and bought over the monopoly of the English rights.

Rose came back to Edge, engaged to some Italian Count. The first time Bellamy met her he congratulated her beamingly. They were all right now, all happy; what was the good of "crying over spilt milk"? It was his favourite adage. There was a spice of elfish malice in Walter Bellamy's nature, but he was not personally vindictive; had not time enough to trouble greatly about individuals; was ready, literally, to kiss and be friends.

But Rose would not speak or shake hands; let alone kiss. She was inflated with the idea of her own importance; the wrongs of Miss Higgins might smart, but the wrongs of a prospective Countess could only be wiped out in blood.

After a while she married, and went to live in Turin, very unhappily, having counted on the rare combination of English morals with a foreign title. And two years later she returned to Edge for good — with one weedy little boy — blowsy, loud voiced and coarsened by ill-temper.

Some intricate process of thought led her to attribute all her troubles to Walter Bellamy; and she stirred up her father's antipathy afresh with her venom.

By this time Mrs. Higgins was dead of a disease which her husband diagnosed as "silly 'ooman's fancy," and the doctors as cancer; while Bertie — who seemed to go completely to pieces after his mother's and Walter Bellamy's influences were both removed — had been hastily shipped off to Australia, to save the results of some ingenious tampering with the signature of the firm.

Fortunately Bellamy — now twenty-three years of age — was in a position which was nearly unassailable; though it would have been difficult to state his exact status in the firm.

Nominally at the head of the travellers, he still appeared to be in everything. For should any operative in the factory, any packer in the warehouse, or clerk in the office — even mechanic or tattler, attending to the women's machines — happen to be in difficulties as to what to do next, his first thought was of Walter.

"Better ask Wally — where's Wally?" they would say, for in Edge the Christian name clings.

With Bellamy this state of affairs had partly arisen from an ambition to excel, partly from a restless curiosity, and

partly from a minute interest in all that concerned the craft upon which he was engaged; while he still adhered to his determination to know just a little more than other people, whether in relation to the humblest piece of mechanism, the fluctuating qualities of Canton silk, or the ebb and flow of the world's markets.

He could let nothing be, take nothing for granted; and it was this keen interest in detail, allied to his delight in getting the very best results out of everything which first set his brain to work round The Automatic Spooler.

Originally, and still in a great many of the smaller factories, sewing silk was spooled with a little machine worked by hand, one girl to one machine.

But lately a large and delicately human piece of mechanism had been invented, worked by power, each machine capable of holding some fifty spools; while the whole thing was attended to by one girl, whose sole duty consisted in removing the full spools and replacing them with empties.

This machine had its moods. The girls condemned it as "spiteful," for the bobbins were apt to fly loose and hit them, while it would catch their fingers unless they were very careful: took the work out of their hands, the bread out of their mouths, and then turned on them. No wonder they hated it.

But Walter Bellamy loved it, and if there was nothing else doing could usually be found in the spooling-room, watching the purring thing; while directly he got home from any journey he ran to it as a mother to her child.

But it was not altogether admiration; his mind was working with it the whole time, while he was acutely aware of what he regarded as its one and only defect.

Directly a spool was full the machine stopped. It was wonderfully done: the smoothing fingers of polished steel moved higher and higher over each as the silk thickened around it. Then, directly one was full the whole thing stopped; automatically, with never a coil too much.

But the *whole* machine stopped. There, to Walter's mind, lay the weakness. The attendant might start with an entire set of new spools; but the silk in some must inevitably be a little thicker than in others. These would be finished first, and then all the others had to wait while they were

replaced. Gradually as the day wore on the stoppages became more and more frequent, and more and more time was wasted; only a second or so, but still the seconds mounted up.

The business of silk jackets had, unexpectedly enough, become staple and managed itself, while Walter did not embroil himself in any more love affairs — though his fancy for Jane Irwin ran like a small sweet tune through his life, and he flew to her at once in any moment of triumph.

He was earning five pounds a week now, besides a fair commission, and lived very comfortably. He had at last induced his mother to keep a servant; though she had retaliated by immediately taking a lodger, and continuing to lurk in the back kitchen, while the girl, Bella — trim in cap and apron — waited at table, attended to the rooms, and did all the clean work.

But when Walter had found that some outlet for his mother's proclivities — which seemed to drive her on with the boring persistency of certain white insects which one finds under a flat stone — were really incurable, he arranged that the lodger should be Thompson — owner of the motor and his special friend, while he managed Bella so that she became his abject slave, thought nothing too good for him.

Thus life ran smoothly; full of variety and interest. He had gay days in Birmingham and Manchester and an occasional trip to Paris; though, curiously enough, he only knew London by passing through it, for an old traveller of "Morrison's" had had the capital as his special, and jealously guarded, beat.

Still things were running so easily that Bellamy's versatile mind sought something to grapple with: found the patent spooler; picked out its one fault and grappled with that.

For months he thought it over: walking to the mill, in the train, or in bed at night. Till gradually his mind seemed to squeeze itself up into a cone — like certain projectiles — with the point riveted on the spooler.

He always knew that when this took place something was bound to happen. In remembering a name or date, seeing his way out of a difficulty, making any elaborate mental calculation; when it got to this point success was always sure.

It was the same in this case. Suddenly, one night, he

awoke out of a sound sleep, with the thing so clear in his mind that an elaborate working plan might have been drawn on the retina of his eye.

The full spools must not stop the machine; they must be managed so as to drop out into a crate below. The way in which this was to be done was so inevitable that Walter laughed at himself for not having thought of it before. It was all there; every detail. Even to the way in which the fresh spools must run down a little chute and drop into place; so that there would be no fear of the girls' fingers being caught in the ever-moving machinery.

Still some one had to be taken into the secret: the mechanism was too intricate for him to attempt it alone, and he felt he must have a trained mind to back him.

After long deliberation Walter chose the German with whom he had worked over the silk jackets: an elderly man named Vonberg, slow, heavy, and minutely painstaking.

Together they roughed out a small wooden model. Thompson was the representative of a large firm of mechanics in Birmingham, from him Bellamy got an introduction — without saying what it was needed for — took them the pattern of the most intricate and necessary part of the new improvement, and induced them to copy it to scale.

Meanwhile Vonberg managed to get the rest of the machine — almost a precise copy of the original — made for him by a local man.

Then a series of tiny spools were turned out by an Edge bobbin-maker. Vonberg had picked up an old treadle sewing-machine — which would supply the motive power — for next to nothing, at a sale: all that remained was to fit the parts together and start them working.

Walter's whole being sang with joy. The only drawback to his happiness was that the thing had to be kept secret: he would have loved to proclaim its wonders to the whole town.

Nothing could be got out of Vonberg: "Her may work; and then again her may not. They is very awkward peoples, them machines," he said, his whole expression lowering with anxiety.

The day came upon which it was at last ready to be tested: in secret, in Walter's room, where he was secure from interruption, for Thompson was away on his holidays.

His brain whirled and danced in anticipation with the spools. His imagination spun rainbow patterns with the flashing silk. It seemed as if the delicate mechanism throbbed and purred in thousands and ten of thousands of pounds: he was not merely a "warm" man like Higgins; he was a millionaire, with special trains and yachts.

All that day he danced on air. He was ineffably condescending to the two senior partners of the firm: charming to the junior, who had recently been admitted, and at whose inclusion he had hotly rebelled, feeling that the place was, by rights, his own.

But now he did not want to be a partner, even in so great a firm as Morrison's. He wanted to be, and meant to be, something far greater.

It was, of course, an absolute necessity, and Vonberg was stolidly insistent on this point, that, until everything was quite certain the whole idea must be kept a profound secret. And to this Bellamy — though he was so enchanted with his own cleverness, with the wonder of the contrivance, that he would like to have told it to the whole town — consented. Though, at the same time he compromised on Jane. Jane must be with him when first he got the machine going.

Vonberg was bitterly antagonistical towards the idea: — "Tell von woman and you might as vell cry it aloud to the town," he said. But still Walter stuck to his point.

It was a late autumn evening, with a wet wind scurrying up the steep streets of Edge, when the momentous trial was to take place; but Jane had struggled gallantly along through it, though almost swept away by the wild evolutions of her umbrella.

Her mackintosh was drenched, wisps of wet hair were plastered across her forehead beneath her down-drawn knitted cap; her cheeks were aflame, her eyes glowed, as she knocked at the back door, and — without waiting for Mrs. Bellamy to reply — opened it; slid in through the crack, and slammed it in the face of the wind; her firm shoulder against the panelling, her strong little hands grappling with the lock.

Once all was firm again, she opened her umbrella: stood it in a corner of the scullery to drain, and shook herself,

laughing, with the drops of water running down her face, smelling sweetly of the clean open air.

"La! what a night! Oi never knowed such a back end" (autumn) "fur rantin' tearin' winds as this 'un."

She took off her cap as she spoke, and hung it before the kitchen fire, then ran her hands through her wet hair.

"You'll catch your death," declared Mrs. Bellamy, washing up the tea-things, draping herself dismally over the sink. "The weather is in my bones; I was telling the burial man only ter-day as he wouldn't get much more out o' me. An' time enough too, a penny a week fur thirty years, it makes my yead muzzy to think on it."

"Get out o' that an' I'll finish with them crocks," said Jane. Drew up a chair in front of the fire, pulled the widow to her feet, propelled her firmly towards it, and forced her into a sitting position. Then tucked up her sleeves and turned the tap on full, so as to drown the stream of complaints and prognostications.

"Walter'ull be in a tackin. 'Ee's waitin' fur yer, yer'd best be off. Oi don't expect young folk to 'ave any time from their junketing fur me; all they wants is ter get us safe out o' road. Keepin' things back from the mither as bore 'im. There 'ee is boxed up all secret loike with that there furriner, as whom Oi'd not be surprised if 'ee wur a murderer; furriners ain't not ter be trusted, not no 'ow. Furrin' by name's bad enough — an Oi ought ter know, ter moy cost —— But the Lord only knows what furrin' by nature ain't up to. Thee best go, or Walter'ull be blamin' it on me."

"Tut, let Walter be." Jane had already finished washing the dishes and was drying them.

They were all arranged on the shelves, and she had scrubbed down the sink, replenished the fire, and swept the grate, and was standing in front of Mrs. Bellamy — listening to a long account of all Bella's misdemeanours — when Walter called down the stairs to know if she had come.

But Jane would not answer; shook her head at Mrs. Bellamy, and even put her hand in front of her mouth to keep her quiet.

"Let him wait," she said: "it's good for men folk ter be kept waiting."

"Walter ain't one as is used ter waiting, I don't never not keep him waiting, not a moment. If ever 'ee 'as a wife——" began Mrs. Bellamy unctuously. But Jane cut in, with her shrewd Staffordshire broadness.

"Oi reckon yer kept 'im waitin' fur nine months ter start with, Missus Bellamy," she said. Then reverted again to the subject of Bella; took up the cat, stroked it, and set it a saucer of milk. Turning at last, leisurely enough towards the door: "Oi reckon Oi'd best go an' see what the to-do's about."

"'Ee won't not tell me a word o' what 'ee's up ter," said Mrs. Bellamy, a note of bitter jealousy in her voice.

"Likely enough, he don't want his Mammy ter know the ninny he is."

"Thank you for nothing, Miss Impudence!" snapped the mother. "There's such things as sour grapes, let me tell yer that — misnaming my Wally when ye'd give the eyes out o' yer yead fur 'im, as all the town knows."

But Jane only laughed as she left the room, made her way up the stairs and knocked at the door which faced the top of them.

There was the sound of a key turning in the lock and Bellamy peered out.

"Ah, Jane! It's only plain Jane," he called back into the room behind him —"plain Jane" was one of his many nicknames for her, in allusion to her outspoken ways — then drew her in and locked the door again; gave her arm a friendly squeeze, and moved away to the big table which — excepting for the bed — engrossed most of the floor space.

The room was, for the greater part in darkness, for the two men had rigged up a central pair of gas lights, such as are commonly seen over billiard-tables, with a powerful green shade which cast the whole of the light in a great oval moon over the table, upon which stood the model; while on the floor by its side was the ancient treadle sewing-machine.

Jane had been told nothing, except that Wally had invented some new piece of machinery; even now she asked no questions, for her quick eyes took in every detail: the bulky figure of the German in his shirt sleeves, sprawling

half across the table, the tiny, gaily tinted reels, the bright steel of the spooling machine, and Walter's glowing face, almost on a level with it, for directly after admitting Jane he had dropped to his knees by its side.

"Sit still, Jane, there's a chair for you. Now, watch, watch!"

His strong, broad hands were poised above the intricate little model, fluttering like birds; some of the silken thread had got tangled in the wheels, and he busied himself with them, while the German passed his finger-tips delicately over each bolt and screw, as if in a caress. He had not raised his head as Jane entered, and only grunted in answer to her gentle, "Good evening, Mr. Vonberg."

For a while she sat there very quiet in the chair assigned to her, her hands folded in her lap, and watched the two men. The great bulk of Vonberg's back, his roughly hewn head, and large deft hands; and beyond him Walter's flushed face, sparkling eyes and twinkling fingers. The whole repeated in a fantastic shadow show, which danced up the wall and cut across the angles of the ceiling: menacing blocks of head and shoulders, and huge hands, hovering and pouncing like Fate.

At last Walter rose, and straightened himself, with a jerk. Then bent forward a little, his eyes on the German's face.

"Now?" he said, the word an interrogation.

There was a long pause. Then a sharp "Ja," like a bark, and pulling up a chair close to the machine Walter began treading steadily, his engrossed eyes still on his model.

There was a sharp click as the gear adjusted itself; then, with a gentle, continuous hum the tiny spools began to revolve.

Jane — leaning forward, her whole intelligence concentrated on the differences in this new spooler — saw the full reels drop into the cardboard boxes, which took the place of the baskets beneath it, one after another like ripe plums; while the German loomed over it, feeding it with empties.

It seemed as if time and space, life itself as such, had ceased, that the only real sentient thing left was this pulsing affair of steel rods and wheels: as if they were there as its slaves and nothing more, hung in air apart from all other worlds.

Presently her quick eyes observed that the reels were coming to an end. Without a word she rose, drew the box towards her and scooped out the full reels.

The German barked at her, some inarticulate word, but she took no notice: pushed back the box into its place, and began to unwind the silk steadily; supplying him with empty spools which he took from her hand in silence, without even glancing at her.

Now and then the thread broke; once something jammed, and Walter sprang to his feet, and hung over the machine, while Jane took his seat at the treadle, sitting watchful and alert till he nodded to her to go on.

After a moment or two he returned to his place, freeing her for her former task of unwinding the full bobbins.

Through it all there was no word spoken; while no sound broke the stillness, save Vonberg's heavy breathing, and the purring hum of the little model.

At last the German drew himself upright:

"Gott, but she goes!" he said; and wiped his shirtsleeve across his forehead.

"I knew it, I knew it." Walter's voice was shrill with excitement. "Jane, we'll make our fortune. Jane, you shall have all the pretty frocks you want. We'll get a motor"— the girl thrilled at the intimacy of the plural pronoun —"they'll have ter take me into the firm! No, I won't go in, I'll lease them the monopoly. They'll shut down all the other branches; do nothing but spool silk, lead the world in it, like Coates with cotton! Jane! Vonberg! — You two silent sticks! What are we to do to celebrate? What can one do in Edge — if we were in Manchester now! Isn't she a darling, a daisy!" He hung across the table, his eyes gloating over the precious thing.

The German looked at Jane, peering curiously through his great spectacles. Put out one hand, caught her firm little chin between his finger and thumb and raised her face.

"Have you not gotten one tongue, Fräulein Jane?" he enquired.

Jane put it out, frankly, impudently; and Vonberg grinned.

"It is there," he said. "It is von long, red tongue; and yet you knows how to keep her still — an' you a female!"

His hand dropped to her shoulder. "I will marry you, if you like, Fräulein Jane; you would make a good wife with your still tongue; and I do not find you so plain as our young friend does say."

"Thank you for nothing," said Jane. "Wally," she leant across the table and plucked at Bellamy's shirtsleeve: "you be careful now! — Just you mind how you go, or Higgins will be robbing that off you, sure as my name's Jane Irwin. And I'd not care ter see yer robbed o' th' only thing yer ever did worth doin'!"

## CHAPTER XXI

BEFORE the improved spooler was actually completed Walter and Vonberg had talked over the question of patenting it. But, unfortunately, Walter Bellamy knew nothing of the patent laws, and his companion nothing of the English laws of any kind. It seemed that little could be done till the machine was in working order, and then Walter — all aflame to submit it to his superiors — could not brook the thought of the long delays necessary for its registration; besides which he was true to his class in his dread of anything to do with the law.

All the time it was actually in the making he kept the secret, though longing to proclaim it; hugging it with the glee of a child who knows something that no one else knows. But the moment it was finished he began to feel a little tired of it, impatient with it. Anxious to push the thing through, to see the small repeated in the great.

Then the expenses of making the model had drained both his resources and Vonberg's to the uttermost. They had no ready money left; had each mortgaged several weeks' pay, and were still heavily in debt to Thompson's people.

Vonberg was of that secretive nature which trusts nobody. But Walter Bellamy, although he hated and in a way despised "Morrison's," had the same sneaking belief in it which a man retains for the religion of his childhood; while his nerves were strained by the very thought of any further delay. For he was one of those people who are constitutionally incapable of waiting.

The German's stolidity exasperated him. His suggestion that they should hide away the machine and wait for a year or more, till they could afford it ample protection, was unthinkable. Walter knew himself well enough to realise that, by that time, he would be totally engrossed in something else. Besides, he was already starting to spend the money

which he anticipated "Morrison's" as likely to pay him for the monopoly.

After all it was his invention; and he had only bound himself to give Vonberg a certain percentage of the profits — whatever they might be.

There were a good many scenes between the two men; while more than once Vonberg called at the Irwins' cottage and asked Jane to use her influence with Walter. But she knew that was impossible. One might guide him gently in the direction he wished to go; but no power on earth could turn him away from it.

"Yer maun just let him gang his own gait; fur there's no guidin' or gainsayin' him when he's once set," she declared.

And she was right. For one morning, soon after this — bored to death with the whole thing — Walter asked for a special interview with the heads of the firm; and explained to them what he had done and how greatly they would benefit by his invention.

"How much do you want for it?" Higgins shot the enquiry point-blank through his rhapsodies.

Walter had meant to keep an interest in his invention. To lease the monopoly, or to demand a percentage on its earnings.

But suddenly the thought of money, of a fine round sum which he could invest in a business of his own went to his head; besides he wanted to have the thing settled, to feel free to turn his energies into a new channel; and he rapped out: —

"Ten thousand pounds."

Higgins laughed roughly. "It wud'na make as much in as many years; even if it'ull work, which I doubt."

The junior partner, Joyce, was away, and only old Peter Morrison and Higgins were there; the former sunk deep in his chair, an immense bulk of flesh with apparently little of life about it, save in the eyes, which, dim and sunken, kept turning wistfully from one man to the other, as though he were trying to understand what they were saying.

With an impetuous movement Bellamy flung round towards him. "After all it is for you to decide; if you will only see it, Sir."

"Aye, aye, lad. But I don't know that I rightly understand what it is you're driving at."

"It's an improvement on the automatic spooler which does twice the work in half the time — will save you hundreds of pounds." Walter spoke slowly and distinctly, as though to a child.

"But we've got an automatic spooler, an' I don't know that it's much good as it is. In my young days it was all done by hand, there was no thought of such things: and only seven shillings a week to the girls too. There's over many of them new-fangled ideas coming out now, lad."

"But this is an improvement," pleaded Walter.

Higgins rose noisily to his feet. "Well, we canna' waste no more time on it now; nor you neither. Ye'll have ter let it bide, Bellamy, and get those invoices out."

"If you won't give it a chance, won't even look at it I'll offer it somewhere else," cried Walter hotly. "Clutton and Son would have it in a minute."

"That mustn't be allowed, Higgins." Morrison spoke with something of his old peremptory air. "Whatever it is that the lad's done it must be seen and judged on its merits." He raised himself slowly from his chair, and stood holding on to the side of the table. "He's a fine lad, a sharp lad, who knows ——"

"Well, it'ull have ter be another time, Mr. Morrison," put in his partner. "We've more than enough to get through to-day as it is, without wasting time over any faldaddles. There's a pile of papers as have been waiting for a week past for your signature."

"When? Will you fix a time, please, Sir?" Walter's eyes were on the old man's face, he was determined to tie him down to a day and hour if possible. "Will to-morrow morning do — say eleven o'clock?"

The dim, wavering glance strayed from Bellamy and sought Higgins' face.

"Better not make any engagement. We're full up: the thing can wait," declared the latter harshly, with raised voice.

But Walter took no notice of him. With an effort of will it seemed as if he forced the senior partner's eyes back to his.

"To-morrow at eleven o'clock, would that suit you, Sir? I'm sure you'd find it worth your while."

"I think so — I think so. I don't recollect that I have any other engagement for that hour." With trembling hands the old man took out a notebook and fluttered over the pages: aimlessly as if scarcely knowing what he sought for.

Then, with a sudden air of decision, he snapped the elastic band round it again, slipped the pencil into its place, and put it back in his pocket.

"Yes — very well, Bellamy. To-morrow at eleven: I suppose the model's at your home."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you can tell one of the carters to call and fetch it up; and we'll give it our full consideration. Good morning to you."

Walter had not seen him so decided in months. Once more there had been something of the old "King Morrison" in his mien; the battering-ram attitude, which could be so benevolent to those whose aims ran with his and yet never overstepped the boundaries of servility.

Things would be different again if the old man once broke loose from Higgins' sway, which had been growing ever more and more absolute from the time of the great strike.

But it was the old king's last effort of authority.

Walter saw one of the carters that afternoon, and arranged for him to call for the model next morning — before he went to the mill — when he drove up with it himself.

That was after the breakfast hour, and the buzzer had gone before they topped the hill and fronted the big mill. By rights everybody should have been in at their work; but instead of that they were gathered in little groups talking together.

Walter Bellamy guessed that something was wrong. Indeed it needed no guessing, for it was in the looks of even the most casual passers-by, in the very atmosphere.

At the block of offices he got out, and beckoned to the workmen to come and help him lift the model, which was wound in a sheet.

The man spit on his hands and felt over the swathed form

gingerly. Then caught hold of it in the place which Bellamy indicated, while he himself took the other side, and together they tackled the steps; Walter facing upwards.

Half-way the man paused and spoke. "Gummy," he said, "but this 'ere's a sorry business, ain't it; we're wonderin' what difference it'ull maeke ter us, me an' my mates."

"What's that?" asked Walter. "Steady now, mind you don't slip."

"Poor owd Peter Morrison; but Oi reckon ye've 'eard: died in 'is sleep last night, 'ee did. Hold on! Lordy! but yer gave me a fright, Oi'd made sure as yer'd dropped it. Aye, it'ull maeke a difference ter us, that's sure. 'Ee was an 'ard 'un, was Peter Morrison, but Oi'll say this much fur 'im—'ee was just; an' 'Iggins ain't even that; if only once he gets his knife inter a man 'ee don't not stop fur nothing."

## CHAPTER XXII

THE sheet which hung over the model of the improved spooler grew grimier and grimier as it stood, week after week, in the corner of the office where Walter habitually worked.

At first the sight of it got on his nerves. Something must be done, and that quickly. He could not get hold of Higgins, who swept him aside with brusque insolence; but once he induced the junior partner to look at it. However, the young man's thoughts were elsewhere; he was worried by Sir Peter's death which gave him work where he had merely hoped to make money.

"Yes, yes: very nice, I'm sure. Very ingenious. Some day — some day, when we've more leisure. But there's too much on hand now — no time to turn round, don't you know. All this South American affair and all."

He was right. Neither of the heads of the firm had any time to attend to anything. There was talk of turning "Morrison's" into a company: besides there was what the junior partner spoke of as "The South American Affair."

Hitherto the raw, artificial silk had been prepared in Coventry and sent in large skeins, or hanks, to Edge. But the supply was neither certain nor satisfactory; for the fashion had become so universal that Coventry was not always equal to the demands made upon her.

Some months before the old man's death Morrison's had been putting up new buildings, with a plant for making the silk themselves, from wood which was to be supplied to them ready pulped.

This had been Joyce's idea. Indeed it was towards this end that he had thrown in his lot with the firm; for he was already connected with the wood pulp business, and came of a family of timber merchants, sawyers and pulpers in South America, where his people held a large area of land.

At the time of Peter Morrison's death he had been prepared to go out there; definitely arrange for a large contract, see through the first consignment and ship it home.

That was at an end for the present. But still the thing could not wait. There was a certain season for pulping the wood, and they could not afford to let it go past. No wonder that there seemed little spare time in which to attend to Walter Bellamy's model.

The young man himself half forgot it, and put off from day to day offering it to any one else: a step which would practically mean an offer of his own services also.

As a matter of fact he did not wish to leave Morrison's at that moment, even if it were to better himself; for the ever-growing factory, and the exotic air of the South American scheme had fired his imagination.

If only he had the chance that Joyce had been obliged to let slip.

His fancy ran riot in the depth of pathless forests — orchid hung; was shot through by a dark-eyed Senhorita; mules with jangling bells and scarlet trappings, all the glow and wonder and warmth of tropical life.

The artificial silk, in its gloss and fineness, became to his mind a sentient thing — a living tree with golden fruits and immense waving leaves, jewelled by lizards; the sap running warm as blood through its veins, exuding precious gums.

What was an automatic spooler, however ingenious, compared with such wonders?

"Bring her back to your own house; keep her till we vill be able to pay for her patent," wrote Vonberg, who had been recalled to Germany by family affairs, in which "Fräulein Jane"— despite much pressing — declined to take any part.

Walter fully meant to take it back. But the whole thing had lost interest for him; was as much forgotten as Rose had once been waiting at the corner of Little France. All he wanted, all he thought of and worked for now, was the chance of going to South America in Joyce's place.

He put forward a claim, for he was not one to lose any chance by not asking.

After all the mission had nothing to do with the working

of the wood, was merely a matter of business which he understood more thoroughly than most people connected with the firm and Joyce seemed willing enough to entertain the idea. But there was Higgins to be considered, and it did not seem likely that he would agree to any move which meant an advancement in Walter Bellamy's position.

However, to the young man's amazement, he consented without demur; almost with eagerness. It amused Bellamy. Was the old fellow still so sore over his daughter's escapade that he wanted to get him out of his sight?

Anyhow the motive was not worth bothering about. He was actually going to South America — the land of his dreams — and that alone was enough for him.

There was no time to think of anything except the business in hand; for his passage was taken for the very week after Higgins gave his consent, and he spent most of his time receiving instruction from Joyce — who knew the country, and all that would be required of him — and getting together his outfit.

Jane — who was to stay with his mother while he was away, for by this time her brothers and sisters were old enough to take care of themselves — saw him off at the station.

Almost her last words were: —"Wally, what about that there spooler? Sure to goodness you'll not let 'un bide up Morrison's while yer away; leave me a note so Oi may take a conveyance an' get 'un back home."

"Hang the patent spooler!" cried Walter, half wild with excitement. Then picked her up, with his two hands either side of her trim little waist, and kissed her. There on the Edge platform: on market-day too, in full sight of half the population of the town!

Jane was not one to make too sure of anything, particularly when it was in any way connected with Walter Bellamy; but there was little wonder, after this public display, that she bought fine calico and lace and set to work on sundry garments, in the evenings after her return from the mill; when she had finished helping Mrs. Bellamy wash up the tea-things, amid a stream of prognostications as to the bad end certain for Bella, and the inevitable fate of Walter! —"The best son as any poor 'ooman ever 'ad" — who

had been born without a caul and was therefore certain sure ter be drowned at sea.

Letter writing did not come easy to Jane Irwin. But about a month after Walter's departure she wrote — brusquely as she spoke — advising him, in his next communication to the firm, to ask that the model of the spooler should be sent back to his own home.

Bellamy was struck by this and wondered what was happening, for he knew that shrewd little Jane must have some good reason for what she said.

But he was engrossed during the whole of each day in wood pulp, and in the idea of a new and wonderful material to supplement it: a material which, out there, was so much waste, would cost a mere song to procure; while his evenings, and — I regret to say some of his nights — were monopolised by a Senhorita such as he had dreamt of at Edge, whom, in the flesh, he discovered to be a curious and greedy animal; ministering to his physical needs and love of beauty without diverting his mind, in the very least, from the business on hand.

## CHAPTER XXIII

AFTER five months Bellamy came back to Edge, tanned and broadened. He had mixed with a different class of people. The indolent air of South America had softened his somewhat aggressive manner; while his own Southern blood had found a certain sense of kinship in the ways and outlook of the half Spanish races with which he had mixed.

He had left Edge a typical, young, middle-class English business man; he returned to it more French than English, all the Gallic traits — of which he had shown such traces in his boyhood — once more to the front; for he had found that the foreign pose attracted, and cultivated it — with the help of a hereditary predisposition — till it became almost second nature to him.

The first evening back in his old home, sitting talking with Thompson, lolling half in and half out of the window, he seemed to Jane Irwin to be handsomer than ever, more alive; more truly self-confident.

But the change in him went beyond this. She had been shaken to her depths by his return; now she found herself further away from him than when he was in South America.

There was something which she was bound to tell him. Before he came she had wondered how she would prevent herself bursting out with it the very first moment they met. Now she sat turning what she had to say over and over in her mind. Thinking: "I will speak of it when they've finished what they're saying." Waiting for Walter to mention the mill, then sheering away from the subject directly it was broached.

All that night the thought of what she had left untold tormented her. But next morning, to her relief, Walter came down in his pyjamas to beg for a cup of tea — while she was getting ready to go to the mill — and, almost before she knew what she was saying it was out:

"Wally, your spooler — I hear — the girls from up 'Morrison's' have told me — they've got it goin'."

"What!"

"Patented and made an' all."

"It's not true — why, Higgins wouldn't touch it."

"It's true enough. I don't rightly know if it's the same all roads, but it works as yourn worked."

"They have it made, in working? *Jane!*"

"More nor a dozen — they'll let no one else touch 'em, have gotten the whole o' the trade:" her kind grey eyes were full on his face, it was his first real set back — how would he take it?

"My invention!"

"Ye've only yersen to blame, Walter Bellamy," Jane's voice was curt with suppressed feeling; "there seems no teachin' yer sense."

"God damn 'em!" Walter's face was white, his eyes flaming. "They'd no right ter touch it — it's mine — it's mine I tell you!"

"That's a way o' yourn, young Wally, countin' as things are yourn, an' lettin' on 'em bide till yer happen ter want 'em," remarked Jane with unusual bitterness; the loaf of bread held up to her breast as she cut her butty.

"But of course they'll pay me — they were only waiting till I came back," declared Walter. Gave a short laugh, and repeated again: —"Of course they'll pay me."

Jane did not reply. Her soft mouth was crushed into a straight line, and she eyed him keenly above the loaf. He was so used to getting everything his own way, his very sureness was apt to make a fool of him.

"They're only waiting for me to come back," he repeated loudly, like a man arguing against his own conviction. Stood for a moment in silence, then broke out again: "Does it drop the full spools into baskets beneath?"

Jane nodded.

"Ay, I told them that, I said there were to be baskets — and the empties run down the slots into place?"

Again the girl nodded, still without a word.

Suddenly the colour flamed up into Walter Bellamy's face, and catching at her arm he shook her.

"What the devil do you want to look like that for? I

asked ten thousand pounds for it. They've got to pay me. Do you hear? Got to, got to! What have you been doing? Why didn't you let me know what they were up to? I thought you were my friend; why didn't you let me know?"

"I wrote — three times," answered Jane. And remembering two letters after that first — begging him to do something — then a third which he had mislaid unread — Walter veered.

"And Vonberg? What was Vonberg doing to let them steal my machine — mine! I suppose he didn't care, I suppose he thought he wasn't going to get enough out of it. Wasn't that like a German!"

"I wrote an' told him; he came over from Germany himsen on purpose. But he could do nothing. Higgins laughed in his face; said as how he might as well lay claim ter every new invention as was ever made. You've no call ter blame Vonberg."

"But what of the model? What the hell ——"

"Hush thee, lod, hush!" Jane laid her hand upon Bellamy's arm: he seemed nearer to her now, in his pain and anger, than he had done as the nonchalant traveller of the night before. "He did all as he could. 'Model,' says Higgins, 'what model ——?' Vonberg tells him as how it was in yor office; and was answered that all the old rubbish had been cleaned out when the place was redded up Wakes week. Joyce said the same. They'd hear nothing on it. Vonberg he got round some of the men later on; an' one of 'em up an' said as how he believed there was bits of it in the scrappin' yard. An' they went out an' looked, but they could find nought; not as much as a bolt or a screw."

"They shall pay for it! They shall pay what I asked, or the whole town shall know of it. By God, I'll expose them! I'll dress an' go up mill now."

Again Jane caught at his arm. "Look you 'ere, Wally. What are yer goin' ter do agin 'Morrison's.' The worst 'ud be no more nor a flea-bite. It's a company now. There's fine gentlemen — lords an' what not — from Lunnon in it. Yer'll not only have ter foight Higgins, ye'll have ter foight the whole lot o' them directors — lords and members o' Parliament — an' Higgins and Joyce both magistrates! Who'd believe yer word against them? Yer'd

make a hole in yer manners, an' that's all you'd do if yer went up in the taekin' yer in now."

"I'll make a hole in their heads."

"An' go ter gaol for it."

"I'll have the law of 'em." Walter's anger had cooled; he spoke sullenly, for he realised that Jane was right, and the knowledge of his own helplessness bit into him.

"It's ill work goin' ter law with them as maekes the law. Just yer wait till after yer dressed and ha' done yer breakfast. Then taeke 'em up all the reports, an' such like as yer have wid yer."

"I sent the duplicates of all I had by another boat, before I sailed, in case of an accident." Walter gave a bitter laugh. "By God, they've all they want o' me. They can give me the go-bye now if they're so minded."

"Then don't give 'em a chance. Wait till all talk o' the other business is at an end. Then see the spoolers goin'; an' mention it to 'em, civil like, as the idea was yourn an' yer've never been paid for 'un, not yet."

Walter moved over to the window, and stood for a few moments staring out, his hands in his jacket pockets. He had been diddled, utterly diddled! He, Walter Bellamy, who had been so sure of himself: thought himself so sharp.

This then was the meaning of the mission to South America, of Higgins' easy compliance. If only he had held on to the idea of the spooler, had not grown tired of it, let it slip.

Except during the few moments he had spent over Jane's letters, he had never even thought of his invention since he left England.

But now it seemed as though nothing else mattered. With the sense of difficulty and failure all his old interest revived. He would get his rights or he would get even with "Morrison's."

But Jane was right. He remembered a case at the time of the strike, when one of the men on picket duty was given three months — with Peter Morrison and Higgins and two other mill-owners on the bench — for striking a man, who himself denied that he ever had been struck.

It was indeed ill work going to law with those that made

the law. But still there were other ways of fighting, and a fight was always worth having.

He turned round, laughing; his face cleared. "By God, I'll make them smart for this, one way or another. But you're right, Jane — you're wiser than ever and prettier than ever, Jenette."

He stared at her meditatively. She was very wise and very pretty. The only real woman, or so it seemed to him, that he had ever known. Should he —— for a moment the thought of their parting on Edge platform returned to him.

Then his face hardened. He could not be bothered with women now, at a time like this. There was Higgins to think of. He and Higgins were quits: now it was his turn to move. And without so much as another glance at Jane, he turned and went slowly out of the room.

Jane was right. Walter could get nothing out of "Morrison's"; for to acknowledge that he had any claim at all on the improved spooler was to acknowledge it in its entirety, and that the authorities would not do.

Joyce seemed bewildered; it was evident that he took very little interest in the inner workings of the mill, and scarcely understood the rights of the case; while Higgins was like adamant, absolutely refusing to discuss the affair.

There were alterations in the new machine, as it now stood, which differentiated it from Walter's model; and though the same idea had obviously been followed, it was difficult to say that the improvements were not the natural outcome of the defects observable in the old spooler.

Then the new machine had been made in Germany, this alone rendered the establishment of any claim the more difficult, as that country specialised in such things, was continually making improvements on the existing machines. Walter Bellamy suspected two of the German tattlers, who had originally come over with the knitting plant, one of whom had been back to Germany for a so-called holiday during his absence; but what proof had he? Even if the train of evidence was complete, there was no money with which to fight a case against a firm like "Morrison's," a firm whose position was almost unassailable. He wrote a letter to the Board of Directors stating his case; but only received the answer that they had perfect confidence in

their Edge representative, before whom "any minor complaints must be laid."

He might go on laying complaints. The only end would be dismissal; with no particular character, a state of affairs which would please Higgins and put any chance of revenge out of his reach: while, if he once got the reputation of being a tiresome, quarrelsome fellow, no other firm would be anxious to employ him.

He was shrewd enough to realise all this, to let the subject drop; at least for a while. But the experience hardened him, rendering him — what he had never been before — suspicious and vindictive.

He had always meant to climb up: felt no compunction as to whom he trod underfoot in the process; but this callousness had not arisen from any feeling of spite — apart from the large dislike of class for class — but from the realisation that, standing upright, certain people were in his way, while underfoot they only served to raise him higher.

Now, in connection with "Morrison's" there came into his life, for the first time, a sense of personal animosity: a feeling which grew till he became absolutely possessed of that most corroding of human desires — the wish to "get even with" a fellow-creature; while life ceased, for the time being, to represent a joyous game and became a sport, in which he appeared to himself, alternately, as the tracker and the tracked.

He was as industrious as ever, a harder and more brilliant man of business, though still retaining that air of polish and restraint which he had brought back with him from South America. Indeed there was not a fault on which Higgins could lay a finger, as far as the firm was concerned; though unedifying tales of Bellamy's private life were whispered all over Edge.

His mother was always well provided for, but he lost all personal interest in her; at times an odd feeling came to him that they were so far apart he would hardly recognise her if he met her in the street. It was the same with Jane, he had lost touch with her, and looked at her coldly and curiously: wondering how she had ever moved him, in what way he was different from other young men that it seemed impossible for him really to fall in love.

But it was the same with his newer friends: with the circles of admiring acquaintances which he had established at all the provincial towns where his business took him, and with whom he was overwhelmingly popular. They did not touch him in the very least; he felt no real liking for them, or pride in them — though many of them were men far above his own station in life. For to Walter Bellamy they were only so many pawns in that great game of "getting on," in which each piece that you won over to your own side counted for something; and realising this fact he pondered over it with a sort of cold curiosity.

## CHAPTER XXIV

ANOTHER year passed. Jane Irwin, back in her own cottage, with her two younger sisters, saw less and less of Walter.

Sometimes after breakfast, clattering back to work in her little clogs — the sound of clogs in Edge is like the tick of a clock set always for working hours — she would meet him going up to "Morrison's," spick and span in his dark blue suit — for he never wore a great-coat, even in the coldest weather, unless it was actually raining or snowing — when he would whip off his hat to her with a courteous bow, and "Good morning, Jane."

Now and then he would speak a few words; but when he did the difference between them seemed more pronounced than ever. For by this time Walter Bellamy had to be very excited or angry to drop into the dialect, and his mincing English seemed like the splash of cold water flung into her face.

She was very proud was little Jane. She would not go swinging up and down the streets in the evenings arm-in-arm with the other mill girls, dressed in her best clothes and laughing loudly to attract his attention: would not try the plan of flaunting another admirer in his face: would not even attempt to change her speech or manner or dress.

She was right in her right place, as she told herself; a place which was — properly speaking — Walter Bellamy's as much as it was hers. If he wanted her he must come to her: she was not going to demean herself by climbing up, hanging on to his coat-tails.

She grew a little thinner and paler, but she did not really fret. Walter was a foolish, spoilt child. She admired him as much as ever for his cleverness and his good looks, but she still saw through him. After all — though she loved him — the loss of his friendship hurt her more than any-

thing else. She would not have married him then, even if he had asked her, for she recognised him as green fruit.

There were some men that "set" long before they were Walter's age. With far less in them they were yet mature: as they were then they always would be. But there was no knowing what Walter would develop into. He was like a rocket still going up, and it was impossible to say where he would drop.

After a while, however, she began to grow really uneasy. But for his sake, not for her own; whatever happened to Wally he would end by needing her.

By now he had dropped Thompson, who was a steady young fellow, and was once more hand and glove with Bertie Higgins, who had returned to Edge, weedier and more dissipated than ever. Out of business hours they were always together with a trail of other young men after them, mostly mill-owners' sons. For by now Bellamy had completely lost touch with his own class; and reigned as a king among these young sprigs, hung between town and county.

He had started a small run-about car; which he bought second-hand, through Thompson, declaring that it saved its price over and over again in train fares. And likely enough it did, but still it was not the sort of thing for a man in his position.

People began to talk: every one in Edge knew what his salary was, and shrewdly conjectured the amount he gained from commission. It seemed as if he was always in the public eye; while he was spending money recklessly: for Walter Bellamy did not work to save, but to taste some of the joys of life before it was too late.

But that was not all: parallel with these tales of his prodigality ran talk of trouble at "Morrison's"—of large losses of stock—voiced aloud, furiously, by hands who had been searched on leaving the mill.

Thefts were bound to occur. Some of the workers, quite honestly, felt that they had a right to certain pickings in the way of ties and scarfs, while the losses in raw material were immense: for careless, or dishonest workers would cut away tangled silk recklessly rather than take the trouble to unravel it, cramming their stockings and the breasts of their gowns and corsets full, so that they might get away from

the mill without their extravagance being discovered and counted against them.

But more than this was going on. The depredations were becoming wholesale, and it was difficult to say where they began or how they would end.

Ever since the inauguration of the firm there had been a privilege, accorded to the heads of departments, of selling certain of the manufactured articles.

It was a pernicious custom, unfair to the wholesale dealers and provocative to every sort of dishonesty, but once started it was difficult to put a stop to it.

Walter possessed this privilege — having certain sums deducted from his pay each week and taking it out in stock instead — while Bertie Higgins claimed the same right.

One of Jane's younger sisters was a fringer at Morrison's, and she brought home tales of the uneasiness which prevailed. Indignantly declaring that it was a "shame" that they should be so put upon; that it was all a new trick of Higgins' to torment them.

One day the two girls were going up the town together when the younger caught hold of her sister's arm.

"Look there — look 'ee now, Jinny, at that there George Higginbottom. Look a' the tie as 'ee's wearin'," she cried excitedly.

It happened to be Thursday, early closing day, and the youth indicated, a grocer's assistant, was lounging about at the corner of the street with a group of other young fellows.

"I dwarn't see naught in that," remarked Jane indifferently.

"Wait till we gets past 'un, an' I'll tell yer," answered the other girl; pulled her on a pace or so by the arm, then burst out with it. The tie George Higginbottom was wearing was of a new pattern that had just been made at Morrison's, and not yet put upon the market — was not even in the hands of the travellers; for the firm had wished to hold it back till the autumn, then spring it, as something quite new, upon the public.

Now, among many other things, numbers of ties of this new pattern had begun to disappear. There had been a great disturbance about it, and only that day Higgins had threatened several of the girls with dismissal; told the

others that he would cut the wages of all the knitters and fringers till the loss was made good.

"Cussin' and swearin' as though we was dirt. As though we'd aught ter do with it. Why, the ties ain't so much as counted till after they're out o' our hands!"

"If you could find who 'un was as sold that 'un ter young George Higginbottom, yer'd be nearin' the truth," said Jane.

"Yer right there; I'll go an' ask 'un, danged if I won't!" cried the young girl, her eyes sparkling; and had half turned to go when, with a sudden qualm of fear — which she could not have explained — Jane caught at her arm.

"Don't thee go, my dear; don't thee go."

"But why not? Why should things be blamed on us as we've never done?" answered Lottie sullenly.

"Don't thee go — getting theesen mixed up in such things," entreated Jane; her whole being seeming to hang on getting Lottie away, on preventing her from questioning the callow-looking youth in the bright new neck-wear, of which she seemed to have some curious subconscious knowledge which she could not place. Had she really seen such a tie once before, or had she only dreamt it?

She could not say. But still the feeling held: that in some way the whole affair was connected with her, was heavy with danger and trouble, against which, by rights, she ought to be up and doing, something — though what she could not tell.

Late that same evening she was sitting up helping Lottie to finish a new dress which she was making.

It was a hot summer's night, close and thundery. The girls' needles stuck to their fingers. It seemed as if they would never come to an end, with all the tiresome finishing off; and yet there was not enough to be worth leaving over for another day.

At last it was all done; and letting her elder sister gather up the scraps, Lottie moved — yawning and stretching — to the window, and was leaning out — sniffing up the night air, and fanning her hot face with a handkerchief — when the sound of footsteps came up the narrow, deserted street.

A regular tramp, tramp; mingled with a lighter step in creaking boots.

Filled with that sort of curiosity which comes so easily to

an empty mind, the young girl craned out of the window — which was low and flush with the street — wondering who it could be that was so late abroad: in boots, too, and not in clogs!

Suddenly she drew back, her face flaming with excitement as she recognised the sound of a heavy, orderly footstep. They were coming right by the house: would pass so close that she could, if she so pleased, put out her hand and touch them. Two policemen with a third man between them.

In a place as small as Edge any matter connected with the police is far more thrilling than the death of kings.

"It's coppers an' a fellow!" she whispered in a shrill aside to Jane. Then drew back a little and pulled the curtain round her so that she could observe without being observed. "Mind, Jenny, they'll see you."

But Jane did not appear to notice what was said. She was standing upright by the table — one hand filled with scraps of blue cotton stuff, the other grasping her scissors and thimble — staring straight in front of her at the side of the room, not out of the window, waiting. For she felt convinced that the thing which had been going to happen all that afternoon and evening was upon her, and went stiff and cold with fear. Though even then she did not know what it was that she so dreaded.

The steps came nearer and nearer and finally passed the window. Lottie gave a gasp of amazement.

"Sakes!" she said; "why, if it ain't that there George Higginbottom."

Suddenly Jane began to laugh. Whatever she had expected it was not this. Never had anybody, or anything, seemed so ludicrous as did the thought of that sheepish, red-faced George Higginbottom at this particular moment; and she laughed till she was obliged to lean against the dresser, holding both sides with her hands, while the tears ran down her face.

Lottie was surprised. She had never seen her quiet, capable sister give way in such a fashion before.

"Well, I never! I can't see what call yer have ter laugh like that," she said huffily, as if fearful that the joke might be against her. "Supposin' the young fellow *is* in trouble."

"Oh, I don't know," gasped Jane, pulling herself together; "Oi reckon it's only drink, an' it seems kinder queer fur that nesh Georgie ter want two policemen ter hold him drunk, when he'd eat out o' their hand sober."

"But they wasn't holdin' him. He was walking along cool as cool, talkin' away. I tell yer what, Jane," Lottie frowned and nodded, her young face heavy with importance; "it's about that there tie. You mark my words, 'ee's goin' ter blab. Whoever it was as sold that there tie ter young George Higginbottom 'ull be sorry as ever he done it."

Suddenly Jane dropped to her knees and began picking up pins and scraps of thread from the floor.

"You get off ter bed, Lottie Irwin," she commanded sharply; "or there'll be no wakin' yer to-morrow come mornin'."

"But don't yer think ——?"

"No, I don't; an' if I did I'd not be click-clackin' my tongue over other folks' affairs," interrupted Jane sharply. And with an offended shrug the girl turned and left the kitchen; while her elder sister sat back on her heels, her white lips drawn tightly together.

After all the trouble might be in a remote way connected with young Higginbottom. Anyhow, for some reason or other, Lottie's last words had seemed to bring it all back again.

Jane folded up the completed dress, gathered her sewing materials together and thrust them into a drawer; straightened the room, set the tea-things ready for the early morning and went slowly upstairs; still with that look of painful striving on her usually serene face. For a lost thought is like anything else that is lost; it is impossible really to rest until it has been found.

True, she dropped asleep very soon after she was in bed; but she had odd dreams of the blue cotton dress that she and Lottie had been busy over, and which in her sleep she could not get right — having cut both sleeves for one arm; while it was so short it was right up round Lottie's neck; was scarcely a dress at all — was in reality a tie. Though after all it did not matter, for it was George Higginbottom that was wearing it and not her sister.

Jane woke at this; and then dropped asleep again to find herself tangled up in much the same dreams of a blue cotton frock, and the young grocer's assistant and his tie. But now he was knotting it round some one else's neck outside the little corner house, above the cattle market, where Walter Bellamy used to live.

Then — quite suddenly — it was not a tie at all, but a rope. And how could she have so mistaken the man who held it? For it was Higgins himself, and he had one end of it in both hands and was pulling with all his might.

At this it seemed to Jane that she gave a great cry and started to run towards them. And in doing so she tripped over the hem of her dress — which, after all, was not her dress, but the blue cotton frock, that had resumed something of its normal proportions — and was falling down and down, and down to an unutterable depth.

"Jane, Jane! what is it? Jane!" cried a far-away voice, which grew gradually nearer; till Jane awoke, with a sickening jerk, to find that her youngest sister Clara, who slept with her, was shaking her violently.

"Lor! Jane, whatever made yer squawl out like that? You've made me go cold all over."

"Sorry, Clary, it was only a dream; go ter sleep, there's a dear," said Jane. And lay motionless till her companion's steady breathing told her she was once more asleep.

Then very cautiously, she slid out of bed; partially dressed, as well as she could in the half-dark room, gathered the rest of her clothing under her arm and opening the door, slipped noiselessly down the stairs.

For suddenly — at the touch of Clara's hands, at the sound of her voice, calling her back out of the bottomless depths through which she was falling — Jane had remembered.

Only the week before she had been up to see Walter's mother, at a time when she knew that he was absent; for by now the chasm between them was so wide that she shrank from meeting him.

She had found Mrs. Bellamy up in her son's room, "turning it out" with the assistance of the new servant — which meant that the mistress was on her knees washing the floor — while the maid flicked airily about with a duster.

The big table in the middle of the room, where the model of the improved spooler once stood, had been piled up with ties, scarfs, and socks, even knitted coats — roughly tied together with string — which at the first glance Jane's practical eyes told her were not the regular travellers' show-stock.

Mrs. Bellamy, sitting back on her heels, wringing out her floorcloth, followed the girl's glance.

"The whole place is mucked up with the stuff that there Bertie Higgins brings up here; he'd a great long cricketing bag full on it t'other day — came along all rigged up in flannels an' all, as tho' he was goin' ter a game. Oi tell my Wally as he'll be gettin' 'im inter trouble if he ain't careful. But Oi moight as well talk ter the air! Look at 'em there! In the teens o' scarfs an' such like."

Jane had picked up a tie, and was drawing it absent-mindedly through her fingers. At the time she did not realise that she was noticing it in any special way: could not have described it, if she had been asked. But for all that the pattern and colouring must have engraved itself on her subconscious mind.

"It seems an awful lot," she said; "but I suppose as both Wally and Bertie Higgins has the right ter sell."

"Well, it beats me how they can pay fur all that stuff an' yet have the spindin'-money as they do, ter go rocketing all over the place wid. Oi wounna be surprised if trouble came on it. It 'ud be loike moy luck. Some people do seem born ter trouble as the sparks flies up'ards; an' Oi ought ter know, seeing as things seem ter be allus agin me, though what Oi've done ter deserve it, the Lord only knows. It's no good me sayin' nothin', Oi ain't nobody, an' only get sneeped fur moy pains. But that there young Bertie Higgins ain't leading my Wally into no good wid 'is flash ways."

"It's more likely as Wally is leading Bertie," answered Jane musingly. Then added, "Why don't you let Lizzie do the scrubbing? No wonder yer rheumatiky, allus on them damp floors."

But Mrs. Bellamy had taken no notice of the latter part of Jane's speech.

"Oh, it's my Wally, is it? Oi must say, Miss Irwin, as

it ill beseems yer ter go talkin' slightin' loike o' moy Wally. When Oi was a young wench, folk 'ad more pride than ter show off so 'acause a young feller had raised 'imself above 'em."

How much can one remember in the moment of waking? It seemed to Jane as if — in the second which was all that could have elapsed between being raised from the pit into which she was falling and feeling Clara's hand on her shoulder — she must have lived again through the whole of the little scene with Walter Bellamy's mother: while every thread of the tie, which she had been drawing through her fingers, pattern and colour, were as distinct as though she had it beneath her eyes: precisely similar to that which she had seen young Higginbottom wearing only the night before.

Down in the kitchen she fumbled for matches, her heart in her mouth as she knocked over a cup. For the need of secrecy was strong upon her: it seemed as if the quiet night had its fingers on its lip, whispering "hush"; as if, should her sister awake, the whole world must know what had happened.

Somehow or other she got into her clothes; glanced at her clogs, then decided on shoes as being quieter; and taking them out of the cupboard, tied them on with quick decided fingers. For even in a case of life or death Jane Irwin could not have gone through the streets of Edge with laces unloosed; while her little white collar was evenly fastened, her hair smooth under her hat, as she slipped into her waterproof, opened the front door with infinite care — and emerged into the street.

If things were bad they could only be made worse, and more conspicuously worse, by going about "all slumikin"; while she felt that, in some obscure way her mind was braced up with her shoe-strings; her thoughts smoothed out with her fine silvery hair.

## CHAPTER XXV

IT was half-past three. In the outer world the dawn was already breaking in a grey mist, which transmuted the houses to castles, the mills to towering worlds.

The streets were quite empty. There was not a sound anywhere save the occasional jarring crow of some cock in a distant farmyard; while it was all so peaceful, so apart from life, that it seemed impossible that anything real could ever happen again. As if any actors who reappeared upon the stage must be mere ghosts of a past activity.

It was cold, too; and Jane shivered as she cut across the market-place — down which a small chill wind was sweeping — and so up to South Bank and Walter Bellamy's house.

Arrived there she was in terror of waking Mrs. Bellamy — of turning on the tap of never-failing recrimination and complaint — and lifting a handful of fine gravel from the side of the path she threw it at Walter's half-open window, with so sure an aim that some of it hit the glass, while the rest fell into the room.

She knew that he was a light sleeper — for it had always been his boast that he only shut one eye at a time — and waited for his head to appear, wondered if he might be away. Then — suddenly recognising the possibility of a sore conscience — spoke his name in a shrill whisper.

The next moment he was half out of the window. "Jane! Jane! — Why, Jane?"

There was something fatuous in his voice, as Jane recognised, for his conquests had been easy and many.

"Oh, yer great fool — come down! Come down an' make sharp about it, Walter Bellamy."

"What, is anything wrong?" he asked in a changed tone.

"That's fur yer ter say," she snapped, and waited while she saw a light flash out in his room, in an agony of fear, lest some one should pass and see her. But in less than

three minutes he had slipped coat and trousers over his sleeping-suit, was downstairs and had opened the door.

"What is it? Jane, Jane, all our lovers' meetings seem to start at dawn."

"Let me in — Oi'll go ter front parlour. An' put out light, it'ull not be needed." She spoke sharply, for his nonsense jarred; though she admired it, knowing that he must have plenty on his mind to make him anxious.

"'Journeys end in lovers' meeting,'" hummed Walter Bellamy as he followed her. "Jane, was that economy, or prudence — the candle, I mean?" His eyes were dancing. He knew as well as Jane did that she had come on no fond mission; but he recognised that she was burdened with some difficulty, if not danger, and the thought quickened his blood.

The snuffing of the candle showed that the day was really beginning. Soon the sun would be risen; staring down upon them with its bold eyes, drawing the gaze of the outer world. Even in the parlour Jane could see Bellamy's face, shadowy white, detached from his dark body, but still plain enough.

"Hearken here, Wally," she took off her hat as she spoke and ran her fingers through her hair; for her head was throbbing, and she still felt heavy, half in a dream. "It's 'aben that there stuff as you've been selling."

"But, Jane! My pretty, plain Jane!" Walter was at his old boyish trick of swinging backwards and forwards, heels and toes, and she could have clouted him for it. "You've never raised me from my slumbers to tell me that? I've a right to sell."

"Sell, yes! A bit here and there; but the place is full up on it."

"It's mostly young Higgins'."

"But you have it here — some of it is yourn, an' the question is — Is it paid for? Is it stuff as you've a right ter have?"

"My dear Jane ——"

"No, it isn't! It isn't ——" she struck her hands together in her impatience and exasperation. "An' now what's comin'? Do yer know what's comin'? Tell me that, Walter Bellamy."

"Jane, you're too pretty to trouble your head about things of this sort — four in the morning, too. Shocking!"

He glanced at the clock on the mantel-shelf, smiled, then yawned, stretching prodigiously; though his bright eyes were free from sleep.

"Is it paid for?" Jane stamped. With the greatest goodwill she could have smacked the smile from his face.

"It will be — next Friday. Jane, is it a bet?"

"Next Friday! An' it's Friday ter-morrow, no, ter-day; an' you ——" suddenly she veered, her voice broken with feeling. "Wally, Wally, how could you have been so mad? Ter sell it in Edge — ter that there George Higginbottom?"

Walter did not question her as to her meaning; and she saw that — at the very mention of the name — his mind had leapt forward to much of what he knew; but still he laughed. There was this in Wally, for all his faults he never lacked courage. "It was only one tie, just one! Poor Georgie Porgie was goin' a courtin'— the girls wouldn't kiss him without something to set him off. An' the whole o' my apple-cart upset! But don't you worry, Jane, it's all right —'pon my soul it's all right."

"Is it all right? Very well, Walter Bellamy; then Oi'll leave yer to yersen an' yer all right."

She was turning when Walter Bellamy caught at her arm. "Tell me, Jane. Jane, don't be cross."

"Cross!" The word sounded so ridiculous, so inadequate to all she felt.

"Well, mad. Tell me — what's the trouble?"

"The trouble's this. That that there George was wearin' the tie as you sold 'im, yesterday for all the world ter see. A pattern as wasn't yet out — an' all o' Edge talkin' on it."

"Let 'em talk!" Walter's voice was airy.

"Yes, let 'em talk! An' let George Higginbottom talk up police station, an' the two coppers as he was strollin' with, near twelve o'clock last night."

"Oh!" Walter's expression had changed. For a moment he stared at Jane. Then walked to the window and pulled down the blind with a sharp jerk: turned round: stared again, his hands deep in his pockets; and, finally, gave a long-drawn whistle.

"What a damned blunder! I didn't even sell it, I gave

it to him. I never sell to private people. I'm not such a fool, Jane;" his tone was almost hurt. "I take all the stuff to Birmingham or Manchester. But that silly goat! We were both at the Swimming Club the other night when he lost his tie — left it behind. He was going to see his girl. We walked back together and I said I'd give him one, ran up in the dark and snatched the first I put my hand on."

"Well?"

"Well, there it is." Suddenly he laughed quite naturally. "George Higginbottom! La! to think of our Georgie as a means to the ends of Justice. Jane, my Jane, it seems to me that the fat's pretty well in the fire."

"You'd better tell me, seein' I know what I do. How much?"

"Well, that cussed young ass, Higgins, lost his head; kept on bringing in stuff, more than I knew what to do with ——"

"But you, yoursen?"

"Oh, I'm in it, up to the chin. I'd meant to take it up to Manchester last week, and got blocked. But I'll go to-morrow — to-day, I mean. We'll have it settled up by next pay-day. All serene, Jane."

"An' what about the new ties, as they didn't want out?"

"What's the good o' offering stale stock; things that every one has?" Walter's voice showed a mild reasonableness.

"But shall yer pay for them?"

"Am I likely to be such a fool? We'll pay for the rest — most of it."

"It's thieving! Shame on yer, Walter Bellamy!"

There was the same horror in Jane's voice as there had been years before, when she had told him that he would certainly go to Hell. She had forgiven him so much, admired him in spite of so many flaming follies: but here was nothing more or less than a sordid crime, which it was past even Walter Bellamy's power to wing with glory.

"Jane, you don't know,"— his tone was defiant, for he realised her disapproval —"it's business. Besides, what did they take from me? The worth of hundreds and thousands of such things. And more: my belief in myself, my pride, my future. What does the Bible say? 'An eye for

an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' By God! if I pulled every tooth they had, they'd still be in my debt."

"All that's past. It may be sense, may be Bible truth; but it's not law. Folks canna' steal a'cause other folks has stolen from 'em. It's prison if yer don't get away from here — prison!"

Suddenly she realised what it would mean: the degradation, the unutterable torment of prison to a man of Bellamy's nature. "Shut up in a little cell, with scarce room ter turn in; all the world goin' on, an' you idle an' forgotten there," she said.

This struck home and she saw him wince. But the next moment he gave an odd, high laugh and Jane realised him as more excited than frightened; for any danger, even the sordid danger of prison, was a stimulant to Walter Bellamy.

"I suppose you're right. I suppose I'd better go — make myself scarce — for a bit anyway."

"You must go! Now, now, at once, Wally. It's day now ——"

She was right, for even through the blind the sun was glinting on the brass candlesticks upon the mantel-shelf. "With the day they'll be movin'!"

"I tell you what I'll do. I'll get out the car, and take all the stuff I have up to Manchester. Stop there a night — you can send a wire; I'll stay at the 'Waverley.' Address it in another name — Clarke — William Clarke — that'ull do;" his mind worked like lightning. "Even if it's found out they can't do much. Bertie's too deep in it. It may be nothing — or blow over. Only let me know what happens. I'll go up and dress, then fetch the car and bring it round for the stuff; if you'll get it down ready for me."

"No, that I'll not."

Walter shrugged his shoulders — more with an air of Paris than of Edge. "Then I'll get it myself."

"Yer'll not do that, neither; yer'll go without the stuff or yer'll not go at all."

"But it's what I'm going for."

"What call is there te loy — ter me? Ter me! Yer goin' a'cause if yer don't go yer'll be in gaol ter-night — yer great fool, yer. Do yer think that Oi don't know yer thruff an' thruff."

"Perhaps I'd better leave it, it'ud be safer." Walter spoke thoughtfully, his head raised a little to one side to catch the sound of a footstep far away up the street.

Jane heard it too. Suddenly her anger was gone; all she wanted was to save this old playfellow of hers, to get him away out of danger. "There's a coat an' cap hangin' in the hall. Dwarn't go up ter dress, slip out o' back o' house, an' down alley way ter Brook Street,"— the little car was in a yard there as she knew. "Cum back along past the end, an' Oi'll be there with yer bag. Oh, Wally, Wally, yer maun go, me dear luv, yer maun go, Wally, yer fool yer! Can't yer get a move on yer, yer maun go. Don't yer hear sum'un is comin' down the street? Go, oh, go!"

For a moment Walter hesitated, swinging backwards and forwards biting his lips; his head on one side, while he listened. The footsteps drew nearer. The early riser, whoever he might be wore boots, not clogs, and he turned, still with no particular appearance of hurrying.

"All right — I'll be close on ten minutes." He was in the hall by now, one arm into the sleeve of his overcoat; still whispering for fear of Mrs. Bellamy. "There's some money in a wallet on the chest of drawers, an' my bag's under my bed, the shirt an' things I've been wearing on a chair at the side — don't forget my studs." The corner of Walter's mouth lifted; he was pleased with himself. Few men would have been cool enough to remember such a detail at such a time.

Half-way upstairs Jane heard the back-door close softly; while next moment the steps, which they had both heard, passed harmlessly by the front of the house.

With methodical haste Jane packed the fresh suit, clean linen and boots at the bottom of the bag; then the clothes Walter had been wearing — collar, tie and boots, for he had gone out in his slippers. He could stop anywhere when he got clear of the town and dress by the roadside.

It did not take long — she gave a glance at the piled-up table. No, it would not do to run any risks, she must come back and see to those things later, she thought. And raising the bag, she tucked the wallet under one arm; then slipped noiselessly downstairs and out of the back-door, not five minutes after Walter.

It seemed as if he would never come. The town was beginning to awake, and several windows and doors were thrown open as she waited at the alley-way leading into Brook Street; while tousled heads were thrust forth to sample the day.

At last there was the sound of a distant throb, and the familiar little car backed out of the yard gate; turned and ran smoothly down the hill towards her.

Walter drew up, laughing. "What a morning for a drive! What a lark! You'd better come. Jane, let's elope!"

But without a word Jane thrust the wallet into the niche between the two seats, and threw in the bag: panting as though she had been running, instead of standing there shivering with impatience; while at the same moment she glanced up the long street, and saw that a man had turned in at the top of it; was coming towards them.

"Quick, quick! Wally — go!" she was behind the car, as though she would have pushed it forward.

With a sudden movement Bellamy leant back; flung his free arm round her neck and kissed her.

"Good-bye, Jane. Good little Jane! fine little pal!" he said, and started the car. Looked back and waved one hand, laughing, his whole face aglow with excitement.

"By Jove, but it *is* a lark!" he cried, and was off down the road, and round the corner at the dip of the hill.

Looking up, Jane saw that the man was running, waving his arm; and pulling up her skirts almost to her knees, she bolted along the alley-way; turned up some steps in the middle, fled through a court, up more steps, down a quiet side-street and once more in at the back of Walter Bellamy's house.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE door was open and Mrs. Bellamy was standing in the back kitchen, with her skirt fastened on over her nightgown, by which familiar trick the latter is forced into the part of a blouse.

"Whatever's come ——"

"Light a fire under the copper — there's a good soul. Quick, quick!"

"Well, Oi never! What's all th' moither ——? Where's Wally? Not yet gone six, an' on an empty stomach an' all it's enuff ——"

"Oh!" With a sharp cry of exasperation, Jane flung round and ran upstairs; the feeling strong upon her that more things were about to happen and that quickly. As she ran she tripped over her skirt. It all seemed part of her dream, but though her head was still mazed her actions were decisive enough: as if she was acting apart from her own will and thought.

Up in Walter's room she swept as many of the silken articles as she could carry from the tables into her skirt, and staggered downstairs with them; dropped them on the floor in front of the copper, and pushing aside Mrs. Bellamy — who had done nothing — thrust them in beneath it.

"Sakes alive! Whatever ——" But Jane took no notice; she had caught up the matches and was looking round her enquiringly.

"Where's the paraffine?"

"In the wash'us, if yer goin' ter light that there ——"

But Jane had vanished into the yard.

A moment she reappeared with the tin of paraffine — holding back her skirts from it with a careful hand. And having swished a liberal quantity forward among the delicately tinted silk, she lit a match, threw it in upon it, then drew back, as a wide ribband of blackish flame sprang out into the kitchen.

"Ye'll 'ave the 'ouse on fire," remarked Mrs. Bellamy

with triumphant conviction. But Jane did not reply, she was leaning down peering under the copper with frowning brow. The flame flickered and died down; for a moment it seemed that it was out. Then it caught the silk and began to burn, faintly but steadily; and drawing herself upright, with a long breath of relief, she turned towards the stairs, and mounted them, more slowly, for by now she had become conscious of an immense fatigue.

She was at the top again, with another skirt full, when the knock at the door — for which she had been all on edge, which she knew so well was coming — echoed through the house.

It was no use going down, for she would only meet the newcomers in the hall. And, in desperation, she began to thrust the remainder of the silk goods under the mattress of Walter's bed. But even that was no use — was all futile as the dream had been — for one of the two men, who were at the door, came straight upstairs and caught her in the act.

The only comfort was that Walter Bellamy had got away just in time.

But even that was no use in the end. For the man who had come running down Brook Street, had gone back directly Walter disappeared round the corner — without troubling himself in the very least about Jane — and getting another motor had given chase; questioning and following till he caught up his man just outside Manchester. Even then he would not have got him, had not Bellamy stopped his car to finish dressing, and experienced some trouble with the exact arrangement of his necktie.

That evening he was brought back to Edge. And that one night he slept in prison.

There is a little exercise yard — barred, both round and above like a cage — at the back of the police cells in Edge; while looking down — right into it as into a bear pit — stands one of the smaller mills.

Some of the hands saw Bellamy walking there next morning. And one of the men threw him down a couple of cigarettes and a box of matches; and another a newspaper; while the girls leant out and waved and kissed their hands. For Walter Bellamy was theirs and of them; and the Edge

people are above everything loyal to their own; while, after all, his crime was only against "Morrison's," the most hated power in the place. Besides was he not the "loveliest boy in all the town"? Or so the mill girls said.

Jane, despite her manifest complicity, was not put in prison; though she was warned to remain indoors at her own home, while a policeman kept watch at the corner of the street, looking the other way in an unobtrusive sort of fashion. For who could be rude or unkind to Jane; unless it was the man she loved — which is the way of the world.

But indeed everybody seemed to be trying to hush it all up, and not to hurt anybody's feelings, provoke any sort of outburst. For it was as Walter Bellamy had predicted. Bertie Higgins was too deep in it. The deeper enquiries went the further was he found to be involved.

If so much had been known earlier Bellamy would have been allowed to depart in peace. Now all that the authorities wanted was to get rid of him as quietly as possible: for Higgins had been one of the original partners in the firm, was one of the largest shareholders, besides being an invaluable manager. It would never do to make this scandal — the second which had gathered round his son's name — public property.

There was a sort of trial next day, in which all the magistrates were mill-owners; and in which the whole endeavour seemed to be to check Walter Bellamy's flaming oratory; his story of the patent spooler, the very mention of young Higgins' name; while somehow — through it all, do what they might — both Higgins and Joyce were made to feel that they — and not the prisoner, with his assured, though perfectly courteous manner — were the real culprits.

After all it was more a consultation than a trial: not even held in the court house, but in the magistrates' private room. For it had been decided, before Walter was brought in, that there was to be no prosecution. It would not do; there was, as they all felt, too much involved.

The only stipulation made, and this was adhered to, was that Walter Bellamy should leave Edge — immediately; indeed that very day — and return no more.

Mrs. Bellamy washed the floor with herself and her tears

when Walter went back to her: taking the side streets, for once desiring to pass unseen. For, despite all his bravado, the thought of those girls blowing kisses down on him through the overhead bars of the police-court yard — the memory of that night in the dreary little cell — had bitten deep.

Once more Jane packed for him; carefully and methodically, while he ate his dinner. Then walked down the street to the station with him, stiff with pride and suffering in the sight of all Edge: for the people were turning out of the mills, just when it was the time for Walter to catch the last London train.

For anyhow he had gained this much from his disgrace — which, to his mind, lay in the fact that "Morrison's" had, even then, got far more out of him than ever he got out of it — he was at last going to London.

Still some feeling, perhaps the truest emotion which he had ever experienced, caused Bellamy to refrain from kissing Jane this time; even buoyed up — as he was — by the laughing, half-admiring crowds upon the platform.

But at the last moment, as he leant out of the window, she put up one hand and laid it with a little sob against his cheek: —

"God bless thee, Wally. Wally, yer great fool. An' taeke care o' yersen, an' write an' let us know."

"An' don't quite forget me, Jane," he shouted the words down the platform, and was out of hearing before she could reply. But he saw her smile and shake her fair head: and anyhow he knew that she would not forget.

She was not that sort, staunch little Jane! Suddenly it dawned upon Walter that they were as good as engaged. Anyhow she would be his wife some day, when things had straightened themselves out a little. She was such a brick; if only he could teach her to speak as well as she looked.

"I wonder what you can see in that there Walter," remarked Lottie that evening, very young, and hard as all youth is.

But Jane — who was lying flat on her bed, in a state of utter lassitude — only smiled faintly. For as a matter of fact she wondered also, just as much as any one else could do.

## CHAPTER XXVII

WHEN Walter Bellamy arrived in London he had something over a pound in his possession and a modest assortment of clothes packed by Jane, amongst which he found not a single tie. Jane's one act of bitter protest had been the wholesale discarding of all these brilliant plumes: but she had packed a pork pie within the circle of his collars; and weeks later, when he came down to his last pair of socks he found a ten-shilling piece in the toe of one of them.

How well she knew him, astute little Jane! *They* were ugly yellowish, brown things, which he had been forced to buy one day when he found himself stranded, without any luggage, in a tiny country town. She had realized that whatever might be the depths to which he sank, he would never wear them until the others were riddled with holes; so that her hardly earned gift would be discovered when it was most needed.

With difficulty renouncing the glories of the "Grand Central" he found a shabby little hotel near to Euston, and spent the night there; his supper, bed and breakfast eating away all his loose change, and breaking into his solitary gold piece. But he did not trouble much. He was actually in London, and for the present that was enough; the infinite possibilities of it went to his head. It was like an elixir distilled from the blood of all who had made their fortunes there, and risen to fame. The people who went under did not concern Walter Bellamy, for he was more cruel and callous than most youths. But there was no denying his courage. If he did not pity others, he certainly never pitied himself.

Having paid his bill and left his luggage to be called for, he made towards the City: the magic hub of this smoke-grimed seething place, the heart which pumped the blood through every artery.

It was a cold day, with glimpses of pale sunshine and an east wind which cut him to the bone; giving him a not unpleasant, clean, stripping feeling, driving before it every scrap of paper and straw, whipping the women's tight skirts so closely around them that they might as well have been naked, flattening itself against Bellamy's back, pushing him on in front of it, like the very spirit of hustling progress; driving all this mass of people Citywards, booing at them round every corner when they attempted to turn aside.

By constant asking Bellamy managed to thread his way through a tangle of streets into Holborn. Took a false turn and got into New Oxford Street; then into Soho, where all his Gallic blood was aflame at the sound of many tongues, the alien sights and smells, the glances the girls gave him, as he strode along, his head held high, turning quickly from side to side, his bright eyes full of eagerness.

He had once seen a piece of cheese under a microscope at the Institute; a complete quarter-inch world of struggling atoms. London reminded him of it now, with all these pale, struggling, yet indomitable people.

After all life was like that vulgar rhyme which declares that "little fleas have smaller fleas upon their backs to bite 'em." Everybody was feeding upon everybody else; the thing was to grow so big that you did not feel the torment.

Despite his abstraction he somehow retrieved his way and found himself below St. Paul's. It did not strike him as beautiful or wonderful, and he fancied it must impress people only by its size. What moved him far more were the hurrying crowds around its base, for all his being cried out for movement.

Moving a little down Cannon Street he had lunch in a cheap restaurant, where all the food was permeated by the smell and taste of steam, and by a feverish sense of haste; and where the waitresses threw the food at him, looking all the time the other way, intent always upon the next customer; while he listened to orders shouted down the lift and wondered what the scene was like in those subterraneous regions, from whence — in response to a fusillade of orders — chops and steaks, and eggs and bowls of greasy soup, and slabs of fish innumerable, and smells and noises

— all the indecencies of food — were belched up without ceasing.

Nobody took any notice of him or spoke to him; four or five men at his table read their papers while they gobbled their food. It was more like coaling up than eating. But Walter liked it. It seemed to him that once one had set life spinning at such a pace it might whirl on for ever.

After his meal he pushed straight on for a little, and then turned along Garlick Street and through a tangle of warehouses down to the river.

Already the short winter's day was fading; fainting away with no hint of crimson, as though this overwhelming town had packed too much into it; expected too much of it: as though it were wearied by its combat with all the smoke aud turmoil; of wearing itself out over a place which was so evidently better served by the night.

For some time Walter leant over the parapet and gazed up the river to Westminster. Then down, and saw the Tower Bridge open and shut, snapping its jaws over a steamer, which already showed gleaming headlights. An odd fancy took him that this London was a giant; a sentient being, with the river for its gullet. That here, where he now stood, was its belly, into which it gulped such craft; inwardly digesting all that was glorious of them — the silks and spices, the wine and gold — to vomit them forth again: mere empty husks, or stuffed with such gross things as beer and pig-iron.

He had an idea that he would like to live by the river, and moved in the direction of Westminster. But he found nothing save warehouses — which more than once drove him back from the water's edge — till he passed Blackfriars, and came to places which might have been palaces; ablaze with lights and fringed with gardens, which separated them from the grey street and pavement, the grey river and the wraith-like figures which overhung the parapet, or sat huddled upon the seats: like a dirty hem to a fine lady's petticoat.

As he reached the County Council gardens he turned up into the "Adelphi." The streets were so narrow that he thought the place looked cheap, though there was something pleasing to him in the high windows and porticos; for in the old days in France, when vice was less of a profes-

sion, some good blood had found its way into the Bellamy veins.

Seeing several advertisements of chambers to let he rang and asked to see the rooms. Found them anything but cheap: and thereupon determined that he *would* make money, *would* live there. Setting his affections on the Terrace itself. Giving himself three years till he should possess a whole balconied flat there; with that stimulating feeling of having something to fight for, which any check to his desires always gave him.

By the time he reached the Strand the people were hurrying westward. For the mere delight of opposing such a current he moved in the opposite direction and fought the general stream. Battled his way through the crowds waiting on the pavement and elbowed past the queue waiting outside the Tivoli. Finally, feeling the want of tea, he turned into one of Appenrodt's restaurants which holds a corner position — just where the road widens in front of the "Cecil"— with an upper room looking straight along the street.

Here he found a seat, right against the window, with the roofs of the 'buses — surging along like top-heavy galleons — almost on a level with his knees; while below him the taxi-cabs and motors, like frigates and curvettes, cut in and out of the flashing stream, fringed by the surging wave of humanity along the pavement.

London! It was the place where half the things of which he read in the papers took place. Any one of those men beneath him might be a millionaire or a murderer, a foreign potentate, a famous politician, a cracksman or company promoter. Might have slept in prison only a couple of nights before, as he had done, or in a palace; or in any one of those painted women's arms.

As for the women — loitering along the pavement; hurrying home from work; or sailing smoothly in their taxis — each a warm, compact, swiftly moving little world of its own — into the great court of the "Cecil"; flashing past the beggar on the pavement, the strap-hanger on the 'bus — they looked so different: but really they were divided into two ranks. They undercut the men at their business: small and apparently frail, but utterly indomitable, they edged

their way in everywhere, splitting up their industries as a fern will split a rock. Or they exploited men, offering their bodies for money or position or offspring; keeping such souls as they possessed coldly aloof: never quite giving themselves away: setting their slaves on to hunt wild beasts among the snow, to pluck the plumage from strange birds; to dig for jewels in the bowels of the earth, all to feed their vanity, their lust for the rare and costly.

The thought of women, and their insatiable greed, and all that they offered and all that they withheld — stimulating passion by mystery — went like wine to Bellamy's head. He had experience, but there was so much he still wanted to know. He was sorry that he had helped the Union to uphold the working women in Edge — though it had not been for their sakes that he joined the cause. But to these others, flushed and bejewelled, he grudged nothing: their trade was for, and not against him and his sex.

After paying for his meal he went out again into the street, delighting in the jostling, the warm touch of other shoulders against him. Deterred for a moment by a cross current he felt some one slip a hand through his arm; and turning saw that it was a girl, with a flower-like face, who smiled up at him meaningly.

But, for all the stir in his veins, Bellamy's north country canniness held, and he shook his head; while next moment the breaking of the press swept them apart. He had no money to spare. As it was he would have to spend another night at the hotel, and had it not been for his youth and exaltation, the morrow would have indeed loomed darkly before him.

Next morning the thought of the river still drew Bellamy, and he set off towards Westminster, determined this time to explore westward; to get a lodging during the morning, to send for his things, and to settle down in earnest to find employment. Never for a moment did he contemplate failure, his penurious boyhood had taught him how very little it is possible to live upon — while he never doubted his ability to earn at least that little.

Passing across the front of the Abbey, he moved down Victoria Street: then turned into Smith Street, which both

disgusted and amused him. Here indeed was a fine fringe to the dignity of the church.

But Vincent Square was better; and for a moment he thought of seeking lodgings there, in sheer relief at the contrast to what he had come through. But on second thoughts he adhered to his decision to live, if possible, by the river and cut down Rochester Row.

Once past this he found himself among the spacious avenues of the Westminster working-men's flats: passed the Tate Gallery and the Barracks, and finally discovered what he wanted: just on the verge of the Vauxhall Bridge Road, facing the river and a ship-breaking yard — its gates decorated with huge wooden figure-heads, straight-featured women, and Titans and Neptunes, which had proudly thrust their way through many a storm, remnants of the bygone romance of sea craft — a narrow four-storied house with the legend "Lodgings for Single Gentlemen" displayed on a card in one of the windows.

Here, on the top floor, he obtained a minute room, with the promise of some attendance — for seven shillings a week: paid a week's rent in advance, and tramped back to Euston, where he disbursed a shilling that his luggage might be forwarded. This done he lunched in Charing Cross Road, on a plate of hot meat — simply described as "meat" of an origin quite unknown — for fourpence, vegetables twopence, bread a halfpenny and a penny to the waitress. Then with one and ninepence — which at that moment represented his entire world, in his pockets — he turned Citywards once more, reaching St. Paul's before he realised that it was Saturday, and that the stoppage of business was absolute, instead of being partial — limited to the warehouses and better sort of offices — as it is in the north; where Thursday is, for the most part, early closing day.

It was the first real chill which had touched him since he arrived. Not so much because it delayed his chances of employment as because of the air of blank melancholy which it imparted to the place, as though some one — in the full flush of robust and noisy life — had suddenly died.

For a moment or so Bellamy was at a loss to know what to do. Then remembering that there was still much to see, he dropped down Ludgate Hill and turned to the river, by

Blackfriars. Once more passed his future residence; was stimulated afresh by the mysterious fashion in which the tram comes out of the depths below Charing Cross, and finally made for the Tate Gallery.

Bellamy had very little artistic sense; but he worshipped beauty of body, and some of the statuary held him. Above all those of the young men: Lord Leighton's athlete struggling with Python, Bates' "Hounds in Leash," and — perhaps more than any — Thornycroft's "Teucer," who roused him to a fresh desire for bodily fitness.

He must not let himself grow "soft." There was not room in the attic for his Indian clubs — even if Jane had packed them — but there were always things he could do: lying face down on the floor and pushing himself forward to the extreme stretch of his arm, abdominal exercises and deep breathing. He would give anything to be like one of these fellows, and moving towards "The Teucer" he ran a loving finger down his fine sinewy thigh and along his biceps; a liberty for which he was straightway brought to book by an attendant.

"Sorry, Sergeant," he replied with his most charming smile: —"but Oi — I happen to be studying this kind of thing just now, and one's artistic feeling sort of runs away with one; *comprennez — vous?*" Bellamy tagged on the French as a make-weight for the slip over the personal pronoun, which was one of his most constant falls. But the next moment it was forgotten in the conjecture, as to whether the attendant — who he knew was not a sergeant and would therefore like to be addressed as such — took him for an artist or a young medical student, and which he would prefer to be.

Still debating this important subject he found himself in the room with Watts' pictures. Glanced at "Hope," and "Love and Life," and other such allegories indifferently, as being too "pretty-pretty" for his taste. And was finally brought to an odd, and not altogether happy, pause in front of "The Minotaur."

Afterwards this picture and "Mammon" were the only two in the whole gallery that he could remember. "The Minotaur" got him "in the wind" as he said. The inarticulate, awful stirring of the spirit through the brute flesh,

the reaching forward of the soul, the immobility of the clumsy hoofs — all the delicacy of touch bound up beneath layer upon layer of horn, he could almost see the sensitive fingers twitch and stretch beneath it.

It made him think of Edge and the potteries. He could not have said why; but for all that the simile was right. There was the same stirring to get loose, away from all the manifold layers of class distinction, repression and poverty. The same straining of the spirit.

"The Minotaur" depressed him; but "Mammon" roused his fighting spirit. He could go one better than that brute. Some one had got to be top dog, but not in that way. They had had enough of that sort of thing. In his kingdom youth at least should go free.

He remained in the gallery till closing time. Then moving down on to the Embankment was attracted by a whirring sound from among the workmen's dwellings; and turning in that direction found the broad asphalted avenues alive with children on roller skates.

Many had but one skate — tied on with a piece of string. These pushed themselves forward with the free foot; swung it high and darted along on one leg. Then — when fresh impetus was needed — brought the other again to the ground, with a sharp push, and so on: singly, coupled, or clinging in solidly moving groups, laughing and shouting.

Other children — more fortunate — or less generous in sharing their pleasures — had two skates, with the full complement of straps, and swung along at a tremendous rate. Often two together — the girls and boys in separate couples — for they were mostly at the age of mutual distrust — clutching each other's shoulders, each arm held stiffly at its full length; swaying from side to side, with the weight first on one foot, then on the other; or with their arms round each other's necks, or linked together.

There were a few older people, but very few, and for the most part it was a carnival of children, who swung, darted and dipped like swallows: while the noise — the laughter, shouting and shrieking, flung back by the hollow squares of the tall houses, was incessant.

For the most part the dwellings were in darkness; the fathers were getting their Saturday-night's shave, or in the

public-houses, the mothers marketing, for there was no school next day and no need to hurry the children to bed. But the avenues were brightly lighted — showing up the slim figures, the loose scarfs, the flying plaits of the girls, and it seemed to Bellamy that he had found the source of the well springs of London life.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

THE impact of a stout woman laden with parcels reminded Walter of the morrow. One and ninepence had its limits and required harbouring.

Thus, doubtful of what lay to the west of his lodgings, he retraced his steps towards Strutton Ground — lined now with stalls and aflame with paraffine torches — and entered a small general dealer's — a replica of his boyhood's home, even to the smell — where he bought a small loaf of bread, a quarter of a pound of tea, a quarter of butter, a halfpenny candle and two boxes of matches.

The shop was full of the very poorest people, some with bottles for paraffine or milk, others bargaining over a single rasher of bacon, a single herring or egg, as a treat for Sunday's breakfast.

One woman who wished for a quartern loaf, felt over each on the counter; set her affections at last on one, of which the bottom crust was rather burnt, and insisted that the shop-girl should scrape it, then weigh it carefully and add what had been lost in the shape of a slice from a cut loaf kept at hand for the purpose.

Outside the shop a lame child pressed his nose against the glass, wistfully regarding the sweets — intermingled with bootlaces, red herrings and locust beans; marbles, tomatoes and small combs — which decorated the window.

He had been there when Walter Bellamy entered, and all the time he was waiting to be served he could see the flattened, whitened features against the pane. With one of his odd spurts of generosity he added a brilliantly striped halfpenny sugar-stick to his other purchases and presented it as he went out.

For a moment the white face was lifted from between the bent shoulders, and the light eyes gleamed up into his face — with the sidelong glance of a wild animal; then the boy clutched his treasure and fled without a single word, fearful

of being despoiled, not attempting to eat it there in the open, but clasping it beneath his thin jacket; seeking some dark hole or corner where the delicacy might be enjoyed in safety.

As the sharp tap of the child's crutch was lost in the general turmoil a man leaning against the side of the shop door remarked: —

"Enter the good man of the Morality Play: distributes largesse. Scene one, act one."

He spoke with what the Edge folk, accustomed to their own broad speech, call "the foreign tang"; and Bellamy, glancing sharply round, was surprised to see that he was a wretchedly dressed individual with a sodden, pinched face; wearing a great-coat, buttoned up to the chin, showing that flatness and closeness which suggest very little beneath.

"The quality of mercy is not strained. . . . It blesseth him that gives and him that takes," he went on, with a note of bitter mockery in his tone.

Walter stared — elocution had been one of his strong points at school. He had recited this very passage at the prize-giving, with — what *The Edge Times* had described as — "great dramatic force."

There was nothing dramatic in the stranger's delivery. He did not move his hands: spoke as though merely making some quiet observation. But Walter Bellamy was shrewd enough to realise that he possessed that which is far more difficult to achieve than any dramatic delivery — the enunciation of a cultured gentleman.

Always eager to learn, he would have continued the conversation; but with a slight nod the stranger turned aside, and he did not like to follow. The fellow — for all his pure English — looked like a beggar, and at the moment Bellamy felt that he could ill afford such friends.

Tea fourpence, bread a penny halfpenny, butter fourpence halfpenny — best fresh salted — candles and matches a penny; sugar stick a halfpenny. This left him ninepence-halfpenny. But after all it was not what a man had that counted, it was what he looked like and how he felt. Bellamy caught many a glimpse of himself in the shop windows, and was by no means ill-pleased.

He was thoroughly well turned out. The moorland air had given him an appearance of vigour and cleanliness, which is denied to habitual city-dwellers. He certainly did not look like a beggar, which was half the battle; and, moreover, he did not feel like one, which was the other half.

As his landlady opened the door, he delivered his purchases into her hands.

"I thought as I had left it till so late, without giving any orders about my breakfast, it might be awkward for you. So I did a little marketing — just on the way home from my Club. Breakfast at nine, please." He smiled charmingly, well pleased with himself.

The woman felt over the packages doubtfully. "Won't you take an 'errin' or a bit o' bacon, or something o' that sort as a relish?"

"Do you know," Bellamy smiled again; "I never fancy anything but toast and tea, or perhaps a roll or a little fruit with my breakfast. It's a Continental habit I've dropped into. Good night, Mrs. Burston."

"You've 'ad your supper?"

Bellamy, who was half-way up the first flight of stairs, turned. "Indeed, yes. I had it, or rather dinner, at my Club. Good night, *dormez bien.*"

"That there's a foreigner I've got in the top front," remarked the landlady as she rejoined her own family, seated round a comfortable supper in the basement.

"I can't abear them blackies about my place," declared her husband sourly. For though he lived on his wife's earnings he found a perpetual grievance in the fact that he could not have his house to himself.

"He ain't black; no more black than you are; a nice-spoken fellow, Frenchy I should think. I wonder if he'd be above givin' Ayda some lessons, it'ud come in useful in 'er trade." Ada was the eldest daughter and apprenticed to a milliner, a slim, white-faced thing, with her hair elaborately puffed and tied up at the back with an immense bow. She leant forward now, flushing.

"Oh, do let me, Mum. I saw him coming up the steps, an' he's a real darling — must be six foot if he's an inch."

"No, that I won't 'ave!" shouted Mr. Burston, very loud; and thumped the table as a signal that he was not to

be put down. "I mayn't be nobody in my own 'ouse, an' I don't put myself forward in no ways. It's true worth as tells in the end, an' you'll find that out when I'm gone. But as ter 'avin' my gal cheek ter jowl with one o' them foreign darkies I won't, an' that's plain! Do ye 'ear? I won't 'ave it! Neither now, nor at any other time, neither."

"I might see," pursued Mrs. Burston, placidly, with her eyes on Ada. "I wonder if he would take sixpence a lesson. I don't believe he's over well off, for all his gentlemanly ways. They say as them foreigners are shocking poor."

"Then where's the rent to come from? Let me ask you that. It ain't my business, an' I ain't one for minding business as isn't mine; but you look a'fore you leap, 'Annah, or you'll repent it," shouted Burston. But his wife took no notice: she was busy thinking.

"It ain't eight yet, seems an odd sort o' time ter 'ave 'ad his dinner. Perhaps that's foreign ways too —— But all the same I reckon 'ed take that sixpence; say two lessons a week. It'ud make a shilling, an' a shilling's not to be sneezed at these days."

"Poor darling," said Ada, and pinned on her hat before the mantel-glass. "I'm goin' to see the pictures with Elsie Blount, but I won't be out later nor eleven."

"You're not goin' out o' this 'ere 'ouse to-night, and that's flat!" bellowed her father, emphasising the remark with a fresh bang on the table. "If you go you won't come back, an' that's all. I won't 'ave my girl stavangering round the streets past midnight with any rag-tag an' bob-tail as she can pick up with."

"I'll take the key with me. An' you might leave the chain off, then I won't disturb any one," went on Ada composedly, with a nod to her mother.

"All right: but just you keep ter Elsie, don't you get off alone with any fellow."

"'Tain't likely! Don't you worry about me; I'm fly. Good night, Mum."

"Good night, Ayda. And now, father, you just get them there supper dishes together, an' scraped while the water's boilin'; but don't you use it all, I'm goin' to fetch the children in and wash 'em against Sunday."

"That there Ayda ——" began her husband angrily as he piled the dishes together and moved towards the sink.

"Oh, just you stop about Ayda. The girl's right enough if you'll leave 'er alone, and don't drive 'er off with yer naggin'; a good girl as girls go. But you're be'ind your times, that's what's wrong with you. Girls ain't as soft as they was in your young days, mark my words. You won't catch my Ayda marryin' a chap like you, not if she knows it."

"She may do worse," remarked Burston bitterly, as he slid the dishes into the washing-up basin and turned towards the kettle; "there's worse things nor marriage."

"Well if there is I ain't chanced on 'em," responded his wife tartly. And opening the area door she called upward to her two younger children, who were playing under the dark shadows on the opposite pavement.

Just to the right of Bellamy's lodging, a large central light, placed on an island, illuminated a star of five roads; Vauxhall Bridge Road running north and south, the two angles of Bessborough Gardens, and his own street.

Wrapped in an overcoat — for the little room was bitterly cold — he sat for a long while entranced, watching the traffic stream across the bridge and along under his window: remorselessly grinding down the slanting shadows of the carved figureheads — cast all sideways by the central light, as though they were once more pushing forward, poised for flight. Then, having devoured a goodly third of Jane's pork pie, cut with his penknife and washed down by a glass of cold water, he got into bed and slept, as only youth and a clear conscience could sleep, after such a meal. For there was no doubt about Walter Bellamy's conscience; it was virgin clear, hard, sound and unscratchable as a diamond.

## CHAPTER XXIX

BELLAMY never quite forgot his first Sunday in London, which partly accounted for his later persistence in fitting all possible gaieties into that day, as a sort of make-up for its dreariness.

The sky was yellowish with coming snow; the wind pitiless, making the streets — which had seemed almost fairy-like the night before — hideous with dust and debris, keeping the people indoors, transforming the river into a grey draggle-tailed slut.

About twelve, unable to bear the inaction any longer, for that was the one thing which shook his optimism, Bellamy went out — "to lunch at my Club" — with the second third of the pork pie in his pocket.

This time he went west. Through Bessborough Gardens and up Lupus Street; sinister and silent, with drawn blinds. There were no children here, as around the workmen's flats, and a shrewd conjecture told Bellamy that there were not likely to be. Cutting north, westward across Pimlico, he passed up Sloane Square — very spruce and respectable, with top-hatted men and fur-clad women hurrying back from church, bent forward against the wind — and so on into the almost empty park.

Here he had his dinner, furtively on a lonely seat under a tree, shielding it with his pocket-handkerchief. For, despite all his courage, he had not quite surmounted the fear, so common to his class, of being caught in the act of eating.

The day seemed endless. He looked at his watch again and again; and shook it and listened, scarcely believing that it had not stopped. About five, out of sheer desperate boredom, as much as anything else, he spent sixpence over coffee and scones, at a well-warmed restaurant. And finally crept home somewhat past seven; telling his landlady that he had a sick headache and could not face the thought of

staying out to dinner:—"Bridge up to any hour, you know: smell of cigars, liqueurs and all that." Though he thought he might be able to take a cup of tea; and just *one* slice of dry toast, very thin.

Something in his look, when she brought up the tea, impelled Mrs. Burston to broach the subject of lessons.

"Oh, I couldn't think of taking any payment," protested Walter; however the good soul held firm and finally he gave in.

"Just for the fun of the thing, then." He spoke as though sixpence was so infinitesimal that it became a joke; the whole idea utterly whimsical, worth dallying with just as a mere fantasy.

"Perhaps we might have a little class — *pour passer le temps,*" he said, sitting up in bed and stirring his tea, his eyes bright again at the very thought of action. "But it must be in the evening when I get back from the office: and I don't know if I can manage twice a week. I scarcely think so. One gets so tangled up with engagements, don't you know. But suppose we start with your charming daughter just to see how we get on, eh?"

"Well, the only question is — where? I can't 'ave Ayda comin' up 'ere; and all the other rooms is let."

"*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*" remarked Bellamy airily.

"I don't understand foreign talk myself, an' you may be right for all I know. But all the same it'ull 'ave ter be in the kitchen or not at all," answered Mrs. Burston; who for all Ada's ability to take care of herself did not mean to run any risks, particularly with a bright-eyed foreign gentleman who wore mauve silk pyjamas, with their hint of vice, of costly dissipation.

"But the kitchen would be delightful," he answered, so sweetly that she was completely won.

And indeed — as he snuggled down, pulled the scant blanket supplemented by his own great-coat up to his chin, and endeavoured to warm first one foot, then another, in his hand — he felt that the kitchen would be something more than "charming." For he had glanced down the area, as he waited for the door to be opened, and had seen the warm crimson glow of the fire, blinking opulently in the wide grate.

For three days Bellamy lived upon his watch — from which he found himself temporarily forced to separate — and the sixpence for Ada's first lesson. Then he found Jane's half-sovereign, and that gave him a lift into the beginning of the next week.

He walked innumerable miles, through the innumerable narrow streets and alley-ways which constitute commercial London, mysterious-looking places, with high warehouses at either side, menacing cranes overhead, and trap-doors in the pavement; the cobble stones crowded with horses and drays, and men in their shirtsleeves, loading innumerable packing-cases and crates.

With angry jealousy he noted the dapper clerks, who — their pens still in their hands — would occasionally swing open the wide main doors, and run down the steps with some last directions for the burly carters.

Almost for the first time in his life he began to feel ill. Not tired, though very footsore, not even disheartened; but oddly sick, as if the conception of this great London had stuck, undigested, in his gullet. But for all that, the lower he went the more he ground his teeth over the determination to succeed; to get the better of the world, to "best it" as, momentarily, it was besting him.

Meanwhile, he kept his boots highly polished, his clothes brushed, his chin shaved — though the state his linen got into drove him to the odious ignominy of a celluloid collar — and whistled as he went.

At last, on the Thursday, when things were at their worst — and he always knew that when that time came something must, and would, turn up — he got a post — as packer in a large silk warehouse, by the simple expedient of bringing one of his former references up to date. Starting once more on the familiar task of boxing up in large wooden cases the bobbins and skeins which, likely enough, Jane's nimble fingers had helped to wind — for more than once he came across the label of his old firm.

For this he was paid eighteen shillings a week. Then one of the clerks who attended to the invoicing of the goods sent out, and the directing of the labels, fell ill; and Bellamy did the addresses, while another clerk took over the invoicing in addition to his own.

After a while he got tired of doing the work of two men. And as Bellamy had shown care and insight, and wrote a clear clerkly hand, he was given the place, with thirty shillings a week. Upon which he retrieved his watch and bought a new tie: a glossy black with a narrow white stripe.

It was obvious that he understood his work; in addition to this he spread out all his attainments with the skill of a master window-dresser. Caught himself up with an apology for talking French instead of English — before his superiors too. Quoted Edge and Paris and Lyons, Wantage and Manchester with an air which led to a belief that what he did not know about the silk world was not worth knowing. And was so smart, and respectful and ready-witted that he soon got another rise: the rung in the ladder this time being a bad attack of influenza which laid low the typist who attended to the French correspondence. This brought his wages up to what he considered salary point; to wit, two pounds a week.

The original holder of the post came back after a month; looking miserably ill, but apparently taking her reinstatement for granted. Needless to say it was a woman. No one but a woman expects to find bowels of compassion in a business firm, and Bellamy, who knew his worth, remained undisturbed. She actually pleaded an invalid mother, which amused him. He had a mother too. So had most people; but he knew that was not the way to touch Brown, Son and MacCullagh. The way to do this was to appear as if you had absolutely no interest outside "The Firm," and to make yourself as indispensable as possible.

This was part of the A. B. C. of business. But apart from this astute knowledge Bellamy possessed real qualifications, having the element of this particular trade at his finger-tips; while he was an upstanding young fellow, a credit to any firm — all of which gave him an infinite advantage over the small drab thing who, with her influenza, served as this special rung of his ladder. Besides, women had no business mixing themselves up in men's affairs: and that was the beginning and the end of the whole affair.

Oddly enough, though he could not bear to see a lame child lacking the sweets for which it craved, he did not give a second thought to the girl he had supplanted.

When Jane had been such a brick, helping him to get away, he had determined that he would marry her as soon as he achieved a steady two pounds a week. But now, even with the three or four extra shillings which he obtained from his French class an established fact, the very idea seemed preposterous. He had to dress like a gentleman. It was often too wet to walk down to the City, and that meant 'bus fares. He had sent home for his roller skates, and occasionally took Ada to the rink — Ada who clung and screamed, and adored. He had also joined a gymnastic club in connection with one of the large churches; and though the subscription was merely nominal, he had to buy shorts and a gauze vest, and rubber-soled shoes. It all cost money. But he couldn't afford to get soft. Besides which, he sent five shillings every week to his mother. A primitive duty, his persistence in which was one of the odd contradictions of his nature, though it excused many other duties.

The truth was that the two pounds and few odd shillings — shorn of that five — was hardly sufficient for him to keep himself. It would be wicked to drag dear little Jane — Jane who earned, and *lived* on, the princely sum of eleven shillings a week — down to a life of such grinding poverty.

In fear of losing him, his employers raised his pay to two pounds ten. But still his expenses increased. The Rector of the parish observed him at the gymnasium classes, such a wholesome, well-built, nice-mannered young fellow! discovered that he had a fair baritone voice, jumped to the conclusion of his Christianity, and roped him in for the choir.

After this he bought a frock-coat and top hat, and moved down to a balcony bed-sitting-room at Mrs. Burston's, feeling the need of somewhere to ask his friends.

It all cost money; though he lived as sober and simple a life as any mother could have wished for, and Mrs. Burston — noting the augmentation of Ada's giggles — observed him closely and persistently.

The worst of it was that he could never appear to be saving or scraping. For in his class of life it would never

be forgotten against him. A "real toff" could afford to be "hard up," but not Walter Bellamy.

Meanwhile, in his whole daily régime, there was only one element that was not utterly smug and clerkly, one cloud upon Mrs. Burston's maternal complacency; and that was his friendship with Francis Gale.

## CHAPTER XXX

GALE was the unique person who had quoted Shakespeare in Strutton Ground on that first Saturday night. The next time Bellamy came across him he was leaning over the parapet of the Embankment just opposite the Tate Gallery; later on Bellamy observed that he always seemed to be leaning, either against or over something.

He happened to look up as Bellamy passed; and turning round leant backwards, with his elbows on the coping, his shoulders high, his bleached face sunk between them.

It was an oddly contradictory face, at once puffy and emaciated. The forehead, under the peaked cap, was hollow at the temples, the bridge of the nose finely cut, the eyes sunk deep between the fine brows. But underneath the eyes the flesh was pouched, the nostrils and end of the nose coarsened; so was the lower lip, though the upper — short and straight and sensitive — seemed to have absolutely nothing to do with it; to be scarcely on speaking terms with anything so palpably its inferior.

"Well, Philanthropist!" said the stranger.

"Well," retorted Bellamy, rather clumsily — for anything like banter made him feel awkward. But for all that he lingered; though the other man had turned, and again leant facing the river; with his chin cupped in his hands.

"It's jolly here on a fine evening, isn't it?" he began tentatively.

"You moderns!" the man gave a short laugh and a shrug: "what use you make of words! Jolly — jollity — jovial, jocund! To me they picture Bacchus and all his crew: fauns, satyrs and nymphs. The vintage, and the vintners: grape-crowned, irresponsible, lustful youth! Music — not flutes or pipes, but the clash of cymbals. Red mouths, juice stained; bare breasts; white thighs. But to call this jolly." He stood upright, and waved his hand, first down then up the river. "Once England might have

been jolly, but I doubt it. It was always like poor Tom 'a'cold ——' No, it was never jolly! Urbane is the most you could say of it: wrapped in the cobwebs of centuries. Tender, pathetic, peaceful — for any one who prefers the negative cocoon to the worm or the butterfly — I'll grant you that. But jolly! My God, no! The place seems so dead, it's a wonder it doesn't stink — even worse than it does."

"You wouldn't say that if you were down in the City." Walter was standing very upright, one hand just touching the stone coping, the other grasping his well-furled umbrella. He spoke in his most business-like, man-of-the-world fashion. An evident survival of England's lost life. "By Jove, things are humming in the City; there's not time to turn round."

"Children playing with dead men's bones. But you're from the north — Staffordshire or Lancashire?"

"North Staffordshire." Walter flushed with annoyance; not that he was ashamed of his birthplace, but of the fact that he still carried the tang of it on his tongue.

"Oh, you northerners keep some youth; are merely middle-aged, while we suffer from senile decay. What are you in — cotton?"

"No, silk — of sorts."

"Artificial silk, silken, silkine, mercerised silk — how much of it that the silkworm has bowing acquaintance with, I wonder. How much of reality in anything? I'd stick to cotton if I were you — real needs against the sham luxuries."

"But I was brought up to the silk."

The stranger laughed: "So was I!"

"Where — up Staffs way?"

"No, other factories for attempting to manufacture silk purses out of sows' ears — or calves' heads, or such cookshop delicacies."

"The worst of those artificial silks," remarked Walter sagely, for he could always fall back upon his real practical knowledge, when other people started on epigrams —"is that they won't bear wetting — go all to pieces."

The other man laughed; an odd cracked laugh. "That's what's wrong with me. I wouldn't bear wetting. And

without doubt I have wetted — pretty considerably too; and gone to pieces under the process."

He jerked himself upright, pulled his thin coat round him and turned up his collar. For though it was already March, and the midday full of the promise of Spring, by six o'clock it had turned too cold to be leaning over stone parapets; particularly when, as now, the tide was coming in, with its damp sea chills.

"Well, I'll say good night." The stranger touched his hand to his cap and turned.

"It is cold, I think I'll get on too. Do you live near here?" Bellamy, oddly reluctant to let the man go, moved on a step or so at his side.

"What! That's good! Live! I don't live anywhere. Sometimes I exist, and sometimes — for rare moments — I soar; but as for living! Don't you realise, young man, that you've been talking to a ghost: a ghost of a mistaken idea."

"I live quite near;" with one of those impulses which so often made Bellamy fling overboard all that hoarded conventionality of months, he touched the other's arm: "come back and have some supper with me. Usually I dine at my Club, but on Friday nights I go to a gymnasium near here, so my landlady gets me something to eat quite early."

The other turned and regarded him with an odd twist of that superior upper lip. "I was just wondering whether you'd come with me, but my Club's in Pall Mall: and — hang it all —— but there's not a taxi to be seen; while the 'Savoy's' a fairish step, would throw us too late for the theatre ——"

Walter Bellamy laughed, almost boyishly. He knew that the stranger was laughing at him; and if any one of his associates at the office had dared to do such a thing he would have been furious. But one could scarcely take a man who wore such boots seriously; much as one might learn from him. "Oh, come along," he said: "cold meat and bread and cheese and beer," and swung his companion round, with a hand upon his arm in the direction of his own room.

Luckily he had a latch-key by now, and his new friend got a wash and brush up in his bedroom before Mrs. Burs-

ton brought the supper; but for all that she stared at the stranger, while he stared back, with his odd mouth all awry and his eyebrows raised as if to ask what she thought of him: then turned to the window and stood gazing out, with his hands in the pockets of the great-coat which Walter did not dare ask him to remove.

"Rum thing those figures opposite, fronting inland after all these years. Reminds me of birds in cages: one feels one must do something — set them free for their Islands of Desire, turn them facing round with the outgoing tide."

"Sometimes it almost looks as if they were moving when the wind is stirring the shadows from the trees at the side, and the pavements are wet and shining," answered Bellamy, with unexpected insight. "We'll want another bottle of beer, please, Mrs. Burston."

"Not for me, thanks," the other man turned round as he spoke: "I never take it."

"No beer — but what will you take?" Walter stared, then with an effort of imagination added: "I'm afraid I've got no wine in — so seldom here, you know."

"I'd rather have tea, if it wouldn't be giving too much trouble."

"Of course not, bring some, please, Mrs. Burston. And now, supper's ready I think — all excepting your tea. Will you start?" Walter played the host a little clumsily. Suddenly he felt rather a fool. Mrs. Burston's stare had quenched his ardour; the stranger looked far worse in the smug room — for all his wash and brush up — than he had done on the grey Embankment.

The other must have caught some of the doubt in his glance, for as he moved forward he laughed.

"You needn't be afraid; I shan't run off with the spoons. I confess to many weaknesses, but that's not one; unless they're Georgian — and of the very best. By the way, I think I ought to introduce myself, my name's Gale — Francis Gale."

"And mine's Bellamy — Walter Bonnet Bellamy." Walter held to the "Bonné," but he had never picked up the other point in his name which Gale struck immediately.

"Belle-amie."

"Do you speak — pronounce it like that, is that correct?"

"I really don't know. But it seems the obvious way, though of course any number of French names have been twisted out of recognition. Belle-amie — beautiful friend: by Jove, it's like a name out of 'Le Romaunt de Rose.'"

"Of course it's French," answered Bellamy pompously; "my father belonged to an old French family. My second name — it's spelt Bonnet — is after my grandmother's people. We are of Norman origin I believe."

"More likely Gascon."

"Why?"

"Well, they're notably quick on the uptake, for one thing." Francis Gale's cynical eyes examined his host thoughtfully. It certainly would not do to recount all the qualities usually attributed to the Gascons. "Do you speak French?"

"Un peu." The young man flourished a few sentences, and the other replied with clear scholarly French that was very easy to follow.

They were still conversing in that language when Mrs Burston brought up the tea, returning to her own quarters to repeat that after all it was a foreigner and not a beggar that Mr. Bellamy had with him. For the ordinary woman — stimulated by the sense of mystery — will forgive anything to a man of another nation.

Walter already spoke fairly well, while he was as quick as lightning to catch up any point in the other's pronunciation; and for a while Gale amused himself, playing with him, bringing in words that the other misused, and waiting for them to appear again in their proper form.

"You want practice," he said at last, as they pushed back their chairs from the table and Walter proffered his cigarettes. "But, by Jove, you speak French a great deal better than you speak English." Gale's tone was carelessly insolent. Suddenly he felt flat and tired, bored by the whole thing.

"Oh, I don't know half enough words. I only commenced when I was getting quite a big boy ——" began Bellamy. Then remembered, and drew himself up sharply. "My father very rarely spoke his native language — *mal du pays* you understand — excepting with a few of his most intimate friends." Oh, ye shades of Bellamy senior! —

The doggish Bellamy — and Jimmy Clarke, Tommy Irwin and Bram Walsh, twanging their broad Staffordshire over their evening ale!

"You might be a gentleman when you speak French, no one could mistake you for anything of the sort when you speak English." Gale was swinging backwards and forwards on his tipped chair; his hands thrust into the tops of his trousers, his shoulders high, his overcoat fallen back and showing the ruins of a white shirt, clean enough, but ragged and unironed. He was sick and chilly; and — despite his good supper — tearingly empty.

"Oh, I say, that's rather too much. You come here——" began Walter angrily, but the other interrupted him with lifted hand.

"Now, what *is* the good of getting cross. You grow pink when you get cross, my good Belle-amie, and then you don't look pretty." He blew out a cloud of cigarette smoke, and watched it float up to the ceiling; dismally enough, as if in the vain effort to discover some possible diversion on life — the smoke from the cigarette Bellamy himself had given him.

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculated that young gentleman.

"Doubtless you will be, unless the Primitive Methodists get you again." Walter stared. How in the world did the fellow know the faith in which he had been brought up? "As for me I can only hope the next world will be warmer than this," Gale shivered as he spoke. Then went on, rather querulously, "After all, what's the good of getting annoyed because I say that you're not a gentleman; you know you're not. You'd never think of it if you were, any more than I do."

"Well, of all the swank; if you could only see yourself!" Walter laughed rudely.

"As you see me, or my own world sees me — or as the Almighty sees me? They all get me at different angles, you know. But don't imagine I'm swanking, as you call it. What does it mean if I am, what is technically known as, a gentleman, and you are not. Things come natural to me that don't come natural to you. But for the rest! I'm a survival, I and my sort; bred out. We'll soon be as extinct as the Dodo; while every year you get a foot further in.

Why, even in sport — once the prerogative of my sort — it's your sort now who own our horses and dogs, who sail our yachts and marry our women, while we're like the drones in the hives. We can't afford to do any of the things that amuse us; and we've never learnt to do any of the things that might profit us. Our passions have sunk to vices; we can't even breed. In the old days they were Seignorial Rights; we toned down the exuberance of the peasant's blood and at the same time replenished our own. But now we come to London or Paris; are the sport of prostitutes and chorus girls — while you push on, and climb up and over. Red-blooded, sanguine, truculent, persistent. By God, it's you who are the top dogs and you know it, and what the hell possesses you to want to become like us?"

Suddenly Gale rose, and swung round to the window. "I say, I suppose you haven't got any brandy, have you?"

"No," Walter answered vaguely. He realised that the other had been speaking more to himself than to his host. But for all that he realised that he was right. Instinctively he flexed his arm and felt the muscles swell beneath his coat-sleeve. He was thinly dressed, but he very seldom felt the cold; he could go for a long time without food. Gale was right, every drop of blood in his veins was red: it pulsed through him like the beat of drums driving him on to fresh effort, to a fuller life. He prided himself on his lack of scruples. If people got down they must expect to be trodden underfoot. To get on, to get on, and still — to get on. To make other people sit up: that was his ideal! But still there were amenities, and no one realised this better than himself.

"It's the broad Staffordshire that sticks."

"Oh, it isn't only that. Not half so much as the words you use — the way you put them."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, 'commence,' for instance — how many times have I heard that word to-night?"

"But that's all right."

"I dare say, but we don't use it. We 'start' or 'begin.' We 'go on,' we don't 'continue.' We say 'What?' or 'What's that?' or 'Eh?' It's very ugly — not nearly as polite as 'I beg your pardon,' but there it is."

"Don't you say 'I beg your pardon'?"

"Oh, yes, if we tread on a fellow's toes; but not if we don't hear what he says. It's little things like that which tell."

Gale was moving aimlessly round the room, his hands still tucked into the tops of his trousers, the long tails of his coat hanging over his arm. There was a patch on the seat of his trousers; badly put on with what looked like a piece of a sock. "Did you say you hadn't got any brandy?" he broke off again suddenly.

"No, and I don't know that I'd give it you if I had, not here anyhow." The sight of that patch had revived Bellamy's self-confidence. "But look here, I'll pay you ninepence twice a week, say Tuesdays and Thursdays, if you will come here for an hour or so and talk and read with me — French and English. Say from eight to ten in the evening."

"Ninepence!" Gale turned round and regarded the other man sorrowfully. "Ninepence!" he repeated, and shook his head. "Belle-amie, my friend, you will never be the complete gentleman till you finish with intermediate sums of that sort. Half a crown — or even a shilling may be considered at times — but ninepence!"

"It's quite enough," answered Bellamy firmly, in his briskest City manner. It had nearly been sixpence, and he felt distinctly lavish as he made the offer, a whole threepence more than he received from his pupils.

"The condensed essence of the very best preparatory school, with everything an extra, and Harrow and Oxford, all for fourpence halfpenny an hour! Somehow it doesn't seem exorbitant." Again Gale shook his head: and then shivered. "All right — and suppose you pay for the first lesson in advance, now; just to bind the bargain."

Bellamy stared hardly. Then, remembering that as a gentleman one must be more or less reckless, even with money — willing to run certain risks — he took some loose cash — which he used to jangle against his keys — out of his pocket and handed Gale a shilling. "There you are and — oh, well, don't bother about the change," he said with his grandest air.

The bulk of brandy one can buy for a shilling is not

great, even when you have ceased to be very particular about the quality. But it is quite enough to change one's outlook on life; to take the place of food and fire, not to mention friends and lovers; even to retrieve the burden of the past. And looking back on the couple of hours spent in Bellamy's company Gale came to the conclusion that it had not been devoid of interest.

"Virile! God, what virility and about as much heart and conscience as a cheese-mite. An imagination big enough to tell lies with, but not big enough for him to see to where the terror of life begins — get the horrors over it as greater men do. He'll go far, that fellow, if the Gallic drop doesn't impel him to make a sudden fool of himself, just as he's got his foot on the ladder. That's the devil with all of us. We get full of corn, begin to kick up our heels — then forget and bray."

So much for Gale's reflections. As to Bellamy, it was only after his strange visitor had gone, and he was on his way to the gymnasium, that he remembered he had omitted to try his famous silence, or still more famous stare upon his visitor. But on further reflection he determined that it would have been no good. There was a look in Gale's pale eyes which gave you the impression that he could see straight through you. And after all what did it matter; they had no mutual acquaintance, and to Bellamy it was an odd sort of relief — akin to his feeling for Jane — to be with some one who was not in the least taken in by his pretensions.

## CHAPTER XXXI

THOSE French and English lessons became a regular part of Walter Bellamy's life. The fee remained at a shilling — often borrowed for a week or more ahead. But he felt he was getting his money's worth and he could afford it; for he had been given another rise, and was now getting three pounds a week.

During the summer the lessons were not always held at his rooms. He and Gale would go to the strip of County Council Gardens at the edge of the river below St. George's Square, or to the Embankment. Or perhaps alter their hours, so that they might visit the Tate Gallery — where Gale taught him a smattering of Art, catching him up at every slip; or Westminster Abbey, where he learnt something of the atmosphere of history, so different from the dry array of facts which stands for that branch of learning at the elementary schools.

Apart from all this, Bellamy was careful to keep to that particular side of London, where it was unlikely that he would meet any of his City associates. For despite the fact that he had given his companion a few passable collars and an old coat of his own — which hung upon him like a sack — Gale could scarcely be said to look spruce. At times, indeed, Walter Bellamy was surprised at his own moral courage in going about with him at all. Though on these occasions he was careful to wear what he called his "mufti" — as distinct from the top hat and frock coat in which his soul delighted — so as to attract as little attention as possible.

One day in late September — for so long had the curious friendship lasted — the two men were just about to turn up the steps of the Tate Gallery, when they were blocked on one side by a group of children and young people, who had just come out, and were straggling all over the pavement,

and on the other by a lady who stood beside a large open motor, giving some directions to her footman.

Bellamy heard him say, "Very well, my lady," saw him touch his hat, and thought, "It's some toff." All in the moment in which she turned and walked towards the steps; a movement which brought her face to face with himself and his companion.

Then, to his surprise, he saw her flush all over her pale, clear-cut face — shaded with a big grey hat and feathers. Saw her stretch out both her hands towards Gale — an odd childish movement, strangely at variance with the complete finish of her appearance — and heard her say, "Frank!" Then, "Oh, Frank!" like that, as he drew back sharply, raised his disreputable cap, and moved forward without a word.

The next moment, however, she had her hand on his arm. "Frank, Frank! How can you, after all these years? Oh, Frank!"

Her voice was broken between tears and laughter, and she was trembling from head to foot.

With a great effort of will Bellamy remembered that he was a gentleman, and, moving on, leant against one of the parapets of the outer wall of the enclosure. But for all that he could not help seeing what happened.

Gale had stopped and stood stiffly upright; not a muscle of his face stirred. For a moment he held his hand to the lady's arm, as though afraid that she might fall. Then very gently loosed her fingers from their hold on his sleeve.

She clasped both hands now and stood before him, something like a child, speaking very quickly. Bellamy could catch the rise and fall of her breast. She was slender and dark, and from tip to toe exquisite. But he had the odd idea that — for this man at least — she was full of passion and feeling, that Gale could have done anything he liked with her. There was a long chain round her neck that flashed in the autumn sun, but otherwise she was all in the palest grey, hat, dress, shoes and stockings: that delicate easily stained tint that nobody excepting a rich woman would dare to wear in London.

It was a marvel to Walter Bellamy that Gale could stand

like that, as stiff as a poker, and merely shake his head when she paused for breath, with the same little gesture of entreaty, so clearly expressed that she might as well have taken her heart out of her body and offered it to him, then and there — all warm and bleeding.

Again she spoke, and again he shook his head. Then said something with a gesture in the direction of the Gallery. Bellamy thought that he must be asking her if she was going in.

But with a sudden movement she turned again to her motor — where the footman still stood, staring in sheer amazement — while something in her manner seemed to tell Bellamy that she was blinded with tears.

Gale followed; waved the man aside — with what seemed to Bellamy a grand gesture, opened the door, helped her in, and spread the light rug, with its embroidered coronet, over her knees. As he shut the door she gave him some direction, and he spoke to the footman, who, touching his hat, mounted the driving seat beside the chauffeur.

Then — just as the motor was starting, and Gale raised his cap and drew back — she did the most amazing thing.

Leant right over the edge, caught the disreputable man's hand in hers and kissed it passionately.

There on the Embankment! Right in front of the policeman, and the little group of staring children, who forever — schooltime or no schooltime — hang about the steps of the Gallery.

For a moment or two Gale stood rigidly still, his cap still in his hand. But as the motor disappeared, engulfed in the traffic, he turned and began to walk rapidly away. Then, as if suddenly remembering Bellamy, swung round and retraced his steps, meeting his pupil — whose indignation at being forgotten was engulfed in curiosity — face to face.

"I say! I beg your pardon, Belle-amie; awfully sorry to have kept you waiting."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," the younger man hesitated a moment then added, "But perhaps you'd rather leave it; not go in to-day."

Gale turned upon him with a quick hard stare, which made Bellamy feel that, in this respect at least, he had more

than met his master. "Why not? Isn't that what we are here for?" he enquired coldly. Though, for all his nonchalance, Bellamy observed that he carried his left hand stuck into the breast of his coat. And thus — as a man generally uses his right hand to raise his cap — drew his own conclusions; which were more romantic than might have been expected from the whilom lover of Miss Rose Higgins.

## CHAPTER XXXII

THAT evening, feeling that he needed some assurance of his own superiority, Walter Bellamy took Ada Burston to the skating rink.

He wore white flannels, a blue serge coat, polo collar, and blue tie, the clear tints of which showed up his bright colouring, his white even teeth, and sparkling eyes to perfection.

Any one who can roller skate over the cobble-stones in Edge can skate anywhere. But in addition to this certainty of movement, there was a neatness, a clear-cut finish in all that Bellamy did. Again and again the other performers stopped and watched him; the way he twisted and turned, the figures he formed, the pose and daring of him.

There was one girl in a dark blue skirt and white blouse, who skated as well as he did, and again and again they waltzed together. She was as slender, as neat and finished as a steel spring, and light as a feather: seeming to possess most absolute command over her dainty little feet, in their trimly laced brown boots, the exact shade of her plainly dressed hair, which she wore parted at the side like a boy.

It was a delight to see the two together. No wonder people stared and applauded, for they were of the very essence of youth, "la joie de vie," as Bellamy was fond of calling it.

He did not skate all the time with the russet-haired girl. He was far too much of a man of the world for that. He skated with other girls, and by himself; and with other young fellows, flying round bent almost double. And twice he took out Ada.

But Ada did not seem to improve in her skating: partly owing to the fact that she would persist in wearing low-cut, patent-leather shoes, while the combs kept dropping out of her hair, and her skates caught in the lace of her petticoat.

All this was certainly not Bellamy's fault. Therefore it was very unreasonable of her to begin to complain on the

way home. To declare she hated skating, and that the red-haired girl wasn't "no class," likely enough out of a factory — for it is an odd fact that while the wholesale owner despises the retail owner, the retail worker equally despises the wholesale — that she should not go to the rink any more if Walter carried on in that fashion: that she was tired and had a headache: that Elsie's brother had offered to take her to the picture palace and that now she wished she had gone.

Poor little soul! She was quite as pathetically miserable as the lady in grey; and her new hat, which required so many pins to keep it even moderately straight, felt like a load of bricks at the top of her befrizzled and padded hair.

But Bellamy had no pity for her. She was "common," and the more he observed and learnt the more intolerant he became of such commonness as he could understand. For he was learning quickly, and already recognised faults in others which he himself had shared only a few months earlier. Besides, there was something feeble about the girl: the sort that seems born to be the sport of any reasonably good-looking man — and he hated feebleness.

He did not condescend to argue with her. Arguing was "common." He simply kept silence, which drove Ada to fresh effort to arouse some sign of jealousy, or even anger. Till at last he turned on her with his hard stare, and said quite politely:

"Do you mind not speaking so loud. We don't want every one to hear us."

It was in exact imitation of the way he had once overheard Gale speak to an aggressively quarrelsome drunken man. Gale had been a little drunk himself, but at those times — though more cynical — he was more punctiliously polite than at any others.

What Bellamy did fail to realise was that — never at any time, drunk or sober — would Gale have used that tone to a woman.

As it was, Ada snapped her teeth with an exasperated snarl. Put out one hand and gave him a push that was almost a blow. Then burst into tears.

She sobbed more or less unrestrainedly all the way home.

But as Bellamy stood holding the area gate open for her she caught at his arm.

"I'm sorry — I — I didn't mean to turn nasty. Suppose — suppose," she gave a broken giggle, which was intended to be coy —"we kiss and make friends."

She lifted her face as she spoke. It was flushed and distorted with tears, rendered grotesque by the light which trembled upon it through the dried leaves of the plane trees at the corner.

Bellamy had not the faintest desire to kiss her: would as soon have kissed one of the figure-heads across the way. But it would not do to have a row with Ada. He had quite a big class every Wednesday now, and she was indefatigable at raking in new members. Besides, he was very comfortable at Mrs. Burston's; he would never get anything again half so good for his money. And stooping he kissed her full on her red mouth.

"Don't be a silly little girl," he said; gave her a little pat on the shoulder and sent her off down the steps quite happy.

He had not wanted to kiss her: did not care twopence about the girl. But for all that the human contact stirred his blood, and for some time he could not settle to sleep.

Since he came up to London he had been too busy getting on to think of much else. He could always subdue his passions if he chose, though it was better fun to indulge them — for there was none of that weakness in him of which Gale had complained in his own sort — whoever they might be!

## CHAPTER XXXIII

EITHER as the result of witnessing Gale's romantic meeting with the lady in grey — of which they had neither of them ever spoken — or that tepid passage with Ada, or else because he had been eight months in the silk warehouse, Bellamy began to grow restless.

Fortunately, about this time, he received a fillip which kept him going for some months longer.

The senior partner in Brown, Son and MacCullagh's was an old man, shrewd but failing, and often absent for weeks; the son was a devotee of golf; the junior partner constantly abroad on business affairs. There were plenty of responsible elderly clerks and buyers. But their weakness lay in the fact that they did not know the anatomy of the business in which they were engaged; while the comparatively new trade in artificial silk — a material as moody as diversified, as subject to outside influences as a woman — baulked them.

Still endeavouring to judge it by real silk standards, they were unable to balance qualities and relative prices. Hung back when they ought to have gone on, then made rash leaps in the wrong direction: aggravating the travellers so that, again and again, Walter — with his crude, practical knowledge — was called in to settle some difference of opinion.

Even then it was not Brown and MacCullagh's own buyers who found him out; but the manufacturers' travellers, who caught his northern twang, his business-like air, and preferred to deal with a young spark — who perhaps knew too much — rather than with a group of men who did not even know their own minds.

Apart from this ignorance of material, their ignorance of the modern working-class constituted a weakness with all the elder members of the firm. For them the manufacturer put a penny in the slot, and the workers did the rest, almost mechanically, going on working as long as the masters supplied what they considered the right number of coins.

But Walter knew better, realising the workers as the mercury in the business thermometer, liable to mysterious fluctuations.

Just about this time they were set anything but fair.

It was the old story of five years earlier. Once more the masters were endeavouring to cut down the artificial-silk workers and threatening a general lock-out should they refuse to fall into line; for the busy season was over and they could afford to have the mills lie idle for a month.

But even they did not realise the strength of the Union, or how the former strike had solidified the workers. It was once more a question of women's wages. But this time the men — if they once came out with them — were determined to put in certain demands on their own account before they would go back! particularly the weavers, whose material was becoming more and more shoddy and difficult to work, while their wages dropped proportionately.

Jane wrote to Walter pretty regularly; friendly, unloverlike letters, usually the gossip of the mills.

The relations between master and workers had become more and more strained; it breathed through all of Jane's letters, for she felt it like thunder in the air.

There were tentative strike meetings. Things seemed to hang fire for an unnecessary time. How well he knew it all! The apparent carelessness: the small attendance, the laughter and inattention at the meetings. Then the sudden stiffening together of the whole body.

Luckily the senior partner happened to be particularly well, coming to the warehouse regularly, and Walter achieved a personal interview, at which he so impressed the old man with his conviction that there was trouble brewing — for he really did know, and used his knowledge in a way which made every iota of it bite — that a bigger order was got out than had ever been thought of before; then another and another, till Brown, Son and MacCullagh was stocked to the very limit of its capacity.

Indeed, for a fortnight — the last fortnight in October — packing cases and crates were pouring in at such a rate that they could not be got out of the way quickly enough, and piled up in entrances and offices; while the whole staff cursed, appealing to every one within hearing, Walter in-

cluded, to know if it was not the "damnedest folly!" And, what would Mr. MacCullagh say when he came home? And what the devil possessed "that old fool"?

For even when he had bought the stuff he would not leave it alone. The underground storehouses were dried with lime, heated with kerosine stoves; the cases constantly shifted and rearranged. Every one's back ached, their tempers were worn to a thread. The tap, tap of the old man's stick, the thin parchment-like face, poked forward between the bent shoulders, was everywhere. Walter heard nothing but complaints and joined in them. Nobody realised that if Mr. Brown gave his employés no peace, the newest clerk in the firm gave him no peace. That the minutely torn scraps of paper which the office-boy was continually clearing up — and could have made nothing of if he had read them — were notes in Walter Bellamy's fine clerkly hand.

The worst of it was that, with all this buying, the firm itself sent out no travellers; the highly perishable stock was simply accumulating. Every member of the firm was in a state of panic. There was some talk of appealing to the "Son," but he was at St. Andrew's playing in a tournament. Unless the junior partner came home soon — and no one seemed to know his address — it would end in a general smash up. And where would they be then?

Not a penny was being turned over. It was nothing but buying — buying. There was not a man among them who would not have got away from the sinking ship if he had seen the chance of another job.

Then, quite suddenly, the storm, which Walter had felt coming — tingling through his finger-tips, crackling like electricity out of every one of Jane's shrewd epistles — broke.

It was an exact replica of five years ago — with additions.

First the winders went out, then the knitters, the warpers, the tassellers, the fringers, the throwers, the twisters, and the weavers, till every mill in Edge stood silent.

But this time it was not only Edge: the two sister towns, federated with her under one Union stood firm by Burton, and brought out every one of their workers, while Bellamy grinned to himself at the thought of all those improved automatic spoolers standing idle at "Morrison's."

Up in London the retail supply — particularly of hard silk — soon ran out: then the warehousemen began to feel the pinch. Only at Brown, Son and MacCullagh's was there still corn in Egypt; and their prices went up with a bound, till every little dressmaker and jobbing tailor felt the pinch.

Walter's salary was raised to three hundred a year. He sent his mother ten shillings a week now, while it was a sort of salve to his conscience to know that Jane was boarding with her and would get some of the benefits. But, for all that, he never thought of what Jane's life really was; still at the same place where he had been five years earlier. Nay, infinitely worse, for when his work was done he had larked about with the other young fellows, or gone off on his bicycle; while Jane, when she had finished at the factory, went home to housework, and washing and cooking, and the never-ending complaints of old Mrs. Bellamy, who seemed to have been wound up so as to go on till eternity.

Directly the strike should be over Bellamy was to start as a buyer. The workers were winning all along the line: prices were bound to go up, and Brown and MacCullagh would want brains at their end of the line. The junior partner was back again, and personally thanked the young fellow whose promptness was recognised by all concerned. No one envied his good fortune, for they had all benefited by it. Besides, he was so royally genial, the old feeling of being on tiptoe had come back to him, and he worked as one possessed: relinquishing all outside interests, excepting his hours with Gale — and even they were dodged in whenever he could get them.

By the end of four months, when the strike broke, and the men and women went back to work — white faced and eager eyed, but triumphant — practically any position in the firm had become merely a matter of time.

Then, quite suddenly, Bellamy's patience broke. He was bored to death by the whole thing. The very thought of going to business in the morning made him feel physically sick. He both looked, and was, ill. The firm offered him a holiday, but he did not need rest. If he could have afforded a race round the world or across the Continent it would have done him good — but what he really wanted was an outlet for his restless activity; a fresh climb, and not

the passive delight of sitting on a hill-top, for after all it was only a hill, and not a mountain.

He realised with disgust that he was getting soft, and transferred his energies from the church guild to the Polytechnic; joined a running club and proved a worthy successor of his father.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

STILL Bellamy did not feel right. He was restless to a degree. His brain seemed to have got the fidgets, as one's legs so often do, and to be forever stretching itself out, feeling after something. For the first time in his life he found a few spots on his face, and went to see a doctor, who declared that it was not measles — as he had feared — but merely an over-exuberance, lack of outlet; and advised more interests; somehow his system was getting clogged.

He thought of women. During the stress of business he had given up his classes, and now he could not be bothered with them: besides Ada had become a nuisance. She was always hanging about; insistently gay and coquettish, sullen, or pathetic; never for a moment natural. Whatever he needed, it was not a woman of her type, or the type which she procured him as pupils.

One evening Walter was dressing to go out; and not being able to find a pair of boots which he needed, rang the bell.

Some one came to the door and he shouted out to ask if they were clean. Then, after a short interval, heard a knock and answered, "Come in," making sure that it was Mrs. Burston.

But it was Ada, flushed and nervous. She held the boots out at the length of her arm, and laughed. "I did them myself," she said, as though it was something wonderful. "All by my little self."

Bellamy was frankly annoyed. He had just been shaving; and was in his shirt and trousers, with his braces hanging down his back. He was going out to see about some important business, did not want to be upset. And somehow the girl did upset him; though in a way that made him angry.

"You have no business here at all, Ada; you know your mother doesn't like it."

"That's a nice way to speak when I've come up all them stairs twice over for you, an' dirtied my fingers cleanin' your beastly boots."

"Thank you; but don't do it again."

"Catch me being such a fool!" The girl swung round in a tantrum. Then hesitated, watching Bellamy tie his tie in the glass.

The tips of his long fingers were coarse, the ugliest part of him: he was hurried and out of temper and made a poor job of it. Ada could see his frowning reflection. Its masculine impatience thrilled her; while the fact that he could bungle at anything gave her courage.

"Oh, let me do that, clumsy!" she said: put her hands on his broad shoulders and swung him round.

Bellamy could feel her hot touch through his shirt, then her fingers trembling under his chin. But despite her nervousness, her trade had necessarily rendered her deft, and she tied the tie, a small bow, quickly and neatly; then hesitated.

She was standing very close against him. Bellamy could feel the warmth of her body against his, the quick throb of her heart.

"Oh, Wally!" she said; pressed closer, shaking from head to foot, and raised her face.

Instinctively Bellamy's arms went round her. For a moment he held her closer, with almost brutal roughness; then he flung her on one side.

"Get out of this!" he said, and going to the door opened it. Then turned again to the girl — who had sunk against the bed, and now hung on to the rail, her face chalky, her mouth open, looking like a silly, frightened white rabbit — took her by the shoulders and propelled her towards it. As he put her out he shook her.

"You — thank your stars, you little fool, that you got hold of me; and not some brute as 'ud have ruined you as soon as look at you. Do you know where girls that do that sort of thing end, eh?"

"No," breathed Ada, writhing beneath his heavy hand.

"Yes, you do, so don't lie. They end in the gutter, an'

that's where you'll end if you don't look out. Ruin yourself and break your mother's heart. Now, just you get out of this, and thank God that I'm the sort of fellow I am; with some respect for the house I live in."

It was insincere. But after all it was better than telling her that she did not attract him, exasperated him so that if he had given in to her evident desire he would have half killed her. The women he wanted were of the kind that one could pay and have done with.

As it was he stood higher than ever upon the pedestal of Ada's love — and it was love, as far as she was ever likely to know it. Thus when any fellow-worker designated men as "all alike beasts," she replied:

"Not all!" and smiled and blushed at the thought of her secret knowledge; so that they were eager to know who "he" was; surrounding her with questions and raillery.

Then some one said: "Oh, men are always the most particular and stand-offish with the girls they think the most of." And this remark fed the flame, so that even Mrs. Burston, misled by her daughter's glow and gaiety, made sure that the young people had come to some secret understanding of their own. Thus Bellamy's bacon and toast — he had dropped the affectation of the Continental breakfast as his salary rose — became crisper, his boots better polished, his whole comfort more carefully studied than it had ever been before.

"Though what it all leads to beats me," remarked her husband bitterly. "Why don't 'ee get the banns called if 'ee means to marry the girl, that's what I want to know. An' if 'ee don't mean ter marry 'er why should I make a Christian slave o' meself a' cleanin' o' his gory boots?"

"Because it pays," retorted Mrs. Burston, who did not intend to show all her hand.

"Oh, it pays, does it? Well, let me tell you this — an' I *know,* though I don't expect to be listened to in my own 'ouse — them forrunners 'ave as many wives as they likes. An' the Pope don't say nothing, just winks at it, as long as all the children is brought up Catholic. If I was to become ——"

"There's only one thing as I wish you'd become," retorted his wife, exasperated beyond all endurance —"an'

that's a dummy; though even then you'd be snappin' your jaws an' makin' mouths at me, I reckon."

"Oh, leave 'im alone, Mum," interrupted Ada loftily. "'Ee only judges others by 'imself."

"Gawd, one wife's enough for me!" ejaculated Burston, bitterly.

"But all men ain't the brute beasts as 'ee'd make 'em out to be," continued his daughter, supremely regardless of the interruption.

"An' pray 'ow do you know that, Miss?" bellowed her father, back at his old trick of table banging.

"Oh, I know." Ada nodded mysteriously, and blushed with bright eyes. "I know."

"Then you know a bloomin' sight more nor any straight female 'as any right to know."

"Oh, I'm straight enough." There was an air of soft triumph about the girl: she had been ready to give all to her lover, had he not shown a nature too noble to take advantage of her weakness.

What she did not realise was that if Walter Bellamy had really loved her she would not have seemed weak, or even attainable.

But no woman could have quite satisfied Bellamy at this time. True, the stir in his blood was partly of sex. But that was the result and not the reason of his restlessness, which was to be found in his ambition; his desire for something new, and altogether engrossing. He was homesick, too; not so much for the people as for the locality; the wild, wind-swept open moors, round his native town. Sometimes he felt that he would give up everything, dare anything to stand once more on the sheer crag of The Cloud Rock; see the valleys, curving beneath him, and feel the great, clear waste of air; bathe in it as in an ocean, fill his lungs with it; run with it and shout with it, as it gathered to a tempest, sweeping round in the cauldron of the encircling hills.

The devil had shown his wit when he took Christ up into a high mountain to be tempted, knowing the heady exultation of such places; the only mistake being that — like most of his kind — he failed to recognise Divinity when he saw it.

In London Christmas was again at hand, with all its sham jollities and gaieties. There were more shops than ever

full of useless trifles, more children's bellies empty. The wind was not boisterous. It was merely venomous and inhumanly cold, a veritable old maid of a wind.

For the time being the glamour had gone out of London, as far as Walter was concerned.

His vanity forbade any slackness at the warehouse; but all personal force was missing from his work, and he was continually answering advertisements, searching the papers for something more congenial.

For all this it was not until the very day when Ada pushed forward her piteous wares on to the shop-board of life that he really found what he wanted.

An advertisement, which would have struck most people as shady, had appeared in several of the evening papers. Then with more boldness, in the better-class dailies.

"Wanted, at once. An exceptionally virile, gentlemanly man between twenty and thirty; with thorough knowledge of the world, and of business methods. Must possess considerable personal magnetism. Liberal salary."

There was no address given, merely a number; while letters were to be sent to the newspaper office.

After the third or fourth appearance of the advertisement Walter wrote — for it stimulated his curiosity — giving very little real information about himself: though making most of what he called his "French origin," and business capacities: couching his letter in the flamboyant terms which such a thing seemed to call for.

He and Gale speculated over it together; Gale declaring that it was from a matrimonial agency and just the sort of thing to suit his companion.

The friendship between these two was a strange one. Francis Gale had the faculty of making Bellamy feel like a country bumpkin, coarse and commonplace; while he realised that the other man saw through him as no one else, excepting Jane, had ever done. Only with this difference: that while Jane liked him despite his flamboyant posing and prevarications —"flim-flam" as she called it — Gale liked him because of it: for he was piquant as a new cock-tail to the waster's jaded appetite, a creature of infinite variety and amusement.

Once having realised that it was no use pretending, Bel-

lamy found a certain sort of relief in the presence of one person with whom he could let himself go; be perfectly natural. After all it was no good putting on airs with Gale if he really wished to learn from him, as he did. For his ardent desire for improvement in the things which he knew the world values overcame his vanity. You might pick a pocket and merely be called a kleptomaniac; but if you dropped an "h" you were lost; while seducing your neighbour's wife was a minor sin compared to eating with your knife.

The whole thing was in exact opposition to the teachings of the Primitive Methodists; but as these had never sunk very deeply into Walter's mind, there was not so much to unlearn.

As for Gale, he regarded Bellamy with a species of joyous bitterness, as the very quintessence of his kind; without heart or conscience or morals, the prophet of the great religion of "getting on." The only excuse for the elder man being, that — having sunk so low himself — he found a sort of comfort in the thought of another who — without any sinking at all — was lower still, in what he considered the very essentials of honour.

"It's a matrimonial bureau; or a Mormon propaganda, or a Piggott affair, or something to do with the White Slave traffic; just the sort of thing to suit you, Bellamy," he declared. For he had been without brandy for a couple of days, and was in his most insolent mood.

"I don't know why you should say that," answered the other man smoothly. He was learning to speak quietly and evenly now, however much he might be moved; for the moment he became excited his vowels broadened: that was one of the things Gale had taught him. "Considering what I told you about my landlady's girl I don't think that I'm quite the ravening beast you'd like to make me out to be."

Gale laughed harshly: —"My dear Belle-amie, when you're a blatant liar you're rather gorgeous. But when you're merely a hypocrite you become insupportable — and what's worse — commonplace."

Walter did not answer. He was not sensitive, except when other people were by. Besides he had his uses for Gale, who — after wandering aimlessly round the room

for a few minutes, in his favourite fashion with his hands stuck into the tops of his trousers, smoking one of his host's cigarettes — lounged out of the room.

"Anyhow," remarked Bellamy scornfully, as the door closed behind his mentor: "I *do* keep myself decently fit." And rising he threw back his shoulders; stiffened his muscles, and lunged as if at some unseen enemy. "By Jove! but he is running to seed fast, poor devil!"

To "keep fit": and to send that ten shillings home to his mother each week. Herein lay his law and his gospel. Not much, but there are religious people who will tell you that some men recognise none at all.

A couple of days later, when he had almost forgotten about the whole affair of the advertisement, there came a letter headed "The Virgo Health and Beauty Parlour," making an appointment for seven o'clock that evening, at an upper flat in one of the narrow streets off Bond Street.

Seven o'clock on a winter's day is an odd hour. Too early to suggest anything disreputable, yet late enough to hint at mystery; and Bellamy's curiosity was quickened.

There were no shops in the street, which was curtained and discreet: though at the number he had been given the door stood open in the charge of a page, the lower floor being occupied by a dentist, whose brass plate was fastened to one lintel.

It was evident that Bellamy was expected, for, after asking his name, the boy touched an electric bell and told him to go upstairs; while almost at the same moment a door on the landing was opened, and he found another page waiting for him; so like the first that for a breath he wondered stupidly how he had got there.

The staircase was thickly carpeted and closely hung with pictures, leading him to expect something rather frowsy and overcrowded.

Thus, when the page opened a door and showed him into a large room, he was frankly astonished, recognising it at once as both beautiful and uncommon.

It was uniformly lighted by electricity — the bulbs concealed in the cornice of the ceiling — panelled in white, and carpeted in grey, while a wood fire burnt in a large grate, with steel fitments.

There were several deep chairs, heaped with cushions in different shades of purple, a couple of couches and small tables holding silver bowls of violets. But, apart from these, there was no ornament; neither were there any pictures on the walls, the white panelling being broken only by the door at which Bellamy had entered, and two more — one at either end.

The room was empty. But after a moment or so a man came in through the door from the landing. A rather stout, well-groomed person of about forty, whose immaculate frock-coat looked oddly out of keeping with the artistic air of the place.

He made his visitor sit down, in the centre of the room so that the light fell full upon him; asked him a few questions and carried on a desultory conversation for several minutes.

At first Bellamy felt impatient, this was not getting to business as he knew it. But after a while he realised that he was being politely sized up, that this was not the place for the brisk methods of the north, and put forward all his powers of charm.

Presently the man got up and rang the bell, and, when the page appeared, asked for Madame Vallence; then went on quietly talking till a lady came in at one of the side doors: bowed to Walter and — after one long calm glance at him and an almost imperceptible nod to the other man — sat down with her hands folded on her lap and her eyes upon them.

Then the man began to explain the nature of the business in which, connected as it was with some of the very highest of the aristocracy, privacy was imperative. The establishment was a Beauty Parlour of the highest, the most select, type. There were the usual rooms for massage and manicure, electricity and steaming; but there was more to it than that. The "Virgo Health and Beauty Company" endeavoured to build up sound bodies within beautiful skins. Better still, it aimed at influencing the mind: tuning it to such a pitch of serene purity that the whole nature was transfigured. Indeed it was a Temple of Beauty, and Madame was its high-priestess.

Bellamy bowed, raising his eyes as he bent his head — in

a way that he knew to be effective — and met Madame Valence's glance full upon him.

When Madame's eyes were lowered she was all wistful softness and appeal. Her black hair was simply parted in the middle and drawn back in a knot at the nape of her neck, held with a couple of large silver pins; her face was almost colourless, and fine as a privet blossom; the brow and nose delicate, the mouth a little too thin lipped — the whole refinement of the face a trifle marred by the heaviness of the jaw.

On this first evening she was dressed in a robe of two shades of purple; which gave the effect of flowing loosely and softly, yet retained its every line, following each curve of her figure; while round the wrists and the back of the neck it was edged with a deep ruff of dark fur. She wore a wedding ring, but no other jewellery; and her hands, on which her gaze once more rested, were singularly white and well cared for.

But that one moment in which their glances met had told Bellamy much. Madame's eyes were dark, so devoid of depth that the retina appeared flattened, as in certain reptiles; while they were absolutely white. All the time he knew her Bellamy never saw them express any feeling beyond tolerant amusement. She did everything, chose the very colour of her clothes, the fashion and cut — with no hard or decided lines — to give a certain negative effect; but her eyes betrayed her.

Perhaps she knew it. Later on he realised how persistently she kept them lowered, except when she pressed home any suggestion — and she always suggested, never commanded — or wished to make herself felt.

Rising Bellamy stood with his back to the fire, and one arm stretched out behind him along the mantel-piece. It was an attitude of curious ease for any one to take in a strange house; particularly for a young man who was there in search of a situation. But Bellamy realised that he was more effective standing than sitting. Besides he had to stand: the whole thing was so exciting and mysterious. The cold calculation of Madame's eyes had thrown down such a challenge to him that he could barely keep from swinging to and fro on his tiptoes, as he used to do in his Sunday

boots: but for all that he spoke slowly and remembered his vowels.

"It seems to me, if I may say so, that you are doing a great work; for people are all swaddled up with ugliness — their laws, their loves, their clothes, their houses, their religion — are all ugly!" If Gale could have been there he would have recognised himself in every word, every intonation, of this outburst; for Bellamy used everybody and everything: —"Above all their religion: their whole doctrine of renunciation, of giving up all that makes for the joy and beauty and abandonment of life. To begin with they choose a religion which was first made for slaves ——" A bitter young Jew in Brown, Son and MacCullagh's — whose intellect beat itself out like a wild bird against the narrow cage of conventional commerce — had taught him that phrase. "What people want is freedom," he went on. "And freedom, as we know, comes only through beauty and the love of beauty."

Walter Bellamy bent a little forward, his eyes full on Madame's enigmatical face.

The man might pay the salaries, but that came later: it was Madame whom he now had to impress. Again she raised her eyes under his glance, and his spirit soared joyously. She was actually wondering how much of all this flummery he really believed.

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

"That is all we know on earth or ever need to know."

It was a remnant of his elocution lessons. That was the great thing about learning of any sort, it always came in. "One could scarcely imagine any more necessary adjunct to religion than truth, which is synonymous with beauty, or a more fitting priestess for both than Madame: *cela va sans dire,*" he went on, and bowed; while Madame bent her graceful dark head, and the gentleman in the frock-coat got up and bowed also.

"Your duties," he said, "would commence at ten o'clock each morning. The establishment usually closes at six, but twice a week it is open till ten or perhaps later. You would have to interview the ladies who come here; and book their appointments and take their names. The names are not always perfectly correct. We shall depend on you to as-

certain little things of that sort; and never to forget a face. For special treatment you would pass them on to Madame — who advises them on points of dress, and on general — a-h ——" he hesitated a moment and Madame Vallence supplied the words he needed.

"Personal charm."

"Yes, that is it, personal charm — or to our young ladies, who are in charge of the different departments; a list of their names and duties will be given you. However it is not merely for physical reasons that ladies come here: but for — for ——"

"Psychological?" suggested Madame softly.

"Psychological — yes — psychological reasons. They are wearied out with the continual round of artificial pleasures. They need rest, congenial companionship, in harmonious surroundings where they are certain of not being disturbed. I believe that you would have a certain amount of influence, and we should expect you to use it. Sometimes a cigarette, a little quiet talk with you in this charming room might do all that is required. For Madame is not merely a high-priestess, she is an apostle of humanity. Yes, an apostle of humanity!" he repeated, rolling the phrase round on his tongue as though he enjoyed the taste of it. "Is that not so, Madame? The minds of our patients ——"

"I think," put in Walter very softly, "that it is not so much their minds that most women are interested in, as their souls."

Suddenly he laughed, almost boyishly: for he had once again caught Madame's eyes, seen the corners of them wrinkle with amusement, and realised that she did not expect him to believe but to impress others with a sense of his belief. That, apart from her professional pride, her money-making instinct, there was in her much the same feeling as he found in himself: the sense of it all being a rather heady sort of game, in which her clients were the pawns, to be moved when and where and how she wished.— That she was not so much proud of her skill as enchanted with the folly of others.

"Women seem to get drunk with the thought of their own souls," he went on, and remembered how in Edge the Methodist mothers and daughters had rocked themselves

to and fro in anguish or ecstasy: how much more quickly they were kindled than the men, who would discuss any portion of their anatomy rather than that immortal self over which the women were continually brooding, and in which they found their one excitement; their one outlet from the dismal daily routine of house and mill.

"You are right there, that is a thing which you must never forget: a woman is as proud of her soul as she is of her pet dog. Your strongest point of influence will lie in remembering this — particularly with the women we have to deal with," said Madame softly. She had seemed to take so big a part in the discussion — her silence, her quick glances had been so eloquent — it was difficult to believe that apart, from the two words, which she had supplied — this was the first time she had spoken. "Just now women are wearing their souls like their figures — lightly corseted. But still they need pampering, despite all the so-called liberty of the present day."

She rose as she spoke, and stood for a moment looking Bellamy over from tip to toe, with such searching intensity that he felt as though he were stripped for a race: "I think you will do," she said at last. "You look strong. Many people in these days are physical wrecks. We find mere bodily strength and vitality carries great weight;" here she paused and glanced at the man, who had also risen, as if to bid him take up his cue.

"Perhaps it would be as well to show Mr. Bellamy over the house," he suggested smoothly. "It would help him to understand his duties better."

"But first," Walter's jaw set, he no longer felt inclined to swing on his tiptoes, was back on firm earth again: — "wouldn't it be better to come to some agreement about my salary?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Madame softly. And turning to the fire stood with one purple suède-clad foot turned sideways on the fender: evidently such sordid considerations were not for her.

The man appeared to hesitate for a moment; gently tapping upon his highly polished nails with a small ivory-backed file, with which he had been touching them up through the greater part of the interview. "We usually give two

pounds a week," he admitted at last. "But in this case we might stretch a point and say — well two pounds ten."

Walter Bellamy laughed, and picked up his hat which lay upon one of the cushioned chairs. "Then, I think I had better say good night. I am sorry we have wasted each other's time. Though in my case the pleasure of meeting Madame——" he paused with a smile and a shrug. Then bowed, and was turning to the door when the man remarked: —

"Three pounds," as patly as an auctioneer; and for the first time Walter realised the mirror over the mantel-shelf.

"I will come for six pounds a week," he said; "not for less. I'm sorry, for I believe I could do what you require; but I have a good billet in the City and I should not care to throw it up, merely for loss." His voice was pleasantly business-like; for the moment he was himself and no one else.

"But you know nothing!" protested the man.

Walter smiled softly: —"Don't you think it is safer than knowing too much? To start with anyhow."

"It's out of the question. Six pounds a week!"

"May I ask exactly to whom I should be responsible in this business, look for instructions? To Madame or to yourself?"

"I am in no way connected with it," answered the man hastily; "excepting as Madame's financial agent. I have a business of my own which entirely engrosses my attention during the day." Later on Bellamy discovered that he was identical with that Mr. Claude Hope, who bore so many mysterious letters after his name, and practised dentistry on the ground-floor. Also that his real name was Hopkins, and he was Madame's husband. "Though of course," he went on smoothly, "any help I can give in the evening, or in my leisure time, is always at Madame's service."

"I think," interrupted Walter rather brusquely; "that as the business belongs to Madame, it is Madame who ought to decide whether or not I am likely to be worth what I ask."

Madame shrugged her shoulders, as though the question failed to interest her. "It seems a lot, doesn't it?" she remarked doubtfully, eyeing Walter once more with a glance

which seemed to see through all his outer covering of clothes and civilisation. Then allowing her glance to travel slowly upwards till it rested upon his face, when — catching the smiling decision in his eyes — she nodded.

"Oh, very well, supposing we try it. And now; there are certain things about which I am obliged to be very particular, dress for instance." For all her softness it was evident that Madame Vallence was sufficiently a business woman to leave a subject when once it had been decided; and, putting one white hand on Walter's sleeve she deliberately felt the material of his blue serge suit between her finger and thumb. "Stuff like this is too harsh, and I should prefer grey: say rather dark grey flannel; you could keep it here and change when you came — and a purple tie."

"And purple socks," put in Walter.

"And purple socks," Madame's eyes were shot with little points of light; and again the corners wrinkled, with that faint cynical air of amusement which could scarcely be called a smile, for it did not even touch her smooth, closely folded lips.

"At the expense of the firm?" supplemented Walter gently.

Again Madame's eyes met his, and he tried the effect of the stare which had brought him such fame, years before in Edge.

"I think that will make it worth while, it is just the sort of thing we want," she remarked enigmatically. And turned to the other man.

"Will you make out an agreement for Mr. Bellamy?"

"A week's notice on either side, and weekly payments," put in Walter.

"As you will," assented Madame carelessly, with that flicker of humour in her eyes. "We have to give a quarter's notice for the house ——" She hesitated, as if wondering whether it were necessary to explain herself more fully, and then turned to the door.

"Now I will show you over the house, while the agreement is being drawn out."

On one side of the room in which Walter had been received was another, divided by partitions for hairdressing; and a small waiting-room. Half-way down the landing was

an office, which was Madame's special sanctum, and from which she could command a full view of the stairs. Above that were rooms for massage, manicure and electric treatment; and on the top floor four tiny apartments, each simply fitted with a big chair, a table or so and a deep couch; the floors softly carpeted, the windows hung with long straight curtains.

Throughout the entire house the prevailing colours were greys and purples, and there were flowers in all the rooms; but no pictures or ornaments, while, even more noticeable than the dainty perfection of the place was the stillness of it.

At first Bellamy could not make out what was so strange about the house — which seemed heavy with the sense of listening, of waiting for something to happen, keeping one's pulse forever on the edge of a sudden leap. Then he realised that it was this very quality, which is the last one expects to meet in the heart of London — the inexplicable silence: the shutting away of all the rattle and roar to which he had become accustomed.

Madame caught his expression and glanced at him with raised brows.

"It's the quiet," he explained. "One's waiting all the time for it to break; it doesn't seem like London."

"There are all double windows, very carefully fitted," she answered; then went on, pulling a curtain aside to show him. "These rooms are merely to rest in. You will have nothing to do with them." She hesitated in the odd way she had of allowing a pause to take the place of words: then continued smoothly. "Ladies can see their — friends here if they wish. There is a lift, and speaking-tubes to the basement, and we serve tea," she added. Then turning out the lights led him on to the landing again and showed him the lift.

"You see, any one can work it. There is a separate exit from the house connected with it; and thus there is no necessity for ladies to meet each other on the stairs unless they choose. They may come here as safely as to the confessional. You must remember that in a great lady's own house there is no privacy; if she as much as locks her door her maid wonders why and reports it to the whole household. She is surrounded by servants who are so many

spies. She can never — as a working woman does — have her house to herself, when once her husband has gone out of it. Here my clients may come and take the necessary rest and relaxation in absolute security; leaving behind them all their troubles, both of mind and body."

Walter Bellamy was over eighteen months with the Virgo Health and Beauty Parlour. But never during all that time did Madame refer to it as anything excepting a means of social and physical regeneration.

Downstairs he signed the agreement for six pounds a week "To commence"— when Walter came to this word he took his stylo pen and — with a flourish of sheer flamboyant vanity — crossed it out, neatly substituting "begin."

"Excuse me, but we don't use that word in our world," he said, and Mr. Claude Hope stared. But Bellamy took no count of him; his laughing glance was full on Madame, and again he saw that she had caught his meaning.

"You're quite right," she remarked gravely: "It's as well to get into the way of humouring their little fancies, even when they are not by. I think you said in your letter that you spoke French; it will all count."

There was no mention of the grey flannal suit in the agreement; but Bellamy felt that there were certain things in which Madame Vallence could be trusted. And he was right. For after he had signed it she told him to wait; and scribbled a note which she put into an envelope and handed to him still open.

"If you will take that to Beecham and Saunders — they have a shop in Sackville Street, but I am sending you to the City — they will fit you out. They are the best tailors in London; and they know me, and know how I like things done. Good night, Mr. Bellamy."

"Good night." Bellamy touched the smooth white hand held out to him; bowed to Mr. Hope — who was irrationally biting the nails over which he had been spending so much time — then took his departure.

## CHAPTER XXXV

UNDER the first branching gas-lamp Bellamy drew Madame's note out of the envelope; read it, and realised that she could be generous as well as just. For it contained a carefully specified order for the grey suit, four white silk shirts, soft turned-down collars, socks and ties; all complete.

Bellamy took off his hat and passed his hand thoughtfully over his smooth dark head, upon which the crest — which had so troubled him during his boyhood — was at last tamed. He had planned to have it cut next day, but there and then he changed his mind.

"It will be better a little longer," he decided, and laughed. Then, raising his umbrella hailed a passing taxi. It was Gale who had told him always — however set fair the weather might be — to carry an umbrella instead of a stick with a frock-coat. Really he had learnt a lot from that disreputable acquaintance of his.

As to the taxi. Why not? One did not work for the sake of working, or for the sake of saving — a pastime for fools — but for the sake of capturing some of the joys of youth, before it was too late; eating good food before the digestion and teeth were both gone; wearing fine clothes while one could still show them off to advantage; keeping fit, which is not possible when one is underfed and overworked.

As the taxi dodged its way out into Regent Street, across Piccadilly Circus and down the Haymarket — then sailed triumphantly along the broad way through St. James' Park — Walter's whole being was on tiptoe again. Life was such a lark! Full of such infinite possibilities. Madame with her odd flickers of humour was beyond compare. And what a quarry, all those overdressed, over refined, and extravagantly beautiful women — whom he had so often seen coming out of the theatres or shops — would prove to him.

Women whom he somehow held responsible for Jane's life; spent spooling silk to stitch their fine clothes with.

For Walter Bellamy could be virtuously indignant. Besides, without doubt, Jane got her share of that ten shillings a week.

Back in his own rooms, he found Gale crouching over the fire waiting for him.

"I thought you were never coming——! It was all I could do to make that landlady of yours — she hates me, Belle-amie, looks on me as the evil genius of your life — bring more coal; and she absolutely refused point-blank to get supper. What the devil were you doing?" He spoke petulantly, unreasonably; for though it was his night to give Bellamy a lesson, he had a good fire to sit by — which was more than he would have got at home — and if his pupil was late it was his own loss.

But the young man did not feel in a mood for quarrelling, and ringing the bell he hung up his coat and hat; then, moving over to the fire, stood in front of it with his hands behind his back; warming himself and looking down at Gale, who was bent double in his chair, coughing.

Poor old Gale! Not much Strength and Beauty about Gale. Bellamy wondered what the Virgo Society could do for *him* and laughed. Such a friend was worth preserving, if only for the pleasant sense of contrast he produced: he was humming, some catchy music-hall air, as his thought played around the other man.

"You seem very full of yourself to-night;" Francis Gale raised his pale eyes to Bellamy's face, with a bitter stare:—"Suppose you've dined!"

"No, and I'm famished, clemmed as they say up north. We'll have supper together," he added — and as Mrs. Burston entered with the cloth gave the order.

"For two, please: any cold stuff you have in the house, we're starving. And——" with a sudden flame of generosity, he flung down a shilling on the table, "get Mr. Burston to step out and fetch us a drop of brandy, will you?"

The woman hesitated; her usually good-tempered face sulky. She detested Gale, believing that if it was not for his influence Walter would settle down and fix things up with Ada, whose gaiety was growing rather hectic. "I let

the rooms to one gentleman, with attendance," she began, "and understood as I was to be asked to wait on one gentleman, not on two; and be paid ——"

"You're paid for everything you do, and jolly well too." Bellamy swung his coat-tails over his arms and put his hands in his pockets. After all it was a good thing Gale had been there; he had kept up the fire which Mrs. Burston — when she was in one of these moods — occasionally let out. Anyhow he was not going to stand any nonsense from her.

"If there's anything extra you know you've only got to ask for it. But if you don't like me or my friend I'll go elsewhere; that's flat! There's plenty of rooms to be had."

Mrs. Burston gave him a frightened glance. "I'm sure, Mr. Bellamy, I'm only too ——" she began. Then her voice broke, and she put her apron to her eyes. "I never expected as you'd turn on me, speak to me in this 'ere ——"

"I speak as I feel — hungry and thirsty," said Walter, laughing. "Come, Mrs. Burston, get us our supper and let's have an end of this."

The landlady picked up the shilling. "I'll get Burston to go to the 'Red Lion'; they keeps better stuff there than round the corner," she said; and leaving the room closed the door gently after her.

"If I'd knuckled in to her she'd have banged it!" remarked Bellamy complacently — sitting down and beginning to unlace his boots —"throw me those slippers, Gale, will you?"

"My dear Belle-amie, your knowledge of the Eternal Feminine is beyond words," remarked Gale, without an attempt to move; his face already a little flushed, his eyes bright at the thought of staying the craving which possessed him.

Bellamy laughed as he threw his boots towards the door, and stretched out his hand for his slippers — which were, after all, nearer to him than to Gale — placed ready by the fire, for he was beginning to insist on the maximum of attendance. "I want to know something of them in the new job I've taken on," he said. And rising, stood with his back to the fire while he gave a triumphant description of his evening's work.

But Gale did not seem impressed. Mrs. Burston had been up again with a relay of dishes, but the brandy had not yet come and he was restless: wandering up and down the room, picking up trifles and putting them down again, his nerves all on edge for the sound of returning footsteps.

"It doesn't seem much of a thing," he remarked vaguely — as Bellamy came to a pause — his head on one side, in a way which gave him the look of a dog listening, all a-quiver, for its master's footsteps.

"How do you mean? Six pounds a week's not to be sneezed at, I can tell you that."

"For fooling women!" answered the other contemptuously; "I'd rather run a hot potato can at a street corner."

"I dare say; but you're not me, you see. I've got my own self-respect to think of," answered Bellamy. And added, shrewdly enough, "It seems to me that in this world it's a choice between respectin' yourself and respectin' other people. You've respected other people and not yourself and see where it's landed you!"

"There are different ideas of self-respect."

"Well, my idea's to keep my end up, and out of debt, and myself well and fit. And if women choose to pay to make fools of themselves it's their concern and not mine."

"You'd better have stuck to the City."

"Foolin' still, only on a larger scale."

"But of a more decent sort. You'll find —— Ah!" Gale broke off suddenly, a crimson spot flaming on either cheekbone; "thank God! Here's the stuff — at last."

## CHAPTER XXXVI

NEXT morning Bellamy handed in his resignation to Messrs. Brown, Son and MacCullagh. It was reported almost immediately to old Mr. Brown, who had a personal interview with him, and asked him if he had anything to complain of.

The concession involved in the question stirred the older clerks more than it did Walter Bellamy — for they were more conscious of the assumption of inviolable well-being which enwrapped the whole firm, as with an atmosphere, and realised that he was being treated with very special consideration.

But Walter had no complaints to make. He had merely "Found a situation more congenial to my essentially literary and artistic ego." He actually said this to Mr. Brown himself; for one of the clerks, quite incapable of originating such a phrase, reported it. But for all that he was very polite and charmingly deferential; having realised the disadvantage of leaving a blurred track behind him.

During his luncheon hour, that very day, Walter went down to Leadenhall Street, sought out the master tailor to whom Madame Vallence had referred him, and ordered the grey flannel suit.

As it chanced he was kept a few moments waiting to see the particular material he wished for; and looking over the piles of fashion plates and patterns which strewed the table in the waiting-room, came across a large reel of delicate, mole-tinted, button-hole twist, left there by some careless fitter.

He was turning it thoughtfully round and round between his fingers and thumb, when Mr. Beecham — who himself superintended the City shop and workrooms, leaving the Sackville Street business to his more showy partner — entered with a roll of grey flannel over his arm.

But Walter Bellamy did not hear him; neither did he hear the sound of the traffic in the street outside.

All he heard was the pad, pad of bare feet, and the buzzing whirr of a wheel.

His imagination had been somewhat deadened by the realities of London, which had given his eyes and ears and practical brain power too much to feed on.

But suddenly, at the feel of the smooth stuff between his fingers, his imagination was again let loose: so vividly that memory seemed vitalised to reality. The pale January sunshine, creeping languidly through the high window, sickened him. He felt the sweat prick out upon his skin; while his heart was somewhere up in his throat; his breath came in short, thick gasps, and once more he was running.

Shoulders and elbows back, for old Jimmy Clarke had looped a thread of silk round his heart and stomach and lungs and was drawing them out of him.

Mr. Beecham spoke, but Walter took no notice, though the man's voice must have brought him half-way back, shaken him free from Jimmy Clarke; for, unloosing the end of the silk from the nick which held it, he pulled it out a few inches and examined it closely.

It was springy, and smooth, and tightly twisted.

Suddenly Bellamy realised the other's presence and turned to him. "This silk is hand twisted."

The tailor looked surprised. But he had been a journeyman before he was a master, and knew the details of his trade.

"You're right there, Sir," he answered; "we make a rule of always using the very best of everything."

"Do you know what it's done with? — It's done with boys' guts; with the hearts and souls and lives of them. Don't ever use it for my clothes, that's all. And if you've got any humanity in you don't use it at all."

For once he did not consciously speak for effect, though the habit was there. He thought afterwards how much he might have made of the subject: how far his protest — properly started in the Sackville Street establishment — might have carried: for he seldom forgot that the Queen's mother had taken a very real interest in the silk industry; while he visualised himself as climbing to Royal — or even

more exclusive — circles by means of his knowledge; as others had done before him.

But at the moment he was too shaken to think of impressing anybody — felt indeed much as he had done when he had sat in the backyard, during that first dinner-hour of his running days — and was glad to get away, and out in the fresh air.

Another task which Bellamy had set himself for that day, a task to be approached with an almost religious fervour and glow, was a visit to the girl typist whom he had supplanted, to acquaint her with his decision, so that she might have a chance of getting back into her old place before any one else snapped it up.

Walter's fancy would have dressed the part in armour and mounted him upon a tall white charger.

But failing this, having got the young lady's address in Putney from one of the other clerks, he buttoned himself up to the chin in a waterproof, and went straight on from business; on the top of a Walham Green 'bus; for in this particular — to wit, his love of the open air — Walter Bellamy was eminently wholesome.

The 'bus made its way more or less steadily along the Strand. But it quickened its pace down Parliament Place and Victoria Street. And once having passed the station swung along at a great rate; making nothing of the crowds in King's Road: or even in North End Road, where the street was narrowed to a mere passage by the heaped stalls, with their flaming kerosine torches: for no privately owned vehicle is more plutocratic in its ways than a motor-'bus.

Just past the church Walter changed as he had been directed. It was a cold evening with a mist blowing that was almost rain. But somehow it exhilarated him; as did the crowded, swaying 'bus. The fashion in which it forged its wicked way through the crowded streets and swung round corners; the bustle and lights; and then the sudden quiet of Putney, with its trees, its small smug villas and air of secrecy. It all pleased him so that he was sorry when — instead of keeping with it on its course through Barnes and Richmond — he had to get off at the corner of Alfred Place, where Miss Dyer lived; though it was some consolation to remember the noble mission on which he was bent.

The street was badly lighted, and it was some time before he found number twelve; which was, in itself, so dark, that at first he thought it must be empty. But the door was opened in response to his first ring, and the little typist herself stood in the hall-way shading a candle in one hand.

"How do you do, Miss Dyer. I called to see you; may I come in?" said Walter. Then, as she leaned forward and peered at him, added:—"My name's Bellamy — perhaps you don't remember me?"

"Oh, yes, I think — from Brown and Mac Cullagh, isn't it? Will you come in? Mind the step. All the lodgers are out so we didn't trouble to light the gas," she added; and led him through a narrow hall and down a step to a tiny room, heated by a kerosine stove, where sat an old lady whom she introduced as her mother: indifferently enough, for she did not seem particularly glad to see him, or impressed by his coming, or the fresh air of vigorous manhood which he brought with him into the overcrowded place. He had seldom felt more vital and glowing with generosity: the knight-errant, the god from the car. And yet for a moment the whole affair seemed to have fallen flat.

The old lady, who wore a black crocheted shawl over her shoulders, and was very like a shrew-mouse — with a long nose, wide at the base and pointed at the end, and a peculiarly receding chin — merely bowed very stiffly and asked him to sit down; while Miss Dyer stood tapping with her fingers on the back of a large album which lay upon the round centre table — almost as if she wished him gone — her head a little bent, her glance sullen. She still looked ill, but with the settled ill-health of a person who lives a life devoid of animation and fresh air; while her skin, her mouse-coloured hair and eyes were much the same colour.

She was badly dressed and the back of her blouse was gaping.

Walter remembered how, in the bad times at Edge, or in the bad mills — where conditions and pay were below the average — despair always seemed to take the girls by the backs of their blouses. Thus the sight of Miss Dyer's gaping button-holes quickened his conception of himself as a knight-errant almost more than anything else could have done. For it was only when Walter Bellamy felt *back,* that

he felt at all: as is the case with so many rather heartless sentimentalists.

"I came to tell you I am leaving Brown and MacCullagh's," he announced, in his pleasantest manner.

"Indeed," answered Miss Dyer in a tone of flat indifference; though Walter noticed that she flushed beneath her thick skin; while the old lady laid her knitting in her lap and tightened her indefinite mouth till it was a mere fold of flesh.

"Yes; I thought I ought to tell you, in case you felt well enough to take up your old work."

"I felt well enough thirteen months back."

"Surely," Bellamy leant forward with his hands lightly clasped between his knees and looked up in her face:— "Surely you don't — you can't — blame me for that? If I'd known — if I'd thought for a moment that you were coming back. Oh!" he rose suddenly and thrust his hands into his pockets;—"you don't mean that you think so badly of me as to believe I'd willingly keep any woman out of her billet."

"Then if you didn't know why are you here now?" Martha Dyer raised her dull eyes and looked straight into Bellamy's face: "Why are you here now," she repeated, "if you thought I was dead, or didn't want to go back?"

Walter gave a little gesture, as if of despair at her unreasonableness.

"I don't say I didn't know. But not till too late — when I was so involved that I couldn't get out of it. You know that the firm went through a very critical time. I was in honour bound — so to speak — to stand by them. Honi soit qui mal y pense."

"Oh, yes, I know all that," said Miss Dyer wearily.

"Anyhow it's too late now!" put in the old lady; and closed her lips tightly again, as if to bite off the end of the subject.

"I don't know — Is it? You see the post is vacant again, I leave in a week's time. And I thought that — but perhaps I'm mistaken; perhaps you've something that you like better?"

"No, I've not got anything yet. It's all very well for girls who have nothing excepting dress to spend their money

on; but I'm better off at home, unless I get fair pay. Ma's paralysed in the legs you see."

This last piece of information sounded oddly disconnected; but Walter Bellamy followed the thread. For, with the poor illness does not mean bodily suffering alone — he remembered the tiny Irwin boy's lame leg, which was really a tubercular bone, and all that might have been done to save his life if any one had had any money to do anything.

"That's hard for her, hard for you both," he said.

"So there's two to keep," went on Miss Dyer in her dull matter-of-fact voice. "If I get a good billet it's worth paying a servant to look after Ma and the lodgers. If I don't it isn't. I got two pounds a week at Brown and MacCullagh's just the same as a man."

"Ah, yes," answered Bellamy; hoping that no one would tell her of his four pounds.

"Anyhow it's too late now. Things don't go twice the same way; mark my words for it!" put in the old lady again. Then, as Miss Dyer said nothing more — and the affair seemed to have terminated — Walter rose, feeling oddly snubbed, and took up his hat.

"Well, I'll say good-bye. I'm sorry to have intruded on your time; but I meant well." Suddenly he put out his hand to the girl. He was hanged if he was going to be beaten by a little thing like that, with a sallow skin. "Come, shake hands, and try not to think too hardly of me. It's the fortune of war you know, and remember I came out to tell you the very day I sent in my resignation."

"Yes, I'm sure you meant kindly," said Miss Dyer. Then added —"Ma, Mr. Bellamy's going."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Dyer, and closed her lips very tightly, as though that was the end of Mr. Bellamy: once and for all.

The typist followed him out into the narrow hall with the candle, and stood awkwardly by while he unlatched the door.

"You mustn't mind Ma, she's not quite — she's apt to be a little childish sometimes. That's why I can't leave her alone — that and her legs."

"No offence meant and none taken," said Bellamy

heartily. For with people like this he dropped back into phrases belonging to his old life: phrases which he would not have used for anything before Gale. There had been another expression:—"The likes of that," which he had found the greatest difficulty in breaking himself of.

As he stood on the step buttoning his coat up to his chin — for it was raining now in earnest — Miss Dyer spoke again.

"Mr. Bellamy."

"Yes."

"Did you really come out here on purpose to — to give me a chance of getting back?"

"Of course I did."

"Not just to see — to find out how — how I was getting on, how far I was down?"

"Miss Dyer! Did you really believe that for a moment? If you only knew the feeling with which I came. How overjoyed I was at the thought that I might make some sort of reparation."

"And yet you stole my billet," said the girl; as if the words were forced from her by an ugly obstinacy beyond her control.

"I think that's a very cruel thing to say," answered Walter.

"I know it is; but life's cruel, everything's cruel! And after all, suppose you did steal it, it was only in the way of business. I had no right to speak so. But if you only knew what these months have been like. Searching the papers, wasting 'bus fares going to the City for nothing. And the housework! I hate housework; I don't do it well, never seem to get it done. Oh, I can't expect you to understand. I don't suppose you've ever been up against things in the sort of way I have, but it's worn my nerves and temper to fiddle-strings."

"Well now, just to show I'm forgiven, will you go and see Brown and MacCullagh to-morrow?" asked Bellamy persuasively.

"Yes, I will, I promise. And — and I will say this, I believe you meant kindly in calling; and I thank you. I'm sure I'm very much obliged." The words came out with as much difficulty as though their utterance was a real physical

effort. For nature had not been kind to Miss Dyer; it had made her plain and undersized, and delicate and inarticulate, without one touch of charm to balance these defects.

But Walter Bellamy — brilliant and charming in his own rather florid fashion — knowing something of such lives as hers, was seized with one of his odd impulses of generosity.

"Look here. Let's be friends. Get on your hat and coat and come up Town with me and have some dinner, and we'll talk things over. It's only a little after seven. It will be too late for a theatre, but we can get in the best end of a music-hall show."

Miss Dyer flushed darkly and her eyes brightened: it was obvious what such a prospect meant for her. Then her face fell. "I can't: there's no one to leave with Ma."

"The neighbours?" suggested Walter.

"We don't know them; we never mix with people, but perhaps another night ——"

"Well then next week. Settle for some one to come in — say Friday — Friday next week; and we'll dine at the 'Troc.' But I'll send you a line to say the time."

"I haven't got a frock — not smart enough," objected Miss Dyer.

"Oh, never mind that; come anyhow, come as you are now," said Walter; raised the girl's fingers to his lips, kissed them gallantly, and then — turning up the collar of his coat, for it was now raining in real earnest — made his way to the 'bus; with the stimulating sense of being a "verrie parfait gentle knight."

It was nobody's fault that the promised dinner never came off. Bellamy was tremendously engaged with his inauguration into the mysteries of the Virgo Health and Beauty Parlour: besides a friend from Brown, Son and MacCullagh's had introduced him to a very fascinating lady of the Adelphi chorus, who took up a good deal of his spare time.

Though perhaps after all it was as well that Miss Dyer should not be led to expect too much of life: more than her unattractive personality warranted.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

FROM this time onward, for several months, Walter Bellamy's life resembled an intoxicating dream. Or — as he sometimes felt, with a thrill of uncertainty — a delicately tinted bubble; which would break at a touch, a breath of reality.

For of such an intangible material appeared those first days in the heated, scented atmosphere of the Virgo Company, where he spent his time interviewing clients. Fine ladies of an almost unimaginable fineness, such as he had never seen before, save at a distance; and who were a thousand times more wonderful close at hand. A bewildering mixture of pride — in their haughty lips, their commanding way of taking everything for granted and of looseness in their complete abandonment to the mood of the moment, their display of silk stockings and bare necks, the very scent which they used. And above all, as far as Walter himself was concerned, in the way in which they began by behaving as if he was not even a man — being in a shop — and ended by making him the fashion; treating him as something between a grand Turk and a prophet.

It was heady wine enough for any young man; for their elegance somewhat disguised their sheer greed for sex, set them apart, and still wonderful. But fortunately Walter Bellamy was more romantic in theory than in practice: combining the Gallic sentiment of his father with the hard English midland-county sense.

And he saw that these fine ladies marked the difference between him and men of their own set by the very way in which they let themselves go before other women.

There were many intimate *tête-à-tête* tea-parties in those small supper rooms. But they kept the distinguished captives of their bow — top-hatted and frock-coated and altogether immaculate — strictly to themselves, though Walter would sometimes meet them stealing upstairs, with that

schoolboy look of shame which even the most mature man wears when he knows that he is making a fool of himself; while they would bring their most intimate friends to see Walter, describing him as:—"Such a darling!" "Such a love of a man."

"Mark my words, my dear; he'll turn out to be somebody — really somebody," they would say. For women are easily misled by beauty: making intimates of men whom any hall-porter at any first-class club would place at a glance.

But all the same it very soon became difficult to say precisely in what respect Walter Bellamy missed. Unless it was in being almost too good-looking: too polite. Though there are still marvels of elegance and courtesy left in the oldest ranks of the peerage.

There was no doubt about his looks: particularly in that suit which Beecham and Saunders turned out to such perfection, with the silk shirt, turn-down collar, purple tie and socks; particularly when the time of violets passed and there were purple irises in the room, for their slim uprightness seeming to harmonise with the long-limbed, grey-clad figure.

Not that Walter Bellamy was ever effeminate. Indeed it was his masculinity, and the piquant contrast which it leant to his surroundings that helped him more than anything else.

For he kept himself very fit. Every Sunday he rowed hard on the river. On fine afternoons he might be seen punting a pretty girl along the shallows. But the mornings were sacred to strenuous and lonely practice with a pair of sculls.

In addition to this, as soon as the days began to lengthen, he rowed twice a week, after business hours, on the Serpentine. Still went to the Polytechnic, where he did wonderful things on parallel bars and trapezes from eight to ten on two other nights. And, as often as not, spent his entire Saturday afternoon in running. For he worshipped his body. Loved to see the skin smooth and shining, and watch the play of muscle as he flexed his arm.

But, for all his fitness, London — though it had not weakened — had whitened him, giving him an air of refinement.

After a little thought he had relinquished the idea of wearing his hair long, and had it closely cropped. Though

by the best man in Bond Street; who sometimes managed to leave the bare suspicion of a wave, to suit the quiet refinement of this new Walter Bellamy, who was as different to the brisk City clerk — who had emerged from Brown, Son and MacCullagh's — as he was from the breezy broad-spoken commercial traveller — or the running boy with his bare feet.

But things linked themselves up.

This new Bellamy, grave and steady-eyed — for it is a fallacy to believe that only the completely honest man can look you straight in the face — a little mysterious, full of strange knowledge of crystal balls, telepathy and mental healing; gentle, and yet masterful — had a spirit which still soared; an imagination which — splendidly pinioned — beat the air in lofty and sustained flights. Was indeed, to the very heart's core of him, one with the little boy in his celluloid collar and sailor blouse, who, years before, had stood up and "testified" in the primitive Methodist chapel in Edge.

There were still the two selves. The one who almost believed, and the other who looked on with ribald applause.

Life was still an amazing game. A sort of juggling where one had not only to keep a great number of balls going all at once, but to make people believe that there were — actually seem to see — double that number.

He had used his instinctive knowledge of human nature in those old days at Edge. He used it now. That was the reason of his masterly ways with the exquisite creatures who came to Madame Vallence's. He realised the fundamental likeness in all women: particularly women who are more governed by their emotions than their minds. Recognised with some surprise that civilisation seemed to move in a circle which brought these fine ladies near to the level of the less responsible of the mill girls: a position in which they were far removed from the middle-class business and professional woman; while the same instinct which made wives of the lowest class respect the husbands who beat them, caused these pampered creatures to thrill at any hint of mastery.

They were seldom very young — that was the pathetic thing about it — mostly between thirty and forty. Osten-

sibly they came to the Virgo Health and Beauty Parlour to be manicured, massaged and generally beautified. Yet it was not beauty for itself they wanted, but the power to attract, or to keep. For it is a piteous fact, that a woman's craving for love increases inversely to her powers of attracting it.

When the younger women came they were often hard and indifferent; mere callous flirts.

But with these others it was different. They wanted to be happy; and their only idea of happiness was love. Usually some man's love, sometimes the love of the children they had once refused to spoil their figures by bearing. But this was rarer, or less clearly comprehended; and it was generally a man, a husband or lover who had grown indifferent, or a friend who persisted in remaining a friend.

For the most part it was not lust or passion which dominated them; but their desire for affection. That craving for something over and above the everyday life which accounts for half those Spiritualists and Crystal-gazers, those Fortune Tellers, Theosophists and New Thought propagandists who make a living by pandering to these futile searchers after that *something* which all the mothers in Edge — with their growing families, their babies at their breasts, their husbands coming home to meals; all the stress of anxiety, hard times, hard words, and even blows — still possessed: the knowledge of being absolutely necessary, not only to one but to many.

There was one lady, calling herself Mrs. Smith — though there was a coronet on her card-case — who seemed possessed of an incurable mania for having her hands manicured. It was Madame who first suggested that she was so wearied out with the daily round of amusements she was glad of anywhere where she could sit quite quiet for an hour; and who helped her further by steady continuous brushing of her hair and gentle massage of the poor nerve-racked head.

For some time Walter only saw her coming and going; always on foot or in a taxi.

But one very hot morning she was obliged to wait for her treatment; and, as Walter's room was cooler than any of the others, Madame herself showed her in there. Rather,

or so he suspected, that he should be given a chance of speaking to a client whom they had both so often discussed. For Madame Vallence was genuinely interested in everyone who consulted her; and at the same time shrewdly conscious as to how far their depression might lead to reckless spending, in the hope of some relief.

It was still early, and Walter was arranging a tall glass vase with irises, from a heaped tray full of flowers which had just come in from the market. After placing a chair for Mrs. Smith, so that she might sit with her back to the light, he went on with his task, skilfully enough, for his perception of fitness and beauty was maturing rapidly.

After a moment or two the woman spoke, gazing up at him, with large melancholy eyes, from above a gold-stoppered scent-bottle.

"You are always here? Aren't you Madame's ——" she hesitated, suddenly realising the young man as looking at once too old for Madame Vallence's son, and too young for her husband.

"No, I am only Madame's assistant — aide-de-camp," answered Walter, smiling. Then went on with his work, for he knew better than to press for confidences; besides, he guessed, from an air of restlessness which hung about her, that the lady would speak again. And he was right.

"I think it must be you that one of the girls upstairs told me about," she went on, after a pause. "You read the future from a crystal, don't you?"

"Sometimes."

"I wonder if you could read mine."

"Perhaps." Walter Bellamy stood back a little and surveyed a round silver bowl he had just filled with hydrangeas, took out one blossom and glanced at it again critically.

"I should like you to try. Now — please," the lady's tone held a note of command; and taking a crystal ball from the mantel-shelf Walter sat down opposite to her, holding it lightly between his finger and thumb, and looking straight into her face.

She must have been forty-five, perhaps nearer fifty. There were dark marks under her eyes, and innumerable tiny lines. The corners of her mouth turned down; her head with its befeathered hat and elaborately curled dark

hair dropped on her long neck, while her diamond earrings took every hint of sparkle out of her eyes. She looked very expensive, very bored, and tired to the soul.

"Do you know, you really never ought to wear diamond earrings," said Walter suddenly. It was the first thing which came into his head; but he felt the truth of it and realised that at times truth is like a tonic to such people. Perhaps because it contains the element of novelty, which they are for ever in search of.

"Why? Aren't they lucky?" There was no offence in the lady's voice; only a languid curiosity.

"It's not that; but nothing takes away from the brightness of the eyes like wearing diamonds so close to the face. Now, will you give me some idea of what it is you want to know?"

"What a curious notion! I wonder if you are right. You may be; sometimes I think I look better without them — but one must wear something, and they say pearls mean tears." She was referring to the earrings; but the next moment her thoughts went back to Walter's question. "What do I want to know? Oh, nothing in particular. If there's anything going to happen, anything new?" It was the old vague desire.

Walter Bellamy placed the crystal on a little table, and leaning over it, with one hand curved round at either side, began looking into it and telling her things: fitting together her evident discontent, the coronet on her card-case, and various odds and ends which he had gleaned from Madame: cleverly enough, for his imagination and common sense both helped him, while by this time he had been afforded considerable practice.

The crystal-gazing was one of the tricks of the place, and an undoubted draw. The last assistant did it, and so Bellamy did it — a great deal better too.

But he never cared for it, feeling that it cramped his individuality; and, after a moment or two, he rose — with a sudden decisive air, and replaced the crystal on the mantelpiece.

"Aren't you going to tell me any more? I want to know ——"

"It's not good for you to know," answered Walter

shortly. Then seated himself again and leant forward; his elbows on his knees, his hands lightly clasped. "Look here, you think too much already, and things like that only make you think more. You don't want to think; you want to cultivate the will power to *do*. I wish ——"

"What is it you wish?"

"I was going to say I wish you'd let me help you. But unfortunately my time's not my own."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, you see, I am here somewhat in the capacity of a healer. Really we are all that. Madame Vallence and the young ladies do their best with the body, and the actual physical nerves. I with the mind — or as I prefer to think — the soul. Sometimes I feel that the soul is like the chiefest flower in the garden of life."

This idea had come to Walter as an inspiration, while he was engaged in keeping himself up to the mark on the Serpentine, only the evening before; not that he believed it, but it sounded well. It was ideas like this which often made him feel that he could write a book: while at other times his fancy turned to the stage.

"That's a beautiful thought," said the lady softly. And it did sound pretty: particularly as Walter Bellamy said it, with that faint French accent in which Madame so persistently coached him.

"It needs the most exquisite care and culture. All the garden round must correspond to it — be grown up to it, this flower of the soul. There must be no poisonous or overwhelming weeds. No creeping insects — bitter, selfish thoughts. But there must be the sunshine — and the dew must bathe it; and the fresh winds of heaven play for ever round it. For it is no greenhouse plant. That's the mistake we often make — Ah, if only I ——"

There was a discreet knock at the door, which opened just sufficiently to show a slim girl in a grey dress, with a large white over-all. "I am ready now if Madame ——"

"Oh, not this morning, I think. I'll put it off, if you don't mind. To-morrow, perhaps."

Mrs. Smith spoke gently, but quite decisively. It was evident that she had no idea of any one disputing her right to do as she pleased.

Then as the door closed softly she turned again to Walter.

"Now, will you go on?"

"Well, I was going to say that my time is not my own. That if you liked to take a course of mental healing, and come and talk things over with me once or twice a week, I think I might be able to help you. But ——"

With a sudden gesture Walter Bellamy rose and walking over to the mantel-piece stood with his arms upon it, his back to the lady. The action in itself was rude. But it gave, very cleverly, the effect of genuine feeling, of overwhelming emotion.

"Well, I am quite ready to take the course as you suggest — it might do me good, help me ——" The lady sighed. There was no doubt about her unhappiness, her longing to ease her mind in some way or other.

"Well, you see, it's like this ——" he began doubtfully, then broke off: —"Do you know—can you guess how difficult it is for me to speak of such a thing as money. Mais, que voulez-vous? One must live. And I comfort myself with the thought that the greatest singers, the greatest painters, sell their gifts. Madame declares — how far she is right, upon my soul, I don't know — that I have great gifts; and that the charges ought to be proportionately high. For ten lessons — Ah! ce n'est pas juste, that one should have to sell oneself so — for ten lessons ——" he hesitated with apparent delicacy, wondering how far he might presume on that air of ultra-expensiveness which encompassed Mrs. Smith.

"Well?" said the lady.

"Fifty guineas," answered Walter, with an apparently child-like distress in his eyes.

"It does seem a good deal," she replied doubtfully. And for a moment he quailed. Very rich people are sometimes very mean. It was more than twice as much as he had ever asked before. Was he going to lose his fish through his own greed? But he knew that his only hope lay in keeping quiet; for certain types of nervous people — though they can argue, or even quarrel — are quite incapable of facing a silence.

After a moment's pause she spoke again: "Well, one

gives as much for a new gown, and if it means any peace of mind, any surety, it will be well worth it. I will write a cheque now ——" she began again: then hesitated and flushed. "No, on second thoughts I think I will bring the money in notes, settle with you next time, if you don't mind, Mr. ——"

"My name is Belle-amie." There was the very faintest accent on the middle syllable.

"What a pretty name, particularly as you pronounce it."

"French ——" answered Walter; contriving, with that single syllable and a sigh, to express all the nostalgia of a hopeless exile.

The very next day, as he was going out to his lunch, he saw a motor waiting outside a shop, a footman standing at the side of it with a rug over his arm, and upon the panel of the door a coronet; while thrown over the seat was the very same light silk wrap which his latest client had worn the day before.

One of his sudden inspirations came to Bellamy at the sight; and stopping he asked the footman — with a perfectly grave face — if Lady Seymour — using the first name which, for no reason whatever, occurred to him — was inside.

The man stared: "I don't know the name, Sir," he replied with more politeness than a less well-trained servant would have shown.

"But surely this is Lady Seymour's car?"

"No, Sir;" he hesitated a moment and added —"The Duchess of Mountjoy's."

"Oh, thank you, I'm sorry — it was my mistake," said Walter politely and passed on.

But he had gained the information he wished, and realised why "Mrs. Smith" had not cared to put her name to a cheque.

That evening he stayed behind the others; requested a private interview with Madame, and demanded — in addition to his salary — a twenty per cent commission on all the business he brought into the firm.

Most women would have shown some sign of annoyance or excitement. But Madame — like a female Napoleon,

pale and indomitable, behind the writing-desk in her little office — merely raised her eyes quietly and asked: "Why?"

"Because," said Walter, and there was pride in his voice, "I have brought in the Duchess of Mountjoy."

"Oh, that's who she is, is it!"

"She is paying fifty guineas for a course of mental healing. And I think — as I started it in its present form, and as this won't be the end — I'm entitled ——" Walter hesitated, shrugged his shoulders, and smiled ingratiatingly, "to something out of it."

"You are already receiving a very large salary."

"I make far more."

"Doubtless, but I had the original outlay. And I now have the risks and immense current expenses to consider."

There was a pause of several moments. During which Walter stood looking down at Madame, with an air of perfect respect, while she — with her elbows on the table, her white hands clasped at the level of her chin — looked up at him, the pupils of her eyes concentrated to mere pin pricks.

All at once the corners wrinkled. She was a Napoleon whose power lay in the fact that she realised when to give way, when to pay the price. She was also amused at her assistant's calm demeanour; particularly as it represented a distinct asset for the firm.

"Very well," she said quietly, "I am willing — under the circumstances."

"The percentage to commence with the payment of the Duchess of Mountjoy's fee."

"That was arranged before."

"It is not paid yet."

Again Madame hesitated; she had taken up a pen and was gently tapping with it on the table, though her eyes never left Walter's face.

"Oh, well," she said at last, "I suppose it's not worth disputing about that." She turned over the papers on her desk as she spoke, hunting for a fresh sheet of paper.

"I will make out the agreement. But I think you must promise that there will be no further request for a rise of any sort during the next twelve months."

"Oh, yes," assented Walter gaily — twelve months

seemed an eternity: there was no knowing where he would be or what he would be doing at the end of that time, "I'm quite willing to promise that. And you needn't trouble to draw out a fresh agreement, Madame; I brought my copy of the last one with me," he pulled out an envelope from his pocket as he spoke, "and I presume you have yours. So we can just add a note, then ask Mr. Hope to step up and witness it."

"You are the most self-sure — no, that is not the word. In English I am not quite certain. In French I should say you had *savoir faire,* but that is not it. The most self ——"

"Confident?"

"Yes, that's it. The most self-confident young man I ever had the pleasure to meet, Mr. Bellamy."

"Oh, well," answered Walter, smiling down at her —"it all helps, doesn't it?"

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

HOWEVER foolish Mrs. Smith might be she was always, in some mysterious way, the great lady.

But this was not so much a matter of birth as of real innate goodness and dignity. For there were others just as well born, who seemed incapable of any reserve. Among them the Lady Constance Barr, an exotic, fragile, dark-eyed creature, who sucked her friends and lovers dry: was possessed of an insatiable desire to know and to have; and would allow her intimates no privacy of either thought or feeling. Again there were those of the quality of Mrs. Seaton, who was an Honourable in her own right — belonged to one of the best families in England — and yet behaved like a cross between a chorus-girl and a stable-boy.

Among them all there was not one equal to Jane Irwin: calm, workaday, matter-of-fact little Jane, with her flower-like face and large womanliness.

Walter often pitied himself in regard to Jane. She was the *one* woman. It was an irony of fate that their stations were too utterly different to allow of their marriage; anyhow at present, when every accessory of his life must be for show.

But sometimes he longed for her: her clear simplicity; the soft burr of her northern speech —" Ee now, lod, dinna' maether "— yet more as part of his native land, than as a woman.

Madame Vallence, widely different as she was, pleased him in somewhat the same way. She was so quiet and inscrutable. What would be personal with most women was, with her, merely a matter of business; of brain not of emotion, and Walter was sick of emotion.

One day they had an odd conversation. More than once he had wished that her husband was out of the way and he could marry her. Hope seemed rather a neutral person-

ality; but he was always there, as a sort of watch-dog, and ran his business in connection with Madame's: though none of their clients knew it.

Walter often wondered what the home life of the two was like. He could not imagine Madame as domesticated in any sense of the word, and learnt, with a feeling of surprise — as though it was something incongruous — almost ludicrous — that the pair had a little girl of eight or nine; and that Madame was, like most French women — for though she had spent the greater part of her life in England, she retained many national traits — an ideal mother.

On one occasion he had told her — in a burst of boyish frankness — that he regretted she was not a widow.

The corners of her eyes creased with laughter. She was no wit touched, though amused and interested.

"Well, I don't know. I like you, *mon ami,* but I also like Mr. Hope; it is impossible to combine all qualities in one man. The real stupidity is that a woman may not have two husbands."

"Some people do," answered Walter with a rather excited laugh, his bright eyes full on Madame's face; for she was seated at her writing-table, looking up at him, her smooth white hands folded in front of her. "Some people do," he repeated meaningly.

"Yes, but that is of no use to any woman — never was, and never will be. I am not a prude, oh no! But I realise that the moment you have a secret intrigue with a man — no matter how good a companion he may have been, how much of a spiritual affinity, as we say here — he becomes your lover, nothing more; a greedy animal who satisfies his lust and then goes away. Why it is I cannot tell — the secrecy, the lying — who knows? But it is a fact, and inevitably true: the *'cher ami'* is never the real friend."

"There are other ways — a divorce, for instance."

"My dear young man, I am not one to drop the substance for the shadow. Besides this, Mr. Hope has never given me any cause for divorce — under the present English law. And I — curiously enough, you will think, knowing my life — have never given him any cause at all, under any law. Besides, we have got over all the storms of life; we have our child, we are contented. But still it is a pity!"

"What a business we might have made of it. If we were sure ——" began Bellamy, and sighed.

Madame shrugged her shoulders. "When is one sure? Certainly not in marriage."

Again there was that glint of ironic laughter in her eyes, for she believed that by holding the purse-strings she held the young man far firmer than by any marriage vows. And perhaps she was right — in so far as anything could hold Walter Bellamy.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

DURING August and September business was slack at the Virgo Health and Beauty Parlour. But not so slack as it had been at the end of other seasons; for by then Madame Vallence and Bellamy had established an ever-growing series of correspondence courses: in so-called mental science, personal attraction and will-power — to which Walter attended with the help of a newly appointed secretary — along with others, dealing with health and beauty, which were Madame's special province.

Between them they never let a client slip. If a woman's complexion was as faultless as it could be made, she was inspired with a longing to pry into the future; impressed with the necessity of reducing or augmenting her figure; attaining to a higher knowledge of her soul; subjugating her male friends by personal magnetism: practising the art of telepathy, or going through a special régime of diet — which the Virgo Health and Beauty Company alone was able to graduate to an exact nicety for each client.

It was Walter who thought of starting a branch in Manchester.

"Their complexions are muddy, all their pores stopped up — skins and brains alike. They're sick of Methodist Revivals. Start them on the closer culture of the soul, a debauch of mental science and self-knowledge, with a little crystal-gazing thrown in as a special *bonne-bouche.*"

"I don't believe they're that sort," Madame demurred doubtfully.

"That's just it! Every woman loves to be taken for what she's not; a prude for a *demi-mondaine,* and vice versa. I know them; they're all sick of everything, the dreary drabness, the flat respectability. We'll make 'em sit up." It was the old Walter who spoke, with joyous anticipation. "I'd start it at the Potteries if it wasn't that the women there will appreciate it all the more for having to

pay for their return ticket to Manchester — in addition to other fees."

Madame gave in. She was getting to depend on Walter's judgment; and here it was more than justified, for the Manchester branch was an amazing success. By the end of the slack London season it was fully established. Walter had leashed in the young Jew — who looked like an Italian — from Brown, Son and MacCullagh's; and after a month's training sent him up there to do the same sort of work as he himself did in Town; while he and Madame went up for the day, on alternate weeks, and saw very special clients at very special prices: by appointment only.

Walter had spent his Whitsuntide holiday in Paris. And twice, later in the year, he had raced over after some new dye or emollient; returning with the air of a delightful, bright-eyed, well-groomed, absolutely conscientiousless dog — bearing some one else's bone between his teeth.

His acquaintance with Miss Hetty d'Esterre of the Adelphi chorus had grown, for she was an independent, outspoken little creature, whose frank vulgarity was like a breath of clear air after the vitiating atmosphere of the Virgo Parlour.

Hetty visited the establishment once, on the plea of having her nails manicured. It was late October by then; and violets and Michaelmas daisies held sway in the grey and purple rooms, while wood fires burnt in the low tiled grates.

But Hetty, no wit impressed, characterised the whole place as "stuffy."

After having her nails attended to she invaded Walter's domain, knocking and opening the door at the same time. Then hesitated on the threshold with the wide stare of a child.

"Oh, I say! I didn't know that any one was here but you, Wally. I hope I don't intrude?"

It was obvious that she did intrude. For Mrs. Smith was there. And Mrs. Smith was crying, sunk low in a deep chair.

But she pulled herself together with a little laugh, for in her own way she had plenty of courage.

"Not at all," she said politely. And got up and powdered her face and arranged her thick veil at the glass over

the mantel-shelf. "I had just finished, please don't go."

"It's shocking to have a cold like that; they seem to be about everywhere," remarked Hetty with great tact, her face buried in a bowl of violets. "Had one myself the other day; eyes an' nose running all the time — Harry Beale — I suppose you know Harry Beale, don't you? — says as how I might have won the Derby with them. But I took quinine. There's nothing like quinine, and a drop of something hot before you go to bed."

She spoke quickly and profusely to give the other woman time to recover herself. And it was evident that Mrs. Smith appreciated the kindness.

"Thank you. I think I will try quinine. I'm sure it is an excellent thing," she said, wished Walter good day and turned to the door; then hesitated, and glanced wistfully at Hetty's bright little face.

"You look very well. Not at all as if you'd ever had ——" she hesitated a moment, then added, "a cold. Do you mind telling me what you do? Are you on the stage?"

"In the chorus at the Adelphi, in the 'Bandbox Girl.' It's a fine thing. Go! — doesn't it just go, Wally? Just like champagne. Have you seen it? for if so you've seen me, second from the end in the front row when they line up. My name's Hetty d'Esterre; at least that's my stage name, the one I'm known by."

"I'm afraid I haven't seen it. I ——"

"Well, you'll have to. It'ud cheer you up. There's nothing for cheering you up like musical comedy. And this is real stuff, no mistake about it. Why, there's some as has been a dozen times an' more — but they're mostly men. Elsie Vardon's the principal, and she always draws them. But it's good apart from her — ain't it, Wally? You must get your hubby to take you, Mrs.——" she hesitated an appreciable moment; but as no information was forthcoming went on — with undiminished friendliness — "the very first evening you can get seats. But you'll have to book days beforehand, I can tell you that."

An odd little smile flickered over Mrs. Smith's face. Before her eyes there flashed a mental picture of the Duke

— permanently middle-aged, engrossed in the business of "The House," committees and fiscal affairs; and she wondered what he would have said could he have heard himself spoken of as a "hubby" by Miss Hetty d'Esterre of the Adelphi chorus. It was not even as if he had ever been really young enough to have had any dealings with such people, as other men of his rank. Once — in her early married days — she, herself, had said that she could almost love Mountjoy if he came home drunk some night, with a woman on either arm. Anything to show that he was human, not merely an admirable machine.

"Yes, I must make a point of seeing it," she said gently. "I'm sure it must be very amusing, and there must be real good in a thing that makes anybody look as happy as you do."

"Oh, I keep my end up!" answered Hetty blithely. And shook hands and wished the other woman good luck, adding the hope that they would meet again.

"Poor old thing. What's wrong with her; looks as if she'd got the pip. Must be pretty hard up for a pal when she brings her troubles to you, Wally. No offence meant, but I'd as soon confide in a tin fender. Refined looking, too."

"By Jove, Hetty, you are the limit! Look here, do you know who she is?" asked Bellamy, standing in front of her with his hands in his pockets, swinging to and fro in joyous anticipation of the bomb he was about to cast. He wore the very best of boots these days, and took unfailing, conscious pleasure in them.

"No;" Hetty, perched on the arm of a chair, stuck out one smartly shod foot and turned it from side to side admiringly. "You didn't introduce us — and she didn't seem keen to let on, though I gave her the lead. I didn't press her. I suppose one does feel a bit of an ass, when one's caught weeping in a good-looking young man's arm ——" she paused, with mischievous deliberation, then added, twinkling —"chair. Seemed a nice sort of person though; quite the lady."

"But you don't know who she is?" persisted Bellamy.

"Haven't I just said so? You'll have to get that brain of yours seen to, Wally. You're going potty with putting

too much polish on your hair, that's what's wrong with you."

By this time Hetty, looking like some vivid tropical bird in her scarlet dress and dark furs, was perched tiptoe upon the rail of the fender, touching up her already brilliant lips before the glass. "After all, who is she? She looks a bit of all right."

"She is——" Walter hesitated a moment, then brought out the words with a roll of triumph; "the Duchess of Mountjoy."

"What?" The girl flung round and stared, still on the fender, her arms stretched out along the mantel-shelf behind her — poised as if for flight.

"The Duchess of Mountjoy," repeated Walter.

"Good Lord! — Then what's her husband?"

"The Duke of Mountjoy, of course, silly child!"

"And I called him her 'hubby,'" Hetty tittered, evidently more amused than awed. Then, descending from her perch, fluttered her plumage for a moment — her every movement bird-like in its quick finish — and returned to her former seat on the arm of the chair. "Not that Dukes count much," she went on. "There's lords and dukes and marquisses, an' all sorts, as come hanging round after our girls. But a Duchess, mind you——" her voice dropped, there was a look of almost reverent wonder upon her impudent little face, with its bright dark eyes: —"a Duchess is in another street altogether. There's girls as have kicked off a Duke's hat; but there's not many as have shook hands with a Duchess. I wonder I don't feel more set up than I do. One 'ud think you'd sort o' feel a thing like that in the air. You're not kidding me, are you?" she added suspiciously.

"No, it's true enough; but mind this, Hetty, it's not got to go any further." Bellamy turned and fixed the little actress with one of his stares, suddenly realising what might be the result of the irresistible pride which had impelled him to flourish his acquisition in her eyes. Supposing Hetty took it into her head to brag too. For Madame's most stringent law was to the effect that nothing should ever go outside the place. "If other people knew as much as we do all our power would be gone," she said.

But he need have had no fear as far as Hetty was concerned. "'Tain't likely I'd give any woman away," she protested indignantly; "let alone any one as nicely spoken as she was. It seems a soppy sort of thing, though, for a Duchess to come and cry in a shop, like that."

"It isn't a shop!" interjected Walter indignantly.

"Well, an establishment, then; or whatever you jolly well like to call it. But if it pleases her it ain't no business of mine. People have to put their time in somehow, I suppose. Well, I must go." The girl rose, pulled her furs up over her shoulders, and thrust her hands deep in her muff. Then looked round with the affectation of a shudder. "Why don't you pull back the curtains a bit and have a few pictures on the wall? It 'ud give me the jim-jams to be shut up in a place like this. I'm glad I put on my red; I always sort of feel like the colour I'm dressed in, and mauve's that melancholy! Madame ought to have a nice warm crimson paper — cheer people up a bit."

"Hetty, you're quite adorable, but anything more awful than that scarlet rig-out in this room! ——".

Hetty laughed. "Well, I'll take it out, and myself with it."

"I'm afraid you must." Walter glanced at his watch — which he now wore on a strap on his wrist. "I've some one just due for a special appointment. But I say, let's have dinner together to-night. A quarter past seven at the 'Troc.' Will that give you time?"

"Time enough if I was coming, which I'm not. I've piles to do at home, an' shall run into Town at the last moment just in time to go on. But we'll have supper together, if you like to come round."

"All right; well, au revoir."

"Good-bye." Hetty — whose hands were so close and deep in her muff that she did not trouble to disturb them — lifted her rosy lips to his.

Walter kissed her. Then gave an excited little laugh; took her by her shoulders and shook her. "By Jove, Hetty, what a lark! What a glorious lark it all is!"

"What?"

"Oh, I don't know. The whole thing — life altogether — you and Duchesses. The topsy-turviness of it all. If

you could see it as I do — if you'd known me; a barefooted little devil running round the town with papers, blue with cold; or padding it thirty miles a day in the twisting shed. And the childhood of these women, little girls with white muslin frocks, bronze shoes, smooth curls as one sees them in the parks; with all their nurses and governesses and teachers. Then to have them coming here, hanging on my every word as though I was a prophet — I sit at the back of myself and laugh and laugh. I can twist them round my little finger! Look here, Hetty, I can twist them round my little finger as easily as I could wind silk on to a bobbin, 'pon my soul I can."

"Well, if you ask me, I think it's a low-down game — but then one must live."

"You're right there, my girl — one must live. And if you don't make a joke of life ——" Walter Bellamy's voice was suddenly bitter —"by God, it makes a joke of you, and a pretty grim joke, too. Particularly up here in London. I remember the first week —— But you must go. And look here, Hetty," he added, as he moved to the door and opened it for her, "go down by the lift; there's a good girl, they'll think you're a falling star if any one meets you on the stairs in that rig-out."

## CHAPTER XL

RIGHT in the middle of the London season, for no apparent reason whatever, Walter Bellamy threw up his post at the Virgo Parlour.

The business was in a flourishing condition: to the branches in Manchester and Paris had been added another in Birmingham; he was making more money than he had ever dreamt of, the commissions alone brought him in over four hundred a year. But neither that nor anything else would hold him, with the grit of dust and ashes between his teeth.

It was true, as Madame pointed out, that the business ran so smoothly now it gave him little trouble. He saw nobody except by special appointment — often made weeks beforehand; he visited the other branches at his own convenience; his time was practically his own to arrange as he wished, while his success was so assured that his commission was certain — or as certain as anything can be in this world — to remain at the same high level which it had already reached.

But clever as she was Madame Vallence could scarcely have put forward a series of more futile pleas, for at that time only a crisis could have held a man of Walter Bellamy's disposition. With ease had come a sense of utter flatness: all the sparkle, all the sense of adventure had gone. He knew the great ladies who interviewed him through and through: was at the end of them. If money ceased to mean more life it was no good to him.

In a state of panic Madame offered to take him into partnership; but it was all no use.

As far as she was concerned his decision was like a bolt from the blue. He seemed to be gone as soon as it was made; for she had omitted to alter the old agreement, allowing for only a week's notice on either side. Indeed it had never entered her head that any man could be mad

enough to give up such a position. She had a long interview with him: put out all her powers of charm, would — quite deliberately — have gone almost any length to hold him. But it was all of no use: her influence had vanished as completely as the last winter's snow.

"What is it you want?" she asked at length in desperation. Women of fashion, were, as she well knew, strangely obstinate. They had set their hearts on Walter, and likely enough would all trail after him, if he chose to start a rival establishment. "What do you want?" she repeated, with no signs of irritation; determined to pay any price that he might demand.

"Oh, I don't know — something different," answered Walter vaguely. And that was all she could get out of him, though she watched him as a cat watches a mouse, her fine eyes narrowed with anxiety; for she more than half suspected the whim of some jealous girl to be at the bottom of so unreasonable a decision.

But it was something far more intangible than this which fretted Walter Bellamy. A sort of conspiracy, indeed, between his mother's drab discontent, and the restless spirit which had driven James Bellamy's forefathers to leave their silk weaving, to mix themselves up in wars, and get carried prisoners to England: till — planted there, on the wind-swept midland heights — necessity forced them back to their old trade. All this and the wanton lure of spring, which — regardless of smuts — was once again rioting recklessly through the London parks.

The first week, after leaving Madame Vallence — parting from her on perfectly friendly terms, for that had become a fixed part of his policy — Bellamy spent in London; realising it, its beauties and fascinations as he had never done before.

Women in the park bowed to him, wondering where they had met the good-looking young fellow. Then remembered and crimsoned. But usually bowed again next time: particularly if they were with other women. For he was a man no one need feel ashamed of recognising.

Besides, he had plenty of tact. He raised his hat beautifully, just enough, but never attempted to stop and talk.

Only Mrs. Seaton insisted. Taking a few running, laugh-

ing steps after him; catching him by his arm and asking him to come to tea with her in Curzon Street.

Walter refused. He explained that he was working very hard. Yes, he had left Madame Vallence — it did not allow him sufficient scope — and was engaged in research work and a propaganda of a more serious nature than had before been possible. He knew that, having refused one invitation, she would ask him again.

As a matter of fact he was doing nothing, with conscious deliberation and joy. He had saved a little money. He had a scheme for the future, and meanwhile he went about and saw life: culling the affections, the thoughts, the interests, of one devotee after another — just as the bees cull the honey from every flower.

To two people only, was he constant. To Gale — for whom he really felt some sort of affection, though they seldom met now — and to little Hetty d'Esterre.

Curiously enough both these were people who, as he realised, saw through him as plainly as Jane Irwin. But, in truth, he felt it a relief to be in the company of some one with whom there was no need to pretend to be anything but what he was — a clever actor of original parts — who were discriminating enough to admire his histrionic powers more than his beautiful soul, with whom he could stand back and laugh at his own achievements.

But still his desires varied. Sometimes he wanted to be thought of as very great and good, sometimes as very clever, sometimes merely, as "a card."

Even with Hetty he could not be quite genuine; for having temporarily discarded his aristocratic origin, he painted the privations of his boyhood as far greater than, in reality, they ever had been, merely to give point to his rise in life.

About this time, after an exhilarating fortnight in Paris, Bellamy moved into charming and expensive rooms — such as he had long dreamed of — in the "Adelphi," spending a good deal of his leisure and money in fitting them up.

He could always make more when he wanted it. The fact of having once touched bottom had given him an unswerving belief in his own powers to climb, for there are few things which make men so reckless as knowing just how bad the worst can be.

Shortly after his return from Paris he went to see Gale on some special business, being doubtful if a letter would reach him. For Gale was always on the drift; and this time Bellamy interviewed three landladies — sulky or aggressive — before he ran him to ground.

He was used to overcrowding and squalor, but the staircase of the last building to which he had been directed, and which was let out indiscriminately in single rooms, sickened him.

It was a high narrow place off Rochester Row, with windows which looked out either into a well, or onto the blank wall of the adjoining houses.

Gale's room was at the top, opening into the well. But he was better off than most, for it was possible for him to catch a glimpse of blue sky between the chimney-pots, if he could only manage to keep his eyes upraised above the intervening horrors which were plainly visible within the other rooms; for immediately opposite, not ten feet from his own window, he could look down into one home packed above the other, a teeming hive of misery and filth.

He was dressing when Walter arrived — though it was five o'clock in the afternoon — haggard and more emaciated than ever. Curiously enough, however — except for a slight puffiness and sagging of the skin — his vice seemed to have refined rather than coarsened him; so that one wondered through what stirrings of the spirit it had eaten its way.

The attic was empty save for a miserable bed and a table filled with a miscellaneous assortment of books and papers, crockery, and cooking utensils, while a tiny fire smouldered in the grate, a flat iron was propped against the bars, and a large tin bubbled upon it: throwing off an odour which, for some reason or other, flashed a vivid picture of the twisting sheds through Walter's mind.

"Well?" said Gale, not too graciously, hitching his braces which were much mended with string, over the shoulder of his ragged shirt: —"what do you want now?"

"The pleasure of your company," answered Bellamy airily.

"Oh!" Gale moved across to the fire, lifted the lid from the saucepan, and carried it steaming to the table: spread a

fragment of newspaper with one hand — for the coarse wood was scrubbed white — stood it down, and began fishing certain limp fragments out of it with the help of a fork.

"I say, what's that? Tripe?"

"Tripe! No," answered Gale shortly, with a hard stare which denied any acquaintance with, even knowledge of, such a delicacy. Then dropping the rags — which proved to be collars — in a basin, poured some water over them and rinsed them; emptied it and blued them in fresh water; wrung them and rolled them tightly up in a towel.

Bellamy had moved to the window and stood leaning against the lintel staring out, down into those unspeakable rooms, which, in their blindless condition, showed that the inhabitants had lost their last remnant of self-respect.

For men or women of the working-class must have sunk very low before parting with some shade between themselves and the outer world.

But Walter Bellamy saw nothing. He knew now what had taken his mind back to Edge, and his running days: it was the smell of soapy water.

Strange how that week of suffering had bitten into him. Jimmy Clarke, grinning and cursing at his wheel, seemed far nearer and more real than the man who was here in the same room with him; while his fury of anger and disappointment regarding the improved spooler was a mere shadow.

He felt wrung and tired with the memory as he turned again towards the room, and saw Gale trying the heat of the iron against his cheek.

"Don't you have to starch them or something?" he asked listlessly.

"No — anyhow they're soft collars and if I iron them wet they get a certain stiffness," replied Gale. Then added bitterly:

"It must be very interesting to you, Belle-amie, to see how the poor live. Couldn't you tempt one of the sweet creatures you meet at that mummery shop of yours to try the simple life with me?" He smoothed out a collar as he spoke and ironed it deftly, first on one side, then on the other; though Walter noticed that little beads of sweat

started out upon his forehead at even that small exertion.

"I've left Madame Vallence."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. I wanted something different. It took too much of my time — of myself," answered Bellamy grandiloquently. "It is impossible to keep an open mind when one is working for other people like that."

"An open mind's often as not an empty mind," snapped Gale bitterly; hung one collar over the back of a chair and started on another.

Bellamy stared round him. He had never been in Francis Gale's room before. Several times he had got as far as the door, but his friend had always come out to speak to him; closing it carefully after him. He knew that Gale was what he termed "somebody" he was more convinced of this than ever since he had got to know people who really were "somebodies" at the Virgo Parlour — the half of them had no backbone — just like Gale. Besides he had not forgotten the incident outside the Tate Gallery. He half hoped to see some photographs or drawings. But he was disappointed; and moving to the table he began to turn over the books. Opened one at random and found a book-plate: — silver a engrailed between three falcons' heads razed sable. Above this was engraved a helmet and crossed swords with florid foliage; and beneath a motto and the legend: —"Ex libris Francis James Gale," while below, on the page of the book itself, were written the words "Balliol College, Oxford," and the date of ten years earlier.

Bellamy was amazed. He had always thought of the derelict as being quite an old man, and this made him — at any rate — under thirty-five. He raised his eyes to the other's face — regarding him afresh from a new point of view — to find that Gale was staring at him angrily; a crimson patch on either cheek.

"Well?" he enquired. The four or five frayed collars were finished and hung on the back of a chair; while he sat leaning forward against the table, trembling from sheer weakness and fatigue.

"Well?" he asked again. Then added, with a plain ef-

fort to speak lightly:—"Once more may I ask what you want. I can't imagine that this honour is thrust upon me, merely by a desire for my company."

"Well, if that's the case, it doesn't look as though I'm likely to get much material benefit, at least — from this place," laughed Walter, with perfect good temper. "Or, to put it quite candidly, from you, my dear Gale," he added insolently. "Generally speaking, I think that it's been the other way. You've touched me for a pretty penny, one way and another, since we first met."

"Don't make any mistake about that, my young friend. You've got a very great deal more from me than it will ever be in your power to give. And now out with it. What do you want?"

"You've got no more manners than a louse!" retorted Bellamy, at last somewhat nettled.

"It's odd, but that's an expression — that, and 'the likes of that,'" mocked Gale, "which would never occur to any gentleman, even in his most lax moods. There are two things that you must never allow yourself, Belle-amie; either to lose your temper, or to get drunk. They both of them want generations of breeding behind them, if they're not to give a man away."

He moved to the fire as he spoke, and seating himself on an upturned box, bent over it; the room was overpoweringly stuffy, but it seemed as if he was always cold.

"Oh, well, if you can afford to be so high and mighty." Bellamy gave a shrug, the very touch of his fine clean linen against his skin pleased him by its contrast to the place. "I came with the offer of a job which I thought might be a help to you. But ——" again he shrugged his shoulders; took out his cigarette case — a gold one that some silly woman at Madame Vallence's had given him, with the words "from Soul to Soul," engraved within it — and lighted a cigarette.

"You mean you came because you thought I'd do something you want doing cheaper than any one else. And since reading that bookplate you feel that I might do it better." Gale's voice was flat with weariness: he had tasted no brandy for a couple of days, and life seemed to be gnawing its way out of him.

Walter Bellamy had seen him like this before. He was right in saying that it took a gentleman to be decently drunk; he himself was a living example of it — indeed was never quite so much the fine gentleman as when he was drunk. Sober he was too wearied and bitter for any show of genial courtesy.

Bellamy had come prepared with a certain offer; but he mentally halved it when he realised the straits in which he found the other man; even turned as if to go. "Oh, well, I'll leave you to it. So long."

But Gale did not even turn — for his pride was still greater than his greed. He would not grovel, abase himself, to this counter jumper.

With his hand on the door Bellamy paused.

It was Gale's handwriting that he wanted, the fine scholarly scrawl which seemed so natural that one could not imagine him as ever having laboured at pot-hooks and hangers — this and his way of expressing a letter; he would never get anything like it for the same price elsewhere.

"It's secretarial work. I'm going to start a small business from my own rooms — I've left the Burstons, turned into the 'Adelphi.'"

"I know."

"How?" questioned Walter in some surprise, with a sudden panic as to who, among all his acquaintances, had lighted on Gale.

"That girl Ada came round, hunted me out to tell me. Declared you'd forsaken her."

"Forsaken her? I like that! That common little slut. That's what comes of trying to be kind to people. Well now, what is it to be?"

Gale had bent lower over the fire, and was stirring the embers anxiously with a fragment of stick, as though hoping for a blaze. For a moment or so Bellamy watched him, smoothing the nap of his hat with his silk handkerchief. Then remarked impatiently: —"Well, I'm off: if you don't care to take it, leave it. Oi'm not goin' ter maether myself about yer," he added, swayed by a whim, dropping suddenly into dialect.

"I didn't say I wouldn't. How much?"

"Half a crown a day."

"I'll come for five shillings."

"Say three and six."

Gale broke into a sharp laugh. "I knew you'd say that! But you're progressing, my sweet friend. Six months ago you would have suggested ninepence, or one and three; perhaps risen to one and nine. But you'd never have ventured on as much as two shillings."

"Well, are you coming?"

"Perhaps, if I feel inclined — what day?"

"Let me see; it's Friday, isn't it. Suppose we say Monday at nine o'clock."

"Oh, I don't know. Monday's a long way off. I can make no promises." The words dropped from Gale slowly with the utmost indifference, as if he did not care in the least what had become of him by next week. And leaning forward he began to blow gently at the fire: scattering a cloud of fine ash.

"Look here, I'll pay you for the first day now." Walter Bellamy took out half a crown and a shilling and laid them on the table. Once Gale took the money he knew he was sure of him. "Here you are: and remember Monday, nine sharp. Au revoir."

At the sound of the money being dropped upon the table Bellamy saw a red flush creep up the back of the other man's neck; and before he reached the top of the stairs he heard him moving about in the room which he had just left.

Then, at the first landing, came the sound of the door being gently opened: but no footstep followed. Gale was waiting — till his visitor had departed — to go out and buy the comfort for which his soul craved.

With malicious amusement Bellamy lingered, knowing that he would not pass him. But the stench of the crowded place — lying like a thick blanket on either landing — was too much for him, and after a moment or so he moved on. Hesitated a few yards from the door; then turned to see Gale slip close round the lintel, and off down the street in the opposite direction.

## CHAPTER XLI

BELLAMY'S scheme was well thought out. He was going to start — in his own spacious rooms in the "Adelphi" — a school of mental Science, Psychology and Ideality.

He had made a fine art of deception. He knew just what people wanted to believe: stimulating them by a brusqueness which was, at times, almost brutal. At the same time he realised to its full the modern idolatry of all that was novel; and that insane curiosity regarding the future, which leads a factory girl to divination from the tea-leaves at the bottom of her cup, and a fine lady to crystal-gazing: was perfectly aware that there is a type of women whom you may frighten, horrify as you will, so long as you thrill them with something unexpected and morbid; and it was on women like this that he went to work.

He was quite certain of his success. No spider ever wove his web with greater foresight than Walter Bellamy showed in the curious blue and black arrangement of his rooms, with their tall narrow windows opening over the gardens to the river.

There was very little in them, but somehow they were mysterious. He felt it himself. The black carpets seemed to leave one treading in space; the straight heavy blue curtains might have shrouded infinite mysteries among their folds. Nothing was normal. He had no flowers, only distorted dwarf trees in black glazed jars; no fire, only a brazier like a watchful eye in each room. Fires crackled and chattered: fires were sociable, belonged to real life and he would have none of them.

But in his own room was white enamel and a flowered paper and gay pink curtains; and after a while he had a chintz-covered arm-chair and writing-table moved in there. He had meant to use his professional rooms after business hours. But he could not stand them. They kept him

screwed up to the mystical — for he was so instinctively an actor that he could not help but fit his mood, his movements, the very intonation of his voice, to his surroundings. This despite the fact that, from the very depth of his soul, he loathed and scorned mysticism, while his happiest moments were when he was swinging clubs, in a white gauze vest and shorts at the Polytechnic, along with other ruddy, healthy, Philistine young men; punting on the river with jolly, soulless girls; or supping — gaily and greedily — with Hetty, who loved all the good things of life.

Soon he was succeeding beyond his wildest expectations: money poured in, while his American clientele alone proved a large source of income.

Every client he had ever interviewed at the Virgo came to him. He left Madame their hair, their complexions and their finger nails; and was quite satisfied with himself. After all one could not expect his conscience to reproach him, for he had none; while they were both far too astute to quarrel.

Gale, decently fitted out, was installed as permanent secretary, with a dark-eyed girl who wrote a beautiful hand — for Bellamy would not tolerate typing — as underling; while a sedate man-servant — who might have been an archdeacon — was engaged to answer the door, and look after his own special needs, which were manifold.

The only thing, at this time, which saved Bellamy from complete charlatanism, was that little sub-devil of his. The very same that had sat at the back of his mind in the Primitive Methodist chapel; doubling itself up with unholy glee.

When he was actually interviewing his clients he had no sense of effort, or invention. To the greater part of him the thing seemed almost tragically real, his eyes dilated, his face grew pale; at the end of a long day he felt utterly wrung out. But still, somewhere at the back of his mind, was the sense of it all being a tremendous lark, an iniquitous, but wholly delightful "take in."

Now Gale liked the blue and black rooms. They suited him and he suited them. His air of ascetic refinement was a distinct addition to the place, besides he stimulated curiosity.

But the rooms, and the view of the river, were the only

things that he did like about the job. He was trying, desperately enough, to pull himself together; and now — by some irony of fate — it seemed that the only way in which he could achieve to a decent life, was by doing that which he despised himself for doing.

Usually he worked in a little ante-room, quite alone. But sometimes Bellamy was out, and he was obliged to interview people; or — if Bellamy refused them — they would find their way to Gale's sanctum and pester him with questions.

It would not have done for him to lock his door; and thus every day became an agony for the fear he felt of seeing some one he had known in his old life. Not *any one,* for he was profoundly indifferent to the world in general, but just that *some one* who really counted.

Years ago, when he was still at Oxford, they had talked psychology together. She had the large brown eyes of a born mystic. That one glimpse of her outside the Tate Gallery had shown him that she was not happy — he knew she was not happy, felt almost triumphantly sure — and suppose she were driven to some such pinch-beck consolation as the women who came to Walter for advice.

The thought got upon his nerves, so that he sickened at every step he heard upon the stairs. It was not so much that he minded her seeing him there, as the possibility of her being there at all.

Usually he worked steadily enough. But he got odd, awkward fits; mostly when he was trying his hardest to keep away from temptation.

One day the girl secretary brought a batch of circulars to Bellamy.

"I had to come to you. What could I do?" she protested helplessly: conscience-stricken at the thought of having to give Gale away. "Look here; I could not send them out, could I?"

They were all different — as Bellamy insisted that they should be — beautifully written on single sheets of rough-edged paper, stamped with the address — and for the most part directed to very great ladies: intimating — or intended to intimate — that now Christmas was over Mr. Bellamy was embarking on a new session; while other items, attrac-

tive to special clients, were to have been added, so that each might carry a personal appeal.

At first glance they were perfectly correct, and Miss Shaw might have put them straight into their envelopes; addressed them and sent them off, as it was her duty to do, had she not happened to read through one in which:— "Belle-amie, Charlatan," invited Lady So-and-So, to partake of a banquet of "Mumbo-jumbo and hocus-pocus pie in the Western Shades of Avernus."

There were not two alike. The words he had got hold of were a marvel. Fetichism, vampirism, demonology: ghoul and dwerger: bogle and dis. Walter's select clients were invited to Humbug Hall, or Abaddon: urged to discover the precise nature of the cream cheese which constitutes the moon; to study the sciences of Diddling, Nabbing, Cozenage, Jockey-ship and Flim-flam, "à la Tartuffe"; or to take their degrees in Aleuromancy, Theomancy, Psychomancy, Myomancy, Geloscopy and Gyromancy, under the directorship of Professor Ben Trovato.

"You must destroy them and go on with something else for to-day. It's nearly four o'clock now," remarked Bellamy coldly; though his cheek flushed.

"You won't — I hope — Mr. Gale doesn't seem quite himself. I've never ——" stammered the girl miserably. For where Bellamy treated her like a chattel Gale was unfailingly courteous.

"Leave Mr. Gale to me, please," answered her employer shortly; so shortly that she did not dare to say another word.

Bellamy was furious. A thing like that might have ruined his entire business. He could not see Gale at the moment, for his whole time until six o'clock was filled up; but his resentment only quickened with the passage of time.

As they were shutting up, and Gale was slipping into his street clothes — Bellamy insisted that those which he himself had given him, and which he wore at business, should be kept on the premises — he told him to wait as he wished to speak to him.

Gale obeyed; he had the air of a whipped cur, which only wants for an opportunity to snap. Bellamy was fin-

ishing some letters in the waiting-room, and he sat down by the door; a forlorn enough figure.

He had put on his wretched clothes; anyhow, all in a hurry. His frayed collar was crumpled; his tie on one side, his boots laced only at intervals; all this in curious contrast to his smoothly shaven face and well-groomed head.

He did not regret what he had done, did not care a damn what happened. If he lost this billet — which made him look and feel like a cur — he would no longer be impelled to pull himself together. He could drink brandy and feel like a god. Then die: anyhow — anywhere. It would all be over the sooner. He had been so much better fed lately, felt so much better. But this — allied to the fact that he was obliged to rise betimes in the morning, keep himself decently, spend his day in respectable clothes — only made him more alive to his condition, more agonisingly sensitive. He had been so detached — apart; now he realised himself, looked upon himself with horror: was suffering much as a man suffers when he comes back to life again after being three-quarters drowned.

Bellamy, seated at his writing-table, began to scribble meaningless nothings on the blotting-paper, marking time. Suddenly his anger was gone.

He could have shouted with laughter as he remembered the ingenious phrasing of those letters. Each word, apparelled like a Harlaquin, tumbled, minced, or ambled through his brain. He felt he would have given worlds to have done it — Gnome, Dis, Dwerger! Where had Gale got them from? They were like the weird haunters of the Staffordshire moors.

What a lark! Supposing the letters had been sent. Imagine the fine ladies, lying in bed, all befrilled and beribboned like toilet pin-cushions — as he had seen them himself, having been sent for on more than one occasion when some fair creature had imagined herself at the point of death — sipping their tea from egg-shell cups, while they opened such epistles. There could be no doubt where they came from; the stamped address was unmistakable.

He half wished they had gone. Probably the silly crea-

tures would be undeterred: come bleating round him just the same. There was no knowing what they would not swallow. Only a few seasons ago they had gone mad over a so-called exponent of the Black Arts.

But there was Gale to be thought of, to be dealt with.

After all, he could not allow such tricks.

But where would he be able to find another secretary who wrote such a beautiful hand; who looked so like a rather cynical saint. One woman had said he resembled Voltaire, another that he was the image of St. Francis of Assisi.

Besides, it was not the sort of business one wanted too many people in. A man of education who was "all right" — as he phrased it — might be stupidly punctilious; cause trouble. There were the police to consider.

No — Gale must be kept at any cost. But he must not be allowed to reform too completely.

He did bitter things when he had been too long sober; his manners, too, became jerky and ugly. Bellamy turned round and stared curiously at the scarecrow of a man; meditating over what was to be done.

Gale swung to his feet, and thrust his hands in his pockets.

"Damn you!" he said. "And once again damn you."

Bellamy's look of surprise was admirable, for suddenly his decision was taken. "Why, what have I done? Kept you waiting? I'm frightfully sorry, Gale, but I had these letters to finish; and I thought as we were going to dine together ——"

"Who said we were going to dine together?"

"Why, didn't they give you my message? There are some odds and ends I want to go through with you. And I thought if you'd have a bit of dinner with me first, you wouldn't mind coming back for half an hour later on."

Gale lounged to the window with his hands in his pockets; pulled back one of the heavy curtains, and stared across the top of the dark trees at the river; at the indigo sky pierced with stars, the brilliantly lighted trams, the flashing advertisements at the further side; the occasional dark hulk of a barge, which moved slowly through the water with an air of mysterious aloofness.

He was trying to remember what was in those letters. He had written them in a fit of vindictive revolt; but he could not remember a single word. He was expecting a scene with Bellamy, and here was an invitation to dinner.

True it was accompanied by a request to come back and work later in the evening. But then one never expected Walter Bellamy to do anything for nothing.

Perhaps after all Miss Shaw had not told him. Perhaps the letters had gone.

He pretended that he did not care. But for all that his relief at the reprieve was so great that he accepted the invitation, almost with gratitude. Though, as it happened, he did not return to work afterwards; nor did he have any very clear memory as to how he got home to the more decent lodgings where he had lately established himself.

After all the invitations could not have gone; for he wrote them afresh, with solemn propriety, next day. Wondering a little; but never for a moment — though he was unusually genial and friendly — thinking of questioning Miss Shaw as to the rights of the case.

## CHAPTER XLII

SPRING — the fourth which Walter Bellamy had passed in London — ran its gay and varied course; followed by a hot and steamy summer.

During all this time, with the inevitable reaction of his nature, Bellamy sickened of the black and blue rooms; sickened of his work; and above all of the unending correspondence which came with the out of Town season, when nearly all his business was conducted by post.

Things were beginning to run too smoothly; success was too sure, and the taste of dust and ashes filled his mouth once more.

Each member of the staff, which had been augmented by another assistant-secretary, took a holiday in turn; even Gale vanished for a couple of weeks to some remote Cornish village, returning browner, healthier, and altogether more difficult to manage.

But Walter did not leave London, even for a night; though there was little to keep him, beyond the dictating of the more important letters, and Gale could have managed these perfectly with his two assistants to keep him in the straight path, while, even if the letters remained unanswered, if he — Bellamy — totally disappeared for a while it would only, as he well knew, enhance his importance.

But where to go and what to do, that was the question. He was overpowered with an immense disgust and weariness, both physical and mental. Life was no longer "a lark" — had become that dullest of all dull things, a stupid farce. He had no wish to travel; except for some special reason with some definite end — so deeply had his business training bitten into him — while though he had a great deal more money than many of the young gentlemen who had gone off grouse shooting, fishing, or otherwise amusing themselves, he could neither fish nor shoot; and had never learnt to play: excepting — as at those tennis parties in the

old days, when he had been considering Rose Higgins — for some end, or else for the sake of exercise.

Once more his world had crumbled to pieces. He did not know what he wanted to do. But it was "to do" something — what scarcely mattered — with his whole heart and soul which he needed, above all else.

His business was a large one. But the inevitable secrecy of it prevented anything like universal popularity. Sometimes he remembered the old days of the strike in Edge, and felt that he would like nothing better than to be the Labour leader, swaying the dense masses — which he sometimes saw blackening Trafalgar Square — from the plinth of Nelson Column. At other times he longed for solitude, for wide open spaces; and dreamt of a pioneer's life, breaking up the virgin soil, or cattle-driving on a wild, long-tailed, long-maned broncho, with a squaw woman for his wife.

Then he started to write a novel; but sickened at the thought of how many people were doing the same thing. Dreamt of the stage, and actually went so far as to get an introduction to an actor-manager, a friend of Hetty d'Esterre's. But the thought of two pounds a week, for speaking the words that some one else put into his mouth, was more than he could stomach. One must either enjoy doing a thing very much — be having a real fling over it — or else be making money. One or the other; and the stage promised neither.

People began to come back to Town, and once more his rooms were besieged, his time booked up for days ahead. But he no longer had the faintest feeling for what he did: secretly mocked both himself and his clients; was only deterred by his sense of the money involved from being openly rude, though the new sting in his teaching rendered him all the more popular.

From the time he left the Virgo Parlour he had received innumerable invitations to "At Homes" and tea-parties; which he persistently declined. There was no compliment, no acknowledgment in things of that sort. If these people wanted him at all they must ask him to dinner; acknowledge him as one of themselves.

Now, early in the autumn season, came the invitation he

had so long coveted; a personal note — not a card — from the Honourable Mrs. Seaton asking him to dine, the preliminary to a small musical At Home, which — as he shrewdly conjectured — was arranged to do away with those long, difficult after-dinner hours.

Still it would have sufficed, had he been in the state of mind to feel pleasure, or even pride, in any achievement. But almost for the first time in his life — he was physically and mentally ill. The last few days had dragged horribly; he ached in every limb, was hot one moment and cold next; while he felt that he would give the whole world if his brain would stop working, only for an hour. For his sleep was more than half waking, shot through with toppling plans, impossible dilemmas; while — that very evening — his dressing was interrupted by a wave of giddiness which threw him trembling into an immense black space, where the atmosphere was thick as a blanket, pressing against his face.

But for all this he was incapable of approaching anything in a slack spirit, and had hunted up Mrs. Seaton's name in the Peerage, and made Gale — who had settled down, once more, into a state of cynical compliance — supply him with further details as to her place in society: what would be expected of him, and the set she habitually gathered round her.

In truth the invitation itself had been the result of a bet. Mrs. Seaton had declared to her greatest friend, Lady Curst, that she would have the handsomest man in London at her concert; and then — having laid five pounds upon it, and experienced, before this, the impossibility of getting Walter Bellamy to come to any such entertainment — had thrown in the dinner as a bait.

It was not a very imposing affair; through it all Walter felt convinced that he could have got far more for the money which had so evidently been expended, while the people were uninteresting from the mere fact that they themselves were not particularly interested in anything, though the girl whom he had taken in to dinner — a pretty, credulous creature in her first season — seemed willing enough to be entertained by her good-looking neighbour.

Lady Curst had gasped when he was announced, and

caught at her friend's arm. "My dear, you've won! I acknowledge it — but it might as well have been me," she exclaimed; and, advancing, shook hands with Bellamy, directly he had exchanged greetings with his hostess.

"You don't remember me, Mr. Bellamy, do you?" she enquired archly.

"I'm afraid not," answered the young man, with that grave steady-eyed frankness which he found so telling.

Lady Curst threw out her white beringed hands with a gesture of mock despair. "There," she cried. "Oh, you men! And I've actually lost five pounds over you. But at least you can, you shall, pity me."

Then, with the unreserve of her kind it all came out. She had thought of Bellamy when she took the bet; had hoped to produce him later, for the sake of refuting Mrs. Seaton's proud boast. And now, as it happened, they had both thought of the same man. "After all, I don't know who's won!" she cried. "It seems to me that we ought to go halves; what do you say, Mr. Bellamy?"

"Oh, I've won," declared Mrs. Seaton. "It was I who bagged him — I only wish I'd made it a pony instead of a fiver, Leila. But where in the world did you two meet?"

"In Manchester, of all places. It's no good you protesting that you remember me, Mr. Bellamy, because I know you don't. I heard that Madame Vallence had started a branch there, last year, you know, Sara," she went on, turning to her hostess, "or was it the year before? —anyhow ages ago — and went up to have a vein on my cheek seen to. Then Mr. Bellamy set me on to telepathy. Such a lark! You think of something, then you will somebody else to think of it too — or they will you, which is it? That must have been how we both came to bet about the same man! There's a proof for you, Mr. Bellamy. Isn't it wonderful — isn't it extraordinary?" Lady Curst went on, as Mrs. Seaton moved away to attend to her other guests.

"I don't know," answered Walter quietly; "it seems to me, don't you know, absolutely natural; an integral part of our everyday life, only people won't realise it. But you don't live in Manchester, do you?" he added, glancing with some curiosity at the slim, drooping creature before him; decorated with — one could scarcely say clothed in — a

minimum of faintly tinted pink *crêpe,* and a maximum of diamonds, which flashed from the waves of her elaborately waved hair to the crossed sandals of her pink satin slippers.

"Oh, no! I live in an unutterable place called Wantage. Or rather I live *by* it, for though I'm very seldom in the place all our money comes from there——" Lady Curst laughed, to give point to the borrowed joke, for she was considered a wit. "I wonder if you know anything of that part of the world?"

"I think — I believe I do," answered Walter.

"Well, my husband has large interests — mills of sorts — there. Something to do with silk, I believe. But really I scarcely know; for though we've been married five years, I've hardly been there at all — I was seedy that summer I met you and couldn't go about much, so stayed there some time doctoring up my complexion, and keeping my hair loose. Of course it's awfully dull; there are none of my own sort anywhere near — you know all my people thought I was doing a frightfully daring thing in marrying a man in trade; but we get on perfectly splendidly. I think the secret of a happy married life really lies in not seeing too much of each other, don't you? We've got a very jolly little house up here in Town — you must come to tea some day; I adore — simply adore London! — next best to Paris."

"Is your husband here to-night?"

"Yes, he's over there — with the grey moustache;" Lady Curst gave a little gesture indicating a tall, rather heavily built man of middle age: —"It's the merest chance, for he hates London almost as much as I love it: is perfectly immersed in his horrid old mills. But where do you live — and what do you do now? Are you still in partnership with Madame Vallence?"

"No, I've a flat in the 'Adelphi,'" answered Bellamy, and was wondering whether to divulge the nature of his present occupation, and obtain Lady Curst as a client, or to pass as a leisured fine gentleman, when the last guest arrived and he was paired off with his own legitimate partner.

Through the greater part of the dinner, however, his attention was more or less occupied with Sir George Curst,

who, in his turn, devoted himself stolidly and almost in silence to the serious business of eating; while it was not till the subject of dress was started, and some one remarked on the prevailing craze of wearing silk on every occasion, that he gave vent to any comment sufficiently audible to reach the rest of the table.

"There's not half of it that any silk worm ever saw," he said; "artificial stuff for the most part."

"Oh, spun silk, you mean?" suggested one lady.

"Or mercerised?" put in another.

"No, not really silk at all, but stuff made from wood pulp," answered Sir George: and began to hold forth on the subject of his business; totally regardless of his wife, who frowned and shook her head, then shrugged her shoulders as if in despair.

"He's quite hopeless when he starts talking shop," she remarked audibly, but not ill-naturedly, "and I'm too far away to kick him under the table. Poor Mrs. Black, how bored she will be! I suppose it's no good asking her to kick him for me."

But to Walter this unexpected talk of "shop" was the one interesting item of the whole affair. For it seemed like a breath of new life, after the inanities in which he had, of late, been steeped. And directly the ladies had left the room he moved round the table, and seated himself by the side of the manufacturer, who was now engrossed with his walnuts and port wine.

"Forgive me — I hope you'll not think that I'm taking a liberty," he began, "but I couldn't help hearing what you said about artificial silk."

"I suppose everybody heard," answered Sir George, without lifting his head; raising a pair of exceedingly shrewd blue eyes for a moment to Walter's face, then dropping them again to the walnut which he was engaged in peeling. A typical manufacturing man: an influential man in his own world, as one could see at a glance; iron grey where he was not bald, with a heavy, smooth-shaven jowl and chin, and small closely cut grey moustache.

"I don't know why I started the subject, though," he went on; "I don't suppose it's likely to interest any one here."

"It interests me immensely," answered Walter. "I lived with silk, in it and by it for years."

"Where — not in our part of the world? You're not English, are you?"

"Half French and half English," answered the young man, and thrilled with pride at the recognition of his foreign manner. Then hesitated, wondering how much of himself it would be wise to tell. After all, if Sir George Curst spoke of him at Edge he would be reported as in good company! They might realise something of what they had missed. The words "the stone which the builders rejected" — repeated in the elder's oily voice — flashed through his mind. After all he could make no move without committing himself, taking more or less of a risk.

"But really I know your part of the world quite well," he went on, in his quiet matter-of-fact business voice — for by now he chose his intonation and manners as he chose his clothes, to suit the occasion: —"though I've lived, and done much of my work, in my fatherland, I've spent a great deal of time at Wantage and Dutton — curious and interesting that fustian cutting is, isn't it — and above all Edge. As a matter of fact I was connected with one of the largest firms there for a great many years — 'Morrison's.'" Walter Bellamy threw out the name with a tentative air.

"Oh!" The manufacturer gave him a quick, apprising glance from under his heavy lids. "Your name doesn't happen to be Joyce, does it?"

"No, sir; Bellamy's my name."

"Oh, well, I'm glad of that — I've heard a good deal of that fellow Joyce, and from all I've heard I have reason to believe that he's an ass — but I thought I'd better be sure before I said anything. Firm's going downhill, I believe, ever since Morrison himself died. Fine old fellow, Morrison: a bit of a bully, too highhanded for these days — quite incapable of moving with the times — but a fine fellow for all that."

"Yes," Walter flicked an ash from his cigarette into the finger-bowl which stood beside him. There were five other men present, apart from himself and Sir George; and though his whole attention seemed to be bent on his com-

panion, he was taking in — almost through every pore — the movements, words and gestures of all five.

"I was very fond of old Mr. Morrison, he was almost like a father to me after I lost my own. They were great cronies: nothing they both loved like a yarn together ——"

Walter realised that this embroidery might be dangerous — remembering the only words which the great mill-owner had ever been known to address to his sire —"You're a damned fool, Bellamy. An' if you ever dare to turn up in my mill again the worse for drink you'll get your money and go — don't say I've not warned you ——" still he could not resist it.

"Really," he added with a burst of frankness, "it was Mr. Morrison's death which ultimately caused me to sever my connection with the firm — the place didn't seem the same without him. Then the air never suited me."

"And what are you doing now, may I ask?"

"Well, just at present I'm engaged in research work ——" for a moment Bellamy hesitated, with the effect of a fine shame at the thought of monopolising the conversation with his own affairs, though really with a convulsion of inward mirth —"conducting a series of little inventions in fact."

"To do with silk?"

"Oh, yes, in some measure," he answered airily; "silk of a sort."

"Hum! so many people think they've got hold of some new idea, nowadays," remarked the manufacturer doubtfully.

"That's just my experience, Sir George, and I was afraid that's how you'd feel about it."

"But still I'd like to hear some more of these ideas of yours. Suppose you come and lunch with me at my Club. The Constitutional — to-morrow, one-thirty; sorry I can't give you longer notice, but I'm only up for a few days. By the by, I suppose you know there was a strike up in Edge — involving us all — about two years ago. That fellow Burton at the bottom of it of course, a regular firebrand! But that must have been after you left. I remember ——"

Once more the mill owner had embarked on the subject

so near to his heart. And, even after they had joined the ladies, their discussion was continued in one corner of the drawing-room — while the concert progressed at the other end. The two men presented a curious contrast, as they stood talking engrossingly together: Bellamy, so tall, exquisitely groomed and tailored — with his oddly held head, his mobile face and brilliant eyes — and the slow, heavily built, yet somehow imposing commercial man.

Yet for all his stolid demeanour, how keen, how far-seeing he was, how completely up to date! His orderly enthusiasm infected Bellamy. Gradually it came back, all the ins and outs of the half-forgotten trade. He felt as though his mind — strangely fevered and alert — were a thoroughbred, curvetting, full blooded, with the very joy of life; while he lashed and spurred it to every leap, with high triumph when each fresh difficulty was surmounted. All the languor and depression of the last few weeks lost in a sense of immense exhilaration.

He had almost forgotten how much he knew; really knew, for Sir George would not have been an easy person to fool with superficialities. Of course he was a little behindhand: had lost count of the latter day markets. But then, as he said, his inventions — one in particular — had absorbed him.

"Inventions!" How full his life had been of them. He used the word with subtle delight, thinking of the marvellous breed — whimsical enough when you came to think of them — which had been hatched in the quiet secrecy of those black and blue rooms alone.

But, as he talked, the feeling grew upon him that there really was, at least, one tangible invention — as in the case of the Improved Spooler — which had nothing at all to do with the artful lying of the last few years. And not only did he convince the great mill-owner of this fact, but he convinced himself also: refusing, so persistently, to divulge his secret — a real material secret — worth divulging, for a consideration — that the other man's interest was thoroughly aroused.

Bellamy was pressing his horse very hard now: certain that no fence was too high — that it was, indeed, winged, strongly as Pegasus itself.

His imagination had never yet failed him when he felt like this, that *something* must happen; that the thing he sought must come: while never had his intoxicating faith in himself soared so suddenly high as on this particular evening.

He seemed so vital, so compelling, racked by these fierce, joyous birth pains of a new idea, that even Sir George took fire.

"When you've anything perfected you'll bring it to me? You'll let me have your word for that? I'll make it worth your while — give you as good terms as any one in the trade. And mind, it will be safe with me. If I get hold of a man with ideas, I do all I can to keep him going. I have no notion of killing a goose that may lay another golden egg. There's some people who'll steal an idea and let the inventor go hang — dishearten him so that he'll do no more. There was an ugly story hanging round 'Morrison's' of Edge — after the old fellow's death — in connection with that improved automatic spooler they've got so tight a hold of: cornered the whole trade with. I wonder if you ever heard of it?"

Bellamy nodded, drawing up his lower lip above its fellow.

"Well, there was a case in point! They say the man who invented it — some young chap in the mill — got absolutely nothing for it; and it's brought them in thousands. That's the sort of thing to take the heart out of any one."

"It seems to me, Sir George, that if a man's to get on in this world he needs an infinite supply of hearts."

"Why — why do you say that, Mr. Bellamy? The idea of you and George talking about hearts!" remarked Lady Curst, who had fluttered near them, and now laid one hand on her husband's arm.

"Well, with what he loses, and what he has stolen, and what he gets broken," said Bellamy, with a gallant bow. Then wished the pair good night and moved across the room towards his hostess, who stood surrounded by a little crowd of departing guests; congratulating himself on the fact that Sir George and Lady Curst were a married couple and therefore not likely to discuss their affairs in common.

## CHAPTER XLIII

OUT in the street — for he had chosen to walk home, for the sake of the air — the thought of Sir George and Lady Curst returned to Bellamy; and he actually stood still to laugh at the thought of how — if they did discuss him — they would reconcile the astute young business man with the psychic adviser.

One carriage had just rolled past him, in which he recognised the profile of the young girl whom he had taken in to dinner, while two men stood still waiting outside Mrs. Seaton's door. But apart from these the quiet street, narrow like so many of the most fashionable quarters, was empty; and suddenly with a sense of fear Bellamy realised that he had actually laughed aloud, a harsh ugly laugh which was echoed back to him by the high houses on either side.

For a moment more he stood still, then hurried on blindly; stumbling as he went. For it appeared as if something had happened; some mooring broken loose.

He had felt that a change was imminent. And here it was upon him, though even now he could realise nothing more than a sort of wild emptiness. Was it that he had spurred his mind — his imagination or memory — he scarcely knew which — too fiercely; or was it the result of those long weeks of deadly depression and spiritual nausea?

He could not say. All he knew was that something which had hitherto held him in touch with the sane commonplace affairs of life — perception which governed his sense of time and place — was gone; and all the way home felt as if he was stepping so high he could not believe his foot would ever touch earth again; while his head was far away and light, a mere throbbing brain.

Two shadowy and, as it seemed, distant figures crossed the pavement in front of him — a young man and a girl, coming out of a house toward a waiting taxi.

Suddenly, to his amazement, Bellamy collided with the girl: walked straight into her — and then stood apologising.

"A thousand pardons — I don't know how it happened. There's something wrong — I — I — you looked a tremendous way off, you know; and now — now," he stammered and then went on in desperation. "Everything's like that. I don't know how I'm going to get home. I can't tell you how sorry I am — deeply regret. But you know there *is* something wrong — it's my head, I think — it won't come down, and the pavement won't stay up," he laughed; trying to express this disconcerting fact as being something of a joke, though there was a hint of appeal in his voice.

"Get out of that, you drunken beast!" The girl's companion elbowed him roughly aside; then as he followed the two to their taxi, still stammering on, his hat in his hand, added,—"Go home and put your head under a pump."

But curiously enough, though he realised his behaviour as that of a drunken man, Bellamy was completely sober; in truth drink was not one of his failings, for he was too vain to relish making an exhibition of himself. And all the way home he struggled desperately to make out what was wrong with him; while his mind worked at an almost inconceivable rate, one thought following another, and disappearing like so many blazing comets.

When he did at last reach his flat he felt so horrible weary and sorry for himself that he could have cried for some one to undress him, put him to bed, and tuck him up like a child. But the ecclesiastical-looking man-servant slept off the premises. There was nobody there.

He thought of a hot bath; and going into the bathroom stared vacantly at the bath, without being able to remember what he was there for.

Then the idea of telegraphing to a doctor occurred to him; and he went into his consulting-room, where he opened the telephone book, and stood, turning over the pages, for some moments before he realised that he did not even know the name of any doctor.

After all it did not matter; all he wanted was bed. And undressing he got in and lay down on his right side. Then found that the light coming through a crack of the blind was in his eyes, and solemnly getting out — with much

pain and weariness — walked round the foot, and climbed in again before he realised that the same thing might have been accomplished merely by turning from one side to another.

It was a horrible night; he was burning hot and yet shivering; while the time crawled, or progressed in bounds which jolted him to the verge of eternity.

Next morning Hansen, the man-servant — who arrived, soon after seven each morning, and had strict orders not to call his master till he was rung for — busied himself in the pantry preparing breakfast; glancing now and then at the clock, as the time went on; wondering a little at Bellamy's lateness — for the old days at the mill had broken him into early habits, which had become second nature — but feeling neither curious nor disturbed, till the charwoman who did the rooms came and told him that Mr. Bellamy must be up; in fact had some one in his bedroom, whom he was talking to, quarrelling with as it sounded to her.

Even then Hansen refused to be disturbed, but all the same his curiosity was aroused; and a few minutes later — finding a pretence to linger by Bellamy's door — he was struck by something in the high-pitched voice, the incessant stream of words: knocked, and receiving no answer — entered to find his master in a high fever; and raving — principally of silk, psychic phenomena and Jane — Jane who was to prevent the ceiling from falling on him; to hold him from floating away into space; to put her cool hand on his forehead — above all to save him — though from what there was no telling.

"Save me, Jane! Jane, Jane, save me!"

Almost at once the whole flat was in a state of disorder. The two girl secretaries arrived and foregathered with the charwoman and caretaker at Bellamy's door, while Hansen delivered himself of his verdict. It was delirium tremens: he was sure of that, for in all his experience no gentleman had ever "carried on" in such a fashion for any other reason. He might pull through; then again he might not, there was no telling — there were cases, etc., etc.

"But something must be done — surely something can be done," urged Miss Shaw; while the other girl clung to

her arm shaking from head to foot. They had neither of them ever liked Bellamy — who treated them as though they were a part of their typewriting machines — but the insistent appeal in his voice would have moved a stone.

Yet still nothing was done, beyond talking, till Gale — a little late as usual, still in his shabby street suit — entered Bellamy's room: gave one glance at the tossing figure on the bed, and sent the charwoman off for the nearest doctor.

"What doctor? — Any doctor! Don't tell me you don't know every doctor and undertaker in the neighbourhood — and you a char-lady! D. T.? — fiddlesticks, how in the world was he to get D. T. I'd like to know? Telephone for some ice, Hansen, and for God's sake keep the place as quiet as you can. You, Miss Shaw and Miss Ashton, had better get to the morning letters, if you will. I'll stay with Mr. Bellamy. No, there's nothing else, thank you."

It was all very quietly done; but the different members of the household dropped back into their places like the fragments of a puzzle; and by the time the doctor arrived the flat was quiet, and there was an iced cloth round Bellamy's head; while the streak of light which had showed down one side of the blind — and at which he had been glancing, sweating and shying like a nervous horse — was screened by a table-cloth that had been pinned across it.

The doctor — a young and painstaking professional man — made an examination, and hummed and hawed a good deal, evidently afraid of committing himself. It might be typhoid fever — then again it might be brain fever — it was very difficult to diagnose such cases in their very early stages. But anyhow the temperature was dangerously high, and there was great mental excitement. He would prescribe a soothing draught and call again in a few hours; meanwhile the patient — Walter Bellamy who had never been any one's patient before! whose fiery vitality had suddenly, as it were, got the bit between its teeth — must be kept very quiet; he would send round a proper ice-bag for the head. Constant watching, both night and day was necessary and he would advise trained nurses; also that any immediate relations or friends should be informed of the state of affairs.

"You are no relation yourself?" he remarked interrogatively, drawing on his gloves, his puzzled eyes wavering between Gale and the sick man.

"No."

"I see, merely a friend."

"No, merely an employé."

"Oh!" the young doctor stared; for this shabby stranger, so very cool and so very much at home, was difficult to place — either in conjunction with the blue and black rooms, through which he had passed, or the pink and white bedroom — though unmistakably of a finer fibre than the sick man, with his brilliant good looks, his sudden lapses into almost unintelligible dialect — through all his ravings there was not a word of French — his incessant cry for, his complete dependence on, this unknown Jane.

The doctor hesitated. Curiosity was unprofessional; but he was still human, try as he would to disguise the fact.

"This lady, whom the patient so constantly mentions — it's always as well to satisfy any reiterated cravings if possible. Perhaps you know ——"

"I know nothing." Gale's glance was so cold that it repelled any further questioning. "If you'll allow me, I'll just send some one to the chemist with this prescription." He moved to the door and stood there in an attitude which somehow compelled the doctor to leave the room before him, wished him a courteous good-bye, and then sent Miss Ashton, the junior typist, off to the chemist.

"A pragmatical fool of a fellow," he muttered; and going back into the sick-room, stood by Walter's bed looking down at him.

After all how little we ever know of each other! The more intimate our relationships the more terrifying our loneliness, our sense of apartness. During the last three years these two had been constantly associated. Bellamy was a great talker: never ceased talking except with the deliberate desire to impress some one with his silence — yet he had hardly mentioned his past life: had never mentioned any people connected with it in any way.

There was only one thing for it, and Gale called Hansen into his room, leaving Miss Shaw temporarily in charge.

"Look here, Hansen, do you know anything of Mr. Bel-

lamy's own personal life? Whether he has any near relations or anything of that sort?"

"No, sir, absolutely nothing. Mr. Bellamy was always talking of himself, sir, but he never not seemed to tell much."

"Well, I've got to find out if there's any one who ought to be sent for. Have there been any letters lately?"

"Only business letters, and from London ladies, sir. Mostly he hands them over to you or Miss Shaw, or tears 'em up — often as not throws them into the waste-paper basket."

"Well, the only thing will be for me to go through some of his private papers. Get me Mr. Bellamy's keys, and then you can go and sit with him till the nurse comes." Gale spoke deliberately; he hated prying, and was determined that — since it was necessary — he would do it as openly as possible.

But after all how little there was.

Surely no man had ever kept so few landmarks of the past. The one small drawer, which held Bellamy's private papers, was almost empty. There were a few very indiscreet letters from great ladies, with famous names, which might well have been used for the purpose of blackmail; a good many carefully docketed receipts, and a few bills — mostly for clothes; several scented scrawls from Hetty d'Esterre, whom Gale knew well by sight, mostly assignations for supping or dining; and lastly, poked in at the back of the drawer, two long letters — which Gale did not read beyond the name and address — in a careful, uneducated hand on thin common paper, signed "your sincere friend and well wisher Jane Irwin."

It was not much, but it was enough. And going back to Bellamy's room Gale encountered Hansen who was just showing in the nurse; stopped and spoke a few words to her; stood for a moment staring down at the sick man — still tossing and calling upon that one name — then, picking up his shabby hat, went downstairs and made his way to the nearest telegraph office.

## CHAPTER XLIV

JANE arrived at nine o'clock that night, in a four-wheeled cab from Euston. Her modest luggage, consisting of a wicker basket, inside with her to keep it from the damp, for it was raining heavily.

She had rung at the lower, front-door bell, and the caretaker showed her up; pressed the electric button of Bellamy's flat, and handed her over to Hansen.

"I'm Jane Irwin, mayhap you've heard as I was coming," she announced calmly. Walked in before him; hesitated while he opened a door out of the vestibule, and entering the large reception-room gazed round her with wide, disapproving eyes.

"Eh, now, Oi didn't know as Wally lived in an apartment house; an' that gloomy an' all. No wonder as he's ill. Eh, Maester, but this London's an awful place! The narrow streets an' the smell; and the crowd, loike a fifth o' November procession as never stops!"

She had slipped off her coat as she spoke — the same brownish green waterproof — and now taking off her black sailor hat laid it on the end of a blue brocade sofa: stabbed her hatpins with a decided air into the cushions, and gave herself a little shake.

"Are you a friend of our Wally's, may I ask? Mr.— Mr.——" she began, politely turning to Hansen.

"No, I'm Mr. Bellamy's butler-valet."

"Oh!" Jane's grave eyes ran thoughtfully over the stout figure, in the smooth black cloth and fine linen — evening-dress in the morning and all! — with a look which was not altogether one of approval. For to the independent northern mind the pampered menial is but a poor thing at the best; and her next words were uttered with as much cool hauteur as though she were a duchess.

"Well, I'll trouble you to show me the way ter his room."

"I don't know, Miss — I — I'll call Mr. Gale," answered the man and vanished, genuinely disconcerted by the con-

trast between the young woman's dress and manner; while Jane left to herself took the thick corded hem of one of the brocade curtains between her finger and thumb, feeling it with frowning brow. Silk — real silk and satin; and the carpet under her feet like soft black velvet: and a servant like a Church of England minister!

No wonder Wally was ill! Things like that must have wanted some working for — Wally couldn't do it on two pounds a week; not on four neither: and that was as much as the head over-looker at her mill got — then to think of the dust those carpets must hold!

She glanced down at her dirty little clogs. How they had clattered up all those stairs! The telegram had been brought to her at her work — even now there were strands of multi-coloured silk hanging on to her black skirt — and she had raced home to get a few things together, knowing she was just in time to catch the last train — and had not even waited to change.

She glanced at her luggage, which she had brought up herself, and which now lay on the floor: looking sadly plebeian and out of place in the lofty room, with its odd paucity of furniture, and those three high windows with their long blue curtains —"Thirty yards of double width material at least!" she thought.

Anyhow she would not add to the dust which must already lie in the gloomy, black depths of that carpet — black of all colours, without so much as a bunch of flowers on it. Wally must have got it out of economy, thinking it would not show the dirt, how like a man; every woman realised the advantage of a good all over pattern — and having kicked off her clogs, she was kneeling tugging at the straps of her basket with small capable hands, when Francis Gale entered, and stood looking down at her; the neat little figure in the black skirt, black and white blouse and white collar; the small head with its silvery gold hair, smoothly parted, and caught up into a great fleecy knob at the back.

> "I like the way she has with her curls,
> Done to a ball in a net behind."

He was thinking — though where the quotation came from he could not have said — when Jane mastered the last

buckle, and raised her face, so that he saw the grey eyes — clear as a child's — the long curling lashes, the ridiculous nose, the soft, sweet mouth.

"Oi was just goin' ter get mesen a pair of slippers," she remarked serenely. "Clogs be hefty, cluttering things to be about in when there's sickness in a house;" she took off the top of her basket as she spoke, and diving into it brought out a pair of crimson felt slippers, then a pork pie, which she placed gingerly on a piece of paper upon the ebony table.

"He was always a rare 'un for pork pies, was our Wally; an' I thought, when he was better enough, so as ter fancy solid stuff ——"

"I'm afraid that won't be for some time. He's very ill, Miss Irwin."

Jane — seated on the very edge of one of the chairs pulling on the slippers — raised her head, her small face white with fatigue; her eyes, circled with black, serene and tender.

"Don't 'ee take on," she said. "It wouldn't be Wally if he wasn't very much whatever he was, that's certain. An' I've known him ever since we both could walk. He won't be took yet, won't Wally," and she shook her head with an odd little smile.

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, he ain't not ready yet," her tone was one of infinite simplicity and finality. "But tell me what does it seem loike, the sickness as has took him. Not — not!" her voice wavered, the colour went out of her cheeks: suddenly she was afraid. For even Wally, the audacious and indomitable Wally, might not be proof against that insidious white plague which claims its victims by the hundreds in Edge. "It's not — not decline?"

"Decline?"

"Consumption, they names it down south."

"No, no — it's a sort of breakdown. He's been off colour for some time — something to do with his brain. I think I ought to prepare you. He's raving — slightly delirious — talking all the time."

"Ay, lod, but Wally allus did that."

"It was hearing him use your name that made me wire to you." Gale glanced at her curiously; could it be that she was utterly indifferent, utterly cold?

"Well, I've coom, an' now there'll be no need ter maether." She spoke more sedately than ever to hide her joy at the thought that Wally had needed her. "Yer'd better be all getting away ter yer beds; or yer'll not be up fur yer work te'-morrow come mornin'."

"We've had some trouble trying to find a night nurse, but——" began Gale again.

"What would you be wantin' a hired nurse for, with me here?" the colour flamed up into the delicate face, giving the lie to Gale's suspicion of coldness. "If yer'll show me the way ter the sink, Maester — Maester——"

"My name's Gale."

With her steady eyes full upon him Jane put out her hand. "Oi'm sure I'm very pleased ter meet yer, Maester Gale; I hope yer well," she said politely. And then added, "If yer'll just go point me the way ter the sink Oi'll wash mysen — fur Oi'm all mucky with the train — then go ter Wally. An' dwarn't thee taeke on, me lod." She laid a gentle hand on Gale's arm, stricken by his haggard air. "He'll be all right now; he's not one ter die young, Wally ain't."

Having shown her into the bathroom, with its bewildering array of nickel taps, Gale wandered back into the reception-room; his hands thrust into the tops of his trousers — an attitude which always told of dejection — and stood for a moment, regarding himself in the mirror above the mantel-shelf with an air of bitter mockery. She thought he looked like that because Walter Bellamy was ill — this small, incomparable Jane — when it was nothing but the result of a long diet of husks. As if he cared a hang about anything or anybody — any more than Bellamy himself, or any other man. He did not want the fellow to die, because it meant the loss of his billet, that was all the feeling he was capable of in these days, or so he told himself.

With a shrug he turned towards the middle of the room: picked up the small muddy clogs, and stood turning them over thoughtfully, in his hands.

"So this is Jane — and Jane's shoe — so much wood and brass and leather for so little a foot. I wonder what she'll make of the day nurse — I wonder what she'll make of any of us! Hansen," he turned to the man who had entered,

noiselessly as usual, "take these and have them cleaned; and that"—he pointed to the pork pie. "Mr. Bellamy will want it directly he is well enough to eat solid food." The corners of his mouth twitched: never before had anything sat down in so solid a manner as that pork pie on the carved ebony table. "And—by the by is Mrs. Grant still here?"

"Yes, sir." Hansen always assumed his most perfect and monosyllabic manner to Gale; recognising—with the unerring instinct of a superior man-servant—the real thing when he saw it. For though the quiet shabby man might have come down in life, even so he was preferable to what the butler himself termed the "jumped-ups."

"Well, tell her to fetch this basket and get some sort of a place ready for Miss Irwin"—It was the last time that name was heard in the "Adelphi" flat; for by the next day she was Jane—just plain Jane—to Gale, to the charwoman, nurse and doctor: even to Hansen, who regarded her, almost with affection, as being true to class—"There's my room—she'd better have that. It's quiet and there's a big sofa if she wants to rest in the day. That will do, Hansen. Ah! there's the bell; I suppose it's the doctor—take those things out, and tell the nurse."

## CHAPTER XLV

JANE seemed so cool that Gale was afraid she might have received a shock, when she first entered the sick-room, to see Bellamy, tossing and flushed, with the white bandages round his head: to realise that he did not even know her, though he never ceased to call upon her name.

But Jane Irwin was one of those people who are always sent for in any time of sickness, death or fear, and during her whole life had lived cheek to jowl with all three: in a crowded community; in small houses with walls so thin that one must be for ever joining — if only vicariously — in the throes of birth or death; not only with those of one's own household, but with the neighbours at either side.

Such nearness breeds in the best a sort of outward hardness, combined with a wide humanity. And thus Jane — drooping a little with fatigue, and paler than ever — stood calmly enough by Walter Bellamy's side, one cool hand clasped round his wrist, while the doctor made his examination: assumed her place as a night nurse, listened attentively to the directions which were given her, and asked a few questions, breaking off now and then to bid Walter lie still.

"There, there, lod, dinna' maether. It's all roight now; Jane's come. There, there, Jane's along o' thee now," she murmured over him; an assurance, which gradually — even during the half-hour which the doctor spent in the room — seemed to influence his wavering mind; bring him some measure of peace.

Gale did not attempt to go home that night — why he scarcely knew — for with the nurse and Jane in the flat and the telephone at hand there was little reason for him to remain. But still he stayed — curiously interested, a little ashamed to go when he was credited with so much feeling — slipping in and out of the sick-room with relays of pow-

dered ice, alert at the faintest stir. Though to please Jane he was obliged to lie down on a sofa and make a pretence of sleep; while she — after her long journey and long day's work — sat bolt upright at the bedside, gently patting Walter Bellamy's shoulder, as one pats a restless child to sleep, making no display of emotion or feeling.

It was the same all through his illness — which flamed the worst of itself out in a little over a week, for it was neither brain fever nor typhoid, nor any other recognisable disease, and therefore, in the end, diagnosed as a nervous breakdown — through all the weakness and lassitude that followed it; the fidgety and exacting convalescence; while it was wonder to them all when she slept or ate, and how she lived, unless upheld by some mysterious, ever-burning inward flame.

"She's like a night-light in a dark room," said the nurse. And though the simile was not a poetical one it suited her as few others could have done. For that was what she seemed: so steady and sure, so exactly the right thing in the right place.

Yet at the beginning all alike believed her indifferent. Among them, Hetty d'Esterre, who almost forced her way into Bellamy's rooms, and wept and stormed at Jane's immovable, matter-of-fact air. "Poor old Bellamy! a real knock-out, old Bellamy! Why don't you send for more doctors, do something? For God's sake, woman, why don't you do something?"

She had come laden with flowers and chocolates "to cheer Wally up," and was appalled at the state in which the ebbing fever had left him. Just conscious, able to recognise her with a faint smile, yet white as the sheet beneath his chin. And silent — that was what frightened her; that he, Walter Bellamy, should not have so much as a word to say for himself. "Why don't you do something — anything?" she demanded again, as Jane followed her out into the vestibule; put her plump beringed hands on her shoulders and almost shook her. "He wants eggs and brandy: fizz, anything, to pick him up — he'll be dying if you leave him like that; why, he looks ready to sink clean through the bed as it is."

"He's doin' fine," answered Jane quietly, very white with

long watching; perhaps a little whiter since Hetty's appearance on the scene. "Don't thee maether, me luv'. 'Ee now, don't thee maether, Wally's doin' fine." She was wondering, with an odd sense of groping in the darkness among new things, as to what was the relationship between the two. But whatever it might be one thing was certain — Wally was all right, it was always the people who loved him that suffered.

Hetty stared, mopping her eyes fiercely with a scrap of lace. "My word! If you ain't the limit! And you're from the same place; were playmates when you were kids, not just come an' go pals like Bellamy an' I. Yet look how upset I am! I don't know when I got such a knock over as I did when I heard the poor old fellow was ill. And you — no one ever thought of Bellamy as ill somehow — perhaps you were sweethearts, you and him?"

"Such talk!" Jane's lips were set firmly, but her fair face flooded with a delicious colour. And suddenly the other woman — a blue humming-bird this time, in sapphire velvet and black furs — darted forward and kissed her.

"You do care! You do; for all your cool ways. And look here, I tell you straight!" Hetty's tone was frank. "I can stand anything better than folks as haven't got no feeling. But you do care; and you're a dear, an' as pretty as paint into the bargain."

It was strange how many there were to care. But it seems that the less people give of affection or honesty in this world the more they get — which is no encouragement to the loving of one's neighbour as one's self, but true for all that. Indeed, there were few men who could have given less of either than Walter Bellamy; and yet the acquaintances — nay, more, friends — whom he had achieved! while many believed themselves better — perhaps were better because of that belief — for the diet of lies on which he had fed them.

The Duchess of Mountjoy — who called to enquire, after reading one of the notices which had appeared in all the principal papers, to the effect that Mr. Bellamy was too ill to see any of his clients for some time — voiced the feeling of many of them when she declared almost with tears, that he had "taken her out of herself," and taught her how to

think — a feat of necromancy which bore better fruits than many a worthier tree.

In the ebb and flow of reason — when, for a moment or so, Bellamy seemed to get his feet, before being swept back into a tossing sea of delirium, where the touch of Jane's cool little hand was all that held him to life — the wavering idea, which had haunted him on the night of Mrs. Seaton's dinner-party, took shape.

He had been right. He knew that he would get it: knew it must come. If not exactly an invention; but the germ of an invention, which would set his name flaming through the silk world: revolutionise his old trade! Coventry, Wantage, Dutton, Edge — above all Edge, the town of his birth! would — thrill to it. It was better than a crowd in Trafalgar Square! Better than the adoration of a few hysterical women, however select.

And yet, after all it was nothing new, but the recurrence of a memory which he had brought back with him from America, and which now returned to him — mingled with, and shot through with, many incongruous memories, in which all his past life seemed like a kaleidoscope, that some malicious and gigantic hand would not let lie.

Still, with the intensity of all Bellamy's "great ideas," it held and grew stronger. And almost his first conscious words to Jane, still upright at the side of his bed, were relative to it.

"Plain Jane, I want to see a man — Sir George Curst — about some business."

"Ay, ay, me lod."

Walter Bellamy gave a shrug of irritation. "Ay — ay ——" he mocked; "you say ay, ay, but you treat me like a fool."

"If more people treated you that gait, Oi'm thinking they'd be less fool than you, me lod."

"I'm master here."

"Ay, yer maester right enough," she responded soothingly.

"And I say I must see Curst."

"Sakes alive, do yer think that Oi've got th' chap, who ever he may be, in my pocket?" Jane rose as she spoke and crossed the room, bent over the fire for a moment or

so, then returned to the bedside with a cup in her hand.

"You taeke yer pap now, an' don't be talkin', or we'll be havin' you goin' soft again."

"I'll get Gale to write——" despite his irritation Bellamy's lips twitched with amusement: was there ever any woman so unchangeably practical as Jane? That was what made one always come back to her.

"Jane," she was leaning over him, one firm arm beneath the pillow. For a moment his face grew softened and whimsical; he looked more like his old boyish self than he had ever done since he embarked upon that great business of "getting on": "Jane, did you — I bet you did — bring me a pork pie from Edge?"

She was still leaning over him, tipping the cup of beef-tea with anxious brow, but now their eyes met, and she laughed. After all how well they understood each other.

"Ye great fool," she said, laid him back gently and patted his shoulder, "to be talkin' o' pork pies an' you but just gettin' clear o' the gate o' death — not ter mention hell," she added with severe brow, "for the hussies as come here askin' after yer, an' the paint an' the powder an' the brass o' them's past telling. Why, they're worse, out an' out worse, nor the girls as sing in the Picture Pallis up Edge," she added. For to Jane's mind these young women touched the uttermost point of brazen audacity.

She was obliged to scold him — it was her way with him — but for all that she did not care a rap about the fine ladies who came in rustling silks, laden with hothouse flowers, to enquire after the patient, her patient! As for Hetty, she found that her grief was evanescent; her moods as many as her pals; while the only one who really disturbed her peace of mind was Ada Burston — poor tawdry, delicate Ada, whose face during her first few visits was swollen with crying — and to Ada Jane gave what she called some plain speaking for her own good.

"It's no manner o' use your settin' your heart on Walter Bellamy," she said, "for he's bespoke to me, an' has been for more years than you've been able ter walk. Oi'd have more pride, Oi would, if Oi was as pretty as you be, me wench"— artful Jane! giving the sugar with the powder — "than ter come hangin' round another 'ooman's young man."

## CHAPTER XLVI

A FEW days later Jane told Bellamy what she had done. It was the first time he was up, and he sat in a deep armchair, wrapped round with a sumptuous fur motor coat; looking out over the gardens, where a faint rosy promise of buds lay across the tops of the trees — for already there was a breath of spring in the air.

He had been quiet and tranquil enough since the fever left him, for once content to drift with the stream. But the stir and fatigue of getting up seemed to have roused him to something of his old restlessness; while he was all on edge awaiting an answer to the letter which he had made Gale write to Sir George Curst, asking for an interview.

"What did you say that for?" he turned a little and looked at Jane, who was sitting by the fire knitting her brows over the darning of some of the fine silk socks which she had found in a great pile in one of his drawers — as if he had opened one pair after another and then thrown them aside, real silk, too!

"The silly wench was frettin' her heart out fur you. Oi thought it wur better to put an end ter it one way or another," she answered serenely. "It's no good sneepin' a poor fond thing o' that sort. 'No more o' yer soft,' I said, 'fur Oi'm bespoke ter him mesen.' She'll feel more settled loike in her mind now, the wench, and likely enough take up with some decent boy."

"It was a lie!" Walter was amused, but the glance he fixed on Jane had rather something cruel in it. "Jane! I didn't think you'd ever tell a lie!"

"The loys Oi tell won't run hell out o' fire, young Wally!" she snapped with sudden tartness in her voice — for her conscience pricked her — holding her needle up to catch the light on the eye of it.

"Jane, I don't want to marry — I don't know how I'd

stand it — I'd feel all tangled and tied up." Bellamy spoke pettishly, yet almost with an air of apology.

"Oh!" the interjection was dry; "well, it 'ud be nothing ter what the 'ooman 'ud feel, Oi reckon."

"And yet you told that Burston girl ——"

"If I've told one loy in my life, young Walter, I've took care as it should be a loy, an' no half an' half about it, neither." Jane was flushed and angry as she rose from her chair; though she could scarcely have said why.

"Yet we used to think we'd be married some day, eh, Jane?"

"Speak fur yourself."

"Jane, you know I'm not the marryin' sort, I ——"

"The less fools ter be bred in the world! It's time yer wur back in yer bed. Oi'll call that there man-servant o' yourn. It's an odd thing to my thinkin' when a chap gets too fine an' penikitty ter let a woman do for him; fur it's certain sure as 'twas a female as washed him when he came into the world, an' 'ull wash him again when he goes out."

Jane had rolled all the socks into little round hard balls as she spoke, and gathering them together in her apron, was moving past Walter's chair — almost with a flounce — when he caught at her gown and held her.

"Jane," there was something relentless in the insistent curiosity of his bright eyes, as he peered up into her face, "would you marry me now, Flower-face?"

"No, an' that's flat."

"Because I've been ill — because I'm a wreck?" It was a deliberate fishing for some food to his vanity, but Jane refused to rise to it.

"No, but a'cause yer a blitherin' fool as hasn't no thought fur anybody savin' Walter Bellamy," she snapped; pulled her dress free and was gone.

She was always like this: tart and sharp with Walter as she was with no one else; it was a species of barrier which she put up between him and her feelings for him. But on this particular day, she was really hurt; more by his manner and look than by anything else. Perhaps it was that she had seemed to have got so much nearer to him during his illness, and that had made her tender. But, whatever it might be, the feeling that he was analysing her — using her

as he used every one else — hurt, in a way it had never done before.

She had only herself to blame for what she had said to Ada Burston. Walter had a right to be angry with her about that, she did not care a rap how angry; she had known it was the only way to put an end to the girl's folly. But here he was — far worse than angry — complacent, amusing himself with her: half apologising — and this was the bitterest insult of all — because he did not feel inclined to marry her.

He always was — always had been like this — the mistake was that she had thought him a little changed; he would forget her very existence the moment he ceased to need her, found his fingers once more on the serious business of his life.

He had never asked how she came to be there, how long she was going to stay; would — likely enough — not even notice when she went away.

She had pitied Ada Burston for a fond fool. She had done better to have pitied herself. To let Bellamy hurt her so after all these years! But then how he had clung to her, called upon her name.

Forgetting to summon Hansen — for once immersed in thoughts of herself — she passed through the vestibule: opened the door of one room, and finding Miss Shaw at work there, fled, half blinded with tears into the large drawing-room — where Bellamy gave his more public lectures, to a select circle of admirers — threw open a window and stood, breathing in the fresh evening air.

It smelt almost like the country. One star hung in the deep blue of the sky; and as yet there were no flashing advertisements to put its far-away beauty to shame.

A tall chimney at the far side of the river was belching forth smoke, coaling up: evidently the factory, or foundry — whatever it might be — was going to work all night.

At the sight of the chimney a passionate sense of homesickness swept over Jane. For despite her air of sweet serenity — the calm way in which she appeared to take everything for granted — she agonised over the luxury of Walter's surroundings. The fine ladies she did not mind, they touched him in reality as little as they touched her. But

all the rest, the very feel of those real silk socks, filled her with a sense of being shut away: left behind, with all the common things of Bellamy's old life.

Away in Edge the evening would be grey and pink. The narrow streets brooding and friendly. She knew all that was happening there. The children playing, the women talking at their doors, the men going off to their night shift, with the clatter of clogs over the rough homely cobbles — here in London there seemed to Jane something furtive in the pad of feet on the smooth pavement.

Oh for the dear workaday world, with its joys and griefs; its nearness to life — to birth and death, to all that was real and primal.

Gale — who, unobserved, was sitting at the writing-table in one shadowy corner, and had raised his head as she entered — watched her for a few moments; then bent over his work till it was impossible to see further: caught the sound of a stifled sob; waited till the darkness enwrapped them both, then spoke.

"Jane."

"Who's yon?"

"It's I — Francis Gale." He rose and groped his way over to the window; put out one hand meaning to lay it upon her shoulder, and touched her smooth neck instead — she was so much smaller than one ever thought: —"Is anything wrong? Any way I can help you, Jane?"

"No," for a moment she hesitated; then added, "I'm goin' away, back home to-morror, Maester Gale."

"Yes?"

"Walter 'ull do fine now."

"Oh, Walter 'ull always do fine — trust Walter for that. Jane, look here, Jane, if I was a man — anything but what I am, the flotsam and jetsam of life — I'd go on my knees to ask you to marry me."

Jane's hand went groping out in the darkness. "That 'ud only be mendin' ill with worse, me lod; fur Oi dwarn't love thee, an' thee dwarn't love me. An' anyway Oi'm not the marryin' sort, Oi'm thinkin'; thank yer kindly all the same."

## CHAPTER XLVII

IT was Jane's one and only betrayal of feeling during the whole of her stay in the "Adelphi" flat. She had been there three weeks, and had not been out, beyond just through the gardens and down to the edge of the river for a breath of fresh air — the limit of her London sightseeing. For she had come to nurse Bellamy through his illness, for no other reason: and now — along with the day nurse — she was going away. The need for her at an end — a flat, stale, empty end.

For though she made no more talk of going, in that steady, quiet way of hers — which held a pride greater even than Walter Bellamy's vanity — she kept to her determination: got Hansen to look her out an afternoon train, because there were still things to be done in the morning, packed up and strapped the wicker basket.

Walter was dressed that day. With the suddenness which was evident in all that he did, he seemed to have put aside his illness; and, almost as alert as ever, was having lunch in his own private room — at the same time discussing some business with Gale — when Jane came to say good-bye; carrying a letter, which had just arrived by post, and which she handed to him.

"Wally, Oi'm goin' along back home ter Edge," her quiet voice gathered a sound of melody on the words "ter Edge" —"this afternoon: if there's any message as you'd be sendin' ter yer mither —"

"Eh, what's that? Oh, just my love, Jane,"— Bellamy had torn open the letter and was reading it with flushed face. "Look here, Gale, Sir George Curst's actually in Town! By Jove I *am* lucky — He's coming round at three. Hurrah!"

With a boyish gesture he tossed the letter to Gale; flung round in his revolving chair, and catching Jane round the waist, raised his face to hers. "Kiss me, Jane, plain Jane! and say you're glad. You cold little thing!" he went on as

she drew back. "I don't believe you care. Why it's the chance of my life. I'll get even with all those fools at Edge now. What a good thing I made you write when you did, Gale. I felt it in me somehow: felt that it had to be done. That shows how one should obey one's instincts."

Suddenly he loosed his hold on Jane and began to walk up and down the room; his shoulders squared with all the old air of vigour, though his step dragged a little—"It's a quarter to two now — I've got an awful lot to think out. And I must have up Hansen and change; these things will never do," he indicated with a laughing gesture, the loose, lounge suit that he wore. "I can't talk business in togs like these — and those letters, Gale, you must leave them till later. I must have my time to myself now, think out things till a quarter to three — No, twenty to — Tell Hansen to come and dress me then. And now, you good people, you clear out, while I formulate my plan of action."

"Oi'd better say good-bye now then, Wally," put in Jane, "my train goes a' half-past three; an' you'll be busy ——" Her grey eyes were full on him as she spoke, with the brooding look of an anxious mother whose offspring is past her understanding.

"Oh, nonsense! Say good-bye when Hansen comes to change me — if you must go. 'Pon my soul I don't know why you should go, Jane; but you always were an obstinate little thing. And after all, I suppose it's better; they'll be wanting you at home,"— with a sudden flame of bitterness Jane wondered who the "they" might be —"Give my love to my mother, and tell her I'll run down to Edge some time, when I can get a free day."

It was not bravado. He had forgotten that last night at Edge and the promise he was under; just as he had forgotten his heartsick longing for Jane, during the night and day which followed Mrs. Seaton's dinner-party.

A few moments after Hansen entered his master's room — punctually at twenty to three — Jane, in her hat and coat knocked at the door, and was bidden, in an absent-minded voice, to enter.

Bellamy who was in the middle of the room raised a cautionary hand. "Wait a moment, Jane dear," he said; then bent his whole attention — swinging to and fro on his

heels and toes, frowning and absorbed — upon the two suits, which Hansen, standing before him, was holding out for inspection; while the whole bed — that bed beside which Jane had sat so long and patiently — was heaped with clothes.

"That grey coat — really you don't understand the importance of the moment, Hansen; the effect clothes have. That's the fault with all you people who never get any further; you don't realise how immense little things may become — how everything matters. Now that grey coat — I know there was something wrong with it. I can't remember what. Yes, I like it better than the black, but for all that I think I'll have the black, and those dark trousers. What is it, Jane — not going yet, surely? Forsaking me now I'm just getting about again! I hope some one's going to the station with you —— *No,* Hansen, not those, the ones with the stripe — and look here, there's a note-book in the pocket of those things I was wearing. Good-bye, Jane, good little Jane: you were a brick to come, good luck to you. But look here, you must go now, I've got to change my pants," he went on laughing: stretched out a careless hand, then turned again to his man.

It was Gale who got the cab. Gale who carried Jane's basket down the long stone staircase, accompanied her to the station, and bought her ticket for her — with an almost savage determination to make Bellamy pay for that at least.

During the long, slow drive — and the wait before the train went — it was difficult to find any words: for somehow Bellamy seemed to have sapped them, while the sense of utter weariness engendered by a railway station was upon them; though there were still many things that Gale would have liked to have said. Jane had been right when she declared that he did not love her, at least not in the way that a man should love his wife; he was past all feeling of that sort, nothing could thrill or stir him now. Yet how dear she had grown to be — the "Pocket Nurse" the "Miniature Housewife" as he called her. How he would miss the sound of her soft northern burr, her restful matter-of-fact ways.

As for Jane — looking at him while he leant over the carriage window — during those last few moments which are so difficult to even the most garrulous — her tender

heart was wrung with pity. He looked so tired and haggard, so obviously in need of some one to look after him. And yet all that she could think of to say was:

"Wally'ull do fine now."

"Wally! Wally! Wally!" Gale flung round angrily as the train moved out of the station. The fellow was a perfect vampire. He would like to go home and tell him what he thought of him — take him by the throat and choke the greedy life out of him.

For a moment he hesitated, his hands deep in his pockets; while the crowd pushed and jostled past him. Then he moved out of the station, and along the pavement for a few yards; looking curiously round him, conscious of an overwhelming longing — though for what he scarcely knew.

After all Bellamy could wait; he supposed he filled a place of some sort in the world: Jane was far better off without him: without either of them; for, despite her broad speech, there wasn't a man in the world fit to polish those stout little clogs for her.

Anyhow what was the good of worrying; things never happened as one hoped or expected. It was far better to just drift with the tide. The flaming letters across a large bay window on the opposite side of the road caught his eye. After all that was what he wanted — had been looking for. He had not tasted brandy since that night when Jane arrived at the flat; no wonder he felt hipped, hated life, and hated Bellamy, who had yet filled a purpose, stood for bread and butter — and more.

All thought of Jane was gone, and he almost ran across the street — shouted at by an angry van-man, who drew back his horses just in time to escape running over him, and dodging a couple of taxis and a motor-'bus by a mere hair's-breadth.

A frantic sense of haste overpowered him, set him trembling. From head to foot he felt as though he were empty: a mere shell burnt out by a scorching flame which licked round and round within him; and he panted as he pushed his way — his forehead damp with sweat — through the wide swinging doors; then sat down at a small marble-topped table and called for brandy, running his tongue eagerly along his parched lips.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

FRANCIS GALE did not appear at the "Adelphi" flat all next day. But the morning after he slipped quietly into his own room — more punctually than usual — and changed his clothes. Made no excuse, but was suave and courteous; showing no inclination to find any sort of fault with his employer.

Bellamy found no fault either, apparently had scarcely noticed his absence; while Miss Shaw reported him as having been out nearly the whole of the previous day.

It was the same all that week. Ladies called by special appointment, and he was not there to see them. Excuses had to be made on the score of his health, but, as a matter of fact, he had never looked better, or seemed more vigorous. Indeed his illness appeared to have left him reborn to a new and freshly resplendent youth, beside which Gale faded to a mere shadow, while the two typists grew colourless and worn.

They all felt that some change was in the air; nothing fresh was embarked upon. It seemed to Gale that the girls were always whispering together, and the sibilant hiss of it got upon his nerves. Yet when he found fault they complained, and rightly enough, that there was nothing for them to do but talk.

It was impossible for any of them to gain Bellamy's attention. He came and went at all sorts of impossible hours; always in clothes that spoke of the City. And twice he was away for a couple of days up in the northern Midlands: returning with threads of silk — such as had decorated Jane's black gown — upon his clothes. But Gale did not think that he had seen Jane; while, though he never even mentioned Sir George Curst, he believed that it was with him that Bellamy's attention was now engrossed, that some important affair hung between the two; for though his employer was so communicative regarding the lesser

things of life — his own light amours among them — he was capable of complete secrecy as to business affairs.

Meanwhile the only thing was to keep people in hand as much as possible and wait: as they all did — swung to and fro by Bellamy's moods; his exuberant high spirits and his silences, which showed more of concentrated thought than of depression.

After all it was not long. For only just a fortnight after Jane's departure Gale entered the flat to find it in a state of complete disorder, littered with packing-cases and papers.

Miss Shaw and Miss Ashton, who were sorting and tearing up letters, could tell him nothing; excepting that Bellamy was out when they arrived, had left certain instructions for them, and was apparently going away.

Mrs. Grant, busy packing china, and two warehousemen — who were taking down the curtains in the drawing-room — added to his scant stock of knowledge by informing him that everything was to be sold; while — when he at last ran Hansen to ground in the dressing-room, piled round with clothes and new trunks — he was informed that Bellamy's destination was, as far as the man-servant had gathered, somewhere in the West Indies.

"He comes home to dress for dinner last evening at a quarter to eight. An' tells me as he is off to-day — and I can't not go home —'ull have to pack all night. An' so I have — all the bloody night." Hansen wiped his wet brow with his shirtsleeve; too exhausted to be ecclesiastical. "All the —— savin' your presence, sir — night. An' him too — after that illness an' all! Came back at eleven: was at it till eight — it ain't so much the packin' you see, sir, as the sortin' out — when I got him some breakfast. Then he bathed and shaved and was off down to the City. Ordered in all these new trunks: things got to be labelled an' packed by eleven! Take me? No, not him. Not one word o' me — except as to what I was to do for 'im — no more than if I didn't exist."

Hansen straightened himself, and loosened the limp collar, which hung like a rag round his neck. "An' now what's to become o' us? That's what I want to know. You'll not be wantin' a butler-valet, I suppose, sir? " There was not even the hint of satire in the man's voice.

Gale gave a harsh laugh. He sometimes wondered what there was about him which seemed to give people the idea that he was masquerading — his poverty a mere pose.

"I expect I'll be wanting a good deal, my good Hansen, but certainly not that. I'm more likely to be looking for an odd job man's place myself, from the look of things."

It was the same with them all. Miss Shaw and Miss Ashton; even Mrs. Grant, and the boy who cleaned the knives and boots and ran messages — though, as Gale thought bitterly enough, he was the best off of all of them, for boys were always wanted. What was to become of them? Steady, hard-working people — apart from himself — who had been unfortunate enough to throw in their lot with a flashing comet: nay, a meteor, for there was no saying when and where Walter Bellamy might reappear.

It was after ten when he got back — and he had to catch the eleven twenty-five train from Victoria — breaking in among them, their doubts, their dubious fears, like a sea breeze which cares little what it sweeps away in its course.

He had told Hansen to leave him out a blue serge suit to travel in, and as he dressed he talked; rapping out directions to Gale, whom he called to his room. He was giving up the flat, had put it in the hands of agents to let for the remainder of his lease. The furniture and everything except his writing-table, and a few more private belongings — which Gale must see stored — were to be sold. There was nothing for which he felt any sentiment. "I'm sick of the whole thing — the whole fal-daddle as that old beast Higgins would have said,"— insensibly during the last fortnight Bellamy's voice had broadened a little; the exotic air of dreamy refinement and culture was gone.

"It's no good keeping any of these things — I shall never be the same person again. They'd never fit me. They're all going up for auction. It was a lark at first — really it was a lark, Gale, for all your long face! And I've made pots of money by it. But I'm sick to death of the whole thing — want to get my fingers on realities again for a change. You know, I'm going out on some business in which I've associated myself with Sir George Curst." For the life of him Bellamy could not resist a rolling emphasis on the "Sir." He was tying his tie in front of the mirror

as he spoke, while Hansen wrestled with the straps of the last portmanteau. But now he swung round and regarded Gale with his hard, bright stare — as if wondering how much he knew. "I've done with this sort of tommy-rot once and for all. It's a real good thing that I've got on to. I believe, and Curst believes, we'll pretty well make our fortunes, if it turns out as we expect.

"I say!" suddenly he laughed — he had not brushed his hair since he changed his clothes, it was a little longer than usual, and there was a hint of the old rampant crest above his brows: —"life's not so bad after all, is it? — To be starting off afresh in this fashion; like the little dicky-birds which begin all over again every spring. La joie de vie! You cold-blooded fish, Gale. You don't even know what it means."

"There's Hansen — and the two girls: you'll have to pay them a month's screw you know, Belle-amie. I'm sorry to intrude on your poetical rhapsodies, with anything so sordid, but still," Gale shrugged his shoulders: after all he did not know why he interfered. But Bellamy seemed so horribly prosperous — he remembered the plea of Reynard the fox, that he could not resist eating the lamb because it looked so fat and contented, so well pleased with itself — if any one ever murdered Walter Bellamy it would not be on account of his vices, but of his infinite self-satisfaction: besides he — Gale — knew something of the life of the average girl typist; the difficulty there was in finding employment; and after all why should they suffer?

"I suppose I must." Bellamy moved over to the bed — where the suit he had been wearing still lay — pulled out a note-book, pencil and thick wad of bank-notes; and then, sitting straddle-legged across a chair, leaning over the back of it, began to figure out what he owed. "Fifteen — eighteen — Twenty-three pounds, with your screw, Gale. Only a week for you — thirty bob, isn't it? I've got all the rest by the month — worse luck!"

He wet his finger as he spoke — one of the few tricks of which he had not been able to cure himself — and fluttered over the notes: handed Gale four, for five pounds each, and rising, carefully counted out the rest from a little pile of gold and silver which he had laid on the table. Then put

the remainder in his pocket and rattled it joyfully, squaring back his shoulders.

"That's the lot, I think; I don't owe a penny, praise the Lord! Sent Beecham and Saunders a cheque this morning. There ought to be a good deal coming in from all this furniture stuff — it cost enough. But what rot having to pay all that out in wages, when likely enough they'll every one of them be in fresh billets within the week. Hullo! it's close on eleven. Go and ring up a taxi, Hansen — better have two with all this stuff, and you can come to the station. Where did you put my coat and hat, eh?"

"It's here, sir, and about my character ——"

"Oh, Mr. Gale will see to that. Write them all characters, will you, Gale, as flaming as you like," Bellamy was brushing his hair as he spoke; frowning over the parting.

"Oh, and see about the telephone being taken away, and gas cut off, will you?"

"Anything else?" Gale asked the question in a flat even voice. But something in the tone of it caused the other man to fling round upon him staring.

"What the devil's the matter? You look pretty hipped. Nothing to worry about, you know: I'll come back all right."

"I confess I don't feel torn with any special anxiety on that score."

"Well, then, what the —— Oh, by the by, there's the address for my letters to be forwarded to; take it round to the post office, will you?"

"Anything else?"

"Anything else! — Well, aren't I paying you a week's screw? That reminds me you'll find a cheque folded with a bill in the drawer of my writing-table. Fifteen pounds for these dwarf Japanese trees! Did you ever hear of such a price? And tell the fellow he's a humbug; they've started growing."

"Brothers!" murmured Gale.

"Eh, what's that? La! what a face. I suppose you think you're terribly hardly used."

"My dear Belle-amie, I think nothing, except that you're truer to type than any man or beast I ever met. That reminds me — though why I don't know ——" Gale spoke

smoothly, his head a little bent; but his deep-set eyes, suddenly keen and watchful, were full on the other man's face. "What about your mother and — and Miss Irwin?"

"Jane — my pretty plain Jane? *Mon Dieu,* I'd clean forgotten!" Bellamy had been giving his nails a last polish; but now he slipped the little pad into his waistcoat pocket and pulled out his note-book. "Better send her something — I suppose she had a lot of expense coming up here, when I was seedy, and all that."

He was flicking over his notes as he spoke: passed by several for ten pounds, found one for five and held it out to Gale. "Send her that, will you? Tell her it's for her and my mother to get some new frocks with: give them my love."

But Gale making no attempt to take the note, had moved back a step with his hands behind his back.

For a moment Bellamy stared, puzzled by something in the other man's expression. "You know the address, don't you?"

"Yes, I know the address!"

"Well, take it, will you? Here's Hansen coming up with the men for my traps — catch!" Bellamy flipped the note across to Gale as he spoke, took up his light overcoat and began to put it on. "Oh, and look here, Gale ——" he stopped with a stare and a shrug: inserted his other arm into the sleeve of his coat; then, stooping, picked up the note which had fallen between them and put it in his pocket.

For without a single word Gale had flung round upon his heel and walked out of the room.

In a book on manners and etiquette which Bellamy had once studied, the reader was instructed never to fully turn his back on leaving a room: to stand somewhat sideways at the door when opening it: to close it gently behind him.

It was quite evident that Francis Gale never had the advantage of perusing this priceless volume, for his behaviour was diametrically opposed to all these instructions.

But his employer remembered it and laughed.

"Poor old Gale, what a state his nerves must be in. That was what comes of letting oneself go: not taking the trouble to keep fit: losing all one's self-respect."

## CHAPTER XLIX

SIX months later Walter Bellamy came back to England: stayed one night in London, interviewed innumerable people — with whom he had got in touch during the last week or so after his illness — then went straight away up to Wantage.

Here he stayed — save for a few flying visits to the Continent and several odd days in Town — as completely lost to all his old associates as though he were still abroad.

He was feeling intensely alive, the languid shams of the last few years were shed: and he snuffed the smell of factory smoke like a battle horse, while the hum of machinery was sweet to his ears. Arms and hands were tingling with life. It was as if he actually felt the innumerable threads of the great new business — all alive with electricity — between his fingers. Every pretence of sentiment was swept away. To work, and make other people work, to start a great web spinning, which would throw out its threads across the entire world — that was all he thought of.

Already, before he returned — on receipt of some of his later letters, and certain small mysterious samples — Sir George Curst had taken over an empty factory, which stood on the borders of the town. By the time Bellamy got back all the necessary building alterations were finished. And now the huge, empty carcass was being fitted with what seemed like life; with brains and nerves, with lungs fashioned to breathe out endless volumes of blackened smoke; and digestive organs and teeth, sufficient to grind, and tear and masticate the faintly tinted, greenish white contents of the great bales, which — sewn up in sacking like wool packs — were almost daily being brought to its doors.

Over the contents of these bales, a French scientist — to whom Sir George Curst had first shown Bellamy's samples, and who was now established in a laboratory close against

the factory — pored ceaselessly; while the German mechanics, whom Walter had imported — with the help of Vonberg, whom he had somehow managed to unearth, for he never quite lost sight of any one who might be of use to him — handled it doubtfully; discussing it endlessly in their own tongue; and, at last — setting up the marvellously intricate machines, which they had brought over with them — testing it: first in unbelief, then in wonder over the capabilities of the new material.

As to the English workmen, they merely regarded it as something new, carrying with it the possibilities of constant work and fair wages. But they made no effort to work up the different processes. To them it was like a picture puzzle, with each piece put away in a room by itself: leaving the whole a blank to all but the specially initiated.

For close on a year this went on. Then the silk world began to be stirred by the breath of a new idea. It reached the Continent first — but that was no matter, for the patents had already been secured — then made its way — as something not yet understood and therefore scarcely to be believed in — back to England.

For a while it was all vague, more in the air than in actual words. But gradually — from being something which every one had heard of and no one knew anything of — it began to take a tangible shape.

Still this was all it amounted to. Some cranks — we continually forget how many cranks of to-day are the geniuses of to-morrow — had got an idea of replacing the wood pulp, used in the making of artificial silk, with aloe fibre.

The thing had been thought of before. Anyhow rope and a rough sort of sacking had been made of the same material; while some one had actually achieved a stiff, unsympathetic kind of tissue from the fibre of pine apple leaves. The world was full of asses of the sort that had attempted to "distil sunbeams out of cucumbers." It would never come to anything — or so people said.

Then — six months after the first rumour got abroad: with that amazing suddenness with which anything that has hung long in hearsay really comes to pass — the new silk flowed out upon the market: flooded the mills with waves

of brilliance, rippled over to the Continent and swept back upon a high tidal wave to the country of its birth.

Sewing silks, twists, hanks, skeins. Silk for broad weaving — for braids, fringes, ribands, brocades: no more simple knitted goods, as with the old artificial stuff.

Silk as strong, and smooth and fine as the "hard silk." Silk that you could rub between a damp finger and thumb — supreme test — without injuring: wash without shrinking or diminishing the lustre. Silk that would take any die. That could be warped into such smooth, unbreakable lengths that the weavers' output was doubled.

It was a lark! That was Walter Bellamy's feeling.

The glittering web spread and spread. He visualised himself as a spider, sitting in the midst of it, exuding silk, or running to and fro flinging fresh strands to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Then, with a sudden turn of fancy, he saw the great, commercial world conglomerated into something like an immense sea anemone: dilating and contracting; breathing out incredulity; breathing in belief: throwing forth tendrils in all directions to catch at anything new; yet still firm stuck to the rock where it had always been.

With a clear remembrance of the old labour troubles in Edge Bellamy sought out Burton and claimed an old acquaintanceship; told him something of the affair — quite enough — and insisted that all the men and women employed in the new industry should wear the Union Badge.

At first George — who was a narrow Liberal of the new school — rebelled at this. But gradually he began to realise that the younger man was right: had made a friend of a possible foe. Besides if they did come to loggerheads with any of their workers it was easier — as some of our newer colonies have already realised — to arrive at terms with an organisation, boasting a brain at the back of it, than with an infinite series of bigotted, and often ignorant men and women.

Bellamy's energy was unquenchable. Having started the mechanism of the business going he set his brain to work on the weakest place.

The supply of fibre threatened to be unreliable; not on account of any scarcity, but simply because they were deal-

ing with a people whom it was impossible to bind down by business methods, inculcate with the necessity for punctuality and who — in addition to this — were held back by the fear that another nation might be making money which ought, by rights, to be theirs.

With this difficulty, as with so many, came a broadening of the young man's ambition. A stream which has been dammed may divide and run two ways with advantage, and Bellamy caught the idea of advertising the stuff as being entirely grown by English subjects, while at the same time regulating the supply and obtaining it at a cheaper rate.

The thing was to find the aloe growing in some place where, under British Dominion, the conditions were, as nearly as possible, allied to slavery.

After some study of the subject — largely vicarious, for he had learnt the art of making other people work for him — Bellamy lighted on Mauritius, with its cheap indented labour; and discovered that there had already been some endeavour made to exploit the aloe, which flourished exceedingly on every piece of waste ground or mountain-side. Then picking out — between finger and thumb, as it were — from among his business acquaintance and creatures, the one man who knew tropical life and understood such things, a broken down, exceedingly intelligent, dissolute and drunken sugar planter, sent him out to reconnoitre.

A few months later — the report being favourable — he despatched one of Curst's most reliable juniors to manage the business affairs, to take over a disused sugar mill which was for sale, to adapt — as far as was practicable — any of the old aloe shredding plant; and to use the first man, his knowledge of the life, work and conditions, to the best possible advantage: keeping him as sober as was necessary, and seeing to it that he used his knowledge for no private ends.

Needless to say, the two men hated each other, watched each other incessantly, and worked against each other, as Bellamy had known they would do. Indeed the whole thing succeeded, even beyond his most sanguine hopes; while Mauritius — a cane-growing colony, languishing in its fight against beet sugar — was only too ready to welcome any new source of wealth with open arms.

The word "Empire" loomed largely in Walter's vocabulary — blazing through his mind like the flashing advertisement for Dewar's Whisky, which he had once seen from his "Adelphi" window — and he interviewed members of the Cabinet, the Minister for Agriculture, the Colonial Secretary; while at the same time, a continuous stream of fibre — neatly sewn in palm-leaf bags instead of sacking — flowed smoothly and regularly in at the mill doors of Messrs. Curst and Bellamy.

For that was what it had come to. They were a well-balanced pair of partners; for Sir George Curst had the money, the business reputation, the solidarity: while to Bellamy was the high daring, the intuition, the power of projecting his mind forward; of not only seeing actualities but possibilities; the rashness of the right moment.

After a while he was seldom enough at Wantage, but lived in Town; attending to the London and Continental affairs of what, after all, was his "Great Idea" or — to put it more precisely — his adaptation of an idea which had been conceived years before by a half-caste Spaniard — father of that first fine mistress of his — who had caught at it when he himself was a young man, drinking to its health so often that it became a mere wavering image — unduly inflated during his hours of intoxication, and mourned, during the intervening days of depression, as the one chance of his life: a chance which — and it was "just like my luck" — he had never had the opportunity to exploit.

With his usual faculty for killing two birds with one stone Bellamy had absorbed it all — during the long scented evenings in the verandah, while the girl was lying against his breast, or crouched at his knees; realising alike his present satisfaction, and the possibilities of a great business success.

He had forgotten the girl long long ago. But the confidence which had been babbled into his ear — at one moment as a bribe to matrimony, at another as the irresistible outpouring of a drunken man — still remained.

And now the outcome of it all — housewives say that if you keep anything for seven years it will come in handy — was "Curst and Bellamy" the coupled names of almost world-wide fame.

Another year and no single weak spot remained in the industry. Every part of the vast mechanism worked smoothly and in order. There was scarcely a town which was unfamiliar with the green and gold labels; the packing-cases, the crates, the irreproachable green vans with the insignia of the firm in flowing gold letters across either side — the Trade Mark, a thick tress of silk twisted into a Staffordshire knot; superposed by a scroll bearing the legend: "In Truth is Strength."

Walter Bellamy had been right in saying he would never again fit into his rooms in the "Adelphi." He could as soon have fitted the little general dealer's shop at the top of the Edge cattle market; perhaps sooner, for circles meet, and he was certainly at his furthest from the "Adelphi" days: the loose grey suit; the white silk shirts and purple ties, the slight stoop, which he had, with some difficulty encouraged — the whole Dionysian pose.

His very figure changed. He was still very careful to keep fit. But he did it with a Sandow exerciser in his own room: he was strong and muscular, but he had shed his joyous, half wild alertness.

In these days he no longer flung himself from a carriage: he stepped out. He didn't lean forward when he was talking, his hands loosely clasped between his knees, his head a little bent, his ardent eyes upraised. He leant back in his chair, and regarded his companion with a cool level glance, his hands tip to tip upon his crossed knees, in front of his slightly solidified person. No one could say that he was growing fat, even putting on flesh: but there was a firmness. Formerly he had been a curious compound of blood and air; but now prosperity enveloped, thickened him.

At the best he had only pretended to be completely of the spirit — but it had given him a flair. Now nobody could tell, himself least of all — Jane might have known, but he never saw Jane now, he was so often near to her that any time would do — how much of him was really business man. But it is certain that the phase had gone deep.

It had always been a pleasure to dress Bellamy, but it had been a question of tint and flow; now it was all line and fit — as Beecham and Saunders realised.

Hansen, however, the only one of the old party, whom

Bellamy had hunted up — simply because it seemed stupid to let there be two people in the world who knew as much of him as his own man-servant, when one would suffice — diagnosed the difference as much the same as that between a young girl and a married woman, which was clever of him. For the change was subtle; showing, not only in the man himself, but in his surroundings; the dignified flat in Cavendish Square, the style of the dining-room suite, the influential cook in the background.

In three years' time Walter Bellamy knew every one; went where he pleased. He was so very rich that it did not matter who he had been: he could even afford to talk of poverty; there was no need to pretend anything — and here was the fly in the amber, for life shorn of its "play acting" was shorn of half its joy.

He dropped Mrs. Seaton, whom he referred to as "that woman." Hetty d'Esterre had become impossible; coarsened, grown promiscuous in her loves. He was very particular about women in these days — he knew so much about them. They must be very exquisite and very pure and very well born. The idea of marriage, a house instead of a flat, occurred to him. Then Curst had no child and a son was needed to perpetuate "The Firm."

## CHAPTER L

SEVERAL times — after seating himself at the top rung of the particular ladder up which he had climbed — Bellamy met Lady Constance Sartoris, the dove-like débutante whom he had taken in to dinner that night at Mrs. Seaton's. She was now twenty-two: the smoothest person he had ever seen, in her fair hair, her fresh skin, her manners, her voice, her movements. To Walter Bellamy's mechanical mind she seemed "to run" to perfection, with no possibility of getting out of gear. Besides, her hands were adorable, slender, white and tapered. No amount of manicuring could re-make Walter's hands to his satisfaction, and he was determined that the "Son"— the first fresh young sprig of a regenerated tree — should have nothing to complain of in this matter.

He thought about it for some time; he was a solid person now and his mind worked more slowly. Then he deliberately put himself in the way of seeing more of Lady Constance: proposed and — after a little maidenly hesitation — was accepted.

The engagement left him quite untouched. He had feared a feeling of restraint; but, as a matter of fact, it gave him no feeling of any sort whatever.

He kissed Lady Constance's smooth cheek, and slim white fingers, with much the sort of pleasure that a child feels in stroking a seal-skin coat. Admired her pretty little blush — always so exactly in the right place; bought her a diamond ring, ordered flowers to be sent every day, booked himself to dine with her once during each week, and determined to try and keep another afternoon free to take her out to tea or to see pictures. And then — having regulated all the preliminaries for the marriage — which was not to take place till the early autumn — for the Templetons were poor, and Lady Templeton had her eye upon the sum-

mer sales as a help towards the trousseau — immersed himself once more in his business. For Curst and Bellamy's, though it was still to stand under the same name, had become too big to handle, and was being converted into a company: a change which involved an enormous amount of work.

Besides, Hansen could always be relied upon to remind him when he was to dine with his betrothed, was even trusted with the task of remembering her birthday.

Life had become as smooth as though it ran upon pneumatic tyres. Occasionally a feeling came over Walter Bellamy that he was like a well-padded chair, which his inevitable good luck was pushing about upon carefully oiled casters. But really he had no qualms or cares beyond the fear of putting on flesh. For youth was dormant in him.

There are times like this. They come at intervals between the ages of ten and a hundred. As time goes on they lengthen: but they are never to be counted on as quite gone. For youth — indomitable, eager, questioning and desirous — springs eternal. And there lies all the tragedy of old age; of heartbreaking Springs, when all else in Nature is reviving, beautifying itself afresh.

It was the first week in March when Walter Bellamy made his proposal. During the whole of March and April there was nothing in the outer world to exhilarate any one. It was cold, misty and raining. Grudging weather with that hint of yellowness in the air which is so characteristic of London; finding its reflex in the bilious outlook of many of its inhabitants.

The Templetons were down in the country for a month at Easter, and twice — from Saturday to Monday — Walter joined them: realising for the first time all the horrors of a well-ordered county life, when the exact time for everything — even to the boiling of an egg — is a matter of tradition.

Here he was introduced to innumerable future relatives, and kissed Lady Constance, and squeezed her hand when they were alone — as often as he remembered. For still spring had scarcely touched the trees, and even the boles of the elms were unbroken by green.

Then the Templetons returned to Town. And suddenly

spring leapt into life: with warm, wanton winds, sunshine and flowers, and the singing of birds.

Walter went, dutifully, to dine with his betrothed and her family; and it was actually warm enough — though only the first week of May — to go into the balcony after dinner.

Was it the spring in his veins? Or that he wore a buttonhole of lilies of the valley, with their exotic scent which went to his head like wine? Or was it that the business of the Company had been satisfactorily arranged, that he stood balanced on the top of his ladder: incredibly prosperous: certainly putting on a little, a very little flesh, but all quite in the right place — like Lady Constance's blush — looking round to see where he should jump to next?

It is difficult to say. But suddenly the old Walter Bonnet Bellamy rose, and rent the husk of the prosperous City man.

As a drowning man sees his whole past life before him, so Bellamy saw love, and its exponents as he had known them. The warm-lipped, full-blooded ardour of that half Spanish woman; the infinite allure of a little French girl he had once been intimate with; the rough, half maternal passion of some of the mill girls; Hetty d'Esterre, with her gay delight in all the gay rituals of life.

A hot pain burnt up the back of his neck, some small vein in his cheek throbbed, his eyes felt as though there was sand in them.

At that moment all his needs were elemental. He wanted a woman in his arms — to seize her and shake her; bruise her with his rough embraces. He wanted the wind and the wild open moors; to run and shout and to feel his strength.

Scarcely knowing what he did he put out both hands, caught his betrothed's head between them, and ruffled up her smooth hair: then, half angrily — feeling that he would as soon have boxed her ears — kissed her lips, drawing them to his harshly, cruelly.

"Let's be married to-morrow — no, to-night — A midnight wedding! Let's run away!" he said with that rather shrill high laugh which betokened intense excitement. Then caught her to him and held her close.

"Let's do anything wild, and mad and bad — the spring's got into my veins. Con, Con! what a lark it is to be young

and full of life — what a gorgeous lark! Think of it; just you and I, and nobody else to matter a tinker's damn in the whole world."

"Walter — you hurt me — Walter I — I — you'll bruise my arms — and mind my hair. Oh, Walter, let me go."

"I won't let you go. I've got you and I mean to keep you. So don't flutter your plumage like that, you poor little scared dove." A sudden note of contempt was in his voice.

"Really, really you hurt. Oh, Walter, let me go. You frighten me — I — I ——" The girl's face was white, as she pushed away from him, her lips trembling, her eyes full of tears; while somehow her roughened hair made her look ridiculous — like some one in another person's hat.

"You don't love me. You wouldn't even know that I hurt you if you loved me," Bellamy's voice was aggrieved. He had never asked for love; but still it ought to have been there.

"You wouldn't treat me like that if you loved me," flamed Lady Constance with sudden spirit; for during the ebb of Walter's passion she had contrived to wrench herself free, and stood close against the lintel of the drawing-room window — could actually hear her mother and aunt discussing the delinquencies of the kitchen-maid. "Men have more respect for the girls they really love."

"Respect! — They respect their grandmothers!" Walter Bellamy laughed rudely. "There's no room for respect where a man and woman are all in all to each other."

"But they do; I know they do. Mamma says" — Lady Constance's voice broke in a sob — "You've behaved perfectly horribly — you've frightened me out of my wits. If you come near me again I shall go indoors." She was still trembling, but with a sensation of not unpleasant excitement; there was even a meagre trace of challenge in her voice. "To kiss me like — like that."

"Like what?"

"Oh, you know — on my mouth. Mamma says ——"

"Mamma! Mamma! Mamma belongs to the Victorians who mistake sentiment for passion: the Lord only knows how they ever propagated their species. And you —— Constance, have you got any warm blood in your veins?"

"You're horrid, disgusting to-night. How can you talk like that. I never thought ——"

"Nor felt either! Do you know what love is? It's brutal and cruel and wild. It sweeps away everything else in life. There's nothing worth having apart from it." Walter Bellamy's voice swung in its old rhythm. He had shed the decorous business man, the finger-kissing suitor; was his old flamboyant self once more. "They paint love as a little boy with toy wings — he's a giant with pinions which stretch from heaven to earth. There's no bargaining with him, giving a little, holding back a little, it must be all or nothing. Constance, if you won't come away with me to-night — think what a lark it would be, to climb down the balcony here, and run off and be married! — Or not married."

"Walter!"

"Well, at a registry office — that's what I call splitting the difference. If you won't do that I'll not believe you love me." Bellamy gave his head a little jerk as he spoke, with all the air of an obstinate spoilt child. He felt that he was playing Lady Constance as though she were a fish; and for the first time for months was really enjoying himself. The daughter of an Earl — no longer sweetly smooth, but agitated; trembling yet fascinated — as surely as that silly little rabbit Ada Burston had been — and he, Walter Bellamy, who had run barefooted — hawking papers through the streets of Edge.

"I couldn't — I ——"

"Well then next week," persisted Bellamy; while — "take me or leave me" tittered the sub-goblin at the back of him.

"You know I can't, you know ——" Lady Constance almost wrung her hands. "Nothing's settled. We should get no presents — with the season coming on and all. Then there's my trousseau."

"Oh, very well! If the trousseau is more important than the bridegroom." A sudden sense of almost unendurable boredom descended upon Bellamy. Here was the place to end the whole wearisome affair: And with a melodramatic shrug he swung round and entered the drawing-room, where Lady Templeton and her sister — who had

caught the sound of distress in Lady Constance's voice — had risen to their feet, staring with open mouth. For in the best circles a man seldom makes a woman cry before marriage.

"Lady Templeton, may I ask — in my ignorance — how much a young lady's complete — really complete trousseau is likely to cost?" enquired Bellamy; his bland air oddly at variance with his expression, that Pan-like expression of malice and delight.

"Oh, I don't know," the good lady spoke confusedly, bewildered by something in Bellamy's manner, which put him quite apart from the man she thought she knew: — "Anything from twenty up to a thousand pounds, it all depends. My housemaid who is engaged to the ——"

"Still you think a thousand pounds would be a fair price?" interrupted Walter suavely.

"I suppose so — I ——" she began; then laughed constrainedly —"But what a very odd question. Why do you ask?"

"Because, if you'll allow me, I will send you a cheque for that amount, to-morrow. Your daughter and I have been having a little dispute as to relative values — she has made her choice. And"— with a sudden delightful sense of holding the floor, of amazing the two stout, conventional women, and the trembling girl at the window, as they had never been amazed before — Bellamy dropped into his most business-like tone —"And for the other goods, as per invoice — I will not trouble you further. The matrimonial bargain being"— here he gave a shrug, and quick gesture of the hands —"so to say — off."

"Lord Templeton is in the smoking-room with my son — Lord Templeton ——" began his hostess, drawing herself up, very flushed: realising, as she afterwards declared, that there was something unendurably insolent in "that wretched man's manner:"— For Bellamy, with his head a little on one side, was staring at her as though she was some strange and interesting animal —"If you will explain to Lord Templeton — Constance, my child!"

Her glance turned to the window — where her daughter was standing with tear-stained face — almost as if she were appealing for help to the well-drilled nonentity, whom she

had trained never to think for herself: —"Constance, Constance darling — what is it?"

"I don't know, Mamma. Walter was very strange — he frightened me — I — I—— But really it was nothing."

"The truth is this," Bellamy bent forward, suddenly sombre; for — despite the fact that his sub-self applauded the whole scene with ribald delight — he really had a distinct sense of ill-usage: after all what right had his affianced wife to bore him? "I find that I am not loved for myself. To speak quite plainly Lady Constance's affections are engaged elsewhere."

"Indeed, Mr. Bellamy; I'm sure that there is — never has been any one," remonstrated Lady Templeton. "Constance was always so reserved — Constance!" again that almost appealing glance; but her daughter's eyes, tear-drenched and deprecating, were fixed on Walter Bellamy's face.

"No," he answered gloomily, "it is no use; she doesn't love me, and"— Suddenly the sub-self gained the upper hand and Bellamy laughed, not insolently but with the air of having found out something amazingly funny —"And I'll be hanged if I love her. So what's the good of marrying — eh?"

There was something persuasive in his smile as he glanced round at the three women, before adding — with a sense of delicious irony: —"For what does any one ever marry for excepting love? Love which 'rules the camp, the court, the grove ——' The truth is that Lady Constance visualises Cupid as a porter, *avec une corbeille* on his back, hiding his wings. Whereas I —— But I will not bore you by recounting the ideals of a common man," Bellamy added — with a species of brag that the climber only allows himself when he is very sure of his firm foothold — then glanced once more at the girl: sighed — very passably, for he was an excellent actor — smiled: included all three in a sweeping bow, and left the room; without even giving Lady Templeton time to ring for the butler to let him out.

"Odious creature!" ejaculated Miss Carstairs; "I always knew it, Harriet. The fellow is a cad — a cad! — I told you how it would be. It isn't as though his wealth was anything out of the way!"

"But still, with three girls not out, one's got to put up with something," lamented her sister. "There's Dora, who must be presented this season. You should have had more sense, Constance," she added pettishly. "To quarrel like that — to cry! You look a perfect sight; nothing puts a man off like tears."

"But — but I loved him," sobbed poor Lady Constance; as though that were a sufficient reason for any folly.

## CHAPTER LI

AS for Bellamy, on leaving the Templetons' house he hesitated a moment or two. Then, determining to walk home, crossed the road, moved up it and turned into the Green Park.

How was it he had ever admired Lady Constance's smooth perfection? He was in a mood where — if it had not all been so deliciously funny — he would like to have defaced her: picked her up and thrown her against a wall, as a savage will do with an idol which has exasperated him by its calmness.

After all what did he want with marriage? What did he want with a son? Now that the business was going to be turned into a company, with a registered name, there was no need for that.

The solemn humbug of those Templetons!

He threw back his head and laughed. He had behaved like a brute, a cad — but all of a sudden he realised that was how he wanted to behave. He wanted life without veneer — crude, rough, naked — he wanted to wear gaudy ties, to eat with his knife — with no servant behind his chair to criticise him. To kiss or curse as he felt inclined: after all that was the life which suited him best.

With people like the Templetons life, one's whole existence, was "faced," like early Victorian furniture. A pretentious farce, running neither to tragedy nor comedy.

A few dark forms were huddled up on the seats as he passed them. To sleep where and when and how you like, with the sky for a canopy; who else had so free a life as these derelicts, stripped of all responsibility, beyond the thought of the next meal?

This reflection brought a sudden memory of Gale. He had agonised over just such a life. But things would bite to Gale's bone which — as Bellamy realised — he himself would pass by unnoticed, regard as a part of everyday life.

What had become of Gale during the last few years? He felt that he must see him; that he was the only man to suit his mood.

Moving beneath a lamp, which stood at the centre of four cross paths, he pulled out his watch and glanced at it. It was only a little past ten. Night or day was always much the same to Francis Gale; why not go now? His mind was made up. He must find him and that at once. His need for his long-forgotten friend had, on a sudden, become as imperative as though it were a matter of life or death. The only thing was — in which direction had he better start on his quest; and for another moment or so he stood hesitating: deep in thought.

A miserable wisp of male humanity, hovering near, glanced greedily at the well-groomed young man, who stood with his overcoat thrown open, displaying one pearl stud, and an expanse of white shirt front; the gold watch still in his hands.

For a moment he hesitated: then stretched out a grimy claw. "A copper, guv'nor, ter get a bed — out o' work for months — wife an' kids starvin'——"

"You'd drink it."

"Not I, governor, I ain't——" began the man. Then — as his red-rimmed eyes met Walter's, beneath the yellow flare of lamplight — all at once he dropped his whine. "Well, what am I to do? A cove's a cove for all 'ees in rags. An' there's you gents with yer champagne suppers an' yer fancy lydies."

With a laugh Walter Bellamy dropped a sovereign into the narrow palm, with its tangled bunch of claw-like fingers.

"Go and get drunk — gloriously drunk — drunker than you've ever been before," he said. And then with a sudden decision turned away at right angles to the direction in which he had been going. And so into Piccadilly, where he hailed a taxi.

He would go home first and ask Hansen where Gale was to be found; likely enough Hansen would know, for he had always, somehow, seemed to regard the derelict as his legitimate master.

But Hansen knew nothing for certain. He was slow and sleepy. Mr. Gale had been in Grove Buildings, in Roches-

ter Row, a year back. After Mr. Bellamy left he had moved a great many times. It was a wonder to him — Hansen — how he lived, a real gentleman too!

Likely enough he was dead; he had gone away to nothing last time he saw him. By the by, some one had told him of some new address — it might have been Mrs. Grant — but he was not certain: had no idea where she had said the place was.

Bellamy could have stamped with impatience. As Jane had said years before, if Wally did not want a thing it ceased to exist to him; if he wanted it he must have it at once.

And now he wanted Gale.

The tears actually came into his eyes. After all Gale was the only man friend he had ever had since he climbed out of his own sphere — he and Sir George Curst were merely business associates each with a good deal of contempt for the other — and now Gale had vanished: forsaken him.

It was no good questioning Hansen further. Besides, the taxi was still ticking away outside the door, and though he had more money than he knew what to do with, and had just given a sovereign to a beggar, the thought of those twopences bit into Bellamy: he would go to Gale's last address, places of the sort in which he lived were, for the most part, open night and day. And bidding his servant go to bed, he went downstairs again, and told the waiting taxi-driver to take him to Westminster.

An all night sitting had been predicted for the House, and he thought that the driver might take him for a Member. Well — after all there were more impossible things! A rumour of dissolution was in the air; if he chose to stand for Wantage he was pretty sure of a seat.

But he did not choose — and never would. He was seized with a sudden aversion to all that was smug and respectable. Not that it seemed necessary to be either to sit in Parliament; but the pose suited with the position, the place: and he hated anything that was out of focus.

Dismissing his cab at the end of Parliament Street, he crossed the Square, passed the front of the Abbey and turned into Great Smith Street. Hunted out Gale's latest address and found him gone: was directed first to one place

and then another — each as it seemed a step further down in the abyss which lies beneath London's social and commercial life. And finally, towards one o'clock, made his way back to his own flat, more convinced than ever of the value of Gale to him at that special moment; more determined that he should be, must be, found.

## CHAPTER LII

DIRECTLY he had finished breakfast the next morning — with that strange persistence which distinguished him in all on which he had set his heart — or rather fancy — Walter Bellamy started out again on his search armed with Mrs. Grant's address.

The taxi-driver took him down to the river and along the Embankment, to avoid the traffic in Victoria. Nearing his old lodgings, the idea of questioning Mrs. Burston occurred to Bellamy, and putting his head out of the window, he told the driver to stop opposite the ship-breaking yard, then got out and rang at the bell.

Mrs. Burston herself opened it; her fresh, full face had fallen into sallow bags, her eyes were faded, as if with continuous weeping.

"Good morning, Mrs. Burston, I am Mr. Bellamy — I wonder if you remember me," said Walter, for the look she gave him held no sign of recognition.

"Oh, yes, I remember you," answered the woman, though there was no lightening of the dull, detached air with which she regarded him, as though he were part of a system, a world, past her comprehension.

"I was wondering if, by any chance, you knew Mr. Gale's present address? You'll remember he used to come here to see me."

"Yes; but I don't know his address." Quite mechanically Mrs. Burston lifted a handful of her apron and began polishing the brass knob of the door, which was not so bright as it had been in the old days.

"Perhaps your daughter ——" began Bellamy. It was this thought that had impelled him to call at the place; for had not Ada herself gone to Gale to tell him of the move — some four or five years earlier — into the "Adelphi" flat: "If I could see her, she might be able to help me."

A dull red flooded Mrs. Burston's face: —"She is not here."

"Oh, I'm sorry for that! Perhaps she will be in later on?"

"No,"

"Would she write — I will leave my address."

"She is not here."

"Well, if you'd give me her address — or let her know when you see her."

"It ain't likely as I'll be seeing her; at present anyways."

"And you have seen nothing of Mr. Gale?"

"No."

"But Ada ——"

"Aydar ain't not here."

"But she'll be coming back some time, I suppose?"

"Mayhap — but 'tain't likely."

"Perhaps if I were to write ——?"

Again Mrs. Burston flushed hotly. "I ain't sure o' her address; not just at this moment, not in my head, so to speak."

The woman's manner implied something so evidently wrong, showed so plainly that she was unable, or unwilling to communicate with her daughter, that Bellamy felt there was little use in persisting.

"Well, I'm sorry to have troubled you, Mrs. Burston. I hope you're quite well, and your husband and the little ones, though they must be quite big by now."

"Yes."

"Well, that's all right," he said; and with a nod and a smile was turning again towards the waiting taxi, when an ugly spasm — as though she were struggling with tears — crossed the woman's face.

"She was never not the same after you came to lodge with us," she said resentfully.

"But I ——" Bellamy stared at her in amazement: — "I never did anything."

"No," answered Mrs. Burston, "that's just it." And moving back a step she shut the door, quite quietly, in his face.

So that was the trouble! With a shrewd guess as to what had become of Ada — for in his class "the streets" were an ever-present reality, a warning for any flighty girl, a never-failing terror for all respectable parents — Walter Bellamy

directed the taxi-driver to take him to the address on the borders of Pimlico which Hansen had provided, and then dismissed him; for he was nearer to things — the sort of things that influenced Gale's life — on foot.

He was fortunate enough to find Mrs. Grant — his ex-charwoman — at home; the basement rooms, in which she lived, permeated with steam, for she was washing.

From her he learnt that nearly a year earlier Gale had left Grove Buildings, after several moves, and taken a single room in Strutton Ground. She could give Mr. Bellamy that address but she had not seen him since, had no idea if he were still there.

"To tell the truth, sir," she said, rolling up her sodden hands in her apron — showing the front breadth of her skirt worn through to her stay busk — the inevitable badge of the wash tub, "I hadn't the heart; there was nothing I could do. When 'ee was in Grove Buildings I'd go wash and tidy up a bit fur 'im. But by the time 'ee got to Strutton Ground there weren't nothing left ter tidy. Terrible he looked. Broken down and 'alf starved — if you'll excuse me saying so, sir," she added; as though starvation was a fact of such vulgar banality, that it might reasonably offend the ears of such a personage as Bellamy. "It made me cry, that it did. Though I see enough o' that sort o' thing about me, in all conscience. But a woman as can char can mostly happen on something to turn an honest penny by. With a gentleman it's a different thing — and there's no mistake about poor Mr. Gale being that. We can bear things there's no expecting the gentry to bear, nohow."

As Bellamy made his way through the drab streets leading from Morton Terrace, where Mrs. Grant lived, to Strutton Ground — the very place where he had first met Gale, how these creatures returned to their lairs! — he wondered what of the "gentleman" would be recognisable in him, were he unshaven, ragged, half-starved. How many generations it had taken to make Gale's breeding visible beneath all this, even to the eye of a charwoman. For since that sudden outburst which had swept him off his feet the night before, Bellamy had realised a new, or rather a different point of interest in himself.

He was vulgar — naturally. More, he liked being vul-

gar; he loved scenes and intrigues. To make a splash with his money, to feel that people stared at him: the continual excitement of beginning afresh. The very things which so upset the traditional gentleman.

Everything which he had started he had thrown aside, on arriving at the point where people had said all there was to say.

But after all no part of his entire life had been so dull as the last two years; the years which had elapsed since his "Great Idea" had been in smooth working order.

Certainly he had piled up money.

But what was the good of money when one had to dress more quietly than an auctioneer's clerk, behave more decorously. When everything could be had by merely paying for it. It would be better fun to pick pockets!

He remembered the old days when a motor of his own had been his supreme ambition.

Well, he had a motor. But, after all, what was its solitary, smooth-running grandeur, compared to a swaying, pitching motor-'bus — with its buccaneering ways, the elbowing of smelly humanity, the odd snatches of conversation.

He remembered being sent to the cooked fish shop in Edge to buy his parents a bowl of stewed eels for supper; and dipping his fingers into the jellied gravy — which was half glue — and sucking them. Nothing had tasted half so good to him since.

After all, life was the only thing worth having. Life and yet more life. Intellectual joys were all in the past or the future: ambition defeated itself. As for money there was nothing which stood more surely between a man and real life.

True — it might have brought him a wife with a title, or as many mistresses as he pleased. But he did not want that. If he wanted a woman at all, it was one who would curse him if she tired of him: or — and here was an odd contrast — cook for him, work for him and with him, sit by his fire-side. Some one stable and comprehensible, who was used to the ways of men of his class; who would not mind if he had cheese for breakfast, and sat down to dinner in

his shirtsleeves; who — and this above all — wanted no other man in her life.

And here — though Bellamy did not recognise it as such — was a clear case of atavism. For there is no woman — out of a harem — who so entirely relinquishes all other male society, when she marries, as the wife of the respectable English working man.

On reaching Strutton Ground, Bellamy heard that Gale had left rather more than a month earlier. But the woman who kept a greengrocer's shop on the ground floor of the house, directed him to yet another place, this time in Horseferry Road.

Here, after climbing innumerable stairs — each flight headed by a landing, with dust-fringed pools of water beneath grimy strings of washing; and narrow doors, scratched and battered and defaced, as though entrance had been as eagerly sought as if they were the gates of heaven itself — Bellamy descended to the cellars and found a deaf and dumb cobbler, who wrote Gale's address for him on the edge of a newspaper.

## CHAPTER LIII

THIS new address Bellamy found to be a second-hand dealer's, with strings of clothing fluttering in lines outside the door — empty mockeries of poor, and for the most part, frail humanity; while the chairs they had sat on, the tables they had ate at, debouched on to the street, along with empty parrot cages, and obsolete gramophones.

In response to persistent knocking upon the counter inside, a woman of almost incredible frowsiness emerged from a trap-door in the floor, apologising for her slow appearance on the grounds that few customers called in the mornings. As for the people in the rest of the house, she declared — her face sullen when she realised that Bellamy had no wish either to buy or to sell — they were all sorts. For her, she "didn't mix with such folk."

But half a crown quickened her memory.

There were two attics right at the top of the house, in one of which her husband kept his surplus stock. She had heard him say that he had given some one leave to sleep there for eighteen pence a week — more fool him! It might be the person wanted; anyhow, if he liked, the gentleman could step upstairs and see for himself.

Bellamy did step up. And up, and up, and up, through a house so tall and narrow that it could scarcely have stood, save for its neighbours.

The second-hand dealer's stock in trade seemed to permeate the place; indiscriminately mingled with the lodgers, for there was a baby fast asleep in the open drawer of a large chest, while the children, half naked, played at horses astride of chairs.

The house was full of noise. The snoring of some night bird. The whirr of a sewing-machine. A woman raucously abusing a child, for a "dirty little slut!" A cracked high-pitched voice — which Walter found to belong to a

crazed beldame, who sat on the stairs singing: "My love is like a red, red rose." The sound of frizzling fat. And beating through it all an incessant grinding moan, which broke into a loud shriek — like an animal in frantic pain — just as Bellamy topped the last landing but one.

Here a couple of women were standing talking, their bare arms folded in their ragged aprons. With her moist eye on Bellamy one of them nodded towards a half-open door. "It's the first," she explained affably. Then added, with a harsh laugh: "An' it's allus the first as counts — I aughter know 'avin' 'ad six meself — buried four an' all."

At last the top landing, where the bannisters hung in mere shreds, was reached; and Bellamy, finding himself confronted by two doors, opened one at random: was met by a prodigious stench and flapping of wings, and discovered that the loft was being used as a pigeon-cote: turned to the other door — half blocked by a wardrobe and pile of bottomless chairs — and knocked. Then, hearing some sort of a sound from within, pushed it open — for there was no lock or handle — and, entering, found the man of whom he was in search.

The place was full of furniture; piled with gaping mattresses and rubbish of all sorts, right up to the very ceiling, save immediately beneath the skylight where, upon a mattress on the floor, lay Gale; a little raised, as though he had propped himself up against a box which stood behind him; and then, out of sheer weakness, slipped down and forward.

He was emaciated beyond anything Bellamy had ever seen; there were no blankets on the bed, only a few indescribable rags; while one thin hand clutched a tattered, grimy shirt — and here was the last touch, for at his lowest Gale had always been fastidiously clean — across his breast.

For a moment or two he gazed at Bellamy blankly, with his glazed sunken eyes. Then as the other spoke, bending over him, a look of recognition dawned on the waxen face.

"Ah, Belle-amie," he murmured — a ghost of the old twisted smile on his cracked lips with their dark surrounding shadows: —"Here we are, you see. The virtuous apprentice, and the rake — at the last stage of his progress." He spoke in gasps, his voice so hoarse that Bellamy had to kneel down to catch what he said —"How did you find

your way up here? — It seems that poverty is much the same as the churchman's after-world — the poorest highest up — and the richest nearest the fire. Ugh, the cold! it's like a wolf at my vitals."

He shivered as he spoke; his shoulders thrust forward either side of his sunken chest. And indeed, though the sun streamed in a dusty ray through the skylight, it just missed the sick man; while, kneeling by his side, Bellamy was conscious of a draught which cut like a scythe across the floor.

"Gale, my dear fellow! My poor, dear fellow! I've been hunting everywhere for you; thought I'd never find you." There was real feeling in Bellamy's voice: he scarcely realised that he had not been spending the last three years in a fruitless search.

"What do you want?" It was the old bitter question.

"I want nothing except to help you — get you out of this horrible place."

Gale shook his head, again with that strange smile, as though more than half amused at his own plight. "I can't go — I'm waiting — expecting a visitor."

A sense of chill came over Bellamy; after all he was not needed — there were others. "Some one who will help you I hope?"

"Some one who will help me eternally — the only true democrat," answered Gale, with a glance of such mocking significance that Bellamy could not fail to catch his meaning.

"Nonsense! I'm going to get you a doctor, straight away. And then,— if he'll let me — a taxi to take you back to my place, for Hansen to look after — you remember Hansen?"

"My dear Bellamy, he'd turn me into a renegade — draw me into the bosom of the church at the last ——" The broken words were interrupted by a prolonged struggle for breath, which left Gale bent forward above his knees — trembling from head to foot, with the sweat pouring down his face — but still he held to his point. "Hansen's so damned diaconal!"

With an odd tenderness — though not without an exact picture of himself as a good Samaritan, who was possessed of no ulterior motive, and this amazed him, gave him quite

a new pleasure — Bellamy helped the sick man to lie down again, rolling a bundle of rags as comfortably as possible under his head.

"Just hold on a bit — I must go out and see about things — I'll be back in ten minutes," he said, and, descending the innumerable stairs, found a chemist's shop where they gave him the addresses of the nearest doctors.

After ringing up three, he at last found one who was in and told him to call round at once; then got on to his own number and bade Hansen come, bringing blankets and hot-water bottles.

This done, he found a restaurant, and ordered some hot soup, leaving a deposit for the tin they lent him to carry it in; then turned into a public-house and bought a small flask of brandy.

Suddenly his fine gentlemanly ways seemed to have dropped from him. It did not even enter into his head to waste money paying a waiter to bring the soup, but carried it as naturally as he had once carried his own dinners to the mill in Edge. For the first time for years, he felt completely at his ease, in his right place; the very crudeness of his surroundings fitted him.

Back in the little loft he found he had no spoon and bribing a child from the next floor with a penny to fetch him one, fed Gale with soup and brandy — a sip at a time.

As he was doing this, kneeling facing towards the door — with one arm beneath the sick man's head — there was a hurried, deprecating knock; then, with no pause for an answer, it was pushed slightly ajar, and a woman slid through the aperture. A battered wisp of a creature, who hung just inside the room, one arm drawn back behind her, one hand clutching the breast of her low-necked blouse, her pale blue eyes wide and fixed — not on Gale but on Bellamy — her weak mouth open, the rouge standing out like a blow on either cheek-bone.

"Ada," whispered Gale. Then again, "Ada, come here."

But the girl did not appear to notice his words. Her eyes, still on Bellamy, became suffused with red, as if tears strained at the back of them; while her hand slid up to her throat. And the next moment — with an odd shrinking movement, as if to gather her lost womanhood and her

flimsy garments around her at once — she had slipped from the door.

With a gesture Gale signed to Bellamy that he should follow her; and he did so. But in vain. For though he once caught sight of a bedraggled feather — two flights before him — by the time he reached the street door the wearer of it had disappeared, melted away into the motley crowd.

"It's nothing," said Gale, when Bellamy told him — "nothing could be done. I've tried, but the whirlpool has got her." For a moment he lay back, shivering so that Bellamy took off his coat and laid it over him. Then he spoke again.

"It's beneath all of us — some escape — some are foredoomed from birth. Some are always peeping over till they grow giddy and fall. But all alike we walk a plank above an abyss. Beneath us are despair — murder — profligacy — cruelty — lust — we try to believe they're not there — only in books — in newspapers. Then some unutterable thing puts up an arm out of it all, and clutches us by the ankle," he said; and fell silent again with his head sunk forward on his breast.

"The worst of it is," he added again, after a long pause, "she's not wise enough to be really good — to have demanded the price that so-called good women do demand — or clever enough to be successfully bad — after all success is an art."

"She was always inclined that way," remarked the other man; but Gale lay silent, plucking with thin white fingers at the nap of the coat which had been laid over him. And drawing a dilapidated chair from among the stack of furniture, Bellamy sat down upon it, with folded arms, listening to the sick man's rattling breath, the coo and flutter of the birds next door, and the indescribably mingled sounds which penetrated from the lower floors — the seething stew of life and birth and death — in which he had a curious feeling of being the only distinct entity.

After a little while the medley of the sounds was broken by a heavy footstep, and Hansen entered laden with blankets and parcels; then turned to call to the doctor whom he had encountered in his search for the place.

"The place is a rabbit warren — I thought I was pretty

well used to this part, but I began to fear I was beaten," said the latter, while the man-servant looked hopelessly round for a clean place upon which to lay down his load; finally, pulling forward a large tin bath, laid the blankets in it, and placed the hot-water bottles (still hot) at Gale's feet.

For a few moments there was silence; while the doctor — a heavily built man, with a weary, overstrained face — knelt on the floor, examining his patient with the stethoscope, and putting a few questions, which struck Bellamy as being more a matter of form than anything else.

As he rose to his feet, and stood gazing down at the sick man, his mouth was set; while Gale looked up with the old twisted smile on his face. And so, for a full minute or more they regarded each other in a silence which lasted till Bellamy — feeling the look of comprehension between the two men almost too poignant to be borne — broke it with the words:

"I'm afraid it's an awful place to have brought you to, Doctor, but ——"

"Oh, it's all right ——" The doctor turned, and, wiping his stethoscope on a silk handkerchief replaced it in his bag, which Hansen held open.

"I'm used to it, it doesn't matter," he added vaguely, his voice holding a sort of settled despair, for in the district where he lived and worked he was so seldom called in till it was too late for anything to matter. "I'll send round something that will ease the pain and shortness of breath."

"A complaint most incidental to death," put in Gale in his strained whisper.

"I want to take him away, back to my own place, where he could have a nurse — every sort of care. I suppose it could do no harm?" suggested Bellamy.

The doctor glanced at his patient, then shrugged his shoulders. "It can do no harm," he said slowly.

"Nor good," murmured Gale. "No, no!" he gave a shudder of impatience as Bellamy began to insist. "No, let me die as I've lived — what's the good of masquerading at the last?"

"You'd be better, sir," put in Hansen. "I've got a taxi outside. And with them blankets and all, Mr. Bellamy and I can carry you down quite safely."

"No — no, my good Hansen. I'll stay here — till the next move." Gale's voice broke into a cough, but they caught words which sounded like a protest against prolonging the agony.

"It's no good if he doesn't seem inclined to go; nothing can make any difference," put in the doctor. Then moved to the door with Bellamy at his heels. "Pneumonia — oh, yes, the last stages — and everything else. Why, the man's eaten through and through with fever and privation and ——" he gave a significant gesture with his hand towards his mouth. "The wonder is he's held on so long — the way breeding tells! Any one can see he doesn't belong here. Of course he mustn't be left. Keep him as warm as possible. He may last the night or he may flicker out any moment; the heart's in a terrible state. The stuff I'll send you round will help it, but ——"

He turned again, half out of the door, and gave another long glance at the sick man, who was lying back with closed eyes, panting. Then moved down the stairs, with the incurious air of a person who is well used to such places.

Seeing that it was nothing less than cruelty to press Gale to move, Bellamy followed the doctor downstairs, and sent the taxi driver off with a note — which he scribbled on a leaf torn from his pocket-book — asking Mrs. Grant to come round at once prepared to stay the night, for what would have been the use of a professional nurse in such a *ménage*. Then he moved along the road, making purchases which would not have occurred to any one who did not know what destitution meant.

Back again in the high, narrow house, climbing slowly up the stairs — with the old sensation of being utterly wrung out by all the excitement of the last few hours — Bellamy observed that the last landing from the top was deserted; while through the half-open door came a murmur of voices, and the thin, persistent cry of reluctant life.

## CHAPTER LIV

AFTER having seen Mrs. Grant established, with everything she could need at hand, and hunted out a more or less decent woman on the second floor, who — for a consideration — promised to hold herself in readiness for any emergency, Bellamy went back to his flat and bathed and changed.

That morning, the first thing before he went out, he had — with an unusual sense of shame — acted up to the insolent offer he had made and sent Lady Templeton a cheque for a thousand pounds; half believing that she would accept it, so greedy had she shown herself in the matter of settlement and wedding-presents.

But she must have had some pride, despite her cheeseparing, for on getting back to his rooms he found an envelope, addressed in her narrow sloping hand, with his own cheque, returned to him without a word, neatly folded in a blank sheet of paper.

So, they would sell their daughter, though they would not take gratuities: Bellamy shrugged his shoulders as he opened another letter, bearing Lady Constance's sprawling caligraphy — so characteristic of the day and so totally devoid of all true character.

But it was a piteous enough little epistle, despite its dashing appearance.

"*Dearest Walter:*

"I don't know how we came to quarrel last night or what I said — poor little me! — to make you so angry. Please do believe that I love you and will do *anything* you wish. Mamma is very angry, but it is you who count. I shall be walking with my maid in the park, near the Achilles statue, after tea, about half-past five. If you will be there we will talk things over.

"Yours always,

"CON."

In answer Bellamy wrote, what was perhaps the manliest, most truthful letter he had ever penned, telling her that he was not good enough for her — though here he felt himself to be lying — that she must put all thought of him out of her head; that some day, when she was happy with a man of her own sort, she would thank him for what he had done.

Then, with a sudden remembrance of Jane and the means she had used to turn aside poor Ada Burston's fancy, he added these words, "Besides all this — to tell you the quite honest truth, a truth I ought to have acknowledged to you long before — I care, and always have cared, for some one else; though "— and here he displayed his inveterate desire to leave some door open in all he said or did —" it is not in the least likely that we shall ever be able to marry."

But, though he quoted Jane, Jane had been mistaken on one point — her innocent little lie wasted — Ada's mother, all the good people, had been mistaken in the girl; only Bellamy himself, and that useless fool, her father, had realised how she bent towards the abyss of which Gale spoke. It was a difficult world. After all was it better to be good — as the moralists term goodness — realising nothing of other people's proclivities and temptations, or to be wise by experience? For life is truly one of those things of which one can only gain experience at first hand.

Lady Constance and Ada Burston! After all there was not much difference between the two; save that the one was, and always would be, fenced in with an impassable barricade of conventions, while the other was defenceless.

And the bad, bold man of the story had let them both go free. Here Bellamy laughed, visualising himself as the two mothers would see him.

There was another letter among the mail which awaited him; one with an American postmark, which he carried off to his Club and smiled over as he ate his dinner.

It was from a man he had known in America — a typical young Yankee who had kept up a desultory sort of correspondence with him, and now wrote asking him to do some odd commissions, among which was the securing of a real old-fashioned clown's suit —" I guess you'll laugh fit to split yourself," continued the letter, "but I'm starting a circus; been at it since the Fall, collecting freaks, and training the

horses. It's all pretty well ready now — real slap up affair — and we're going to start on touring the West. Now, if you'd only come in as Ring-Master, our fortune would be made."

Something of his old boyish excitement lit up Bellamy's face, as he read this epistle, then leant back for a few moments, toying with the idea; while he glanced round at his indifferent companions, all alike absorbed in their food.

"What a lark it would be!" he thought, with a thrill of real excitement. Then put the letter aside while he ate his dinner; and returning to it as he smoked, found this postscript: "By the by, we want a dwarf, not over three feet, less if possible. If you come across such a thing ship him out to me — or better still come along too. There's money in it, take my word for that."

The thought of the fellow's crazy suggestion, that he — Walter Bonnet Bellamy, partner in Curst, Bellamy and Co. — should actually be drawn over to America for the sake of becoming ring-master in a travelling circus — should moreover be distinctly attracted by the idea — tickled Bellamy so that, as he walked across St. James's Park to make a last enquiry for Gale he thought he would tell him of it. There was just that sort of humour in the thing that the poor fellow would really appreciate.

But Gale — seeming too far gone to be amazed at anything, even at his own fate — was leaning back amongst his pillows; with Mrs. Grant nodding at his side, sunk deep in a disreputable armchair, which she had pulled down from among the stacks of furniture.

But, though Gale did not stir or look up, she bestirred herself at Bellamy's entrance, and gave him the latest report. The doctor had been. He said that Mr. Gale might live through the night, but it was doubtful. There was nothing to be done. She had everything she needed, was used to sickness. The second-hand dealer had been up making a scene — afraid of infection among his stuff — but she had sent him off. Oh yes, she was all right, not afraid. "If only the poor gentleman could get better." The tears rained down the good creature's face as she spoke.

"If only 'e'd gone into the Infirmary a couple o' months back. But Lord bless yer, Mister Bellamy, 'ow could 'ee, a

gentleman like 'im!" she said. And then — having lighted Bellamy down the first perilous flight of stairs — returned to her post.

He would not have cared to have sat up all night in that eerie attic, he thought. But here was a woman, who was probably afraid of a mouse! — Oh, well, they were queer creatures; from Lady Constance Sartoris — with her tentative offer to do all he wished — downwards.

## CHAPTER LV

WITH a distinct sensation of being pleased at the growth of something in the way of real feeling, Bellamy's first thought, on waking next morning, was for Gale. And he rose directly Hansen brought him his tea, fully determined to be with him by nine o'clock at the latest.

But there was a pile of letters awaiting him, some of which had to be answered. Then Curst, who was in Town, rang him up and kept him a long while over the telephone. Thus, with one delay and another — the whole working together in that curious fashion which makes the most determined disbeliever in Providence feel that there is Some One who holds the strings, arranges our exits and our entrances — it was close on eleven before he left his own flat.

Had it not been for this, and the brilliantly fine morning, which determined him to walk across St. James's Park, he would not have encountered the very person whom he — at that moment — most wished to see, the lady who had spoken to Francis Gale nearly six years before, outside the entrance to the Tate Gallery.

During the last year or so Bellamy had seen her several times; most often walking in the Park with a couple of dogs, while once when he had been out with Lady Constance, the two women had bowed and smiled.

"It's Lord Boynton's eldest sister," explained his betrothed, after they had passed; "Lady Victoria Milne — the only one not married. She's perfectly sweet. Of course she must be quite old now; she'd been out a long time when I was a tiny girl. Still I think she's lovely — though Mamma doesn't like her, calls her 'that old maid.' But there must have been some romance — don't you think there must have been some romance — she *is* so pretty! Isn't she pretty, Walter?"

How tired he had grown of that constant appeal for affirmation, on even the most trivial point.

Now as he saw the quietly elegant-looking woman coming towards him, across the bridge which spans the lake, his mind was made up in a moment. And stopping, well in front of her, so that no mistake was possible, he raised his hat.

"Lady Victoria Milne——"

"Yes?" The lady stopped and lifted her eyes quietly to his, with no heightening of the colour on her pale cheeks, though she was evidently surprised—"I am Lady Victoria Milne, but I don't think——"

"You don't know me—and I apologise for what must seem an unpardonable impertinence. Believe me I would not have dared to stop you like this, if it had not been about—what seems to me—a most serious, most urgent matter." With his hat still in his hand Bellamy bent a little forward; assuming that look which in the old Virgo days he would have designated as being "of a serious sweetness."

But Lady Victoria did not seem impressed; while her expression and attitude was so neutral that he felt convinced she was listening to him as she would to any ordinary beggar, with a gentle tolerance that was ready to weigh every word. But that withal, she was not very much concerned, or even inclined to find offence in the fact of his being a stranger. Had, in fact, lived so long, and so completely, brooding over one thought, that all the rest of the world had grown shadowy, outside and beyond herself.

But in his next words there was no doubt that Bellamy reached that inner sanctum of her heart and mind.

"One day, several years ago, I think that I saw you speaking to my friend Francis Gale. It was outside the Tate Gallery; I wonder if you remember?"

"Yes," the word was a mere breath. If possible Lady Victoria was whiter than before as she uttered it; but for all that it was as though some light, soft and yet intense, had been kindled within her, shining through the clear skin, the brown eyes, the parted lips.

"He is ill—very ill, I'm afraid. He lives——" Bellamy's voice broke, the word "lives" seemed like a challenge flung in the face of the gods, for more than twelve

hours ago life had been so palpably hovering for flight; then he pulled himself together, though he could not have dared to repeat the word — "over there" — he made a gesture with his hand in the direction of Victoria Street. "I was on my way to see him now. And as you know him, I felt ——"

"I will come;" Lady Victoria spoke very quietly, she had already turned, and — almost insensibly — Walter moved on, while she walked at his side.

"It is a pretty bad locality — he has been in very low water, poor fellow. I don't know whether I have any right to take you there," he demurred.

"I think that there can be no question of that."

"But I'm not sure ——" began Bellamy again, with his irresistible desire to find a reason for, to justify everything. How did he know what these two had been to each other. Gale must have had many such friends in his old life; it might be that he was taking too much for granted. "I don't know," he repeated, "you see, Gale has never told me anything of himself."

"I think that in a great emergency one knows things that one has never been told. You knew — somehow you knew directly you saw me, what else made you speak? — that he is all I have ever cared for." She spoke quietly and simply; then, as they moved out of the park, put up her hand and hailed a passing taxi.

"I think we'd better drive, we shall get there more quickly. And it may — may make all the difference," she added, while, for the first time, her voice faltered.

## CHAPTER LVI

DURING that drive, which he never quite forgot, Bellamy's companion sat leaning a little forward: with something in her attitude — quivering yet tense — which reminded him of a runner, whose whole soul is thrown before him to the goal towards which he strains, oblivious of all else; while the very pose of her clear-cut profile — turned, neither towards him nor towards the window, but with the brown eyes, those eyes of a mystic, set straight before her — intensified the impression.

She was very plainly dressed in dark blue serge, with a touch of white at the neck and a black hat. But there was still that sense of something exquisite about her which Bellamy had noticed before: and along with it that delicate air of virginity, which some women preserve, unfaded, to their death.

She was not young; indeed, gave the impression of looking older than she really was, for the pale skin was traced with fine lines, and there was grey among the soft hair which showed at either side of her hat. And yet, at the same time there was something of unquenchable youth, which it was difficult to explain: unless by saying that it was the pure, distilled spirit of a womanhood which had passed its years in waiting.

Bellamy — realising that she did not feel his glance — studied her intently. There was something in her that he wanted to get at, to understand. At the bottom he had a very poor opinion of what he called "swells," for the mistrustful contempt of the idle rich — which he had brought with him from Edge — had been strengthened by experience. Yet here was something, at once the outcome of birth and beyond birth.

Half through Strutton Ground the road, narrowed by stalls, was blocked with a coal cart, from which the tailboard had broken away, while the contents littered the road.

Bellamy, watching, rather cruelly, for any signs of impatience, saw his companion's hands — which lay clasped in her lap — involuntarily tighten, and suggested walking the rest of the way, only a few hundred yards at most.

To this she assented; and getting out, Walter paid the driver; then led the way, between the stalls and along the crowded pavement — littered with rubbish, slippery with orange and banana peel; and blocked with perambulators and go-carts, which exuded children and groceries.

It was a mean, ugly scene, with the hard spring sunshine streaming down upon it; fetid with the odour of humanity and coarse cooking.

"I'm sorry to have to bring you through such an awful place." Bellamy, unable to remain silent, felt impelled to some sort of apology; though, having spoken, he became aware that the woman at his side was completely oblivious of all apart from the man whom she was on her way to see. And here was another point which roused his curiosity; for, in the same position, he would have worked himself into a dramatic fever over the fact of any one he loved, or fancied he loved, living in such a place, amid such surroundings.

It was the same as he mounted the staircase, in front of her so as to clear the way. For turning at each landing he saw the pure oval of her face lifted out of the dimness, with unwavering eyes gazing upwards and past him.

The door of the attic was a little open. He could hear the murmur of voices, and a hoarse rattling breath — thank God, Gale was still alive!

With a thrill of real joy at the thought of whom he was bringing — not unmixed with an excited sense of the dramatic — Bellamy asked his companion to wait for a moment on the landing and went inside.

There were blankets and sheets now, drawn up to the dying man's chin, and piles of white pillows at his back. A pair of old curtains had been draped over the adjoining furniture, and a screen put round the bed; while a tray — with a clean cloth on it, and bottles and glasses — stood by his side; but for all that the place looked dismal enough.

Some one had pulled the mattress forward a little, so that the dusty light fell full upon Gale — who was lying back against the pillow scarcely breathing, with the blue shadows

intensified round his eyes and lips — while the doctor knelt beside him, his ear against his bare chest; and facing the door stood Mrs. Grant, wringing out cloths and sponges in a basin of steaming-hot water.

"He 'ud be washed, though it wur waste o' time — so soon!" She shook her head significantly. She was used to death, had washed many dead people, and her words held that curious mixture of matter-of-factness and feeling, so common to a woman who has passed her life in close proximity to birth and death.

The doctor put up one hand, as if to bid them be still. But, though they did not speak again, the silence was only comparative. For up the well of the staircase came the sound of the crazed woman singing, a child fell with a scream, bump — bump — down the stairs; while in the adjoining loft the pigeons fluttered and cooed without ceasing.

It was dramatic! Bellamy's keen sensibilities took it all in at a glance: the doctor in his black coat, the white bed, Gale's thin hands plucking at the blankets; and the red-faced woman — her lips trembling, the tears running down either cheek — all alike swimming in a sunlit haze of dust.

As the doctor rose to his feet, and put by his stethoscope — with that same brooding air, as if things were past all curing — Bellamy moved forward and touched him on the arm. "There is some one — a lady, waiting to see your patient. Do you think ——?"

"Who is it?" It was Gale who spoke, his voice seeming to come from some interminable distance.

"Who is it?" he repeated. Then catching at either side of the mattress he pulled himself upright.

"Ask her — to come in," he said, while to his amazement, Bellamy saw the same inward glow, which had illuminated Lady Victoria's face, shine through Francis Gale's; stamped, as it already was, with death.

## CHAPTER LVII

AT five that evening Gale died.

It had been the most curiously detached day that Bellamy had ever known. The first day in his whole life when he had felt himself to be a looker-on instead of an actor — the principal actor — in life's immediate drama.

The doctor could do no more. Mrs. Grant felt that she ought to go home for a few hours and see after her children — as the lady was there and there was nothing to do. Later on she would be needed.

Bellamy sat on the top step of the stairs. A spirit-lamp, along with a kettle and small saucepan, had been bought for Gale's room; and he kept it lighted on the landing at his side. Hot water was always needed in sickness; then there were the bottles to be kept constantly filled, for the sick man was growing deathly cold.

Towards one o'clock Bellamy went downstairs, with the same tin as he had carried the day before, and bought hot soup which he insisted on Lady Victoria eating. But she could not take much; and a little later he fetched some milk, then — with the handiness which must distinguish every man whose mother has gone out charing, leaving him to grapple single-handed with the housework — made her some tea.

Hearing the rattle of cups and the movement overhead, the woman on the landing below crawled to her door, and sent a hoarse whisper up to him — "There's no one been near me since the mornin' — an' I'm near dead with thirst."

"All right — go back to bed and I'll bring something down to you," Bellamy called over the bannisters, with a glimpse of a dishevelled figure and grey face against the lintel of the door below; made some more tea, and cut thin bread and butter and, taking it down, laid it by the mattress where the sick woman had again thrown herself. Then bent and peered at the red crinkled face upon her breast.

"The nipper all right?" He was genuinely interested, as she moved the child so as to turn on her side to drink. The cry it sent out, enraged, insistent; the way it beat the air with its tiny clenched fists fascinated him.

"Oh, he's right enough — a boy. But in a fine paddy — I was that dry, you see, there wasn't nothing for him." The girl's face — she could not have been more than eighteen — was full of pride, as she handed him the cup, and drew the child again to her breast. One might imagine she had fulfilled a destiny affecting the whole world, instead of merely bringing another nameless brat into an unappreciative world.

Back on his step — where he had spread a newspaper to sit upon — Walter again took up his vigil; with that odd feeling which had come to him so often before, of something being about to happen: not only Gale's inevitable death, but something in himself.

He had wrapped the tails of his frock-coat high round him to keep them as far as possible from contact with the floor; and now folding his arms round his knees, sat gazing meditatively at his patent-leather boots, mechanically occupied with his old trick of moving his toes backwards and forwards inside them. After all where was the fun of wearing boots when one never wore clogs, and there was no comparison to be made — all the savour of life lay in its contrasts.

The door behind him would not keep shut. He could hear the woman's soft voice, and Gale's hoarse whisper, even an occasional broken laugh which — curiously enough to his mind — told of happiness.

"It was the one good thing I ever did — going away — keeping away," he heard the dying man say.

And then again — "It was because — I did love — and eternally — do — love you."

"I never really lived — was only the scapegoat — the conglomerated ghost — of the sins — of my fathers."

Much was lost among the other noises which permeated the place. But sometimes whole sentences like this were audible; while he could hear Lady Victoria speaking of her own life — and once there was a sound as though she were praying.

It was odd how their subdued voices seemed to dominate all the louder turmoil of the place.

Between the roof of the attic, where Gale lay, and the pigeon loft next door, was a narrow space. Several times while Bellamy had been with him he had seen a pair of bright eyes, an arched neck and smooth sweep of shining breast press tentatively forward and then retreat.

The woman was speaking of religion — of Christ and the Virgin — of the Holy Ghost — the Dove.

Bellamy had often laughed at such things. But he could not have laughed now: it all seemed part of the whole.

After a pause he heard Gale's voice whispering — very low: —"I couldn't, Vic — it's not real to me. I ——" he said. Then suddenly broke out, quite loudly, almost in his old voice: —"God, that's funny!"

With flutter of wings, a white pigeon — somehow emboldened by the hush,— had pushed forward into the room: hovered, for a moment with beating wings above the mattress, and then, perching on a beam which ran beneath the roof, begun to preen itself.

## CHAPTER LVIII

IN looking back on his life Bellamy always saw it in a series of acts.

The first began — not when he went to work, for that was inevitable — but when he left the Shades, relinquishing the highest rate of wages which it was possible for any boy of his age to earn in Edge: the next on finding he had been tricked over the automatic spooler — what followed was merely cause and not effect: the third with his entry into the Virgo Health and Beauty Parlour; and the fourth on his meeting with Sir George Curst.

Now with Gale's death he embarked on the preliminaries of the fifth act.

Curiously enough, through it all, though Bellamy boasted of many affairs with women they had none of them been the cause of any one of these changes, till Victoria Milne became rather inexplicably mingled with this fifth act, perhaps because through her, Bellamy first realised the strength and persistence of the merely spiritual; recognising an untrodden and untried ground as far removed from the spiritualism of his charlatan days as are the two poles.

This knowledge affected him in a curious fashion; striking at the root of that utter boredom which now took the form of a furious impatience, with the exacting, and hardly learnt, business of being a gentleman.

For the first time in his life he began to spend money rashly; with no calculated effort at display. He made — apart from Lady Victoria — the rashest sort of friends. More than once found himself decidedly the worse for drink.

Any one might have said that he was going to the dogs — which was exactly what Sir George Curst felt, though he was far too discreet to say anything.

But as a matter of fact Bellamy was engaged in growing something in the way of a soul; a process which rendered

him as restless and irritable as an infant which is cutting its teeth.

The only person who could assuage this restlessness was Victoria Milne; and in her quiet flat in Queen Anne's Gate he found something of peace.

She was a devout Catholic. Bellamy had always professed a complete disbelief, but his early training and association must have gone deeper than he realised — his vehement disavowals had always lacked something of Gale's cool indifference — and now a faint wavering tendril of Primitive Methodism intermingled, oddly enough, with the more exotic belief of his new friend; swinging him to and fro between devotion and dissipation.

But still there was this one definite step upwards. For the first time in his life he did not care in the very least what any one said or thought of him: forgot the footlights.

As for Curst, Bellamy and Co., nothing — not even the whisper of failure — could revive his interest in the great business which he had brought into being; and which now seemed to be in danger of that dissolution which threatened his whole world.

Things were tumbling to pieces all around him; there was the crash of falling in the air. He felt as a man might feel in an earthquake, only anxious that everything that stood should come down and have done with it.

In turns he visualised himself as a sort of Napoleon — terribly alone, standing with folded arms, surveying a shattered civilisation — St. Helena before him as a fresh jumping-off place. Or as a circus clown, kicking his foot through a paper-covered hoop: a god of a clown, with a world for a plaything!

Life had never seemed at once so terrible and so comic. With the actual need for work had gone the one guiding thread through the maze.

He strained to catch something of Lady Victoria's calm faith; but only the *fear* of God came back to him, the forms of her religion were merely — apart from the music — exasperating. He had been a mummer too long himself, realised all the wires, which went to the working of it.

Another swing of the pendulum led to the establishment of a pretty and demure mistress. He felt that he wanted

something more or less stable in life; and realised that he could trust her to be faithful as long as was necessary.

But at the end of a week that also failed him, and he did not care whether she was faithful or not.

By this time his business was in a parlous state; but his mind refused to work upon it; to regard it as anything beyond an immense source of irritation. The solemn conclaves of the directors enraged him so that he could have screamed, as did his partner's remonstrances.

"Just when the business needs all the care and thought that we can give it," complained Curst: "you're here, there and everywhere; there's no getting hold of you. I tracked you from telephone to telephone the other morning and heard you had gone to church — Next morning at ten o'clock I rang you up and Hansen said you hadn't got home till three in the morning and were asleep. Church again, I suppose."

Bellamy laughed: "Variety is charming, I don't believe you've ever realised how charming, Curst. I remember that morning, there was a special Mass at Westminster Cathedral — such boys' voices! And the night that followed —— 'Pon my soul I don't remember what happened then."

"Look here, Bellamy," Sir George Curst brought his large hand down heavily on the table. "I can't believe that you really realise how serious things are."

"It's not that I don't realise it," answered Bellamy, and yawned: "it's that I don't care. And nothing's so dull as talking about things one doesn't care about. Don't you feel that yourself, now, Curst?"

"Well, it means ruin if there's any truth in the report about that new invention of Weislers — and it's pretty well an established fact by this time. Ruin! will that touch you?" Sir George spoke slowly with emphasis on each word, his heavy head thrust forward, his eyes on Bellamy. If the thought of financial ruin would not rouse his junior partner to some sense of his own danger what would? Besides, at the back of Curst's capable, slow-moving brain was the thought that, if only he chose to do something — to really set his mind to it — Bellamy might divert the threatened catastrophe. For having no inventive faculty himself Curst could see no limit to its powers. Bellamy might be

an ass in many ways, but his resourcefulness was beyond dispute.

This time, however, he refused to rise to the occasion; but lounging over to one of the windows of the stately suite of offices, where the famous firm conducted its London business, stood for a moment or so, staring out, with his hands in his pockets; then laughed.

"There's the cleverest little devil out there, throwing Catherine wheels all along the pavement; what a lark it must be!"

"Ruin!" repeated Sir George with the finality of despair.

"Well, you've got your old business still, you know, and after all I don't suppose I shall starve."

"Oh, if that's all you care about!"

"Well, it's the principal thing, isn't it? One's no good when one's dead," answered the other man cheerfully: realising that was what he had arrived at — or got back to. The working-class philosophy in which a sufficiency of food is the only thing that really counts.

As far as he was concerned, the sooner the whole thing came to an end the better he would be pleased. For in a way it tied him and he was mad to start all over again.

At last Curst became so exacting, took up so much of his time — while the directors proved themselves so contrary and panic-stricken — that his patience broke and he went abroad, where he spent a whole year travelling about the Continent with dubious companions; gambling a good deal and haunting Roman Catholic churches, endeavouring to find something which his keener, subconscious self knew, all the while, was not to be got at in any such fashion.

By the time he at last got back to England Curst, Bellamy and Co. had ceased to exist.

There were no very great libabilities. The thing had paid too well while it lasted: and most of the capital put into it — on its transformation into a company — was still intact, while their supplanters had taken over the greater part of the machinery.

It was an honourable defeat; and luckily Curst, who knew his business through and through, had realised the moment that he was beaten and not attempted to keep the thing going. The aloe-fibre silk had not proved a failure,

it had simply been ousted by something else, was as useless as a pricked bubble.

He had been prepared for anything. In all fashion trades one must feather one's nest while one can; and submit to the inevitable fluctuations.

The really unfortunate thing about it all was the fact of a new discovery having been made, just at the precise moment when it was most inconvenient to Curst, Bellamy and Co.

The turn in fashion's wheel had, quite suddenly, decreed that nothing excepting dull-surfaced silk should be the vogue. The aloe-fibre product had always been irradicably shiny and silky: three years before that had been regarded as its greatest beauty.

But still, real — hard — silk was too costly for general use; besides, the supply would not have been equal to the demand. Thus Curst and Bellamy's might have held on had not another firm discovered a new — and so far strictly guarded — secret method of producing an even cheaper silk; capable of either a dull or brilliant finish.

For a while urgent letters and telegrams followed Bellamy as he zig-zagged his meteoric way about Europe. Then they ceased; and, feeling that the Old Man of the Sea had at length dropped from his shoulders, he lingered for a while — still restless and unhappy, for he had no work to do, though somewhat stimulated by the thought that almost all his money was gone, and he would soon be bound to start afresh — then made his way back to London. Drawing in, gradually, as his funds really reached bottom; feeling, once more, all the delight of planning, of running the margin fine, risking an almost wicked extravagance, and then creating an appetite by going without.

He had begun to grow as slim and alert as in the old days: shedding his slow-moving mind with his superfluous girth. By the time he reached Town, consulted his bank-book and realised to a nicety the stimulating limitations of his funds, he felt life was becoming a "lark" once more, now that he was newly stripped for the fight.

On his second day in England he went to call on Lady Victoria.

It was late autumn and he was fortunate enough to find

her alone, during those precious hours between tea and dinner, when intimate conversation — which deals with feelings and aspirations, not mere material matters — seems easiest.

They sat over the fire for a long time talking, and Bellamy told her of his wanderings, his restlessness: the way in which the devil of prosperity had driven him into the wilderness, though he confessed to at least seven of like calibre to bear him company. Then they drifted off to speak of Gale; while she told him more than she had ever done before of their common youth together — for she had known him since he was a boy at school.

It seemed as if during the year, and more, of Walter Bellamy's absence she had so missed having some one to whom she could talk of her dead love — who knew something of him during his last years — that his friendship had grown more valuable to her; she was ready to give more in return.

It appeared that Gale's weakness was hereditary. It had overcome him during a hunt-breakfast while he was still at Eton, gained in ascendance during his college days, had indeed been the ultimate reason of their parting. For they had loved each other very, very much — she put it in the simplest of words — had even talked of marriage; till her people's objection to the match seemed to bring him to a fuller understanding of his own weakness. Then it was as if he saw himself as a menace to her happiness, to a future generation.

For a long time he fought against his besetting sin; while she wrestled with him, and for him. Then, quite suddenly, the fatalistic strain — so strongly developed in his nature — got the better of him. He grew frightened of himself, or for her: threw up his studies for the Bar, and disappeared, dropped out.

That meeting outside the Tate Gallery was the first she had seen of him for eight years.

And then came the end in Little Peter Street.

Nothing had ever touched her love for Gale. Ever would touch it, for she believed in the immortality, the complete permanency of real love.

Bellamy at the opposite side of the fire, looking at her as

she leant back in her chair with her hands folded in her lap — compared her life with his — for he would always be too complete an egotist to find any other standard of comparison.

How much had she lost and he gained by his full life, his many light loves. Or again how much had she gained and he lost by his lack of any one definite ideal.

"There is a girl in the place where I lived as a boy, who might be capable of loving like that," he said slowly.

"Is that Jane?"

"Why, how did you know of Jane?" Bellamy stared in amazement.

"That afternoon I was with Frank, not long before he died, I spoke of you, how good you had been to him, and he said: —'Rum fish, Belle-amie — there's a girl — Jane — he ought to marry Jane.'"

"Yes — he knew her; she came up to nurse me once when I was ill. Three — four years ago, or more."

"Well, why don't you?"

With one of his old quick movements Bellamy flung to his feet and stood on the hearthrug before her.

"My dear lady, the idea of my marrying!" He threw out his hands and shrugged his shoulders. "Do you realise that I'm broke — absolutely broke? I'm going up to see Curst next week to find out if there are any pickings left — that is if I can get together my train fare. And then ——"

"Then?"

"Then! then! Oh, all sorts of things are possible," he laughed boyishly. "I'm bursting with ideas ——"

"You could do a lot of good — you know so much about the working people — what they suffer, how they live."

"With the conviction at the back of me that nothing is unendurable except *not* to be a worker. Philanthropy! My dear lady! I could never do it. It would bourgeon and blossom into the most blatant socialism — or cut away into anarchy, with one eye always on the Press headings. I'd start a new religion, or play hanky-panky tricks with an old one. It's no good, I could never do the thing simply. Besides, there's too much charity in the world as it is. *We* don't want it."

"Why not go back to your old business? You understand that."

"Only too well!" Bellamy made a grimace of disgust.

"Look here, Lady Victoria, I'm a poseur — a blageur — a pickle-herring as our people say — to the very finger-tips. I think I've got beyond considering what individual people think of me; but I love to set the multitude a-gaping. There are endless openings for professional religionists — agitators. And the worst of it is I feel I could do it so jolly well. But I don't want to go into anything where I have to pretend I'm not lying, when I am: it's so dull to do a thing very well and have no one applaud."

"What's wrong with your life is that you've never wanted anything badly enough."

"Oh, haven't I? I wanted to get on, and now I've got on — and where am I? Don't quote the execrable old pun as to 'getting honour.'"

"One needs a better stimulant than mere general success; one supreme ambition or affection. Can't you find out what you really want to do; not what you want to get by doing — that's always tasteless."

"I want the best opportunity of being myself ——" Walter spoke slowly and with unusual difficulty; trying to put his thought into words, to answer quite truthfully the question in Lady Victoria's brown eyes: —"of using the sort of faculties I have, without the chance of doing any harm to any one. If I could — if it weren't too late — I'd be a conjuror; do you understand what I mean?"

"I think I do."

"There *is* one thing ——" Bellamy had thrust his hands into his pockets as he spoke, felt in one of them a letter which had lain there, half forgotten, from the day before; and suddenly — with that odd feeling as though it was, and always had been, the only, the one inevitable idea — seized upon a suggestion which it contained: "I believe there is a chance of finding my niche." He swung to and fro upon his heels in front of the fire, his eyes dancing with merriment.

His expression of mystery and delight was infectious, and the woman sitting in the low chair at the side of the hearth laughed up in his face.

"Well?"

"Well——? Well? Look here, it's such a magnificent idea — such a stupendous lark, that — as you started on the subject of a certain person — don't you think I ought to go up to Edge and tell *her* about it first of all?" Bellamy laughed teasingly. To him a secret was always such an irresistible thing that he made sure his companion would insist on being told. But she took it quite gravely.

"Jane, you mean? Yes, I think you are quite right."

"Jane, plain-Jane! I used to call her because of her snubbing, straight-spoken little ways. Do you know what her whole name is? Jane Irwin! There's something uncompromising for you. And do you know what she's like? Five foot nothing, with a skin like porcelain, and hair so fair it's almost silver."

Walter's voice rang out its old sing-song. He had not yet had time to get his hair cut, and that characteristic crest — with its thread or so of grey — was erect once more; he was wearing old clothes, he was sunburnt, there was no trace of smugness left.

"A 'come-and-kiss-me' mouth, and grave condemning eyes," he went on. It was delightful to recount Jane's perfections. Of course that was why the French and Italian women had wearied him so, none had Jane's silvery fairness; and those others, all too complacent after Jane's bitter sweetness.

Jane and the life that the letter in his pocket offered to him. Of course that was just the thing he wanted. Nay — more pressing — *needed,* had needed from the very beginning.

"When you go and tell her — what you won't tell me — I wonder what she'll say."

"They have a phrase in Edge, for any one who is different — a card — they say: —'Well, ain't you a real knock-out.' Ten to one that's what she'll say." Bellamy laughed; he could almost hear Jane say it.

"Walter," Lady Victoria had risen; and now stood, with one hand on the mantel-piece, looking at him very gravely — it was the first time she had ever used his name, and curiously enough it gave him a little chill, as though he realised she was going to say something which might ruffle

him, and wished to soften it: —"how long is it since you saw her?"

"As I said, between three or four years — perhaps more."

"And you think that she cared?"

"I — well, I think she did. She was always jumping on me, you see."

"And you left her there all alone, through all those years of prosperity."

"She lived with my mother, till she died, two years ago."

"And even then you never went to her?"

"No." Bellamy fidgeted from one foot to another, feeling like a guilty schoolboy under Victoria Milne's accusing eyes.

"Well, I wouldn't go now if I were you. Ten to one she's married — happy."

"Oh, but I would have heard!" Bellamy felt that there was something fatuous in the words, but they were out before he realised what he was going to say.

"Why should you have heard? She doesn't belong to the great world; her life's her own, as much as yours is your own. It was a caddish thing to do — to leave her like that: as though she wasn't worth troubling about."

"What can you expect from a pig but a grunt." Bellamy gave a careless shrug; it was almost as if he was proud of his reversion to type, but for all that his face flushed.

"Of course I knew you weren't a gentleman, as we count it;" Lady Victoria spoke with such matter-of-fact gravity, that the words were robbed of all offence: it was as though she might have said: "I knew you were a dark man and not a fair man."—"But I did think you had constancy. Oh, you men! You leave your coat in a cloak-room for an hour, with the guarantee of a numbered ticket. But you leave a woman anyhow, anywhere, and expect to find her still waiting — ready and willing — directly you want her." Lady Victoria spoke with heat, almost with passion.

"I hope she is married — happily married. I hope she has never even thought of waiting," she added.

## CHAPTER LIX

BELLAMY'S idea had been to go to Wantage first to see Curst, and then on to Jane.

But he reversed his plans. Lady Victoria's words had bitten deep. It was true he had always thought of Jane as waiting.

On the crest of each wave he had forgotten; but in the depths, which divided one from another, he had looked up to her as his own bright peculiar star: through all the ebb and flow of life the idea of her constancy had been a solace to his vanity. In those dust and ashes moments she had been the only one he ever thought of.

Now for the first time he asked himself why she should be constant. She had never even said that she loved him; he had taken it all for granted.

With a feeling as if his imagination had been violently wrenched round, he pictured Jane as the wife of a steady working man, a weaver.

The man was horribly real: pale and narrow chested, as are most weavers. Three years — no, it was four. She had two children. He saw them quite plainly; sticky, chubby toddlers, likenesses of their father. Jane would leave them with a "minder" and go to work as usual; getting up early and cutting her butties by lamplight, just the same as she had done on that far-off day when he had taken her the first silk coat. But now there would be a man there, putting on his clean boots, washing at the sink, drinking his tea.

When Jane ran back for dinner, when she returned in the evening, the man would come and go. Kiss her when he liked, rail at her when he liked; dandle the children which should by rights have been Bellamy's; lean against the doorpost talking on summer evenings.

He could see it all. The spotless little kitchen; the man's

boots by the fire, his intolerable air of being master in his own house; Jane feeding the babies with "pobs."

Bellamy left Euston soon after twelve; travelling third-class in a smoking carriage, with a man who might have been a mechanic, and two commercial travellers, who tried to talk to him. But it was impossible to retain the thread of what they said, for through the mist of blue smoke he saw the endless routine of Jane's little day: even to the shaking of the potatoes round in the pot at dinner-time.

He told himself fiercely that she *could* not be married: that it was quite impossible that he should not get what he wanted so terribly — and what he believed himself to have always wanted.

But it was of no use. At twenty past one he saw the man knock the ashes out of his pipe; while Jane took off the children's bibs and damped down the fire. They were going back to work.

Bellamy writhed. The intimate knowledge of it all, the familiar homeliness, made it unendurable. But it was not quite so bad as the evening before, when they had taken off their boots in the kitchen and crept upstairs in stockinged feet, so as not to wake the children. For in their class — his own class — married life was inevitably intimate: there was no room for anything else.

The same craving for some one who understood him, for something real and human — which had impelled him in his search for Gale — the same obsession over the business in hand, which had possessed Bellamy in all he did, possessed him now.

But with this difference. All his life he had forced success, the sort of success he wanted; but now came the fear of failure. He had an individuality as strong as his own, to contend against.

With some women the thought of a husband might have only added zest to the chase. But with Jane he knew it would be an absolutely insurmountable barrier. Jane had not learnt to look at things in a modern way, was indomitable in any question of what she regarded as right.

Though apart from that — and this, even more than her virtue, would render conquest hopeless — if Jane once loved a man well enough to marry him, to bear his children, no

other man would exist for her. At this thought it was as though some one took Walter Bellamy's heart very firmly between finger and thumb, out — away from that warm fireside — and placed it on the cold pavement in the open street. For he could still, quite clearly, visualise his own emotions. Though, for all that, it was a terrible feeling to realise, for the first time in his life, that anything might be quite hopeless.

The wait at the Junction appeared interminable: the half-hour before the local train crawled into Edge station longer than all the rest of the journey put together. It seemed to Walter Bellamy that all his life he had been pursuing, and overtaking; but that Fate was now having its turn: marking time.

He had thought of marriage with Jane as a thing which might come towards the end of his life, a serene sort of haven for old age.

But the longing for her, the passionate sense of jealousy towards that pictured man — whom Lady Victoria's words had called into being — was wilder, more passionate than anything he had ever felt before.

It was as though Jane was not only part of his youth, but youth itself. That in losing her he would lose every Spring that was ever to come. He saw himself growing white and thin, and stooping. A mere shadow of a man, amid a fallen house of cards.

As he got out of the train at the little station — so much more familiar than the many places he had been to again and again since he was last at Edge — he stumbled; there was a mist before his eyes, a singing in his ears. But for all that he determined to walk up the hill to the town — he could not have sat still to be driven — and putting his bag in the ancient omnibus, which plied between the station and the "White Hart," he told the man to take it up and engage a bed for him.

Then, meaning to go slowly, he walked quickly and breathlessly up the long, steep incline. The street was very empty, it was only a little past four, and most of the people were still in the mills. Up in the town nearly all the shops were shut, and an uneasy chill came over him: some one

must be dead, he thought; then remembered that it was Thursday, early closing day.

Where the main street branched he turned off to West Bank, where he had left his mother and Jane.

He scarcely thought she would still be there, the house was too big. But still he experienced a sort of shock when he realised that she had really left. Not that it was empty or shut up; but the curtains were somehow different; besides the doorstep was dirty. The very look of the house a negation of Jane.

Still he rang the bell, and enquired of the slatternly woman who answered the door if she knew where Miss Irwin had moved to. But she could tell him nothing; and after he had moved away he realised that, if that "man" really did exist, the name Irwin would mean nothing to her.

He thought of going to the top of the town to watch the people come out of Morrison's mill; but sickened at the thought of meeting her before all the world, and turned up St. Simon Street instead; and so into the old churchyard, determined to wait till the clatter of clogs had gone by.

It was a soft October day; still warm though the dusk was gathering. The same half-witted man was sweeping up the leaves from the paths, shambling and muttering. The same — or much the same — little group of gaffers were on the seat round the tree: shivering a little and talking of going home, but still lingering over the affairs of State.

With a mingling of curiosity and courtesy they drew Bellamy into their talk — "What do yer think of this 'ere danged Government, eh, Maester?" asked one old man, with bright child-like eyes gleaming through his heavy horn-rimmed spectacles.

Walter answered; what he scarcely knew. At that moment Governments seemed too trivial to be worth a thought.

"Yer a stranger ter these 'ere parts, an't yer?" pursued his interrogator.

"Ay, that 'ee be," put in another. "Oi knawed 'im by 'is twang."

It was odd to think how this might have pleased him years ago, thought Bellamy, gazing out over the mist-

haunted valley, but now it seemed as though the words put his heart more definitely than ever out in the cold, and he began to feel like a ghost.

One by one the old men hobbled away with talk of tea. The man in the horn spectacles lingered last of all.

"Females," he said, likely enough putting the stranger's melancholy abstraction down to love—"Females is danged contrary, allus was an' allus will be. It's no manner o' use we men folks maethering our sen about the like o' them." Here he paused, gathering himself together over his stick, preparatory to his departure: then added, with a burst of personal feeling, which seemed as though it could no longer be repressed.

"There's one thing certain sure; Oi wish as Oi'd never been wed. Females!"

It was growing chilly. The pavement beneath the tree was greasy with fallen leaves which the odd job man could not keep pace with: it seemed as though the scent of death and decay was in the air. All those dead people: had they burned as he burned, struggled, fought and loved? And how did they regard it now that it was all done with? Lying there quietly, thinking it all over, as one thinks over one's own childish escapades. Bellamy saw them far more plainly thus — stark and straight, gazing up through the earth to the sky — than in any possible Paradise or Purgatory.

At last the silence was broken by the sound of voices, and the clatter of clogs. Coming down the hill, going up the hill: all the people on their way home.

A few passed across the churchyard, taking a short cut to Little France, and bending sideways peered at him curiously through the dusk.

At last they were all gone. And rising, Bellamy made his way into the street, and by devious ways up through the cattle market to the little low house where Jane had once lived with her two sisters.

The feeling of being a mere unsubstantial spirit came to him. It was all so familiar. Here and there he recognised a face; but no one recognised him. It seemed as if their very glance put him apart from them, as something alien to their own world.

In the low house — from the window of which Lottie Irwin had seen young Higginbottom pass between two policemen — there was an overflowing little family at tea; but no Jane.

A ridiculous old song, with a refrain of "Oh, have you seen her lately?" swung to and fro through Bellamy's mind. Though after all, on reflection, he remembered that it was a "he" and not "she" of whom the song spoke.

At last he turned into a little baker's shop in Upton Street, a shop where he knew that Jane used to deal.

There was the same Madonna-faced woman behind the counter, grown grey now. Peering at him across the loaves of bread, she remembered him, and he could have hugged her for it: it seemed to establish his own reality.

"Oi reckon it's all roight yer comin' back now," she said; "but Oi wouldn't run no risk if I wer' you, Walter Bellamy." She spoke kindly, flushing over the words; at which — for the first time — Bellamy remembered that he was not supposed to return to Edge, even as a ghost.

As for the Irwin girl; she was not working at Morrison's any more, but at Mackennons' down at the bottom of the town, living close alongside of the mill.

"Is she ——" For once Bellamy was at a loss for words, he could scarcely blurt out the question as to whether she was married, and there was nothing else he could think of to say. But the woman thought it was Jane's health about which he was concerning himself.

"Oh, she looked fine an' well — considerin'," she added, and flushed.

"Considering?"

"Well, she wasn't so to speak up to the mark just then. Her second was born not a month after, an' I've not seen her since."

So he had been right.

There were two children as he had pictured them. And of course there was the man.

Somehow Bellamy got out of the shop. He told himself that he had better go straight away to London, believed he was going. But for all that his footsteps led him to Mackennon's mill, lying in the hollow beneath the old church.

He walked with his coat thrown back over his arms; his

hands deep in his trousers pockets, his shoulders rounded, all the weight of his body on his hips; while his feet came down heavily on the cobbles, for the spring was gone from him.

People glanced at him curiously as he passed. If he had not been so well dressed he might have been taken for an "out of work."

Almost against Mackennons' was a small general dealer's, thronged with children on errands for butter, sugar, tea, etc.; tiny quantities, just sufficient to last till the next day — pay-day.

At length he managed to gain a hearing, and asked where the married woman, who had been Miss Irwin, lived.

But the shop people did not know. In that friendly fashion, so common in Edge, the question went the round of the customers. Still no information was forthcoming, till a matron with a baby on her arm came in.

"Missis Halford, it may be as he wants. Oi reckon it's Missis Halford as he means; Oi know as she's got a sister as is called Irwin. Look, there's her Willy now," and she pointed to a tiny boy in a tunic, hugging a loaf and a couple of kippers. "Willy, is yer mother along yome?"

The child nodded. Bellamy had watched him choosing the kippers, with a look of intense anxiety in his tiny face, untying the knot in his handkerchief with his teeth, counting over the pennies. He was just as Walter had pictured him — without the chubbiness: narrow chested and pale, the image of the imagined father! Somehow it was impossible to realise that he was really Jane's child.

"Will yer show 'im ter yer place?" asked the matron; and the boy nodded — his solemn eyes full on Walter above the top of the large loaf. Then led the way, without looking round, out of the shop, and through a small tangle of narrow red houses; while Bellamy followed, feeling as though he had shrunk away to something far smaller than the child; who he now realised had Jane's grey eyes — Jane's direct, condemning glance.

After a while they turned through the narrow archway in the middle of a row; and along the backs of the houses into a small yard.

A woman's voice called out asking the child why he had been so long: —" Yer' Dad's in a fine taekin'," it added.

" There's me Maether," said the boy, in rather an awe-struck whisper, as some one in a white apron appeared at the door.

A dark dizziness came over Bellamy. He did not dare look up above the apron; make a certainty of what had hitherto merely been a dread. It was as if by not looking at her he could actually prevent the woman from being Jane.

Then she spoke: —" Who is 'un, Willy? — Did yer want me, Maester; I'm Missus Halford."

It was not Jane after all! The slurred drawl was as unlike her clipped speech as anything could be. For a moment Bellamy felt as though he were off his feet; being swung round and round in a warm, sunlit space.

" I heard that your name had been Irwin," he said at last. " Excuse me, it must have been some mistake." His mind went fumbling forward in the dark as he spoke: where had the boy got those eyes, that expression?

" So it was — Lottie Irwin." The woman bent a little forward from the step and stared at him. " Oi don't know that Oi — sure to goodness it's not Wally Bellamy? " her voice rose shrilly, there was the sound of a chair being pushed back in the room behind her, and a man came to the door. " 'Ere's Wally Bellamy come back, Bill," she added, with an air of hard indifference; " mayhap yer mind 'im."

" Lord, yes, we was in the Shades together! " exclaimed the man and put out a long yellowish hand. He was grey and bent, with a narrow face, and bowed legs, but the moment Bellamy saw him he remembered. It was Billy Halford, the runner. Strange how persistent life is! He had lived on pastry and relishes, but still he had lived, and propagated his kind — mayhap more runners.

As if he had guessed Bellamy's thoughts Halford put out a hand, and tweaked the small boy affectionately by the ear: —" No runnin' fur this 'ere nipper, Wally. No, not if I knows it. They say as he's like Jane — yer mind Jane? 'An' so 'ee is: the dead spit o' 'er aben the eyes. But come in an' 'ave some tea an' tell us where yer've been all these years. We often talk o' yer — thought yer was dead."

"Nought never comes ter harm!" snapped Lottie. She had never liked Bellamy, and now stood in the doorway making no move to second her husband's invitation.

"I won't come in now, thanks. Another day, Billy, I'll come and have a yarn; I want to see Jane."

"Jane's better without yer," Mrs. Halford glared at him fiercely. "A lot o' good yer've done ter our Jane. The times an' times as she could a' married, an' well too, if it 'adn't been fur the bee as yer put i' 'er bonnet fur 'er!"

"Then she's not married."

"What's that ter you. Come along in, now, Willy. Oi can't be havin' the tea about all hours."

"Where does she live?"

"It's nothing ter yer where 'un lives," cried the woman; and catching the boy by the arm, swung round. "Now then, young Willy, just yer go an' get yer 'ands washed. Come along now, Bill."

Billy Halford — grinning, with the feeble, deprecating humour of a man who realises that his wife rules him — turned and banged the door loudly, almost in Bellamy's face. Then opened it a crack; peered out, and winked.

"She's got a down on yer, an' no bloomin' error," he whispered hoarsely — his furtive backward nod telling Bellamy to whom he referred. Then he added: —"Twenty-one, Court Four, Churton Street," and closed the door again. This time without a sound.

## CHAPTER LX

THERE is an expression in Edge, which speaks of a "procession of one." It was such a procession as this that Bellamy made on his upward course towards Court Four: swinging, swaggering — buoyantly treading on air.

The mill girls had finished their tea by now and were parading Upton Street, arm in arm in long lines. They glanced at him encouragingly, admiringly, as he forged past them, head in air; for he was no longer a pale creeping ghost, but a man, full of vitality and strength.

But Walter Bellamy had no eyes for any one of them! He was on the best errand that any man could ever be bound upon.

Fancy that little chip Billy Halford with children! Miserable little things! He had heard a baby crying in the kitchen. His children and Jane's would never cry.

He swung round a corner and down the narrow alleyway into Court Four; peering at the numbers in the flickering gaslight. Ten — eleven. Impatiently he swept across the yard, lit a match and found — number five.

Then, taken with a sudden whimsical idea he moved into the centre of the little square. He would go to the house with the brightest light shining through the cleanest and straightest blind.

For a moment or so he stared round. Then caught it — very small and narrow, filling up a spare place in one corner — made straight for the door and knocked.

A strange woman with a candle in her hand, opened to him. But Bellamy was by no means daunted. He *knew* Jane's house when he saw it.

"I want Miss Jane Irwin," he cried, very loudly and distinctly, with a dominant note on the "want."

"Come in, Wally," said a quiet voice from the back

room; and with a sense of having walked over the woman with the candle Bellamy went in.

He had planned, all the way up from Billy Halford's just to take Jane in his arms, and kiss her, and kiss her, without giving her time for a word of reproach.

But she was sitting close against the fire, with her lap full of sewing; and as she did not rise when he entered, the best he could do was to kneel down by her side, and put his arms round her rigid little form.

"Jane, Jane, I've come back."

"So I see. An' now get up and sit on a chair, Walter Bellamy."

"You knew my voice; you knew it was me!" he cried, for he was not to be damped so easily.

"Yes." Jane had been white when he entered the room, but now she shivered, her face drawn and lined with pain. It was as if his words had brought back to her all those long years during which she had waited and listened. It seemed, somehow, horrible to have remembered his voice so quickly; her pride was hurt at the thought.

"Get up an' sit in a chair; are yer daft, ye great fool, Walter Bellamy?" she said: and half rose. With the result that all her sewing fell from her lap and Walter laid his head there instead; clinging to her and kissing her hands.

She was not married, but somehow he was afraid. Of something less material than that imaginary man, but even more difficult to grapple with.

She felt tears on her hands, and it softened her. But still she was very firm; made him get up and sit on a chair at the other side of the hearth, and talk of commonplace things. Though once he was away she wanted him back; close to her, kissing her hands — the silly thing.

He told her of Gale's death: of the great business he had built up, and of its failure. Of how irked he had been; longing for all the familiar, common things of life; sick to death of playing the gentleman.

"It's ill work pretendin' to be what you're not," remarked Jane sapiently, with as little flattery as Lady Victoria had shown. But still, how she looked at him! With a sort of unwilling, half-maternal tenderness. After all

he was "Wally": nothing could ever alter him; make him like other people.

And she loved him. When one loves a man one must take him for what he is: she knew that.

Now that there was the width of the hearth between them her whole being seemed strained towards him. Though she still kept him to commonplace things; she had suffered so much at his hands already, and was wary.

He told her of his plans. Of the letters he was constantly receiving from the American circus owner.

"That's what I'm going to do," he said. "It's all I'm fit for: to amuse people, to be in the public eye — to fool, bamboozle them." He spoke bitterly, half hoping she would contradict him. "Jervis is mad about it. He says he can't get a Ring-Master, who looks anything — with any of the air of a gentleman — the grand manner — haughty arrogance! I can manage that; it's easier than the simple gentleman. Picture me, Jane, with a waxed moustache, frock-coat and long whip —— But by God I'm not depreciating it!" he added warmly. "After all it's the one thing to suit me: I've known that for a long time. They're travelling all over America; it's a tip-top affair, and they get huge audiences. It really will be a tremendous lark — I can see myself at it." He rose to his feet, and stood swinging to and fro upon the hearth, his face flushed, his eyes bright.

"How tremendously alive he is!" thought Jane; despite the grey hairs in that upstanding crest of his, which she felt such a longing to smooth back from his forehead.

Suddenly his face dropped; it was as if all the brightness and colour had been wiped out of it, and bending down he laid one hand on her shoulder, giving her a little shake. "But it's no good unless you'll come too, unless you'll be my wife. Look here, Jane, I've never known anything sure and stable in my life except your friendship — I've no right to say love, no right to expect it. But there's no taste in anything without you — never has been — I fizz up: then everything goes flat."

He was on his knees at her side again, his arms round her, his face strained up to hers. "Jane, I want you, I want you."

With an odd little shiver, such as a person gives when

stepping into water of unknown depth, Jane put out one hand, and smoothed back the crest of hair from his forehead. Her mind was made up, but still she fenced.

"You've done without me all these years."

"Only because I didn't know what I wanted."

"How long would it last now, I'd like to know? As long as yer circussing?" she asked the question scornfully.

"It would last always, because it's always been there."

"Such talk!"

"Jane, will you have me? — You know the worst and the best of me."

"A fine lot o' best there is ter know, young Wally!" It was ridiculous how she dropped into the old way of speech with him; how her hands seemed to linger over him.

"Jane, you must, you must!" He pleaded, torn with anxiety. He had never felt so uncertain, so fearful of anything before.

"There's no must in it."

"If you'd only try me."

"There's no tryin' in marriage; it's takin' for keeps, or leavin'!"

"Then take me — for keeps." There was a sudden note of boldness in Bellamy's voice. "Take me for keeps, Sweetheart."

"It's four years an' more since Oi set eyes on yer:" Jane felt the weakening of her position, in descending to a complaint; but she could not help it. "Off you go — just loike a man it is, too — stavangin' about all over the world, an' makin' certain sure that you'd find me here, waitin' yer when yer got back."

"I won't do it again:" there was something of mock humility in Bellamy's voice, for he had realised that crack in Jane's armour.

"Yer won't have the chance, me lod, once Oi've got yer ——"

"Then you will — Jane, you will, you will. Jane darling!"

"Well, I suppose that's about it. You'll never make much o' a mon — it'ull be loike havin' the fifth o' November every day, marryin' you, Walter Bellamy. But Oi reckon, as no one else 'ull have yer, Oi ——"

She had been pushing him away from her, with both firm hands against his chest, as she spoke — her head bent, so that he could see nothing beyond the silvery gold head with its narrow parting. But now she raised her face to his; and he saw her eyes were more intense, swimming in a sort of radiance, her mouth — that kissing mouth of hers — trembling towards him, and took her in his arms.

It was wonderful, once having let herself go, how she clung to him, the passion and the force of her; he had heard people say that blonde women were cold, but she was like a quivering flame against his heart.

"Jane, Jane — you pearl of a girl — you little Flower-face, how I love you! Carissima mia." Bellamy held her close: the very touch of her thrilled him through and through; though with this feeling there was that deeper one which comes with an almost inevitable mating. But for all — he could not keep quiet, was conscious of all the languages of which he knew enough to make love in.

Jane, however, did not speak; till at last she drew herself a little apart from him — still quivering, her cheeks pink, her eyes glowing. And then what she said was characteristic enough.

"Eee, lod, it's past all understandin', what Oi see in yer, to be so soft with yer."

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