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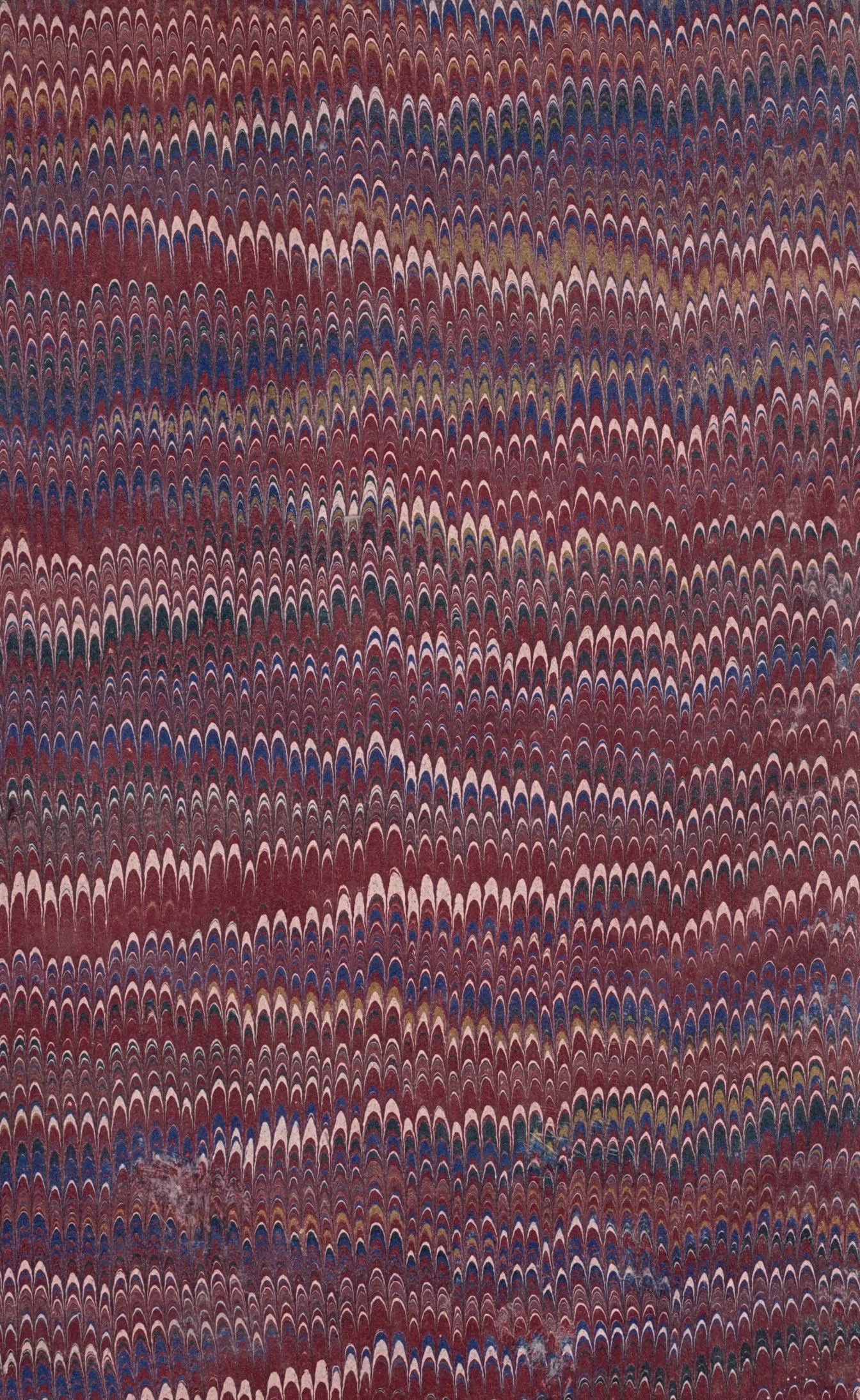

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THE WEAKER VESSEL.

CHAPTER I.

GEORGE DOLMER DELAMERE, ESQ., being advertised to lecture in the Athenæum Hall, Bondage Road, Houndsditch, under the auspices of the Moral Tone Association, I paid my threepence, secured thereby a right of entry to the reserved seats, and went in to listen. I was at this time an idle man (not I think from any fault of mine), and anxious to find some business which should bring in butter for that necessary daily loaf which was already provided for me by a kindly fortune. In the hope that I might one day find a literary use for the knowledge I was picking up by bits and scraps, I had devoted myself for some months to the study of life and manners in various corners of London, and was in the habit of making enthusiastic and copious notes. George Dolmer Delamere, Esq., was known to me, as to almost everybody, by name, and the doings of the Moral Tone Association had been trumpeted in the newspapers of late.

I sat down and waited in a waste little room, and had ample time to look about me. There were thirty or forty people already present, and at intervals of a minute or so a newcomer would appear, smoothing his hair furtively, and creaking to a seat on tiptoe, as though he were afraid of awaking the echoes. People coughed apologetically and shuffled their feet, and sat apart from one another. The place and everybody in it had an air of penance, and, so far as one might judge from appearances, the gospel of the Moral Tone was not gay or popular. The audience was made up mainly of youngish men, most of whom looked thoughtful and earnest. They were ill at ease because they were not used to society, and they were evidently anxious to observe and evidently anxious to be unobserved.

When we had sat in a shuffling and uneasy silence for a quarter of an hour a dapper man opened a door at the back of the room and looked in. The scattered assembly applauded, and

the dapper man disappeared; but a few minutes later returned at the head of a string of ladies and gentlemen who, in accompaniment to a dropping fire of hand-clapping, advanced to a low platform and took their seats upon it. The leader took his place at a red-clad table in the center, and at his right sat a gentleman whose very aspect was a lesson in tone. He was tall and slender and stately, and he condescended from his crown to his heels in every attitude and movement. His face was refined and capable, and he smiled in a complex way, which expressed curiosity and affable pity and a profound allowance all at once. He had a tall, bald forehead; silky white hair, rather unusually long; long, narrow hands of extraordinary whiteness and delicacy; and a mouth which, in the intervals of his smile, looked a trifle peevish and disappointed. He was in evening-dress, and would have looked remarkable and distinguished anywhere. Here he was as remarkable as a stag in a herd of cart-horses. I supposed this gentleman to be George Dolmer Delamere, Esq., and the dapper man in the chair confirmed my supposition by his introductory speech.

Mr. Delamere, he told us, was a gentleman who had always taken the deepest interest in art. He was known in the highest artistic circles, as everybody knew; and his delicate taste and profound knowledge had secured for him a position unique in the artistic world. He was warmly interested, also, in the condition of the people, and the Moral Tone Association had been so fortunate as to enlist his invaluable sympathy and support. The dapper man would no longer detain us from the intellectual treat in store. Mr. Dolmer Delamere would deliver to us an address on the Line of Beauty.

Mr. Delamere arose and began to talk, without preface, in a gentle and persuasive voice, which carried conviction of high breeding in every tone of it. A great blackboard on a wheeled stand was placed upon the platform, with a clean napkin hanging over it, and a number of pieces of white chalk scattered on a rest below it. While he talked he took down the napkin and polished the blackboard, as only an accomplished critic and a gentleman could polish a blackboard. By way of preliminary, he told us, in his soft, persuasive voice, that the only fashion of manfully facing the future was to convince ourselves that the past was dead. The creeds in which the human race had been cradled were dead and done with. The religious go-carts in which humanity had toddled for centuries were broken, and there was not the faintest little hope of mending them. That hope of a hereafter with which benevolent cheats or misguided enthusiasts had beguiled the poor and suffering was

finally extinguished. There was but one life to live, and it must be made the best of. To make the best of it, it was necessary to redeem it from ugliness. Ugliness, whether material or moral, was a crime which created its own punishment—a crime infectious as measles. Everybody suffered from it, and almost everybody actively propagated it. He proposed to offer a slight—a very slight—reactionary dose that evening. He would do his humble best to show us what beauty was and what it was not. When everything was beautiful and everybody had caught the prevailing sentiment of things, everybody would be good and everybody would be happy, because beauty and goodness and happiness were interchangeable terms. He put all this lightly, gracefully, in well-chosen, striking, and clear words, so that nobody could fail to understand him; and then, with a rare purity of line and certainty of hand, he began to draw upon the blackboard. He showed us architectural lines which were ugly and architectural lines which were beautiful; and he drew for us curves of all kinds, talking without pause the while, and interesting everybody present. Then in awhile he mounted to the human face, and drew a plain but not unprepossessing countenance in three quarters. He pointed out to us how plain it was, and by the side of it drew another face, unmistakably the same, and yet pleasanter to look upon. Talking on and working with great delicacy and assurance of touch, he drew a third face, still unmistakably the same, but charming; and finally, after a fourth step toward perfection, he sketched for us a face which was simply and purely beautiful. As he stood aside from each drawing in turn as it was completed, the little audience broke into warm applause; and when the last face was finished the stamping of enthusiastic feet raised a dust of faded odor from the floor, and made the place feel as if it had awakened after being neglected for a century. Then, when the applause had subsided, he told us how the faults in the first face, which made it plain, were due to certain inadequacies of character, and traced for us mental and moral progress in the lines which led up to beauty.

Finally everybody was interested, and most were charmed and persuaded. If Mr. Dolmer Delamere condescended to us—and he did—it seemed so natural, and the condescension was so delicately and kindly expressed, that not a soul could dream of taking umbrage at it. How could he but condescend, moving on so high a plane of thought, being so refined and sensitive and good, and so filled with that piety of cultured nature of which he spoke so often? His audience was rough and poor,

and he was a product of ages of exquisitely refined thinking and living.

The dapper man proposed a vote of thanks, which was most eagerly carried, and he promised Mr. Delamere that, if he should again honor them by his presence, an audience more fitting in number and enthusiasm would certainly welcome his appearance. Mr. Delamere responded, the ladies and gentlemen withdrew, and the audience crowded round the platform to discuss and admire the five faces on the blackboard, until somebody turned out the lights, and we were left to find our way out in the dark.

The gas went out so suddenly, and I had been looking so intently at the five beautifully drawn outlines, that for an instant everything was left distinctly on the retina or on the mind. On the mind, I think, for I am conscious now, and seem to have been conscious then, of the pale ring of faces, and the tint of the walls, and the shape of the windows, and the colors of the shadows that lurked in corners, and half a dozen other little details of which the eye could not at any given moment have taken complete cognizance. The faces quite lived with me, and I went out into the streets in company with them.

I do not know if it may not seem a bold thing to say—perhaps it may seem a boastfully foolish thing, though it is no more than simple fact—but I never, in the whole course of a wandering and eventful life, have cast a conscious look upon a face, if it were only in passing along Regent Street or in struggling to a carriage from a railway platform, but I could recall it clearly and identify it, and if I were artist enough could paint it. A picture impresses itself less vividly and profoundly, and I have but dim remembrances of many portraits which I have scrutinized with care. The five sketches were but newly imprinted on the mind, however, and I carried them away with unblurred eyes. I compared the fourth and fifth, and somehow, though it was likely enough that a finer moral and intellectual excellence was expressed in the last, somehow, in my unregenerate way, I liked the fourth the better, and thought it a more human and lovable type.

I sauntered on, without taking much notice of the people whom I passed or who breasted the bitter wind which blew behind me, until a something out of consonance with the street recalled me to myself. A pair of well-appointed carriages had halted at the edge of the horse-road, and Mr. Delamere, whose figure was easily recognizable, was shaking hands with a lady who leaned from one of them.

"Pray, let me drive you there," said the lady; "it is so little out of our way."

"No," said Mr. Delamere. "I am obliged to you; but I will walk until I find a hansom."

I sauntered on, thinking. I heard the lady say: "Good-night, then," and Mr. Delamere said to the coachman: "Home." The carriage moved past me, and a minute or two later Mr. Delamere went by, weaving a scarf about his throat as he walked. He turned in passing and regarded me, and then went on with a slight shiver at the bitter wind, and, going at a swift and resolute pace, turned a corner and went out of sight. My way led me after him, and I followed. When I reached the corner he had already cleared the short street upon which I entered. Not a figure broke the monotony of its lines from end to end, and the neighborhood was more desolate than a desert. The noise of the wind was dulled here, and I could still hear the quick and nervous beat of the lecturer's heels as he trod the pavement beyond the next turning. Suddenly the step paused, and there was a cry. I ran forward —I had not more than twenty yards to run before I reached the corner—and there was the apostle of sweetness in the hands of three who were not as yet his disciples. He was struggling with them; his light overcoat was torn open, and I saw the gleam of his white shirt-front in the light of a street-lamp. As I came in sight of the swaying quartet I saw a blow struck. Mr. Dolmer Delamere fell full length on the pavement, and at the sound of my approaching footsteps the three scoundrels made off at a run. I shouted: "Stop thief!" as I ran, and saw the fellows scatter and take different ways.

Mr. Delamere was but little hurt. His hat was crushed, his right elbow was numbed—I had a fear at first that his arm was broken—and his coat was torn in two or three places. His watch dangled from its chain, and the buttons were torn from his waistcoat, but he had lost nothing; and when I had helped him to his feet we ran, at his urging, to the end of the street shouting: "Stop thief!" until it became evident that his assailants had escaped. No policeman made an appearance, and, so far as I saw, no one appeared at door or window to manifest any interest in the affair. We settled down almost directly, and I ventured to observe—being young and nervous, and feeling it necessary to say something—that all the world was not quite converted to the principles of the Moral Tone Association.

"No," he said; "you arrived by a happy accident for me. Those fellows were ready for any extremity of violence." He

looked down at me from his superior height, and by and by added: "I have seen you before this evening?"

"Yes," I answered. "I was present at your lecture."

"You reside in this neighborhood?" he asked me, with that courteous condescension which had marked him all the evening.

"Some miles away," I said. I went on to express some surprise and admiration for his coolness. Most men would have become a little flustered and excited.

"I have lived long enough to learn one important lesson," he responded. "Now is a man's only time. When a thing is done, I have done with it."

I was much the more flustered of the two—indeed, he did not seem disturbed at all. He chafed the numbed elbow, and, catching me in the act of looking at him, he said, with a smile:

"That is a part of now, and will be for a day or two, I fancy. You go about among these people? Yes? You are not a clergyman? I thought not. A doctor? No? I student of human nature?"

I blushed and pleaded guilty stammeringly. They were interesting—the people down here. I am afraid I caught something of his own tone, and, being very young and an absurd prig and coxcomb in a hundred ways (though, as I believe, a fairly honest and lovable lad at bottom), I was pleased to find that he did not confound me with the rest of his hearers, and wanted him to understand that I was an intellectual young person.

"Yes," said he, still chafing the numbed elbow, "they make themselves interesting." Then a moment later, "What sort of a sample had I there to-night? Were they exceptional?"

"Certainly not representative," I told him. Exceptionally intelligent, curious, and anxious to learn, I fancied. For the most part the people of that quarter seemed apathetic, stolid, not anxious to go beyond themselves and their affairs of every day. He was so easy, stately, and condescending that I was rather in awe of him, and expressed myself somewhat hesitatingly.

"You must be good enough to let me know to whom I am indebted," he said, when I had done speaking. He drew a card-case from his pocket, and we exchanged cards. He paused beneath a lamp and read my name and address aloud. "John Denham, 10 Warwick Court, Gray's Inn." A four-wheeled cab rumbled into the street; he hailed it, and it proved

to be empty. "You must let me set you down, Mr. Denham, if you are going homeward now."

I accepted his invitation, and as we rode he persuaded me to talk. The rattling noise of the vehicle made conversation difficult, and I had to shout at him, so that I felt impudent and noisy. When the driver pulled up at the entrance to Warwick Court Mr. Delamere shook me by the hand, expressed a desire to see more of me, promised to write in the course of a day or two, and then drove away.

In a day or two an invitation to dinner awaited me. Mr. Delamere expressed a hope that I might not be engaged for the specified day, and asked me, if I should be so, to appoint another date and give him a week's notice. I wrote at once to accept the invitation. I looked forward to the evening with a fluttered expectancy, and was rejoiced to think that I was about to set foot in literary and artistic London.

CHAPTER II.

I THINK my chambers were among the tiniest in town. If there are less spacious apartments they are inhabited by people smaller of stature than the average Briton, or not inhabited at all. The bedroom was about the size of a Saratoga trunk, and the sitting-room was only a trifle larger. I was very happy there and very full of dreams and ambition, and I spent my days in pursuits more or less literary. I was not quite certain in what direction I was to blossom, but I had a modest certainty that I should flower out in one way or another, and become rich and famous—a delusion which I have found to be common among bookish young men of three- or four-and-twenty. I had written a three-act comedy, which no manager would so much as look at, and a five-canto poem, which no publisher would venture to introduce to an uninterested world; and in the course of a score or so of chapters I had got the characters of an intended novel into so unearthly a muddle of cross-purposes that I had thrown aside the whole thing in disgust, and for the time abandoned it. None of these things destroyed or abated the modest confidence already mentioned.

I was sitting in my own room an hour or two after the dispatch of my answer to Mr. Delamere's invitation to dinner when I heard a noise of hammering overhead, and after responding to it by a vigorous employment of the poker on the brick-work of my fire-place, I threw open my outer door and awaited the arrival of the personage whose presence had been signaled. Above me dwelt a young man of seven-and-twenty

—four years my senior—Walter Pole by name. He had no occupation, and seemed in want of none; but he had a prodigious circle of acquaintances. He read a great deal, though how he found time to do it was something of a wonder, and he lounged through time with a solemn *insouciance* which some people found irritating and others charming. He was a good deal of an athlete, and chose to disguise his activity by a pretense of idleness, propping himself up lazily against the walls and doors with his head rolling idly, as if in quest of a restful corner, and his hands in his pockets. He and I were great chums; but he feigned to be too idle to walk down-stairs to knock at my door like an ordinary Christian, and always demanded an answer to that noisy signal of his before he would take the trouble to descend.

On this occasion there was a pause between the signal and the sound of his steps upon the stair, and so, leaving the door open, I resumed my book and went on reading. In those happy days—it was the spring of the year 1865—Charles Dickens was alive and at work, and the whole English-reading world was engaged with Mr. Silas Wegg and Mr. Nicodemus Boffin. I am aware now—on the authority of an American gentleman who ought to know—that since the great master's death fiction has grown to be a finer art than it was in his day, but somehow—whether with advancing years one's faculty for enjoyment grows duller, or whether the gilt had been rubbed off the fictional gingerbread by the defacing hand of Time, as it has been rubbed off gingerbread of so many other kinds—there comes nobody who delights me in his way. I would fain have the finer sorts of art which have grown up in the last score of years, abolished, and the dead master back again; or—and the second wish seems likelier of fulfillment—would fain see some new man rising who would make me laugh and cry as he did, and as he still does whenever I look into his noble and delightful pages.

A new book from Dickens. Let elderly and middle-aged people remember what it meant, and let me enjoy myself for a minute as I recall that afternoon.

I forgot the signal and the open door, and I read on until the last page of the number was finished. Then I became aware that the fire was out, that the door was still open, that the dusk of the spring evening was falling fast, and that I was stiff and cold. I rang the bell to have the fire remade, and then walked upstairs to the first landing. The door was closed, but my chum answered to my knock, returning to his

pocket, as I entered, the hand he had used to open it, and beckoning me in-doors by a backward movement of his head.

"I was coming down," he said, "but I had a call just as I knocked to you. Do you fellows know each other?" We did not, and he introduced us to each other. "Jones. Denham."

Jones presented rather a striking figure. He was taller than common—six feet two, I should say—he differed very much from what one's ideal Jones should look like; he was magnificently mustached and bearded; he had jet-black Italian-looking eyes and an olive-colored skin. His features were remarkably delicate and refined, and his long wavy hair was parted in the middle.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in a soft voice which had a faint suspicion of an un-English accent, "but did I see your name upon the door-posts as I came upstairs?"

"I live in the rooms below these," I answered.

"Was it you who saved Delamere's life the other night?" he asked.

"Saved his life?"

"He certainly said so."

"I saved his watch," I said. "I was lucky enough to hear him call out, and when I turned the corner the men who had attacked him ran away. I don't think his life was in any danger."

"Well," said the Italian-looking Jones, smoothing his glossy beard with a hand of beautiful whiteness and delicacy, "he quite thinks he would have been killed if it had not been for the happy accident of your arrival; and he is, I assure you, boiling over with gratitude."

Remembering Mr. Delamere's unusual coolness, I was a little astonished at this, but I said nothing.

"The Delameres are great friends of mine," continued Jones. "Delamere is a remarkable man. He has never done half as much as he should have done, of course; but he stands aloof from modern art a good deal, and lives with the ideals of the past."

With this a certain undefined uneasiness took possession of him, and in a little while began to develop oddly. He rose and poked the fire. He fidgeted with the gas, raising and lowering the flame of the burners. He strayed to the bookshelves, and there took down and opened a score of volumes, returning each after an apparently unseeing glance at one of its pages. Pole, with one leg thrown across the other, followed these movements with a glance of some meaning, and

once or twice the merest glimpse of a smile flickered across his face.

"What's the matter, Jones?" he asked, after awhile, when the other's signs of uneasiness had become so marked as to seem to call for some recognition.

Jones seemed to make up his mind, and then seemed to recoil from his determination, and then seemed to make up his mind again.

"Do you sketch at all, Pole? Do you paint?" he asked. "Have you any sketching tools about? Anything will do."

"No," said Pole, "I'm sorry to say I do nothing in that line. What is it that's a-hurting you, my boy? The divine afflatus?"

"I've an idea," said Jones, wincing as if it hurt him to have this not too-pointed bit of fun poked at him. "I want to get it down before it goes. Anything will do. A bit of brown paper and a fragment of charcoal. Anything."

"There's your brown paper," returned Pole, opening a drawer and setting a sheet of paper on the table. "And there's your material for charcoal." He drew a packet of firewood from a locker, and cutting the string which surrounded it, thrust one of the pieces between the bars of the fire-place, and left it there.

Jones pounced upon the paper, smoothed it with both hands upon the table, and then thrust a second stick between the bars.

"Don't let that burn too far," he said; and drawing out the first, returned to the table, and with the burning bit of wood began to work all manner of preparatory eager signs with it, as though he were hungering to realize his idea.

Now at this time it was meat and drink to me to see an artist at work; and I arose to watch the Italian-looking Jones with an excited interest of a sort which hardly any other spectacle in the world would have awakened in me. There was a glamour about an artist, even if he were a duffer, which no other earthly creature had about him. Jones, with that clumsily shaped bit of charcoal, before the red sparks had fairly died out of it, began to draw with a feverish hurry and rapidity. Pole got ready one bit of charcoal for him while he used another; and in something under five minutes, as I should guess, a very beautiful and noble face was expressed upon the brown paper, and the artist threw himself into a chair and lighted a cigarette. His eagerness to get the sketch made had seemed a little exaggerated, and now his indifference and laxness seemed a little overdone. I was young, and, as does not

happen with every young man in the world, I knew it. I mistrusted my own experience, and yet I seemed to discover a something overdone in the Jonesian enthusiasm of desire and its rapidly followed exhaustion. Did artists really work in that way? Were they so seized by an idea, and so incapable of resisting it? Or was Jones exceptionally gifted, or exceptionally susceptible, or was he a little bit of a hum—? I dared hardly complete the inquiry.

Pole stood over the table with his hands in his pockets and his head on one side, and looked enjoyingly at the drawing. For my own part, I was a little staggered by the bold swiftness and dexterity with which this inspiration had been brought to life, but Pole's becoming face expressed a gratification so unusual for him that my doubts died, and I began to think that I was in the presence of a new Michael Angelo.

"I say," said Pole, in his idle way, "you must let me keep this, old fellow."

"If you care for it," Jones answered, languidly. "It's off my mind now. I've got it down, and I can get it again whenever I want it."

"You don't mean to say that you could reproduce this inspiration accurately?" Pole asked him, still beaming at the drawing.

"Oh, yes," said the artist, with a careless modesty. "You see," he added, waking up a little, "when an idea gets into the mind it offers itself sometimes in a will-o'-the-wispish, tantalizing kind of way. It comes and goes, revealing itself in glimpses which are neither clear enough nor prolonged enough to make that kind of impression on the memory which is necessary to fix it. But if you can catch the tricksy thing and set it in form, no matter how roughly, it is your own property for good and all. The definite impression is secured—clearly stamped on the mind. I shall never forget that face again."

He dropped back into languor, relighted his extinguished cigarette, and smoked in silence. Two or three minutes later he arose, looked at his watch, took up his hat, and said good-bye.

"I think," he added to me, "that you dine with the Delameres on Monday?"

"I wrote to-day," I answered, "accepting."

"We shall meet there," he said; and with more good-byes he went away.

Pole, having closed the door behind him, came back at a waltz, and having circled the room twice or thrice, cannoned against a sofa and fell into it, laughing. Then he got up and

looked at the charcoal drawing and rubbed his hands, and laughed again, with an enjoyment so genuine that I laughed with him.

"Here's a lark," he said, still chuckling.

"Where is it?" I asked him.

"Here," he answered; and opening a drawer below the book-shelves he drew out a sheaf of papers, from among which he produced a rough sheet of gray paper, such as grocers use, and, holding it before me, displayed to my astonished vision an absolute replica of the drawing which had just been executed in my presence. He set the two side by side, and we examined them together. They looked almost as if they might have been produced from the same lithographic stone.

"What is this?" I asked; "a coincidence?"

"Yes," said Pole, turning upon me with a delicious grin of mischief, "a coincidence. Do you know Wilson Craig? No? He's a far-off cousin of mine—Scotchman. Poor Sebastian had the same idea at Craig's only a week ago. He was tormented by it; was obliged to get it out. If you can once catch the tricksy thing, you know, it's your own property for good and all. But it comes and goes, my boy, revealing itself in glimpses which are neither clear enough nor prolonged enough to make that kind of impression on the memory which is necessary to fix it."

"Sebastian?" I asked. "Who is Sebastian?"

"Sebastian! Sebastian is Jones. Sebastian Dolmer Jones. His name has been a damage to him. If his godfathers and godmothers at his baptism had seen to it that he should be called Bill, or Dick, or Tom, or Harry, it would have been a blessing for him. But Sebastian Dolmer's bound to be a bit out of the way, and to have artistic cranks and furies, don't you see? Sebastian Dolmer can't even speak his native tongue without a little bit of foreign accent. How should he? Bill Jones could have done it, or Dick, Tom, or Harry, but Sebastian and Dolmer couldn't manage it between 'em though they tried ever so. Thank your stars you're plain John, my boy."

I felt a vicarious shame. I would greatly have preferred that Jones should not have been bowled out in this ignominious way. Pole's rejoicing at it seemed cruel and unfair.

"Rubbish!" said he, when I put this before him. "The only advantage this kind of humbug brings with it is that a man can laugh at it. What do you think pretense exists for, unless to be found out and laughed at? You're going to dine with the Delameres, are you? Then you're going into the very nursery and citadel of humbug. The dinner's real and the

wines are real. Plates, knives, forks, spoons, chairs, tables, white ties, shirt-fronts, dress-coats, all real. But the people and the sentiments! Keep Sebastian Dolmer in your mind, John. There's a lot of Sebastian Dolmer in the enlightened converse of the Delameres. But whenever you hear it your safeguard is to say 'Jones' to yourself. Look here!" He became quite hot upon a sudden, and struck the table, leaning across it and looking me straight in the eyes. "I'll tell you what you'll find there. You'll find the sham enthusiast in art, who doesn't know a Rubens from a Vandyke; and the sham enthusiast in humanity, who wouldn't part with sixpence to save you from starvation; and the sham enthusiast in friendship, who'll stick pins and needles in a wax caricature of you when you're gone; and the sham enthusiast in the last new fad of atheism, who's deadly afraid of ghosts and says his prayers on the sly; and the sham enthusiast in poetry, who's as wooden under her wooden simper as this wooden table. They tremble with sensitiveness, every man Jack and woman Jill of them, and they're just as tough-hided as a lot of camels. They're boiling over with sympathies of all sorts if you listen to 'em, and they're dryer than the desert sand. Look at this!" He snatched the drawing vehemently from the table and held it up before me. "Why can't plain Jones come here and say, 'I'm just itching all over to show you how practiced and dexterous I am. There's a rapid bit of certainty for you! And now I've staggered you, I'm happy!' Vanity's a natural passion, and, like all natural passions, it's useful while you've got the bit in its mouth and the reins in your hands. But the beggar comes Sebastian Dolmering with his stale old inspiration and turns his own cleverness into a shameful lie."

"They can't all be like that," I hesitated. The fancy made my head ache. I was young and ingenuous, and I wanted to believe in people.

"Go and dine with the Delameres," he answered, still speaking hotly, "and then tell me how far I'm wrong."

CHAPTER III.

I WENT to dine with the Delameres, and while I dressed and while I was on the way I felt as if I were somehow on a mean errand—as if I were going to spy out the defects of my host and *convives*, and find out each one of them in a false enthusiasm. I had no right to accept a man's hospitality on those conditions, and the dinner began to take the aspect of an ordeal. It seemed especially terrible to face Jones, whom I

already knew to be a pretender. He would probably go on pretending, and I should have to look and listen and to pretend to be deceived by his pretensions. As we get older we take a more humorous or a more allowing view of human foibles, unless we happen to have been so bitterly wounded by them in our sensitive days that the whole world grows hateful; but there is nothing more hopeless and mournful to the heart of an ingenuous lad than the beginning of disbelief in his fellow-mortals.

I was partly relieved and cheered by an unexpected encounter at the door of Mr. Delamere's house in Cromwell Terrace. A little old gentleman was in the act of discharging a hansom there as I drove up, and as he stood on tiptoe to reach the outstretched hand of the cabman I recognized him. This little old gentleman was the Reverend Dr. Fish, an old friend of my father's and a great favorite of mine. There was a good fat vicarage in my native Warwickshire village, and Dr. Fish had held it for many years. In his old age he had allowed himself to be transplanted to London, chiefly in order to make room for his son, who had taken the living the doctor had vacated.

"Ha, John, my boy," said the doctor, as I alighted and stood waiting by him at Mr. Delamere's door. "I expected to meet you here." He was silent when a man-servant opened the door and while we disembarrassed ourselves of hats and coats, but when we had mounted the stairs and found ourselves alone in the drawing-room he began to speak again. "I heard of your gallant conduct the other night. Delamere mentioned it to me, and—you mustn't be offended, John—he talked about doing something for you. He has a weakness for patronage. I told him of course that that would never do, and told him who you were, and so on, and as a matter of fact you are here under my recommendation. Delightful people—delightful people—but curiously exclusive."

I was on the point of saying that I had been surprised to find him there, but remembering that Mr. Delamere's opinions about religion afforded me my only grounds for surprise I kept a judicious silence. The old doctor, with his eyes beaming benevolently behind his gold-rimmed glasses and his soft old face alight with friendship and amiability, touched the theme which was in my mind.

"They are, as I said just now, delightful people, but I am not sure that some of them may not be a little dangerous if placed in contact with a mind not altogether formed. They have curious opinions, even reprehensible opinions sometimes,

some of them. There's that book of Seeley's, and there's that other book of Renan's. They are not works which I would recommend a young man to study; but after all, you know, John, we must know doubt to fight it, and I find Mr. Delamere a kind of mental tonic."

It was plain that Dr. Fish felt it necessary to justify his presence there. "You don't know Miss Delamere yet!" he went on. "Of course not. Of course not. A very superior young lady, a very charming young lady. Perhaps a little overeducated. I am no friend to these new-fangled notions about female education, but she wears her learning lightly, and she is certainly very charming."

Mr. Delamere appeared and welcomed me very agreeably. The guests began to drop in, among them Jones, whom I greeted with a wretched consciousness of embarrassment, being afraid, though I knew how unreasonable the fear was, that he was somehow aware of my knowledge of him, and thinking all the while how hideously ashamed he would have been if he were aware of my discovery. I was introduced to an American lady who was assuredly old enough to be my mother; a lady who wrote poetry, and blushed and simpered behind her fan like the dear young creature she had been thirty years earlier, and made my life a burden to me while I tried to talk to her. Then I was introduced to a tall and stately foreigner, who left me abruptly to talk to a fat woman in red, who received him with a shrill ecstasy, and then, while I was rather forlornly turning over the leaves of a book of engravings, a lady who commanded my instant attention sailed into the room, and moved from one to another with salutations and welcome and apology for being late. There were more reasons than one for looking at her, for, to begin with, she was very strikingly beautiful and graceful, and dressed with a taste which, though I was then even more ignorant in such matters than I am now —and that is saying a great deal—seemed to me altogether exquisite. But the thing that enlisted my attention was this. The fourth drawing of that suite of five which Mr. Delamere had executed upon the blackboard at the lecture for the Moral Tone Association had been neither more nor less than an accurate reproduction of Miss Delamere's face. I could not help thinking that in a person of Mr. Delamere's reputation there was something wanting in good feeling and delicacy in having drawn his daughter's features for the instruction and amusement of that mechanical crowd, and when I came to remember the comments on the fifth drawing and his cold-blooded artistic improvement on his child's features, I felt for the mo-

ment as if I hated him. But Mr. Delamere himself carrying me up to his daughter and introducing me to her as the hero of his adventure of a week ago, and making much of me to her in spite of some feeble protest of my own, I had no time to pursue my thoughts of him. When it appeared that I was set apart to take Miss Delamere down to dinner, and when it appeared further that everybody was impressed with an absurdly untrue idea of my courage and usefulness on the night of the attack, I resigned myself for awhile in a kind of stupor. Pole's denunciation of the Delameres and their set of friends and acquaintances was with me for an hour and more, and nothing but my beautiful neighbor's easy charm of manner drew me away from the memory of it.

Mary Delamere was two years younger than myself. She had a perfect self-possession, and a distinguishing quietude of manner which would have become a princess. She was very beautiful, and in her quiet, kind way did so much to put me at my ease that I became grateful to her, and was not long in arriving at the conclusion that, whatever brand of insincerity might have been marked upon the rest of the people there present, she herself was as honest as daylight. Nothing about her pleased me so much as the soft, sincere serenity of her manner—a something so gentle and engaging that I have no words for it. One used to hear—for phrases come into fashion and go out again, as clothes do—a good deal of the eyes as the windows of the soul. I never knew anybody of whom the saying seemed as true as it did of Mary Delamere. Candor lived in those large gray orbs of hers. They were not made to hide deceit. Before the evening was over I was ready to fight anything or anybody in defense of that belief.

Perhaps if it had not been for Pole's diatribe of a day or two earlier I might have been more disposed to believe in the sincerity of other people at the table. There was a lady opposite to me who talked of her poor, dear Hottentots in tones of greatest affection and as though she owned a nation, but I never learned in what relation she and the poor, dear Hottentots stood to each other, or on what ground she made them hers. A long-haired, clean-shaven man sat beside her and held the table spell-bound for awhile as he spoke of the desecration of a Turner which was in the possession of a titled acquaintance.

"They had had it cleaned, Delamere," he said, with a voice and manner of resigned despair. "All that lovely impasto architectural stuff turns out to have been built up in white and glazed. They have cleaned the glaze away, and now the thing

stares at you, with the middle distance hanging over the foreground—a forlorn line of dirty chalk. I could have cried with anger. I could positively have shed tears of mortification. I could indeed."

The long-haired, clean-shaven man made this protestation with a sort of reserve, as if he would rather that we didn't think too highly of him for it.

Jones said it was heart-breaking, absolutely heart-breaking, and (as an aside to the man behind his chair) that he would take a little currant-jelly.

I caught Miss Delamere's eye at this moment and was guilty of a youthful impertinence, of that sort which is only perpetrated by shy people, who, as a matter of fact, say and do, in their own desperation, the most impudent things which are said and done in the world. I asked why the gentleman didn't cry, if he wanted to. Her eyes laughed, but she held up a warning finger.

"You must not say that sort of thing," she answered. "It is not good form."

I was horribly disconcerted, and for awhile found nothing else to say. The man had irritated me. I was persuaded that he had cared less about the Turner than I should have done myself, and that he had only mentioned its destruction in order to show how delicately toned he was, and what a love for art he had. But of course I had no least little right to ridicule her father's guests to the lady of the house, and I told myself that nobody but a cad could have dreamed of making that unfortunate observation. Yet Pole's opinion of the people was working in me, and I had been embarrassed by the willful exaggeration of my own accidental service, and Jones's trick of being inspired with the same urgent fancy twice running was present in my mind, and I seemed to breathe an atmosphere of humbug which stifled me.

I suppose Miss Delamere saw my embarrassment and took pity upon me.

"You live in Gray's Inn, I think, Mr. Denham?"

"Not actually within the inn," I answered, determining that I at least would be precise. "In Warwick Court, just outside the inn gates."

"Do you happen to know a Mr. Pole who lives there?" she asked me.

"Very well, indeed," I answered, not much relieved from my discomfiture by the introduction of his name.

"He was a great friend of ours until a little while ago," she said. "He used to be very enthusiastic at times about art and

books and politics, and we thought he had a career of some sort before him. Is he—you know him well, you say—is he changeable?"

I thought not. He pretended to be lazy; but what with his friends, and his books, and his athletics, he must always have his hands full.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I know that way of his, but I was not thinking of that. There are a great many young men who are ashamed of being thought enthusiastic, and he is one of them. He used to come here very often, and my father had become attached to him, but somehow he has drifted away. I should be obliged if you would tell him that he was asked for. You must understand," she added, brightly, "that he and I are friends of fifteen years' standing, and that I have old-established rights to an interest in him."

It was clearly impossible to say what I knew of his reasons for staying away, but I promised as lightly as I could to convey her message. Then I began to wonder whether Pole had included this delightful young lady in his condemnation of her father's guests.

"They can't all be like that," I had said to him when he had done with Jones.

"Go and dine with the Delameres," he had answered, "and see how far I am wrong."

And now, bent on discovery, and quite certain that if he attacked Miss Delamere with the rest, then I should be able to confute him, I watched my chance. Somebody spoke of the civilizing influences of art. Art seemed the Delamere gospel —the tidings of joy to an ugly world– the only possible redemption of men and women lay in it.

"Don't you think it easy," I asked her, "to overestimate the things that art is going to do for the world? Isn't there at least a little danger of falling into a sort of cant about it?"

She looked at me with a surprised smile.

"Do you know," she said, with that patronizing air which young women can always assume so successfully with men who are but little older than themselves, "I was at first inclined to think you shy, Mr. Denham! But you are a very bold person indeed, if you dare to ventilate that doctrine here."

"But really," I stammered, "it all sounds wild to me. I —I won't speak of it, if I must not, but—"

"Let us talk of it later," she said. "Colonel Seaforth is talking. He is always worth listening to."

The possibility that this speech included a counter-proposition, to the effect that I was not worth listening to, so weighed

upon me that I lost the first part of Colonel Seaforth's speech. When I was able to listen I found he was telling a story of a comrade who died before the Redan. Nothing could have been better than the manner of his narrative, nothing very well more affecting than its matter. I was ashamed of my own eyes, and made a pretense of eating to disguise myself.

"What a theme for a poem!" said the American lady, clasping her hands together. "Oh, may I use it, Colonel Seaforth? May I?"

"I should prefer the theme in marble," said the clean-shaven man. "I can see the cold, inscrutable calm of the dead face."

"No, no, Cumming," said our host, shaking his head with a grave decision. "You forget the costume."

"You are quite right, Delamere," returned the clean-shaven man. "I forgot the costume. Language *is* the medium for it after all. It is one of the themes in which omission becomes the chief artistic virtue."

So they forgot the hero in the space of ten seconds, and the lady opposite was reminded by the story of something which had happened among the poor, dear Hottentots, and had no earthly bearing upon it, so far as I could discover.

The dinner came to an end, and when coffee had been served the men followed the ladies upstairs. There was some excellent music, and a great deal of desultory clever talk, and then people began to go. No further chance presented itself for talk with Miss Delamere, and when I came to think of it I seemed to have acquitted myself so ill with her that I did not dare to make an opportunity. I had been insolent about one of her father's guests, and I had accused the whole table of the vice of cant, and altogether the sooner I hid my head in shame the better it seemed likely to be for me. I took advantage of Dr. Fish's farewells to shelter my own, and, much to my surprise, found Miss Delamere's cordiality in no way diminished.

"We are at home on Fridays," she said, kindly, "from nine in the evening. Come next Friday, and bring Mr. Pole with you. Will you?"

I promised for myself, and said I would bring Pole if I could. She raised her eyebrows in reproof for what I knew to be a kind of *gaucherie,* and I got away covered with confusion.

"Pole?" said the old vicar, when we reached the street together. "Walter Pole? Are you a friend of his? I used to meet him at the Delameres. A bright young fellow of high

principle, I always fancied. I used to think—oh, well, that's no business of mine."

We walked to the street corner together, and there separated, each taking a hansom. Pole was in his own rooms when I got home, and hearing me enter, came down in his dressing-gown and slippers.

"Well," he asked me, "what do you think of 'em?"

I didn't know. I was weary and dispirited. I told him with a little heat, when I began to talk at last, that he had spoiled my evening for me, and that I believed them to be a deal nicer and more genuine than he thought them. I believe I charged him, in my own mind, with the three failures of which I had been guilty.

"I suppose," I said at last, "that you don't include Miss Delamere among the sham enthusiasts. I don't think I ever met a more delightful girl."

"Miss Delamere's another pair of shoes, John," he answered. "I wasn't talking of Miss Delamere."

I told him of the invitation I had for him, and in his own idle way he began to beat the half-extinguished fire with the poker.

"Yes," he said, drawlingly, poising the poker in his hand, "I think I'll go." Then he dropped the poker with a crash in the fender, and said, with startling emphasis: "I'll be hanged if I do." And with that he got up and marched away, leaving me staring after him.

CHAPTER IV.

POLE sauntered into my rooms on Friday evening just as I was making ready to start for Mr. Delamere's house. I had not seen him since his curious exit, but I had sent him a note asking him to provide me with some excuse or message in case he should be inquired after.

"So you're going, are you?" he demanded.

"Yes, I'm going. What am I to say to Miss Delamere?"

"I suppose," he said, propping himself against the bedroom door and lounging there, "that the straightest thing to say will be that I wouldn't go."

I put it to him that that was an unamiable message for a friend to deliver. He shrugged his shoulders and rolled about against the door for a time with a manner which seemed to disclaim responsibility.

"If you like to invent any social lie, you may, my boy, but I'm not going to save your conscience by inventing it for you.

Say you tried to persuade me and failed. Is that too hard for you?"

"Do you want to make enemies of them?" I asked.

"Enemies or friends—it is all one to me," he answered. "I don't suppose they'll care greatly whether I go or not, and I'm sure I sha'n't care much how they take it."

"There are thousands of people in the world for whom one doesn't greatly care," I urged, "but one doesn't go out of the way to wound them. You might send a civiler message."

"If old Delamere asks for me," said Pole, "you can tell him that I think and speak of him with a constant want of respect and veneration. If Miss Delamere should do me the honor to call me to mind again, you may tell her that I am sorry not to be able to meet her."

Finding that I could make nothing better of him than this, I set out, and arriving at Cromwell Terrace in due time, found the rooms already fairly filled. Miss Delamere shook hands with me, and afterward I got into a corner and sat dull and resigned, knowing nobody and noticed by nobody. The rooms were filled with a loud buzz of talk; and I saw so many introductions going on that it seemed as if nobody knew anybody except the host and his daughter. After the space of an hour Miss Delamere found me out and sat down beside me.

"You did not bring Mr. Pole?" she asked. "I suppose that you have seen him?"

"Oh, yes; I have seen him." A sudden awkwardness fell upon me, and Miss Delamere, who was toying with her fan, looked up and became immediately aware of my embarrassment.

"He refused to come?" she said. "Did he give a reason for it?"

I began to stammer something, but she stopped me almost at once. She made no display of temper or confusion, or indifference.

"Will you tell me actually what he said?" Then, seeing that I grew more embarrassed than before—for I knew that I was making a foolish effort to smile in an allowing sort of way for Pole, and an apologetic way for myself, and failing horribly—she added: "Never mind, Mr. Denham. I ought not to have asked you. I shall be right in thinking it was not pleasant or friendly. Now let us talk of something else. Do you care about celebrities? That is Mr. Cushing—the gentleman with the eyeglass and the black ribbon—the author of 'The Spider.' Have you read it? No? People are talking

about it a great deal. That is—" and so on through half a dozen.

They were all people with whose names I was more or less familiar, and it was interesting to see them for the first time. I had forgotten Pole for the moment and the discomfiture his purposed absence had brought upon me, when Miss Delamere brought him back to memory.

"Have you known Mr. Pole long?" she asked. I told her I had known him pretty intimately for a year. "You like him?" Yes, I liked him much. I felt as if this avowal were a sort of tacit expression of his approval of want of politeness in her case, and made it awkwardly. I thought at the time, and I knew later on, that she understood me, but she pursued her questioning. "He is not natively impolite, I fancy?" I thought not. Brusque, perhaps, but too kindly to be insolent or ill-bred. "Shall I introduce you to Mr. Cushing? I must go now, for I see more people coming and I have to receive them. Oh! Here is Mr. Jones. You know him already. Sebastian, I leave you and Mr. Denham to each other."

Jones sat beside me in the place she vacated and began to talk, but I could see that his heart was not in it, and that he was somehow distracted. He appeared to be more interested in his own coat than men commonly are, and sat plucking at his sleeves with delicate thumb and forefinger until I made a discovery which I suppose I ought to have made much earlier. Jones was not attired in absolute black as other men were, but had had his clothes cut out of very dark claret color. When he was sure that my observation was attracted by this fact he mentioned it.

"You are looking at my coat? It's something of an innovation, and I dare say that one may be laughed at for it. But really one finds the monotony of English dress oppressive, and evening-dress has quite grown beyond one's power of endurance. One has been looking for some sort of moral Curtius to throw himself into the gulf for years past, and since one can't find him one must sacrifice one's self."

He invested the theme with a certain air of lightness. Since that time I have seen men jest under fire in the same spirit. I could see that he felt the seriousness of the position.

"Somebody has to lead the way, and of course it doesn't do to be too bold at first. One may find somebody to follow one's lead, or even to go beyond it. The thing once started may make strides. One doesn't know. But really it *seems* impossible that men should be content to go on forever in the present monotony of hideousness."

I began to take an interest in Jones. The artistic humbug with which he had chosen to mark the beginning of my knowledge of him had made him noticeable, and this new development, which seemed to be so admirably in consonance with the first, helped to make him worthy of study. For the first time in my life I began consciously to try to see inside a man, to appreciate his standpoint, to endeavor to see how he saw things, and what kind of opinion of himself supported him. It struck me that since I was perilously near to hating and despising him, and since he was perilously near to self-worship, it might be worth while to study him, if only with an eye to reconciling the difference and striking a reasonable balance. You have a right to be grateful to the man who sets you upon any new field of mental effort, and I have to thank Jones for many happy hours.

I began to observe him closely. He was very far from being uncomely, and so far as I could discover there was nothing in the way of warning in his face. He had very fine, soft, dark, Italian eyes, faithful and sincere to look at, with just such a patient longing in them as you may see in an intelligent and affectionate dog's. His mustache hid his mouth, but his forehead seemed to express honesty and candor. Nothing but a slight pinching of the nostrils betrayed any poverty of nature or littleness of sentiment. Something of coxcombry and affectation could be traced in his manner, but not enough to offend, unless you were somewhat too readily disposed to be offended.

"Delamere quite desponds," he said, clinging to his theme. "But, then, Delamere is elderly; he is getting on in life, and one doesn't expect to find the enthusiasm of hope in a man of his years. I dare say, now, you take this for a sort of ridiculous trifling; but really it isn't so if one looks rightly at it. When beautiful dress was a part of every gentleman's duty the arts flourished as they have never flourished since. Every assemblage of ladies and gentlemen afforded the eye a feast of delicate and rich coloring. The popular taste was educated to color, and to us who look upon tone and forms as the elementary civilizing influence, the question of dress assumes an importance which, of course, it can not wear to those who do not share our convictions. To dress with grace and refinement is one of the ways to thinking and living with grace and refinement."

While Jones was talking thus Mr. Delamere appeared in our neighborhood, and, taking a chair which happened to be vacant near at hand, drew it up to the sofa upon which we sat, and placed himself before us.

"Nobody would think," he said, striking in here, "of dis-

puting that proposition, but really we are at such a period of decadence that—" He paused with an air of dejection, but brightened a moment later. "I don't know," he went on. "'When things are at their worst they sometimes mend.' Perhaps we may really hope for a rebound from all this. The popular taste can never be finally depraved."

"Everything seems to move in grooves," said Jones, seriously. "We have our cycle of ugliness with us now. We shall move out of it by and by."

"I'm not sure," said Mr. Delamere, putting up a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, the better to scrutinize Jones's raiment, "that the point of departure is well chosen. You see, Sebastian, that if you push your point to its legitimate conclusion you may arrive—you must arrive—at golds and reds and blues. Now the question comes, Will the material and the form lend themselves to a richly colored treatment? To my mind that question carries its own answer."

"I have thought it out, sir," Jones answered, with a respectful firmness of demeanor. "If we desire to move the crowd we must have their good-will. To be moved too suddenly is shocking. The material is too important, too solidly fixed as it were, to be tampered with at first without danger. A slight deviation in color—a mere hint of movement in the right direction—can give no shock, while it may invite attention."

"Of course," returned Mr. Delamere, "one has not spent sixty years in the world without learning patience, but even now the narrow-mindedness, the extreme limitation of vision which characterizes some of the best-meaning people one encounters, is a little trying. I was speaking of this very theme the other night at the Trelawneys', and a gentleman, whose name I have forgotten—he turned out to be a medical man of some eminence—chose to be mightily satirical. I remember now, a Doctor Brand, a disorderly giant of a man; a man, I should say, judging from what I saw of him, of excellent capacities. He thought the soap-boiler a more practical person to encourage in the cause of civilization than the *costumier*. He put it rather well, but 'My dear sir,' I said, '*chacun à son métier*. Let us all work together. Let us welcome anything that helps. Soap and the scrubbing-brush by all means, but then I do not deal in soap and scrubbing-brushes.' I heard him afterward—he is a loud man, not too well-bred, and one can hear him over a whole room—and he was talking of fiddling and Rome burning, and that sort of thing. He found some listeners, too."

"There is no popular art-feeling," said Jones. "There is no conception of the necessity of an awaking."

I thought of many things, but then I knew how young I was, and I kept silence. Mr. Delamere took up his parable anew.

"I am a little tired," he said. "One doesn't sacrifice one's conclusions any the more for being tired, but I confess to a little fatigue. There are none blinder than those who won't see, and people will *not* see that to be ugly is to be immoral. They have to see that two and two make four. That is a matter of the counting-house, and must be remembered in the purchase of the daily loaf. But they are quite sunk in stupor about everything that does not relate to their hateful daily comforts. One moves them for a moment—even in Houndsditch"—he looked at me—"one finds people who will listen; but they go to sleep again."

"One would hardly think, sir," said Jones, with a mournful appeal, "that you would shrink from lending the weight of your own example to a movement of this sort." He shook his claret-colored sleeve, and, looked almost hopelessly at Delamere.

"I do not disapprove of it," said he, solemnly. "It is well meant, Sebastian, and it may bear fruit beyond your expectations. But I am too old, a little too much daunted by futile experiment, too saddened by repeated failure. Youth has the vitality for experiment. By the way, I must show you my last bit of Worcester, Sebastian. Are you interested in china, Mr. Denham?"

I was on the edge of some idiotic rejoinder about the opium traffic, but I understood in time, and saved myself. Mr. Delamere piloted us down-stairs and showed us a cabinet, with most of the contents of which Jones was evidently familiar. My host, delicately handling some of its treasures, grew extremely eloquent and interesting.

"He probably knows more about old Worcester than any man alive," said Jones when we were left to ourselves again by the chance intrusion of other guests. "His learning is prodigious."

I went away dazed that night. I felt somehow as if I had been beaten about the head. My wits were scattered, and I did not get at them easily. This solemn air of going crusading about the color of a coat and a pair of trousers, this prodigy of learning in old crockery-ware, fairly stupefied me. I walked alone, and my soul rebelled at it all. This huge London, said I, hotly, to myself, lies sweltering about them, noble and

loathly, all comedy and tragedy, and they turn their backs upon it, and blind themselves from the sight of it, and find their soul's bread in *bric-à-brac* and the wine of life in the distillation of the fashion plates. And I thought myself particularly clever, and felt that I was great and magnanimous and altogether what I ought to be by comparison with these triflers, and got into a very satisfactory state of mind by reason of them. But if I thought poorly of the great art critic himself or of Jones his pupil, I had formed, without knowing any very sound reasons for it, a different opinion with regard to Mr. Delamere's daughter. I do not pride myself upon any special discernment on this account, for a boy's judgment about a young woman is liable to be influenced by facts of which he takes no count. Mary Delamere was, to begin with, a very beautiful girl, and, to continue, she was to my mind, even in her personal aspect, better than beautiful. I thought I read nothing but candor and goodness in her looks, and if for once I was right, it is not a thing to be greatly proud of. I have thought the same things since, and have been wrong, and it would be a worse world than it is if all the eyes that look sincere and honest were the loop-holes through which mean natures peered to spy their own advantage, and all the unwrinkled foreheads and blooming cheeks and laughing lips were no better than pretty disguises. Here and there in the world, in the middle of all the chicane and frivolity, and that pitiless icy selfishness which is the deadliest because the commonest of human crimes, you find a nature so honest, so true, so gentle and tender that your only way with it is to love it and worship it and wonder at its goodness. And you are a lucky man if its very goodness does not sometimes make your heart ache.

CHAPTER V.

I HAD no need to discover that Mr. Delamere and Sebastian Jones were not wholly given over to the demon of hollowness. Mr. Delamere's books held a good deal of sound thinking and admirable writing, and Jones's pictures were visible to prove his faculty of imagination, and to show that he could draw and paint what he had imagined. But what with Pole's emphatic condemnation of them—which carried great weight with me at the time—and my own small discoveries and observations, I should have fallen away from them altogether if it had not been for the fact of Mary Delamere's influence. I do not think that I was ever in love with her, though I might have

gone that length but for another's unconscious intervention; but from the first I admired her and revered her, and credited her with all imaginable good qualities. It was so great a pleasure to meet her that it more than atoned to me for the impotent exasperation I felt in the presence of Jones, and the bewildering contempt with which Jones's friend and patron inspired me.

It was then entirely upon Miss Delamere's account that I kept up my acquaintance with her father, and consented to give his halls the benefit of my presence, and his society my carefully disguised contempt. But I should never have known in its details the story I am about to tell if it had not been for one or two accidental circumstances, such as are always happening in life to jostle us out of the road upon which we fancy that our feet are set, and into new roads upon which we had never the remotest intention of traveling.

Mr. Delamere's out-of-season entertainments and receptions came to an end. The entertainments and receptions of the season, which were of a much more exalted and magnificent description, were suddenly, according to annual fashion, arrested, and in mid-May the house in Cromwell Terrace was closed and the family went abroad, accompanied, as I learned, by Jones. Mr. Delamere found a certain spell of continental life per year quite necessary for him, and he preferred to take it when the winter health-seekers were all gone home, or going, and before the arrival of the annual summer and autumn crowd of tourists. He liked to have the foreign galleries to himself as far as possible, and always, wherever he might be, he had a sort of haughty and tolerant patience for the crowd. He spent his life in directing the vulgar gaze toward objects of art, and he resented, in his polished and gentlemanly way, the presence of the people he so constantly and eloquently invited.

Pole and I, having nothing better to do, went up river and lived aboard a hired house-boat. The business arrangements which had been necessary before we took possession of our summer-house were entirely carried out by Pole. I knew nothing about the boat until we entered upon it beyond the fact that it belonged to "Old Goldsmith," that we paid forty pounds for its use during the summer season, and that during the regatta week at Henley its proprietor would expect to have leave to quarter himself upon us. I had that vague and general idea of Old Goldsmith which people gather of men they have heard of and never seen, and it naturally happened that when he presented himself in the flesh he proved to be the exact opposite of what I had imagined.

I remember the day perfectly. I have reasons for that exactitude of memory, as will in due course appear. It was broiling hot, and in the first week of June. The river was low, and the clayey bank beside which the house-boat was moored was already fissured with the heat, and its baking cracks gaped like so many Tantalus mouths above the water, which flowed so near and so unreachable. I was half asleep in the dinghy, and Pole was lounging on the deck, making the shallowest possible pretense of reading Roman law, when a movement on his part awoke me from my dreams, and he murmured softly to himself:

"Now what on earth does that old scoundrel want here?"

"Which old scoundrel?" I demanded, sleepily.

"That old scoundrel!" said Pole, nodding his head backward. "Old Goldsmith."

I rolled over in the dinghy, and, with my elbows on the stern seat, looked down the river in the direction indicated by Pole's nod. On the smooth, mirror-like expanse of the river there was but a single craft, and seated in it, holding a tiller-rope in either hand, was a fat, contented-looking young man of undeniably Jewish aspect. His black eyes gleamed and his fat cheeks creased, and his Hebrew nose wrinkled in a smile of recognition, as the boat, impelled by a sunburned waterman, whose neck and arms were of the color of a new-baked brick, bore down upon us. His white teeth, which looked the whiter by contrast with the jetty little mustache curling above them, held the stump of a fat cigar. He was dressed in white boating flannels, and a huge cable of watch-chain ran from one breast-pocket of his flannel coat to the other. The plump hands that twirled the tiller-ropes were all over rings. His diamonds gleamed, his watch-chain gleamed, the black eyes and white teeth shone as he bore down; he seemed to shine all over; and what with the bright daylight and the sunny river, and this opulent glitter of the new-comer, the effect on my sleepy eyes was altogether dazzling.

"Halloo!" said the new-comer, as he stepped aboard with a dapper dexterity. "Here you are."

"Yes," said Pole, casting a lazy eye at him from under the rim of his straw hat, and speaking with a conspicuous absence of welcome in his tone; "here we are. Who's a-denying of it?"

The new-comer stooped to the boatman and handed him a coin.

"This won't do!" said the boatman. "I want a shillin'."

"He wants a shilling!" The new man appealed to me.

"Did you ever hear such a thing? Why do you want a shilling? What do you want a shilling for?"

"Why? 'Cos it's the regular charge. What for? Why, for scullin' you up here."

"Upon my word!" said the new man, still appealing to me —Pole had gone back to his pretended study of Roman law again—"I'm always being got at. Everybody gets at me. There you are; that's a sixpence. Go and revel on it, go and revel!"

His voice stopped half-way in his hooked nose, and all his n's sounded like d's. He laughed with a delightful cunning and self-approval, and his black eyes and white teeth twinkled more brightly than before.

"It's beastly hot," said the waterman, wiping his tanned forehead with his red fore-arm. "Twopence wouldn't break a gentleman like you, would it, Mr. Goldsmith?"

"What a wandering style of conversation!" cried Mr. Goldsmith. "What's the connection between the heat and twopence?" He pulled out an ostentatious handful of gold and silver, and turned it over from one hand to the other, facetiously blowing upon it, as if to sever the wheat from the chaff, and showing to me and the boatman some thirty or forty sovereigns. I saw the glittering eye look at me to remark if I had noticed this little Pactolus as it flowed jingling to and fro with metallic ripple. "I haven't got twopence. D'ye think a gentleman carries coppers about with him? There's a threepenny bit for you. Upon my word everybody makes a mark at me, and everybody brings me down. I'm not half active on the wing. I can't escape 'em."

I had never met so merry and so self-satisfied a young gentleman. He fairly beamed with self-approval; and he smiled and smiled at the smiling boatman, who seemed to recognize a certain humor in him, until the latter disappeared round the bend of the river. Then the gay young gentleman leaned over Pole and slapped him on the shoulder.

"What brings you here?" asked Pole, without looking at him.

"A little bit of pleasure. A little bit of business," he responded, gayly, seeming in nowise disconcerted by the evident coolness of his reception.

"Well, get both of them over," said Pole, rising and sauntering into the house-boat. The smiling Jew followed him, and by and by I heard Pole asking for pen and ink.

I confess that, though I tried not to be curious, I did not succeed to my own complete satisfaction. The jingle of money

within the boat made me fancy that some part of Mr. Goldsmith's belongings were passing to Pole. I cast the dinghy loose and sculled idly over to the other side of the river to avoid hearing more. Pole was supposed to have a good deal of money of his own, and I did not understand what was going on at all. It was obviously none of my business, but I would a great deal rather have believed that Pole had nothing in the way of borrowing to do with the smiling young personage, and yet it seemed from that jingling of coin and that asking for pen and ink, as if money were changing hands between them. Then I bethought me that though I had paid my half of the house-boat rent beforehand, Pole might not until now have settled with the owner, and so dismissed the matter from my mind.

My companion and his visitor shortly afterward appearing on the outer deck of the house-boat, I sculled back again. Pole was grave and silent—but he was often grave and silent, and it was his manner to seem constantly self-possessed. I could not avoid a feeling that something of importance had happened; but the sense of it was only in the air, and there was nothing to give the fancy solidity or shape.

"If you'll wait here awhile," said Pole, turning on Goldsmith, "I'll go up to town with you."

"All right," he responded, cheerfully. "I've got to take two or three petticoats to see Bedford and Toole in the Pauly-Tooley-Technic Entertainment, and I want to get back again. Stunning funny name, ain't it? Pauly-Tooley-Technic. Bedford's name is Paul, you know—Polytechnic. See the joke?"

"Yes," said Pole; "it's a fascinating bit of humor. Wait there."

Mr. Goldsmith remained upon the deck, and affably offered to beguile the time of his waiting by tossing with me for a sovereign. I declined this sportive offer.

"Look here!" said the agreeable young man. He selected two sovereigns from a little handful, and sitting down upon the deck, with his back lounging against the wall of the boat, he began to toss and catch the sovereigns with a flourishing dexterity which seemed wasted on so simple a process. "We'll go the best of sevedteen," he said, "and see who'd have won if we *had* been tossing. I like to go a big long number because it prolongs the agony. I call to you on the right hand and you call to me on the left." When he had arranged the preliminaries to his own satisfaction he entered upon his self-appointed business with gravity. He called "eight all," and even seemed excited. Again he spun the glittering coin, and peered into

his palm to see the result. "I should have lost," he said. "I always do lose. There's nothing like my luck in the world. I never have a slice of luck like other people. Now, wod't you have a flutter?"

Still I declined, thinking of a famous phrase in the collected works of a philosopher of his own nation, and half inclined to quote it to him. "Surely the net is spread in vain in the sight of any bird." I repressed myself, however, and he sunk into silence, and producing a miniature book from an inner pocket fell to checking entries in it with a little gold pencil, until he became absorbed enough to forget me. By and by Pole appeared, dressed for town, and he and Mr. Goldsmith, stepping ashore, took their way across the fields toward the railway station.

I was a little curious still, in spite of myself. I should as soon have thought of the magnificent and refined Mr. Delamere himself associating with this young Hebrew, as of Pole, who was fastidious in the choice of his companions. If I had been disposed to criticise my friend I might have thought that he was a little too ready and too profound in disdain, and Mr. Goldsmith was just the kind of person of whom he would be most readily and most profoundly disdainful. Yet the two had dealings together, and the fat little Jew at least was obviously unconscious of any great social or intellectual difference between them.

I was displeased to find myself clinging in fancy to this problem, the solution of which, however simple or complex it might be, was assuredly no business of mine, and I took up a book to get rid of it, but still finding myself hovering round the theme in a manner which I felt to be altogether absurd and undignified, I walked off to the village, locking up the house-boat before I started, and ordered dinner at the inn. Pole and I did our own cooking, and were getting to be expert, but a regimen of chops and steaks palled somewhat when the pleasant novelty of providing for ourselves was worn away, and on this particular afternoon I felt a distaste for solitude.

Nothing seemed very entertaining that afternoon. I lounged about the river-bank until dinner was ready, and then sat down to my meal in a room overlooking the stream, and read the day before yesterday's newspaper as I eat. Dinner over, and I made it last as long as I could to kill the time. I hung at the window watching the few craft about the stream, when I heard my friend's name mentioned loudly and distinctly.

"Mr. Pole. Mr. Walter Pole."

A lady stood at the steps by the water-side, and near her was the man who had brought Goldsmith to the house-boat. The man answered in a murmur, pointing up stream. The lady said "Thank you," in a somewhat harsh and metallic-sounding voice, and turning away from him looked casually up at me as I looked out of window, and so moved away. She struck me as being overdressed, and her face was painted. She was perhaps two- or three-and-thirty years of age, of a handsome and imposing presence, but reckless and passionate to look at, and I had an instinct that she had been drinking. In the mere second for which her eyes rested on mine they were scornful and defiant; and in her manner of looking away from me there was a world of disdain.

The lady struck me as being no more a desirable acquaintance from Pole's point of view than the Jew had seemed to be —if anything a little less. The memory of her face and figure stayed with me; I might almost say it haunted me. There was a sort of imperious abandoned devilry about her which made me think that she had fallen utterly out of her own esteem, and that her worse self stood before her better self, striving to stare her down and brazen her out of her reproaches. I can not tell how or why, but the magnificence of her dress seemed to be in contradiction with her face. I fancied her in squalor, with the great lustrous coils of her heavy hair unloosed and hanging in disorder.

She kept me in unpleasant company across the fields as I walked back to the boat. I saw her at a distance once, drawing patterns on the turf with the point of her laced parasol, and looking downward. From where she stood she could see the house-boat if she were but minded to look at it; and I had so much aversion to the possibility of being recognized as one of its inmates and being questioned by her that I purposely sauntered away from it until I assured myself that she had disappeared. Then I approached it, dropped into the dinghy, and pulled up stream. It was an hour before I came back again, and the shades of evening were beginning to fall. The lady was on the deck of the house-boat, trying the door, which I had locked some two or three hours earlier. It was but a step from the baked clay of the bank to the deck. I drifted by in the growing dark, and feigned to take no notice of her, though I was irresolutely inclined to accost her and to tell her that Pole was absent.

I heard her shaking and knocking with an apparent increasing anger and insistence as I drifted beyond her, and

then the sounds ceased, and she seemed to have resigned her attempt to enter, or to have made up her mind that the boat was really deserted. I kept away for fully an hour after this, and then returning and finding the coast clear, entered, lighted the lamp, and sat down to my usual evening's work. At this time I was resolute to select and record whatever seemed best worth noting and remembering in the progress of the day—thoughts, impressions, descriptions, scraps of all sorts. I was engaged in this way and quite absorbed in my task, when the door was thrust suddenly and noisily open, and, turning a startled look that way, I saw the lady standing before me.

She stared at me with a sort of haughty and angry surprise, as though the chamber had belonged to her, and I had been an intruder.

"Where is Mr. Pole?" she asked me, curtly and disdainfully.

"He has gone to town," I answered.

"You heard me asking for him at the inn," she said, with the same curt disdain of words and tone; "why did you not tell me then that he was gone to town?"

"I beg your pardon," I answered. "It did not occur to me."

"It did not occur," she said, in a voice of explanatory suavity, as if she addressed some third person. Then, "I will wait until he returns."

She entered, closed the door behind her, and sat down. I made no objection to this, though I am afraid I showed no enthusiasm of welcome. She sat in silence, and when I made a motion to place the lamp nearer to her and to set a little heap of books beside her so that she might occupy herself, she waved me away contemptuously. Except for an occasional tapping of the foot upon the floor, which bespoke either anger or impatience, she made no sound; and when I had offered one or two casual awkward observations and had received no more sign of heed or answer than if I had addressed a graven image, I also relapsed into silence. A half hour of excessive discomfort—on my side, at least—went by, and then came the sound of a tuneful whistle which I knew for Pole's. My companion recognized it also, and rising to her feet stood facing the door.

A mere moment later Pole leaped on the deck and the vessel swayed faintly. Then the door opened, and I saw Pole's face look in with its usual aspect of idle *insouciance*. Underlying that lazy, careless look there was always an expression of waiting courage, and I had always thought that Pole, if he were really awakened, would be an awkward enemy. His eyes

blazed into swift anger as he caught sight of the waiting figure, but he resumed his usual look almost at once. He stuck his hands into his pockets and nodded at me, presenting so complete a picture of his common self that I was more than half inclined to doubt my impression of a few seconds earlier.

"That you, Adelaide?" he said. "I'll walk to the railway station with you. We'll talk as we go."

She answered never a word, but followed him into the darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

When Pole came back again in the course of about an hour, he began to swing his hammock and otherwise to prepare for the night. For my own part, I had to pretend to be not in the least interested by his visitors, but I knew that my manner seemed odd and constrained, and my very desire that he should notice nothing seemed at last insistent and impertinent. I arranged my own hammock, and drew the curtain which separated us for the night across the chamber, but I had only just addressed myself to sleep when he drew it back again and addressed me. The gleam of his pipe shone in the darkness, and revealed his eyes and the tip of his nose by occasional glimpses.

"Did that woman tell you anything, Denham?" he asked.

"Nothing," I answered. "She asked for you, and when I told her you had gone to town she said she would wait."

"Was she here long before I came?"

"About half an hour."

He was silent for a minute or two, but smoking furiously, as I could see through the darkness, by the alternate glow and fading of the pipe.

"I don't know why I shouldn't tell you," he said, at the end of this pause. "You'll hold your tongue about it."

"If you want to tell me anything that you want kept secret it shall never be talked about."

"Very well. That's my wife."

I think I was too astonished to reply. He was quiet for a time, and then he laughed oddly.

"We were married four years ago. I remember tipping the pew-opener. She let off an old joke on me: 'You've tied a knot with your tongue that you can't undo with your teeth.'"

He laughed again in the same odd way as before, and I made no answer. I did not see what could be said to be of service.

My head whirled, and I thought of all sorts of ridiculous things, congratulations and condolences, but luckily none of them passed my lips. Pole said no more. I heard him lay his pipe down carefully, and I heard him settling himself in his hammock. Then I listened to the lap of the water on the boat and the stir and rustle of the leaves which hung above the roof, and the nibbling of a lonely rat who had his home in the well, and defied all our efforts to entrap him. I had never until then felt so dreary and unhappy in my life, and I lay awake the greater part of the night thinking of Pole and pitying him, and wondering what the history might be.

He was precisely like himself next morning, and preciaely like himself for many days afterward, and for a long time there was no more said between us. I thought then, and still think, that he took my silence as the most friendly and acceptable thing I had to offer, and that he liked me the better for it. On his side the revelation of an unhappy secret, and on my side the knowledge of it, seemed to draw us closer. But he seemed to desire that I should treat the revelation as if I had forgotten it, and with every day it grew to be less possible to speak of it. So between us we buried it for the time.

If I have not conveyed a sufficing picture of the woman, my feeling about Pole's union with her will seem exaggerated, unless indeed the feeling itself be translated into the picture, and is seen as a reasonable part of it. I have now lived twice the years I had then known, and have seen the world of men and women far and wide, but I have never met anything to equal the hate and pride and self-disdain of her face. "I know you hate me. Well, I hate you, and despise you, and I hate myself and all the world." The proud eyes, and the haggard, painted face said these things plainly, and never failed to say them in my imagination when I recalled her. A dreadful, hateful, ruined face. A woman to pity and avoid.

Naturally enough she had not seemed so dreadful at first as she became when I knew of Pole's connection with her. We pass people in the street every day with absolutely no feeling, who would inspire us with an awful terror and aversion if they were in any way wound about our own lives, or the lives of our friends.

Then, naturally enough again, I began to regard my friend with different eyes, and with new light upon him began to see and to understand things which I had not hitherto noticed. His ordinary idle and tranquil ways deceived me no more, and I saw in him chiefly a settled determination not to be cast down. Being impelled to notice him as I was, I began to see also that

his apparent ease of demeanor covered a good deal of shyness. His lounging air gave somehow an impression of complete coolness and *savoir faire*, but this on closer knowledge of him became transparent. Perhaps in the warmth of my sympathy I exaggerated what I saw in him, but I began to think him far more sensitive, more retiring and sympathetic than a score of people I knew who more or less laid claim to these qualities, and I came to regard him as a man rather unusually prone to suffer, though uncommonly well able to conceal his pains.

The regatta week came, the house-boat was towed up to Henley, and Mr. Goldsmith arrived with a great kit of the most amazing, glaring river costumes I ever yet beheld. Pole treated him with a remarkable coolness, and yet on more than one occasion I came upon them talking with great seriousness and an air of confidence. Their conversation always came to an immediate end with my appearance, and somehow, without knowing very precisely why, I associated Goldsmith with Pole's unhappy union, and supposed that their talks together in some way related to it.

There was no man on the river who was quite as aquatic in his aspect as Goldsmith, but he was the most useless of cockneys in a boat. On the second day of the regatta he was making prodigious efforts to get out of the course, and was being objurgated from a score of quarters at once, when he ran full tilt into a very handsome and delicate craft, in which were seated two ladies and a gentleman, the latter very jovial to look at, but short in temper as it proved. The handsome craft was lying immediately below our house-boat, and Pole, who had cast aside his usual quiet for the moment, was roaring unheeded instructions to the fat little Jew to back water and to look where he was going, and so on. The proprietor of the endangered craft was vainly striving to get past the ladies to break the shock of the advancing boat, when crash it came, started a plank or two, and threw the ladies and their companion into a struggling heap. The gentleman first emerged from the pile, and had a dreadful struggle with himself not to say things which should prejudice him forever in the eyes of his companions. I knew so well the kind of relief for which his nature at that moment clamored, that I trembled for him. But in awhile he dared to give utterance to his feelings.

"Go home, sir," he said to the wretched Goldsmith. "You have no business here; go home, sir."

He spoke with a very loud voice, and laid a tremendous emphasis on the aspirate in "home."

Goldsmith, who had bumped the back of his head on the bottom of the dinghy—he had a lump as large as a hen's egg there half an hour later—murmured in confused apology.

"Go home, sir," shouted the other. "Go home." And not a word beyond that would the infuriate man trust himself to utter. "Go home, sir; go home."

Somehow the author of this disaster scrambled aboard the house-boat, and so drew upon Pole and myself the attention of the crowd, and at the same time induced the sufferer to include us with Goldsmith in a common condemnation.

We went inside for a moment with Goldsmith, who was half stupid from the shock, and then Pole returned to the angry man and entered into speech with him.

"I hope the boat isn't much injured," I heard him say. "If you'll let me know the amount of the damage I will see that it is paid."

"Send him home, sir," said the angry man, refusing at present to be mollified; "send him home."

"Sir," said Pole, in suavest tones, "he shall be sent. I hope the ladies are not hurt."

The ladies replied that they were not hurt at all; but looking through the window, I was aware of one of them very ruefully regarding a pretty straw hat which was crushed out of all shape. Pole sympathized very warmly, and I heard him insinuating that really after that shock a glass of wine—he must really be permitted. He must really be allowed to insist. He came into the boat, took a bottle of champagne which had been lying in ice for luncheon, gathered some glasses together, and went out again. I in the meantime was preparing vinegar and brown paper for Goldsmith, and doctoring him as well as I could. He was dreadfully sulky, and when I had finished with him, I went outside and found Pole fraternizing with the three strangers, all politeness and regret for the accident, and solicitude for the ladies. The sufferer, all things considered, turned out an extremely amiable fellow; and what between Pole's soothing and the champagne, he came back to himself. He cast some piteous glances at the boat, which was new and of an expensive make, but he said no more until Pole, after an audible altercation with Goldsmith, brought the latter out to apologize, and to promise all reasonable compensation. But Goldsmith was unfortunate in his way of putting the thing, and the sufferer by his clumsiness was hard upon him.

"It is not a matter for apology, sir," he said, "or for compensation. You have no business here. You had better take the advice I gave you, and go home."

"I've apologized," said Goldsmith, half-way through his nose, "and I've offered to pay; that's all one gentleman can do for adother, and if the other ain't reasonable about it, all I've got to say is he's no gentleman."

Then there was an altercation in which I felt that I sounded the depths of shame, Mr. Goldsmith conducted himself so little to my fancy. It was ended by Pole, who bundled the Jew into the interior of the boat.

"We hired the thing from that fellow for the season," he explained, evidently not caring any more than I did to be identified with our companion. "He made a point of coming up to Henley and I gave way. His breaking your boat *was* an accident. Perhaps the fact that he's a blackguard may be accidental too."

There was an exchange of cards between Pole and the stranger, and then the damaged boat was rowed away. Pole marched, with every appearance of tranquillity, into the presence of our guest and landlord, and began, with a quiet dogmatism which must have been painful and exasperating to Goldsmith, to express his opinion of him.

"You are really," he said, "a very horrid little person; and after your behavior of to-day I won't have you about."

"How could I help running into the man's boat?" snarled Goldsmith. The cunning, smiling, self-approving little man was all changed, and he ruffled and swelled, and grew red about the head like a turkey-cock.

"You could have helped using bad language before ladies," said Pole.

"No, I couldn't," said Goldsmith, who was ready to contradict anything.

"That is a trifle worse than ever," said Pole. "The man who can not help using bad language before ladies is a man to be avoided. I must ask you to go."

"I won't go," the little man almost shrieked. "It's my boat. I'll stop."

"If you are not gone in half an hour," Pole responded, "I shall drop you overboard. I have spoken."

At that we returned to the deck, and in a little while Goldsmith began to pack up his effects. He interrupted himself to come out and address us. He said it was part of the bargain he had made that he was to have a week at Henley. He had but three days, and he demanded a guinea a day for four

days more. He added that he thought the request was moderate.

Pole counted out four pounds four shillings and dropped the money in his hand. He took it with no evidence of shame, and went in-doors to continue his packing. But by and by he was back again, blazing.

"Look here," he began, "you're taking a very high and mighty air with me, Mr. Pole, but I'll be even with you. I know a thing or two that you don't think I know, and I'll spoil your game, as sure as I'm alive. It wasn't in my line to denounce anybody, let alone a customer, but I'll spoil your game as sure as I'm alive. Oh, you needn't stare at me! I ain't afraid of you. I haven't got to do the think myself. I've only got to put the missis on to you. She'll jolly sharp put a stopper on you, see if she don't. You go fooling about with Miss Delamere any more—"

Pole had been lolling against the door-post, regarding the man with a look of complete indifference up to this, but here he darted at him, and before another word was spoken, and before I could intervene, Goldsmith was splashing in the water. He came up screaming and spouting, and swam to land, and, standing on the bank, threatened Pole in a most horrible manner, stamping and spluttering with rage. All eyes were turned, and all necks were craned to see what was the matter. Pole pushed me in-doors and followed, closing the door behind him, and when the Jew had screamed his fill and had gathered an eager and excited crowd, he was moved away. A man came, half an hour later, from one of the hotels, asking for his baggage.

"I think," said Pole, observing that a considerable number of people still seemed to linger near us, and to find us interesting and curious, "I have had enough of publicity for to-day. I shall go up to chambers. Will you come?"

I assented willingly, and we went away together. Neither he nor I made any allusion to the quarrel, but it dwelt in my mind heavily, and I was unable to forget it. We went to a concert in the evening, but I heard little of the music, and was wondering, whether I would or no, what the Jew's sayings might mean. Later on, in my room, Pole opened his mind a little, but not much.

"I shall have some trouble over that fellow," he said, after guarding silence for a full hour. "He's a solicitor and money-lender, and his father did some business for my wife before we married, and seemed really to have behaved kindly to her. When we two had to go our separate ways I wanted somebody

to stand between us, and make her the necessary payments, and so forth. I went to look for the old man and found the young one. He did as well as anybody. The old man is dead and the young one has the business. Then my wife is one of their own people. I shall have to find somebody else, I suppose. I dare say you wondered why I had him down at Henley?"

I did—a little—I confessed.

"He has a curious influence with my wife. He can keep her quiet when nobody else can. I thought she might find us out at a place like Henley. I didn't want a scene. He was to have looked out for her. It's a melancholy sort of business, isn't it?" he asked, as if he were merely tired.

I thought it very melancholy indeed, and answered so.

"Well," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "I've made my bed, and I must lie on it. It's all in the day's work. Good-night, old chap."

He would confess to nothing, would make no show, but I thought how heart-sore he must be, and was profoundly sorry for him, not for the last time. But whether I would have it there or no, I could not get Miss Delamere's name out of my head, and my mind strayed here and there in fruitless conjecture. But I could think no ill of Pole, and certainly I could think no ill of the one Miss Delamere I knew. My dreams defied me, and I saw Pole leading Miss Delamere to the altar, and I saw the Jew pounce out from behind one pillar of the building while Pole's wife pounced out from behind another, crying out so shrilly that they awoke me.

After that I lay awake the greater part of the night, wondering if Pole had fallen in love with Miss Delamere in his unhappy loneliness, and if that were the reason of his avoidance of her.

CHAPTER VII.

About three weeks after the events just related, when we had got our floating residence back into its old quarters, there came up the river, one lovely tranquil morning, a fussy and important steam-launch, with a dozen ladies and gentlemen aboard, and a bright-striped awning of pink and white and blue, which shone very prettily and gayly in the sunshine. Pole and I were waiting to enter the lock when this vessel came screaming along to signal to the lock-keeper, and we were still there when she came up. She halted alongside our quieter and less imposing craft, and when the wet gates swung

slowly open and we passed into the shadow and cool between the gleaming walls, she glided slowly after us.

We were just beginning to float upward when a female voice said, speaking above us: "Good-morning, Mr. Pole," and looking up, I was aware of a white-haired elderly lady who was bending over the rail of the launch and smiling downward. Pole snatched off his cap and smiled back again, and was exchanging greetings with her when no less a person than Sebastian Dolmer Jones appeared beside her, and waved a friendly hand to both of us.

"This is lucky," said Jones, "we are two men short. Come on board. We are going as far as Pangbourne. Leave your boat here. You can call for it on your way back. We are going to have a jolly day and leave dull care behind us."

"Pray come, Mr. Pole," said the elderly lady. "We are lamentably short of gentlemen."

Then two or three other people whom Pole knew, but who were strange to me, joined very cordially in this invitation, and we had just confessed that we had nothing particular to do, and were not bound especially anywhere, when Mr. Delamere and his daughter, neither of whom had come within our range of vision, appeared also. Mr. Delamere blessed us, as it were, from his superior height, and said:

"Glad to see you, Pole. Glad to see you. Glad to see *you*, Denham. Glad to see you. Come on board, by all means. By all means, come on board."

As if he waived all possible objections which somebody was going to offer to our society, and were quite resolved not to hear them spoken of. It was, of course, too late to hesitate, and so we went on board, though I did so with mixed feelings. Pole shook hands with Mr. Delamere with rather a chill politeness, I thought; but then I was looking out for that, and I dare say that nobody else noticed it. I had not time for the moment to remark anything further. Mr. Jones took me round and told me people's names, and told people my name, in that pleasant and simple fashion which then obtained. The old fashion had at least the merit of preventing nervous young men and women, who thought they *must* be entertaining, from saying smart things to the wrong people and about the wrong people.

Then I had to give instructions to the lock-keeper about the boat, and when this was done we all steamed away together up the sunny river, and I had time to look about me and see what manner of people I had fallen among. They all seemed agreeable and amiable and bent upon enjoying themselves, and,

with the exception of Mr. Delamere and the lady who had first accosted Pole, the party was entirely composed of young and youngish people.

Miss Delamere was talking to Pole, and he was answering her in a manner to dissipate any fancies of romance between them.

"You have developed a very unlooked-for characteristic, Mr. Pole," she said, with that air of harmless impudence which we all think so charming in a beautiful girl. "You grow retiring."

"Grow?" answered Pole, with equal lightness and gayety of demeanor. "I am grown. Denham and I are hermits. We are a sort of double Diogenes. You passed our tub a quarter of a mile below the lock."

"Is your choice of the life final?" she asked him, smilingly. "Are your friends never to see you again?"

"We have forgotten the world," he answered, with a slight humorous exaggeration of tone, "and supposed ourselves forgotten by it. Perhaps when nature grows unkind we may be driven back to the world we have abjured. I don't know yet how strong we are."

"Nature at her severest did not drive you our way in the winter-time," she said, smiling and nodding her head at him.

Pole's gayety failed him for a mere second, and he blushed and looked guilty.

"Now, Mr. Denham," said Miss Delamere, withdrawing her attack on Pole in what I thought a very ready and graceful way—though it was my habit by this time to think very highly of this young lady and of all she might do—"Mr. Denham has been delightfully regular. You, I trust," addressing me directly, "are not going to turn permanent hermit."

I thought not, looking at the bright eyes and beautiful face. Not the presence of all the Dolmer Joneses and elderly male Delameres in the world could rob a room of its charm while that delightful countenance decorated it. I left these reflections unspoken, but I assured her that I had no intention of turning hermit at all—that on the whole I was rather fond of the world and thought it an agreeable sort of place.

"When I was little," said Miss Delamere, "I was told that it was very stimulating to virtue to let it be plainly seen and known that people were expected to be good. You are expected to be very good to-day, Mr. Pole."

"I will try," he answered, "to make the expectation stimulating. In point of fact, I will be good."

He did in effect become exceedingly bright and gay, and was spoken of as being a great acquisition. There is always at a picnic somebody who is described as being the life and soul of the party, and Pole set all the young people chaffing and laughing so successfully that before the day was over that title was his by common consent. Mr. Delamere's high-bred and lofty quiet would have sat a little heavily on some of us, I fancy, had it not been for his detestor's presence. Only every now and again, to my mind, Pole seemed to flag and to go unusually gloomy. It needed but a word to bring him back to his air of gayety, and he said a hundred bright things, not of the sort which are worth keeping and will sparkle in any setting, but of the smaller sort which make people laugh when they are disposed to laughter, but might seem, perhaps, a little poor and commonplace if they were recorded. They were Paris brilliants perhaps, but then they made no pretense of being Koh-i-noors, and in that sunlight of youth and high spirits and summer holiday they sparkled, as I remember, very brightly. This was a new side of him to me, and the sight of it set me thinking very gravely once or twice how very happy and handsome and genial he might have been if that dark chapter of his life I knew of had never been written.

After luncheon there was displayed a tendency which I had remarked before, and have since observed at such gatherings —a tendency, namely, to get into couples, and to wander away from the center. Pole and Miss Delamere were companions, and for my own part I was attracted by hap-hazard to the society of a certain Miss Clara Grantley, in speaking of whom I shall have to be careful, since the lady's eye will assuredly rest upon these pages, and her introduction to this narrative is already expected. She was, then, the most charming young person of her sex whom I had yet had the pleasure of beholding. I established my own discernment by almost immediately falling in love with her, and I shall remember that sunlit river and those happy fields as long as I remember anything. She was only eighteen and I was barely half a dozen years older, so that we were both very young, and we were both certainly very shy. Shyness is less the fashion among young people than it used to be, I fancy.

I remember that at first we talked mostly about Pole, and that I spoke very highly of him. She told me that a brother of hers, then in India, had been at school with Pole, and was very fond of him. I answered that everybody must be; and so, with Pole as a kind of conversational walking-stick, we began to get along together very nicely. It dawned upon me

at moments that the young lady was very pretty, and I had the sense to think myself a lucky dog in having secured a partner in all ways so agreeable. She had blue-gray eyes and hair of a golden-yellowish hue, a beauty which has grown much more common than it used to be before the chemist came in and invented an auricomous hair-wash. I do not believe that in those ancient days that delusive compound had been invented—ladies should be told that we of the other sex are always able to distinguish art from nature in that particular—and even if it had been, my companion was one of the people who are favored by nature with the best of all possible reasons for not using it. She had a very fair complexion and a freckle or two, which to my thinking made the fairness prettier to look at. I shall abide by the freckles, whatever editorial revision may be attempted. I remember them distinctly.

This charming young person had a mother who was something of an invalid, and was in the country for her health. They were great friends of the Delameres; and Mrs. Delamere (who had been dead for many years) and mamma had been school-girls together. So now the charming young person was staying in the Delameres' house, and Miss Delamere had care of her. She did not seem very much to like Mr. Delamere, which, in its way, was a sort of bond of union between us, and she said she did not think Jones was very nice, which was indisputably another. She had some awe of Delamere, whom she regarded as being supernaturally learned and clever, but she thought he undervalued the other kinds of learning and cleverness which other people had. Jones and he seemed to be very great friends indeed, and Jones was a great deal about the house; in fact, he almost lived there. Her tone seemed to express something of a regret for this fact; at least I so construed it, and it soothed me. I should have been disappointed in a girl otherwise so charming if she had liked Jones.

We strolled about that beautiful afternoon, and I sculled her about the river, where she was at first a little timid, though she soon grew accustomed and fearless, and became interested in learning to steer. I should have been an egregious young coxcomb if I had at this time even begun to have a notion of what was really happening to me, but I took the fever naturally, and at first kindly. There never had been surely so charming a companion. There never had been such a pretty girl. And so far that was all.

Now I myself am, if I may be forgiven for mentioning the fact, a swarthy man, of a muddy complexion, and, as old ex-

perience proves, therefore all the likelier to find blue-gray eyes and yellowish hair and rosy cheeks—not peony, if you please, but rosy, the most delicate, wholesome rose-leaf bloom in the world—I was all the more likely, I say, to find these charms attractive and supreme. And then, of course, I admired the shy, gentle, sweet nature, and the arch, timid face, and had never known anything so delightful. And whether you like to believe it or not, madame, for whose especial behoof this page is, and one or two that have preceded it are, written, I had never fallen in love before. That is, in any way worth speaking of.

We found in awhile two others of our party on the bank, but whether they preferred solitude or were too benevolent to spoil our enjoyment, they declined our hypocritical invitation to join us, and strolled away among the trees; and, like the Ancient Mariner with the water-snakes, I blessed them unaware.

It was altogether a day to remember, but it faded, as all days will. The steam-whistles sounded, and we all assembled at the launch, and went away down stream again. I hoped with all my heart all the time that Miss Delamere would give me an invitation, and I was, I am afraid, very ingratiatory with her. She gladdened me by doing what I wanted very kindly and graciously. So pretty a girl, and so charming a companion! I wanted to see as much of that beauty as I could, and to have more of that charming companionship.

At the lock where we had met them all we took leave of them. A mile or two further down stream they would betake themselves to the rail, and so back to town and dinner. Pole and I, perched on the lock-gate, waved farewell with our caps so long as we could see the flutter of the departing handkerchiefs. There had been a jolly affectation of heart-break between Pole and the old lady at losing one another, and it was because of this that the signals of good-bye were thus prolonged.

While we were still waving and smiling we turned to look at each other, and waved and smiled no more. We both went mighty solemn with a ludicrous suddenness. When we looked at each other next we laughed, but oh! we were serious afterward. We pulled down to our aquatic residence, and went gloomily about our business of cooking and eating. The pleasant day was over.

We lighted our pipes and sat in the twilight, while the land grew duskier and duskier, and the stars grew brighter and brighter. And one of us was filled with I don't know how

many hopes and projects and fancies. There was the magic caldron which Youth, Health, Hope & Co. will lend to anybody, and all the projects and fancies bubbling in it, and I watching for the projection, and the consequent wonderful wild-fowl. And here was the other of us looking at the magic caldron cracked and dry, and beyond refilling or mending. Strange how near we can be to one another and how far away!

CHAPTER VIII.

A DAY or two later, when I told Pole that I had received an invitation to Cromwell Terrace, he made no answer beyond that which might be conveyed in an enigmatical grunt. But a week further on, when I went up to chambers, he accompanied me, and in the evening, somewhere about ten o'clock, just as I was about to set off, he turned up, dressed, and announced that he was going with me. I was very glad to have him, and I supposed that, after the day on the launch, he had made up his mind that Delamere's society was bearable, and had effected his peace with Delamere's daughter.

The house was crowded, and there was the greatest difficulty in getting about. There had been a highly select and distinguished dinner-party, and now there was such a cram as, in my limited experience, I had not seen. The stairs were full, the conservatory half-way up was full, the landings were full, and the rooms were only a thought less crowded. Pretty Miss Grantley was talking to a bald-headed old gentleman in the very last corner I came to, and she gave me a blush and a smile of recognition when she caught sight of me. The corner was defended—barricaded, as it were—by two big china jars, of the shape of a cask, and a capacity, as I should judge, of some twelve gallons. One of these made a sufficiently comfortable seat; and when the old gentleman (who may have had the surprising good sense to think that a couple of young people who greeted each other blushing and smiling might be as happy without him as with him)—when the old gentleman had withdrawn through a momentary crack in the crowd, I took the seat he had vacated, and entered into talk about the water-party of a little while ago, and other matters of equal interest and moment.

This, of course, was all very delightful, but was not allowed to last. I felt a hand laid upon my shoulder, and looking up saw the venerable Dr. Fish beside me beaming through his gold-rimmed glasses. He shuffled into our corner, and with no doubt the most benevolent intentions, he stayed there and

talked until Miss Grantley slipped away. Then I, not daring to follow, and being held by this nice old man by the lapel of the coat while I thought unutterable things of him, sat there in silent torture for a time and answered, I fear, very much at random. But by and by he interested me.

"I see Pole here again," he said. "I am glad to see him here. You will meet people here, Denham, who will improve your mind. Pole is looking very well. You and he are great companions, I believe?"

"Oh, yes," I answered, "we are great friends."

"I am very glad of that," he went on. "Of course no honest man will choose his friends because they are rich and influential; but wealth and influence are valuable things, and rightly used, you know, Denham, rightly used—"

He rubbed his hands and looked seriously and sagely at me.

I had not known that Pole's wealth, or his influence either, was at all beyond the common, and I said as much; but the doctor broke in eagerly.

"My dear young sir, don't you know that there is but a single life between him and the title? You didn't know? Dear me! It's quite a vast fortune—really an exceptional thing! You didn't know that? Dear me! How reticent your friend must be!"

I admitted that my friend was reticent; but I urged that human life was a somewhat uncertain thing to build calculations upon, and that Pole was about the last man I knew to speculate upon it.

"Oh, dear, dear, no," said Dr. Fish, shaking his head with a mournful look; "there is no such extreme element of uncertainty as you imagine, Mr. Denham. The remaining life is dreadfully frail; the poor fellow is hardly expected to last a year—they're moving him to the Riviera now, I believe."

This was news certainly, but I was not in the least degree surprised that Pole had said nothing of it. I thought it indeed most natural in him to be silent.

It helped to make him more of a personage in my eyes, but not as I fancy the good old doctor meant it to do. It seemed certainly to make his position the more pitiable, though this was assuredly to take a most unjust and foolish view of things, for to be wealthy and to hold a place of high consideration in the world are at least among the aids to happiness. But the promise of wealth and rank seemed to emphasize his trouble. The smile of fortune's sunshine did but throw the shade into more somber relief. I did not ask whether it would do so for him; it did it for me in my conception of him.

I learned that the owner of the life which stood between Pole and the title was a cousin Reginald of his, who had been always reckoned feeble. This Reginald's father had been dead but a few months. He was a stalwart man of middle age, and when he came to his end by an accident in the hunting-field had been upon the eve of a second marriage. Three years earlier, the doctor told me, no man would have given a shilling for Pole's chance, but four sound lives had fallen unexpectedly away, and now there was nobody left but this cousin, who had been bred as a stranger to him.

When I had time to think of it, I liked Pole the better for not having spoken to me of this matter. It argued a certain delicacy in him to be silent. I knew, and I still know, a great many men who would have been loud about it, and would have basked in their glories beforehand, whose feet would have itched for the feeble man's shoes.

The doctor found me out later that evening, and told me that he had heard news of Reginald Pole. There was little hope for him. The doctors had decided that he should go southward, but by very easy stages, and the hand of death, so the old gentleman said impressively, seemed on the poor boy already.

"Delamere told me of it," said Dr. Fish. He had spoken of the poor lad who had come so near to high fortune and was now slipping away from it into an early grave with becoming solemnity; but here, at the mention of Delamere, he began to twinkle. "Our host," he said, "will be glad to see Pole back again now, I fancy. I hardly know how it came about; but I fancy they took a dislike to each other. But Delamere won't throw away a chance like that. Of course Delamere's a very high-minded man and so forth, and has a very lofty idea of life, but I suppose he has no objection to seeing Miss Delamere well settled. He is distinctly more amiable to Pole than he used to be. That is how the world goes, my young friend. Do well, thrive, get on in the world, and you will find people agreeable to you."

He went on, eminently well satisfied with himself, and I listened in a sort of stupor. That awful marriage of Pole's was a secret. Nobody knew of it who knew him well.

"I am getting elderly," said the babbling and indiscreet divine, who was certainly old enough to have known better than to take so close an interest as he did in other people's affairs, I thought. "I am elderly, but I feel an interest in youth. I am looking on at a good many things with a great deal of pleasure. Do me the credit to remember this enigmat-

ical utterance in a year or two's time, Denham, and ask me what I meant by it."

"I think I know what you mean, sir," I returned.

"Do you?" he asked, nodding his benevolent bald head and smiling. "Ah! you're a friend of his. Exactly."

"I think you are altogether wrong, sir," I said; "I am sure you are altogether wrong. Pray do not spread any idea of that kind."

"Pooh, pooh!" responded the doctor. "I have known them both for years. I have seen it growing on both sides."

I spoke before I knew it, and the doctor stared at me.

"I hope not; oh, I hope not."

"Dear me," he said, in some confusion. "Let us change the theme." He took me very kindly and confidentially by the arm, and gave his grip a little friendly pressure. "I beg your pardon, my boy, I beg your pardon. I am a foolish, indiscreet old fellow. There, there, let us say no more; let us say no more."

I thought it best to leave him to any fancy he might form. The question was dangerous. If he chose to think that I was in love with Miss Delamere, it mattered little; and since he was so ready to leap at conclusions, it was likely that his suspicions about Pole to the same effect were as well founded as they were of me. I am inclined to think—if I may take advantage of the liberty this narrative affords me—that I was rather an unusual young man in some respects, and that I took rather unusually serious views of things. But the idea of Pole and Miss Delamere really growing to care for each other with that insuperable barrier between them was terrible.

There was never the faintest little doubt of Pole's honor in my mind. If there had been a reasonable ground for thinking that Miss Delamere had had a fancy concerning him, such as an innocent girl might not have about a man who was already married, I believed that he would have cut his hand off, or burned it in the fire, rather than encourage it to her damage. I had so lofty a belief in his honor, and made him so much of a hero in my mind, that any thought of carelessness in this regard in him was outside my conjectures. And as for mere coxscombry, I was a very much smaller creature than Pole, and even I despised it. What was he likely to feel about it?

Now if anybody thinks that the pressure of these reflections kept me for more than ten minutes at the outside from seeking anew the charming society of Miss Clara Grantley, he gives me credit for an unselfishness of friendship to which I lay no

claim. Pole's affairs interested me very deeply, and I was growing more and more attached to him, but I was not quite shut out from the contemplation of my own affairs.

The crowd was not so dense as it had been, and I was able to make my way about the rooms without so much of diplomatic effort as I had been compelled to exert earlier in the evening. As I moved about looking for Miss Grantley, I saw Pole in conversation with our hostess. Miss Delamere summoned me by a smile and a wave of her fan, and I joined them for a few minutes. There was nothing very noticeable in their talk, and certainly nothing in their bearing toward each other which would indicate more than the merest amiable acquaintanceship.

I succeeded in finding Miss Grantley—there is a pleasure in using that obsolete form—and I fell more pronouncedly and decidedly in love with every minute spent in her society. It was all pleasant, all charming as yet, and I had not the slightest intention to struggle against the influence which was stealing over me. Time came when I got into a state of mind no less than dreadful, and could not eat my meals.

Pole and I walked home together. We started in starlight, but before we got home the sky was light above us, and its ethereal blue was lined with beautiful faint streaks of rose. We talked a great deal as we walked, and one thing that Pole said I recalled many and many a time afterward.

"The best way with danger is to treat it as if you did not believe in it."

"If a man aimed a pistol at your head, you'd dodge, wouldn't you?" I asked him; "or strike up the weapon, or behave in some way, as if you believed in the danger?"

"Exactly," he said; "there is no saying so wise that you can't make it look foolish by a question of that sort. But I'm not talking of pistols, though even there you may come to grief if you believe too much in danger. Come along, my Denham. Shoulders square. Head well up. March! And your blood-curdling fever is flown ten miles away."

He clapped me on the shoulder, and we turned into the court-yard together at that instant.

"All the same," I said, "it isn't good counsel for everybody. There are some whose nerves might fail at the pinch, and for them it might be safest to treat danger as if they believed in it very earnestly. Spare the weaker vessel. Don't tow her into action too desperately."

He turned to look at me as if he sought to read some special meaning in my words, and knowing that his eyes were upon

me I felt confused. I had not meant it so, but remembering Dr. Fish's talk, it flashed upon me that Pole might accept my chance simile as an impertinent warning. The more I blushed the more he looked at me, and the more he looked the more confused I felt.

"What did you mean by that?" he asked.

"Nothing!" I said; "absolutely nothing when I said it. But you seemed to find a meaning in it."

"And so you find a meaning in it, too, eh?"

I made some gesture with my hands to signify that the thing was not worth thinking of, and stammered something to that effect.

"Come inside," he said; "let us have a talk about this."

CHAPTER IX.

I WENT upstairs to Pole's chamber feeling guilty and ashamed, though I was altogether innocent. He lighted the gas—for the dawn without had not yet found its way into his chambers—took off his overcoat, chose a cigar, and seated himself, all with quiet deliberation, and then spoke.

"My finding a meaning seemed to help you to find a meaning. That is—if I found one. Let us have it out, John."

It was by no means easy to have it out.

"My dear Pole," I said, "I meant nothing whatever beyond the plain sense of the words I used."

"Quite so," he answered. "You won't think so ill of me as to fancy I'm angry because you have your own thoughts about me. But I want to know what they are."

"Well," I told him, after a moment's uneasy thinking, "the best thing for you to do will be to ask me exactly what you want to know, and I will answer you quite honestly."

"You asked me—innocently and as a mere figure of speech—not to tow the weaker vessel into danger. Then, on my looking at you, you identified the weaker vessel so clearly that you seemed to yourself to have been guilty of an impertinence."

"That is exactly what happened." I was grateful to him for translating me so perfectly.

"Have you yourself noticed anything that would lead you to suppose that I was towing anybody into danger?"

There was a slight flush upon his face, and I could see that it was difficult for him to ask the question.

"I have noticed nothing that would lead me to that opinion," I answered.

"Then the idea has been put into your head by somebody else?"

"Yes."

"May I ask who the somebody is?"

"I would rather not say. It was said in perfect friendship, and in something very like congratulation."

"And you believed it?" he asked.

"No. I can't say I believed it. I had seen nothing to justify me in believing it."

"I suppose it was Fish who spoke to you of it? Never mind. Don't answer if you don't care to. He is not the wisest of mankind, but he is a very good old foolish sort of fellow, and loves to chatter. You and I are getting to be very close friends, and I can say things to you that I can't say to anybody else. I left off visiting at Delamere's house not in the least degree because I disliked the man, though I do dislike him very heartily, but because I thought I was getting into danger. I went back again because, after a good deal of thinking about it, I came to the conclusion that I was not likely to get into danger. There is the whole story."

There was one side of the story, I thought; but I said nothing. A man would have to come to something of an extremity in coxscombry before he would hide himself from the society of women he cared for lest they should fall hopelessly in love with him. Pole was as little likely to be affected in that way as anybody I could call to mind, and as for the old doctor, with his statement that he had seen affection growing on both sides, I declined to value him at all. I had seen Miss Delamere and Pole together twice, had noticed pretty closely, and was quite sure that she at least was heart-whole. I had been determined to be sure of it, but could really find nothing in the world to contradict my surety.

"I dare say," Pole went on, after a pause, "that you are still in the land of romance, John. I left it some time ago. I was kicked out of it, and am in no hurry to pass its borders again. Perhaps I might like to go back, to speak plain truth, if there were any chance of doing it. But the fox was wise after all, and when the grapes are out of reach, one can't do better than think them sour. When you have been flung down-stairs and have had the door slammed behind you, it's sensible to believe that you don't want the *entrée* to the establishment."

The dawn was broadening now, and the gas-lamp had taken a sickly tinge. He rose and turned out the light, and threw the window open and leaned out. A solitary footstep which

had sounded dimly until then struck sharply on the ear. A key tapped smartly upon the iron bars of the gate which separated the court from the inn, and I heard the door of the porter's box open, and the porter's yawn. I got up and stood by Pole's side, and looked down into the court-yard. A little old gentleman in black was standing at the gate, and the porter was in the act of unlocking it. The gate swung open, and the little old gentleman looked up casually as he started to pass through. He paused with a startled air and spoke.

"May I step up to your rooms for a moment, Mr. Pole?"

"Certainly, sir," Pole answered, and the old gentleman entered briskly at the open door below. Pole threw open his own door to receive him, and he came briskly up the stairs.

"I had certainly not expected to find you awake at such an hour," he said, "but I looked up at your chambers in passing because you were in my mind. I have just come from the death-bed of your poor cousin Reginald."

"His death-bed?" Pole asked, in a voice which sounded awe-struck.

"His death-bed," the old gentleman answered. "Lord Worborough and other relatives were already in town, intending to see him off this morning to the Riviera. He was seized with a terrible fit of coughing, and broke a blood-vessel at two o'clock yesterday afternoon. Everything was done that could be done, but he died half an hour ago."

Pole looked round at me very seriously, and then looked back to his visitor, but said nothing.

"I do not know if I am personally known to you, Mr. Pole?" the visitor went on, interrogatively. Pole shook his head. "Allow me to offer you my card. I am Lord Worborough's solicitor." Pole took the card, and having glanced at it, laid it quietly upon the table. "I was charged to carry to you the melancholy intelligence, and to express to you his lordship's desire to meet you at your earliest convenience. I think," he said, hesitatingly, "that you are not as yet known to each other?"

"I have never met Lord Worborough," Pole answered. His voice and face were still very solemn, and, though he was not in any way shaken by the tidings, it was evident that they moved him deeply.

"His lordship will himself write to you to-morrow, and you will, of course, attend the funeral."

"Of course, Mr. Fairfield," said Pole, again glancing at the card beside him.

"I would not have intruded at this hour," said the solicitor,

"but for the accident of seeing you at the window. I do not think I have anything more to say at present, but I will ask you for an interview to-morrow. At what hour may I call?"

Pole gave him an appointment at noon, the two then shook hands, and Mr. Fairfield, with a slight bow to me, took his leave and went briskly down the stairs. My friend and I sat down facing each other, and for awhile neither of us spoke. Pole was the first to break silence.

"This is a strange thing to have happened," he said. "I hardly knew the poor fellow, and his dying—if I should live a year or two longer—makes me rich, I don't know how rich, and gives me a title. Poor fellow!" He pulled thoughtfully at his cigar, and went on talking. "I used to have dreams when I was a boy of being great and rich. I had a sort of fanciful notion that I should meet somebody one day who would tell me that I had been reared for my own good under false pretenses, and that I was duke or prince of something somewhere. I was to have passed my probation and have come out triumphant, and then the truth was to come as my reward." He got up and threw the cigar into the court-yard, and then closed the window. Then he fell to walking up and down with his hands in his pockets. "I've passed my probation and come out a failure, and here's the announcement. Poor Reggy! I'd rather he'd have lived. I feel as if Fate were having a satiric grin at me. 'Here you are, my boy. You've thrown away all the chances you had to start with, and now here's the biggest prize in the basket for you. There are thousands who'd jump at it, and it's no good to you. Take it!'"

"You don't deserve that you should say these things of yourself or think them," I replied. "You are not answerable for your troubles."

"I don't know," he resumed, still walking up and down. "I believe I knew as well at the time as I know it now that I was marrying a woman who could make no man happy. There's a kind of sane madness, Denham, which some men suffer from. I knew I wasn't going to be happy. I more than guessed that I was going to wreck myself. I didn't even particularly care for her, but I felt myself bound in honor, and I married her. Well, it's of no use to talk, and I know that also. I haven't bored anybody else with it. You're the only man I ever opened my lips to."

He would not say, of course he would not say, what this meant, but I knew it. I had begun to think of late that amid the crowd of his acquaintance he counted a single friend, and

that I was the man. I knew I loved him, but in those days I thought disparagingly of myself. That early modesty has developed (as it often does) into rather more than an average certainty of personal merit. As a matter of fact, it arose from my fear lest I might think as highly of myself as I somehow thought I ought to do. But I was uncertain of my own deserts, and thought his friendship a high honor, as any man might have done. As honest, valiant, and stalwart a heart as ever beat, I know he had.

We said good-night to each other after this with no renewal of our earlier conversation, and I went down to my rooms, and so to bed. He was closeted with the lawyer for an hour or two, I learned afterward, and in the evening he went by appointment to see Lord Worborough. I myself made the elderly peer's acquaintance a week later, after Reginald Pole's funeral. He called at Warwick Court when I happened to be in Pole's rooms—a bent, courteous, mild old man, with an affectionate, sad smile. I was introduced to him, and was received with an unexpected cordiality.

"Mr. Pole has spoken to me of you, Mr. Denham," he said. "I am very pleased to meet you. You would seem to be great friends, you two young gentlemen. I do not find that I make many friends nowadays, and I have outlived most of the old ones."

He watched Pole rather closely, as I noticed, and wore, to my mind, an air of criticism. It was natural that he should desire to know what manner of man was coming after him, though it was out of his power to alter the succession.

"I came here, Walter, on purpose to ask you to come down into the country and stay with me awhile," he said, looking from one to the other of us. "I want your friend to come also. One judges a man by the company he keeps. It would be a shame to ask a pair of young fellows out into the country at this time of year under ordinary circumstances, but you see, Walter, you can naturally go nowhere and do nothing for a time, and it will be well that we should know each other. You will come, Mr. Denham? When do you think, Walter, that you and your friend can be ready?"

For my own part, I was a good deal taken aback by this unexpected invitation; but I accepted it, and we arranged that all three of us should go down to Worborough Court next day. The old lord stayed and talked for an hour or two. He was bookish in an old-fashioned way. He had read no theology newer than Paley, no philosophy later than Locke, no fiction since Sir Walter's, and no verse since Byron's. All the new

people were mere names to him, and he did not care to make their acquaintance; but he was pleased to find that we knew his favorites as well as he did—a little better, perhaps, with our fresher memories—and he told us simply that he was glad to find that we were not trivial-minded.

"Books are a great resource," he said, with his mild smile. "I don't read much now, but I find a pleasure in remembering. Something put Commodore Trunnion into my head as I drove down here, and I laughed. I hardly knew poor Reginald," he added, suddenly, with an almost alarmed air of apology and explanation. "He was so confirmed an invalid."

When he had gone away Pole and I set to work to pack in readiness for the morrow's journey, and next day we met the old lord at Paddington at the appointed hour, and went down into Devonshire. A carriage awaited us, and a break for our baggage, and, leaving the latter to follow us, we were bowled away through a wide road with beautiful overhanging hedges until the lodge gates were thrown open to us and we swept into a splendid avenue of forest-trees.

"There is the first glimpse of the house," said Lord Worborough, laying one hand upon his successor's arm, and pointing with the other, with a long, withered white finger extended, the delicate old hand trembling. "It is a very noble old place, and I hope you will be happy there when your time comes."

There was something touching, to my mind, in this informal handing over, as it were, of the ancestral place to the young fellow who until lately had been so complete a stranger.

Pole looked at the house, and Lord Worborough, with his gold-rimmed *pince-nez* balanced on his nose, looked at Pole with that air of watchful regard I had noticed the day before.

"Yes," said the heir apparent, "it is a noble old place." He had been unusually thoughtful and quiet during the whole journey, and now there was a settled shadow upon him.

I saw, as we came nearer, that it was indeed a noble old place. It had a westward aspect, and all its long lines of window shone like burnished gold in the light of the declining sun, gleaming the brighter by contrast with their somber setting of purplish-brown tone. Pole sighed as he stepped from the carriage.

"I shall leave you now," said our host, as he entered the hall. He drew out his watch and consulted it. "Forty-five minutes to dinner. Ample time."

We were shown to rooms which were in communication with

each other, and when the servants had brought up our baggage and everything was laid out in readiness, we were left alone. Pole marched through the open doors of the two intervening dressing-rooms into my bed-chamber, and there, with his head resting against the wall and his hands in his pockets, stood silent for a minute or two.

"I suppose," he said then, "that if I should live long enough for it to come to that, Lady Worborough will have a right to come here."

CHAPTER X.

WHENEVER I found time to think of it, I used to be astonished at my own position, while I stayed at Worborough Court. I had three hundred a year of my own, came of a family of no distinction, plain yeomen for half a dozen generations, and had as much hope of forming aristocratic associations as I had of being suddenly translated to the moon, and almost as much desire for the one as for the other. But the differences in the life were so slight and trivial that I was reconciled to my new place insensibly and at once. To ride in a carriage instead of a dog-cart or a cab—to have a man behind one's chair at dinner every evening instead of having him there on special occasions only—to have another man to fold and lay out and brush one's clothes instead of performing those small offices with one's own hands, were the main changes, and were easily to be borne with. Lord Worborough was not only kind, but companionable, and very like any other amiable, cultivated, and good old gentleman. I think I had vaguely expected everything to be very different from my old experiences; I know I found everything very much the same as it had always been.

Lord Worborough and Pole were a good deal together. The heir apparent was being familiarized with the possessions which would one day be his own. His lordship had always kept his affairs for the main part in his own hands, and he and Pole spent hours in going over business papers together. At such times I was thrown upon my own resources, and since in my boyhood riding had been my greatest joy, and I had not been able to afford a horse in London, I took advantage of the chances offered me, and spent most of my spare hours in the saddle.

I was riding one tranquil afternoon toward the village, thinking of a certain day at Pangbourne for the most part, and recalling with great clearness all that had been said and done, and how somebody had looked at every turn of head and hand,

when I saw, far away across the fields, the crawling line of white steam which betrayed the progress of the afternoon down-train. From the distance at which I saw it it looked like an emblem of peace and quiet, and seemed to travel very slowly, but by and by, rounding a great curve, it came charging down toward me with increasing swiftness and a growing roar. My horse showed so decided a trepidation at the advancing monster that I turned him into a by-lane out of sight of it, and did not return to the road I had been traveling until the train had paused at the station, and the whistle had announced its departure. Then I went on toward the station. I saw without any special interest the little handful of country people dispersing from the station door, and a gentleman farmer of the neighborhood climb into a dog-cart which had been in waiting for him and drive away. The moving of the dog-cart revealed three people, a man and woman, the woman very fashionably attired, and a railway porter, whose hand was pointing straight down the road by which I was approaching the group. In a minute or so I came near enough to see them clearly, and in a sort of horror I recognized the lady I had seen aboard the house-boat. Her companion was the little Jew solicitor, Goldsmith.

For a moment I was completely shaken out of my self-possession, and could think of nothing. My horse bore me me on toward them, and I saw that I was recognized. I have no doubt my face displayed my sensations quite plainly, for Mr. Goldsmith looked up at me with a leer of self-approval, and wagged his head in what I felt to be a triumphing derision. His companion, who carried herself with the old harsh air of self-disdain and disdain of everything, stared me scornfully in the face. I was quite certain that their purpose here was to annoy Pole, and when they had passed me but a little way I wheeled round and overtook them.

"You'd better carry the good news ahead of us, Bister Denham," said the little Jew. "We're going to make a little call at Worborough Court."

"I shall have great pleasure," I responded, as dryly as I could. He laughed jeeringly, and I rode on with but a single glance at the bitter face beside him. Once out of sight and hearing I put my horse from a trot into a gallop, and reached the court a good half hour before they could well be expected. I asked for Pole and learned that he was closeted with Lord Worborough. The horse I had ridden was soft with want of exercise, and was in a lather of foam with his gallop of two and a half miles, and my own air was doubtless a good deal flur-

ried, for the man whom I questioned looked oddly at me, as if he suspected that something was amiss. For the moment I was altogether nonplused. It would look odd to disturb Pole by sending for him, and Lord Worborough would probably think it an impertinence. Then it struck me that I could give the man at the lodge instructions to detain the visitors there, and permit them to do no more than send their business to the house, leaving it at Pole's option to do what he chose with them afterward. Luckily, while I was hurriedly turning this suggestion up and down in my mind I heard a step upon the great staircase leading to the hall, and there was Pole himself, lounging down with his hands in his pockets as usual, and his lithe and active figure swaying into the idlest postures.

"Here is Mr. Pole, sir," said the servant, and withdrew.

"Halloo!" said Pole. "Anything the matter? You look scared." I told him my news, and looking before him with eyes half closed and lips drawn inward, he nodded twice or thrice. "We'll go and meet them," he said then, sliding an arm through mine, and taking a hat from the stand as we went by.

We walked in silence down the long avenue, passed the gates, and came upon the dusty road in silence. I looked at my companion pretty often, and if I had not known his real reasons for disturbance I should never have guessed them from his face. His arm gave a little sudden twitch as we turned a corner of the road.

"Here they are," he said. I had looked up already and had seen them a hundred yards away. They walked on leisurely to meet us, and I could see that Goldsmith was disturbed by the thought of the coming interview. He stared about him with an uneasy pretense of not having seen us, flourished his handkerchief, cocked his hat, pulled out his watch, and drew a glove off and on. When he could no longer evade the knowledge of us he fell ever so little behind his companion, who walked on steadily with an unchanging look until we halted within a yard of each other.

"Well," said Pole. I could feel his hand trembling slightly, with a strong, quick tremor, but his face and voice were altogether commonplace and indifferent. "What does this mean?"

"I am spending a day or two in the country," she answered, mockingly. "I wanted to exchange congratulations with you. Do you think the old man will last long?"

"I have been expecting this visit," Pole returned, with an

air of every-day. "I want you to understand that I sha'n't allow another."

"Indeed!" she asked, with a cold sneer, "and how do you propose to exercise your authority?"

"Well," he said, drawing his arm from mine, and tilting his hat over his eyebrows, "I hold the purse-strings, and until you promise to leave me absolutely unmolested, I shall pay no more."

"I have taken a house down here," she answered, "and I am going to live in it."

"Very well," said Pole, throwing his head back, and looking at her from under the brim of his hat. "We understand each other. We needn't waste words about it. You will do as you please, and I shall use the only power I have."

"We will see about the power you have," said his wife. "At the first delay of a day I shall instruct Mr. Goldsmith to sue for maintenance."

"That's what we shall do," said Mr. Goldsmith, still looking behind her shoulder. "We shall sue for maintenance."

"You threatened that before," Pole answered, "and I give you the answer I gave then. The moment you move in that way I shall go abroad. As for the property here, I never coveted it, or expected it, and I can do without it. I can make it over by deed of gift to the next heir. I sha'n't pay a penny until you have ceased to annoy me. It's the only power I have, and I shall use it."

I could see by her eyes that there was no mischief she would not have done him if she had had the power.

"You have a third of my income now," he went on, and I could see that his steadfast refusal to be angry or shaken was beginning to exasperate her horribly. "In due time, if we should both live, and I should be unmolested, your allowance will be increased, to what extent I can not tell at present, but considerably. You must choose for yourself between a comfortable provision for life and nothing at all. Good-day, Adelaide."

He turned to go, but she sprung forward and intercepted him.

"You want war?" she said, with something of a stagey air and accent, but with an obviously genuine passion. "You shall have it then."

"No," he answered, wearily and quietly. "I want peace, and I mean to have it." He made a movement to walk round her, but she intercepted him again. He lighted a cigarette

and sat down on the turfy bank by the road-side, with his feet apart and his hands clasped between his knees.

"I will have my rights," she said, "and I will make your life a burden to you."

He looked up at her and responded with a dry simplicity, answering her last words only.

"I know you will."

"I suppose you fancy," she went on, with a strange and dreadful distortion of the face, "that I know nothing of your doings. I know everything. I know why you go to Cromwell Terrace. I know why you stopped away. I know how much you wish me dead, and how you hate the sight of me. Do you think I care whether you hate me or not? Not I. Why should I?"

I drew Goldsmith a little aside, and ventured to ask him if he thought any good purpose was being served by the prolongation of this scene. I pointed out that it could only lead to an exasperation of feeling on both sides, and begged him to use his influence in getting his client away. He grinned unamiably and shrugged his fat shoulders.

"If Bister Pole doesn't like it," he said, "Bister Pole's got himself to thank for it, and nobody else."

"As to that," I answered, trying to be as diplomatic as I could, "I am not in a position to form an opinion. But if you have your client's interest at heart, Mr. Goldsmith, I am sure you will persuade her to go away. I understand that Mrs. Pole has no means of her own, and if her husband should be so far irritated as to fulfill his threat, your own hopes of payment might be seriously affected."

"I ain't afraid," said Mr. Goldsmith. "We can come on the estate. It's a legal claim, ain't it? Very well, then. What's the use of talking? If you want a man's fredly services you shouldn't chuck him in the river."

"I want you both to understand," Pole broke in here, rising to his feet. His wife was still talking with a slow, bitter intensity, but she stopped at the sound of his voice and listened, looking from her husband's face to Goldsmith's and back again. "You can make a public scandal of the thing, of course. You can drive me out of England, and make it impossible for me to return, but you can't get money from a man who is determined at all costs not to pay it. Now I am determined at all costs not to pay it—please understand that quite clearly, and once for all—unless I have quiet secured to me. On the first return of annoyance I shall go away, and leave you to your own devices."

His face was very pale and his eyes glittered, but he spoke with a steady voice, and it was plain to see that he produced an effect on both of them. Goldsmith looked uneasily at his client, and she, with her handsome, dreadful face as white as Pole's, looked back at him, her chin raised, and her penciled eyelids drooping, till the eyes shone through a mere slit. I could not help thinking that there was something posed and studied in her look and attitude, and in my own mind I pictured her as rehearsing this and similar scenes with a hungry relish for the excitement of quarrel.

"Now, Goldsmith," Pole went on, "you know your client. If you advise her to her present course you must take the consequences—you can guess what they will be."

Mr. Goldsmith showed signs of faltering. His client opened her eyes in a studied disdain and amazement, and, turning her head aside from him slowly, kept her glance fixed upon his face for awhile, and then withdrew it with a practiced scorn.

"It's no use looking at me like that," said Mr. Goldsmith, fretfully. "Of course I'm devoted to your interests, Mrs. Pole. I want to make the best of things for you; but it's no use cutting your nose off to spite your face. Now, is it?"

"Come, Denham," said Pole, taking me by the arm and moving away. This time his wife made no attempt to stay him, and the last I saw of the pair we left behind was that the little Jew was standing bareheaded and proffering his arm, while his client turned disdainfully away from him and stood stock-still in the middle of the dusty road.

We walked in silence for some two or three hundred yards, and then Pole spoke.

"If they drive me to it I will keep my word. I dare say you thought that I was harsh. I don't care much what people think as a general rule—perhaps I care too little—and if I justify myself to you you must take it as a compliment."

I knew very well he was not thinking flippantly, however he might speak.

"I have suffered enough already, and I can't afford to have this misery hanging over me, threatening to come down at any moment. I must use the only power I have."

I hastened to assure him that I did not see what other course lay open to him. In his new position at least, whatever it had been in his old one, it was impossible, or almost impossible, to hide his whereabouts. I thought he had an absolute right to offer the bargain he had set before his wife, and that if she would not accept it he was clear of responsibility for her action.

"I am glad you think so," he answered. "It helps me to think so. Let us say no more about it."

But the new hint of Pole's interest in Miss Delamere disturbed me, and the more I thought about it the less assured I felt, and the more grieved and anxious. I felt my own thoughts intrusive and impatient, but I could not banish them.

CHAPTER XI.

THE "Morning Post" had announced the fact of the arrival of Mr. Pole and Mr. John Denham at Worborough Court, and after a space of some six weeks, during which nothing of importance to my history happened beyond the scenes already indicated, it announced the departure for London of the same distinguished pair. We went back to town and resumed our old quarters and our old ways. Before we left, Lord Worborough had taken the warmest sort of liking to Pole, and had, it appeared, been anxious to press an allowance upon him, and to induce him to take up a residence more in accord with his prospects and the social position they imposed upon him. But Pole protested that he had as much as he wanted, and preferred for the present to remain in his old quarters, and so, to my great satisfaction, we went back to an unchanged life.

If my friend had been situated like most young men of his age, had been free to carve out his own career and dispose of his own destiny, I am sure that I should have been able to rejoice in the fortune which had befallen him with my whole heart. But having such solid ground for thinking poorly of his high fortune on one side, I allowed myself to think poorly of it on another. My thoughts and feelings here were purely selfish, as I am quite willing to admit. My own means gave me no right to mix on terms of equality with people of such exceptional wealth as would at one time or another come into my friend's possession. I did not altogether like the idea of his having that enormous income and that imposing title, and I felt as if these things forced us apart already. But the difference—if difference there was—was wholly on my side. Pole showed not the slightest sign of being touched by it.

It rained one evening pretty heavily, and I had business abroad. The days were beginning to draw in, and it was dusk in the court when I got to the open door-way of the house and stood there unfolding my umbrella. The lamps were lighted, and gleamed rawly in the faint light. There was something noticeably dismal in the chill mingling of gas-light with what remained of daylight, and the whining wind, which wrinkled

the puddles on the stone pavement, and the relentless plashing rain intensified the feeling. I was conscious, in an absent-minded way, of a further note of emphasis—a single figure in the otherwise deserted court, a man who, with a frock-coat shining with rain, and a shapeless old silk hat, from whose battered brim the drops fell on his nose, stood lurching by the opposite railings, looking upward. As I put up my umbrella and stepped out into the rain he gave ever so slight a start, of nervousness, as I conjectured, and made off in the direction of Holborn. He looked abject and deserted, and I gave him a sidelong glance in passing. He gave a sidelong glance at me, and shot his eyes away from mine in a mere fraction of a second. He was sufficiently miserable to look at, but just respectable enough to have a right to be offended by an offer of charity. I half expected his step to quicken, and could almost hear in fancy the thick voice which I knew must go along with that bibulous nose and the bibulous unsteady lips he had, murmuring the known formula about the poor man and the night's lodging. He came slopping on behind me, with the peculiar sucking noise at each footstep which broken boots make on a wet and level pavement, and I gave him a passing thought of pity and forgot him, as we have to forget scores of such phantoms every day in a great city.

I went to Bloomsbury Square, I remember, to call upon an acquaintance of mine, a musician, who had set some verses of mine to music, and who had given me an appointment that evening to hear a professional tenor rehearse the song. I stayed an hour, I dare say, and then left. There, planted against the railings was a dim, gleaming figure, at such a distance that I should have not noticed him at all but for the chance light a gas-lamp cast upon his wet arm and shoulder, and his seedy, shining hat. He would appear to have gone to sleep there, but the noise of the door which, escaping the maid-servant's fingers, slammed loudly behind me, made him jump into a bolt-upright attitude, and I thought of the man in the court.

So far there was nothing in the world to make me believe that it was worth anybody's while to stalk me about London, and so I fancied this second sight of the man to be an accident. I went home and forgot him again. But next day about noon I turned to look at something in the street, and there was the man once more, slouching a score of yards behind. He turned away when I saw him, and made believe to stare at a shop-window, but I observed one or two furtive glances in my own direction, and began to grow a little curious. I sauntered on

and went round a corner, and then dropping my pace to a mere lounge, I went round a second corner and there waited. The shabby man almost walked against me—recoiled with a start, and then took the other side of the road. I affected to take no notice of him and lounged on again, and coming in awhile to another main street, saw my man behind me still, this time by the aid of a big mirror in the shop-window of a carver and gilder. The shop-window was at a corner, and the mirror stood at an angle in it, giving a clear view of the road for two-score yards. I began to suspect the shabby man of shadowing me for a purpose, and I walked about with no other meaning at all than to see if he would follow still, taking pains not to look as if I knew anything of his presence. It became quite clear at last that the man was really following me, and when I had led him a long ramble I bent my way homeward. When I had come within a minute's walk of Warwick Court I quickened my steps to a good round pace, and, once within its shelter, ran. I passed the iron gate, turned to the left, and then marched leisurely down Brownlow Street back into Holborn. There, at the corner of Chancery Lane, was my man in converse with another, a gentleman in a skin cap, short trousers, and big high-lows. My original follower went down Chancery Lane, the man in the skin cap crossed the street and took up his stand at a corner of the entrance to the court. I went away to luncheon, pretty certain of finding him there when I came back again, wondering what on earth this evident espionage meant, and perhaps exciting myself about it a little more than necessary.

Late in the afternoon I went back to chambers, and after waiting for half an hour, took another ramble. As I expected, the man in the high-lows was so good as to follow me everywhere, to wait outside a house in which I made a prolonged call, and to accompany me at a judicious distance home again.

I went straight up to Pole's chambers, and found him engaged with a book and a cigar. He opened the door with the book in his hand, and threw it on to the sofa as he entered the sitting-room before me.

"Well," he said, cheerfully, "what's the news?"

I told him my curious experience of the last four-and-twenty hours. At first he said: "Nonsense," and laughed, but when I began to describe the experience in detail he grew serious, and proposed that we should at once go out together and investigate the matter. I consented to this quite eagerly. I described the men before we started, so that he should be able

easily to identify them. We walked into Holborn and caught no sight of either of them.

"Let us take a quiet way," I said, "and see what happens."

We steered our course for the great west-central squares, which at that hour lay silent and almost deserted. We walked slowly, both keeping a keen lookout, and before we had made half a dozen turnings Pole began to think that there was something in it. A pinched, wispy little man, in disreputable black, took the same way as ourselves, with a persistence which would have been very singular if it had been accidental. When we began to be pretty sure of him we veered about and met him. He passed us without a look or sign, and two minutes later he was following us upon our backward track.

"There is no doubt about it," Pole confessed. "You are being followed. What is the meaning of it?"

I could not make a guess, but my nerves began to thrill a little at the notion of this unwearying, stealthy watch. There was a mystery in it which was certainly not altogether agreeable, and was yet not without its charm.

"We will discomfit this gentleman," said Pole. "I am going to ask him what he means by it."

I asked him to wait a moment. I thought I saw a better way than he suggested. There could be nothing got out of the man by questioning him, but I proposed to hunt the hunter and find out where he went and by whom he was employed. It was absurd to suppose that he and his comrades were tracking me for the mere amusement of the adventure. They were set on by somebody and paid by somebody, though it was out of my power to guess why anybody should think it worth his while to mark me down in this way.

We stood at a dark corner discussing this question.

"Depend upon it, Pole," I said, and before I could get any further the pinched little man slunk by us without a glance at either. "We will part here," I whispered, a moment later. "Keep an eye on the fellow. See if he follows me again."

We agreed upon this, said "good-night" to each other loudly, and took different ways.

I lighted a cigar and sauntered slowly, to give my man a chance of keeping up with me. I was almost as anxious not to be lost sight of as I judged him to be to keep sight of me. I heard no following footsteps, though the square was as silent as a desert, and I confess to many curious little shudderings as I went. I have never had any very distinguished opportunity of learning whether I am brave or a coward, and I am

rather inclined to fancy that nobody can be sure of his own courage until it has been tested, but I think that most people would have felt nervous under the circumstances. It was not that I anticipated any bodily harm, for I was a match for the wispy old man and half a dozen like him, but imagination came into play, and a score of tingling adventures happened every minute.

I walked softly and listened with all my might. I heard hundreds of imaginary sounds, but not a single noise which could reasonably be translated into that of a pursuing footstep, and at last I paused and turned. I was in a long, deserted, silent street, and from end to end there was not a living creature to be seen. I retraced my steps, and saw nothing, and after a time it became evident to my mind that the inexplicable pursuit had been abandoned. After lingering long to be assured of this, and having attracted the wondering regard of more than one policeman by my suspicious loiterings, I went home. Pole was there before me.

"The hunt is over for the time," he said. "I fancy the fellow understood the meaning of our maneuver, and declined to be followed in his turn. Any way, he made no further attempt to follow you, and I lost sight of him."

We talked about the theme until we wore it altogether threadbare, and then we went to bed. For a day or two as I went about the streets I looked around me to find some trace of the old watch, but seeing none I forgot it, until one evening, emerging from Warwick Court, I saw, sneaking along the opposite side of the way, my friend in the fur cap. I was naturally interested in him, and at first it tickled me somewhat to observe that he was slinking, and pausing, and peering, as if in pursuit of the old business with a new unconscious quarry ahead of him. I crossed over and dropped behind him, and, following his constant glances in one direction, discovered, with a sudden chill and start, that he was hunting my companion.

"And now," said I to myself, "we will find out what this extraordinary business means if I follow for a week."

I had not to follow for a week as it turned out, but I got through as dull and weary an evening as I ever remember to have passed in my life. Pole turned into a restaurant, and this reminded me that I myself was hungry, and that the object of my excursion from my chambers had been dinner. The man in the fur cap took up his post within sight of the entrance and waited there. I took up my post in sight of him, and waited also. The man smoked several pipes, and danced many

shuffling dances on the pavement. The streams of traffic flowed this way and that, clocks boomed and clanged the quarters through the noises of the streets with a most unreasonable interval between. I grew absurdly hungry, and everybody who left the restaurant looked like Pole. I got to dread the eye of the policeman on his beat, and knew that I was a suspicious character. When I had waited an hour and a half, which felt like a dreary day, Pole emerged from the swinging doors, and went home. The man in the fur cap followed him, and I followed the man in the fur cap.

At the foot of Warwick Court the spy found an associate, and after a whispered word or two with him moved off at a good round pace, leaving his confederate behind. I went after number one, determined to find where he might go. I had a second wait while he refreshed himself at a public-house. I peered through the glass door, and saw him engaged with a pork pie and a pewter pot. It began to rain, and if the whole thing had been less mysterious and had seemed less important I could have easily found it in my heart to resign the chase.

At last patience was rewarded, and the man, coming again upon the street, turned up his collar against the rain, plucked the fur cap over his eyes, and walked away with an air of decision. He paused, after a lengthy walk, before a private house in a respectable street, knocked, and was admitted. The door was no sooner closed behind him than I ran to it, and by the light of a near lamp read the inscription upon the brass plate:

"Mr. Goldsmith, solicitor."

CHAPTER XII.

I STOOD at the door for a time, sunk deep in thought, and by and by I began to get a glimmering of insight, though no more. I had only just begun to move away when the door reopened and the man in the fur cap and the big high-lows came out and passed me. I touched him on the arm and he turned his head and paused.

"I want a word or two with you, if you please," I said.

"What if I don't please?" he asked. He had not actually brought his footsteps to a halt, but was moving on lingeringly with a backward stare at me.

"I think you will," I answered, persuasively jingling a handful of silver in my pocket, "if I make it worth your while. Have you any objection to a drink, to begin with?"

Well, no, he said, he hadn't, not so far as *he* knowed. I

asked him to be so good as to pilot me to a place where we might have a moment's talk in quiet.

"I'll show you the way, right enough," he answered, "but you needn't think as you're a-going to get anything out o' me. I can pay for my own drinks when I want 'em."

I made no response to this, and he, turning a corner, led me down a by-street and into a public-house. A barman dozed behind the pewter counter, and but for him the place was empty. I gave my spy a glass of hot rum and water, and for form's sake asked for a bottle of lemonade. When I paid for these I pulled out all the money I had in my pocket, precisely as Mr. Goldsmith would have done. I had perhaps three pounds about me, and I saw my friend of the fur cap looking at it as if he would like it to change hands I thought.

"Now," I asked him, "you don't believe in selling anything for nothing, do you?"

"No," he said, shivering agreeably after his first gulp of hot rum and water; "I ain't one o' that sort."

Nobody would have expected anything of the sort, I told him, from so shrewd-looking a fellow. I thought of the Inspector Buckett, and was resolved to be complimentary.

"But now," I said, "I want you to tell me one or two things." I put a half-crown on the pewter counter and looked at him. He shook his head decisively. I set another on the top of it, and looked at him again, and again he shook his head, this time with something of a mournful sneer. He still made negative signs when four half-crowns lay one upon another before him, but they were less decided than before. "Very well," I said, feigning to observe plain acquiescence in his manner. "Half to begin with, the other half afterward." I held out five shillings toward him. He lingered for a moment, but no more.

"What is it?" he asked, as he pouched the coins.

"You are employed by Mr. Goldsmith?" I asked. He contented himself with a nod. "He set you on to follow me?" He shook his head and smiled. "Who set you on to follow me?"

"Nobody," he answered; "that was a herror."

"Ah! I thought so. You were employed to follow Mr. Pole?"

Again he nodded.

"Why do you follow Mr. Pole?"

"I'm paid for it," he answered.

"Exactly. But what do you want to find out about him?" The man looked about him suspiciously, finished his drink,

and moved toward the door with an almost imperceptible nod of invitation for me to follow. I obeyed the signal, and he led me through a little maze of streets. I stopped him at length by declaring that I would go no further.

"The potman was a-listening," he said, wheezily; "I could see it by the way he 'eld 'is 'ed. My place is worth a lot more than ten shilling."

"Very likely," I answered; "but I don't want you to lose your place. I want you to keep it. Tell me, what do you want to find out about Mr. Pole?"

"The order is," he answered, leaning forward and pouring his spirituous breath into my face, "to see where he goes, and who he meets—specially one place and one person."

"What is the place?" I asked.

"House in Cromwell Terrace," he answered.

"And the person?"

"A young female as lives in the house."

"Of course you know no reason why this is being done?"

"The governor don't tell *me* a lot; you can bet your 'at on that, sir."

There was no more to be made out of him for the time, and I paid him his five shillings and parted from him, but not before I had ascertained that he knew my name and address, and had arranged with him to communicate with me in case anything should come to his knowledge. I had very little compunction in employing this personage to act against his original employer, and, as I walked home, Spenser's line about entire affection hating nicer hands came into my mind, and justified me altogether.

It was embarrassing to take the news of my discovery to Pole, and I was conscious of a feeling, which I knew of course to be altogether ridiculous, that I was interfering in his affairs, and prying into concerns which he desired to keep secret. But it was not a matter for any foolish delicacy, and I seized the first chance I had of laying it before him.

He tried hard to preserve his ordinary look of impassivity, and listened with his shoulders lounging against the wall, his hands in his pockets, and his head leaning sideways.

"You ask me nothing," he said, when I had done.

"Why should I ask you anything?" I demanded in return.

"You must think it all very exceptional and strange."

Of course it was exceptional and strange, and I admitted as much to myself and to him.

"Don't take my silence as a sign of indifference or unfriend-

liness," I said at last. "I will ask you that, but I don't care to ask you any more."

He left his lounging place by the wall and took several turns about the room. Then he stopped and laid a hand upon my shoulder.

"There are no suspicions, no accusations, in your mind?"

"My dear fellow, no."

"Denham," he said, suddenly, seating himself before me. "I don't know what to do. I don't know how I ought to act."

I did not know, I answered, that my advice could be of service to him.

"In plain English," he said, after a time, "here is my trouble. Ought I to publish the fact of this miserable marriage?"

I had thought over this question so often and so long that I had my answer ready.

"The reasons against the publication are obvious enough. What are the reasons for it?"

"They are obvious enough also—some of them. Here is the name of a most spotless and admirable lady coupled with mine. You coupled them together in your mind, once at least; my wife couples them. That old snob and tuft-hunter Delamere is trying his hardest to couple them, in fact. Dr. Fish is full of hints and smiles. I don't believe—I don't believe Miss Delamere cares two straws for me. I suppose I must have let it be seen at one time that I cared a great deal more than two straws for Miss Delamere."

It cost him a great effort to say this. He spoke in a tone of affected lightness, which afforded as poor and thin a disguise as I can remember to have known. When I looked at him his face was pale, and he was looking fixedly before him. The confession came upon me with a great shock, and I understood in the light of it many things which had hitherto been dark to me. Here was half the tragedy I had been afraid of.

"I made that wretched marriage," he went on, after a lengthy silence—"never mind why. I thought I was acting very nobly and loftily, and so on, and I found out that I had acted like a fool. Who is it says we reserve our keenest repentances for our virtues? I was married, anyhow, and tied for life. You have seen my wife, and there's no need to describe her to you, or to talk about her at all. We lived together for a month, and then parted. I met Miss Delamere some time afterward. I won't say that I fell in love with her." He was talking in a hard, dry voice, and with a man-

ner as dry and hard as solid people of deep-rooted feeling do when they are greatly moved. "I formed a very high opinion of her. I thought her the most admirable woman I had ever known, and," he added, very doggedly, "I think so still. In awhile I began to see that other people were becoming aware of my opinion. Her father was aware of it, and resented it as an impertinence, until an accidental death or two put me in reasonable distance of a great future and a peerage. Then he changed his mind, as might have been expected of him."

He rose then and paced steadily to and fro with his chin upon his breast.

"One night," he went on, "old Doctor Fish poked a foolish joke at me about an approaching marriage, and that decided me. I never went near the Delamere's house again until I went with you, and then I thought the folly had blown over. It seems to have revived and sprung to life again, and I must stop away again and put an end to it."

"It will certainly be wise to do so," I said.

"It's rather hard lines, too," he added, with that irritating assumption of not caring, which, after all, I was compelled to admire. For my own part, when I am hurt I cry out prodigiously. When I am in trouble I want somebody to whom to pour out my complaints—a friend to share my burden. "It's brutally hard lines when you come to think of it."

"I fancy," I said, "that your wife and Goldsmith can have but little knowledge of you."

"My wife and Goldsmith have very little knowledge of me," he answered. "They have but very little knowledge of the case at all, it would seem. I don't think I'm much of a coxcomb, Denham?"

He put this question with something very like his usual natural air, and I laughed as I answered. Not much of a coxcomb, I was inclined to fancy.

"Then I can say what is on my mind to say. It's no compliment to a man when a woman falls in love with him, because women constantly fall in love with utterly worthless people. They fall in love with ugly fellows, they fall in love with men who are dazzlingly stupid, or mean, or base. It's quite on the cards that a woman might fall in love with me. It's a recognizable possibility. Eh?"

"Quite a recognizable possibility."

"Then what should the sensitive creature do who desires to save a hypothetical young woman from wasting her affections? What should a tender-hearted man in my position, reading the

first signs of dawning affection, do to shield the poor creature from the blight?"

"For Heaven's sake, Pole," I besought him, "don't talk in this bitter way. Upon my soul, you are worse than wormwood."

"Yes," said Pole, dryly, biting off the end of a cigar. "I'm a great deal worse than wormwood."

"Look here, Pole," I said, rising and laying a hand upon him. "It's no use beating about the bush any longer, and hurting each other with pretenses. You'd best let it be known at Cromwell Terrace that you are married, and then all the trouble, and all the chance of trouble, will be over."

"I said just now I wasn't a coxcomb," he answered, with a bitter lightness. Then looking sideways at me with a face as white as marble, he asked: "You think *she* cares?"

"I think she may. I know nothing. I have seen nothing. She may come to care."

"All right," he answered, throwing the cigar into the fireplace. "Go and cry it on the house-tops. Look here, old chap." He gripped my arm and pushed me to and fro more strongly than he knew. "We won't say any more about it now. I've got some letters I ought to write, and—and some things to think about. Come up to-morrow, will you? Good-night."

We shook hands, and I left him. I don't suppose I could feel anybody's grief to-day as I felt his then. We grow selfish as we grow older, and our own cares absorb us. But at that time I had no trouble of my own that was worth the thinking of, and it is simple truth that I loved him like a brother. I went away heavy-hearted, and in my own lonely room I listened to the sound of his footsteps overhead, to the unnumbered little noises which bespoke disordered and hasty movements and a troubled mind, for hours.

In the morning, among my letters, I found a note from Pole.

"I have been thinking," he wrote, "of our last night's talk. I have come to the conclusion that it will be best to make a clean breast of it. I am going down to Worborough. The old man will be grieved, I know, but I must tell him with my own lips. I authorize you to speak about the matter where you will. There is no need for discretion, and you may tell anybody. Tell Fish, and he will save you all further trouble."

If there was anything made clear by the resolve thus expressed, it was Pole's fear lest Mary Delamere should come to care for him in her ignorance of his position. And if anybody who knows the facts chooses to think the fear coxcombical, I need hardly say that I am very far indeed from being in agreement with him.

CHAPTER XIII.

I COULD not remember to have had a task more embarrassing laid upon me. It was not merely embarrassing, but downright painful, even in the mere contemplation of it. And yet it was so evidently the only thing to be done that it was not to be evaded. Pole went down to Worborough Court as he had promised, and I was left alone to fulfill my part of the bargain made between us.

I had let almost the whole of the first day slide by without action, and had constantly tested myself with rehearsals of the disclosure I had to make. The fact that I was fully authorized to make it had next to no effect upon my mind. Look at it how I would it seemed to wear the air of an intolerable impertinence. But, as I wandered disconsolate down Piccadilly that night, trying to summon up resolution to get the matter over, I encountered no less a person than the Reverend Dr. Fish. He was beaming, as he always beamed, and overflowing with that fatuous and indiscriminating kindliness which marked his aspect in the world at large. We shook hands with great cordiality.

"How do you do, my young friend, how do you do? Rambling? Philosophizing? A charming night for the time of year, but cold."

"Doctor Fish," said I, plunging *in medias res*, "I have something to say to you."

The old gentleman stopped short and looked at me with an almost ludicrous air of alarm. I became awkwardly aware of a somewhat too tragic intensity in my own tone and manner.

"I have been asked," I continued, taking him by the arm and leading him along, "to make public a certain painful piece of news."

The old gentleman, with his hat perched on the back of his head, and his face turned up to mine with an expression of alarmed bewilderment, ambled beside me.

"Pole," I said, "has gone down to Worborough Court to see Lord Worborough, and to make to him the same state-

ment which he authorizes me to make to his friends in general."

"God bless my soul!" said Dr. Fish.

"There were reasons," I went on, delaying, in a sufficiently lame and impotent fashion, what I had to say, "why the thing should not have been made generally known before. But there are now reasons—very urgent reasons—why it should be known."

Dr. Fish said "God bless my soul!" again, and ambled on, holding his umbrella tightly at the middle and gasping at me open-mouthed.

"Pole," I said, making quite a desperate effort, "some years back contracted a most miserable and unhappy marriage."

The doctor stopped, withdrew his arm, and faced me in speechless amazement.

"His wife is living still. I have met her twice, and I can thoroughly understand the reasons which prompted him to concealment. But now his changed position and certain other circumstances, which it is not necessary that we should talk about—"

"My dear young friend," said the doctor, laying his hand upon my arm, "we will say nothing whatever about them." I had not expected so much delicacy from him. "I can see reasons; I can see one or two reasons. The poor misguided boy! Dear me! Such prospects! This will be a blow to his lordship. Quite right and wise on the poor boy's part to make the thing known. Quite right and wise. But who is the lady? Is she—is she—anybody?"

I told him that I knew nothing whatever of Mrs. Pole's antecedents; that she looked and spoke as if she might have been a lady; but, I added, whatever her antecedents might have been, she was utterly impossible as a life-companion for her husband.

I had always known the old gentleman to be of a feeling and sympathetic turn, but I seemed now to have done him less than justice. He was very much moved indeed by the intelligence I had given him, and when we had resumed our progress westward he walked in silence for full five minutes, sighing every now and again, and shaking his head quite mournfully. After this, however, I fancied that I began to discern a sort of sad complacency in his manner, and I do not think I am far wrong in supposing that he found a compensation for this mournful news in the fact that he was authorized to spread it abroad.

"There is, of course," he said, "no possibility of a mistake in this? You understand, John, that if this story is to be repeated it must be no guess-work."

I told him anew that Pole himself desired the fact to be made known, and parted from him shortly afterward with a feeling that I had been unwarrantably meddling with my friend's affairs. So far as the casting abroad of the news could go, the thing was over and done with. It was quite certain, as I knew, that the intelligence would reach all for whom it was intended, and a few chance thousands outside that limited circle. As a matter of fact it was public property in a week, for the earliest precursor of the great tribe of society journals got hold of it, and printed it in a paragraph, the purposed mystery of which blinded nobody. We have grown quite accustomed nowadays to the invasion of what used to be called the sanctity of private life; but at this time the publication of this kind of detail was new in our experience, and Pole and I were not unnaturally angry at it.

It served Pole's purpose in one marked way, however, inasmuch as it brought under Mr. Goldsmith's notice the fact that all attempt to preserve secrecy had been abandoned, and so took one weapon out of hands which were not likely to be overscrupulous. It did this very completely, for the final line of the paragraph ran thus: "It is a significant fact that the husband has himself decided to publish the news of the marriage he has hitherto so successfully concealed." I thought it probable at the time that the writer might not altogether know of what the fact was significant, and I have since remarked that the journalistic capacity for indicating significances and incapacity for actually seeing them are a part of the newspaper man's mental outfit.

When once I had set the news afloat I became actually tormented by the desire to know how it was received in Cromwell Terrace. The very force of my sympathy served to keep me away for a week or two, and I felt so awkward about the whole melancholy business that, if it had not been for Clara's presence in the house, I should probably have avoided Mr. Delamere's residence forever. I have said nothing of the progress of my own personal affairs during the last month or two, and yet that progress was noticeable and rapid. Looking back to almost any period of life, and taking up any thread of existence, it is curious to notice how the contemplation of that one line will, for the moment, belittle the others. By dint of thinking of it you may make almost any episode of your life look disproportionately large; and I suppose that one of the

chief difficulties to be surmounted in the relation of one's own history is provided by this very tendency. I will be careful at least not to exaggerate one line. To go back to all those tender hopes and foolish fears, to recall them for but a minute or two in the silence of my own study, is at once to make them dominate all other incidents and feelings in my remembrance of the time. Pole was my friend, and I shall not easily be persuaded that many men have found a friend more entirely and devotedly at their service in heart and deed. But, after all, he occupied but a mere corner of my life, and every other nook and cranny of it was crammed full of Clara.

I have it on the authority of my wife that I might have spared myself all the ecstasies of despair in which at this time I reveled. I respond by declaring that, though I might have wished to escape them then, I should have been a most mistaken man to do it. Curious! How one looks back from the haven of middle age, where no tempest can toss the heart's bark on that vexed ocean any more, and thinks how enviable that despairing, wrecked, and drowning mariner really was! What happy, fairy islands of safety sprung up sometimes in mid-ocean, when the tempest was at its loudest! What gleams of heavenly blue broke through the dividing storm! Everybody but the most insensible knows these things, everybody loves to recall them. The love-stories of purely fictitious personages make up ninety per cent. of the world's literature, and one finds, now and again, the most elderly, sober-minded, and commonplace old people renewing their own youth in a pretty, rose-colored No Man's Land which has Jack and Jill for inhabitants.

These sentimental reflections will have made it clear to any person of average discernment that a prolonged absence from the house graced by Miss Grantley's presence was impossible to the present writer. He stayed away, this present writer, until he could stay away no longer; a full ten days, as I remember, and then, with a transparent pretense of having some reason apart from the only one he acted on, he made a call.

I had seemed to be guilty of an impertinence in speaking of Pole's affairs, though he had authorized me to do it; but the sense I felt then of my own insolent intrusiveness was not a thousandth part so strong as that which suddenly assailed me when I saw Miss Delamere. A great change had fallen upon her. Her beauty had never been of the robustest order, but now, to my terror and sorrow, she had grown shadowy, so pale and ethereal she looked. She smiled with all her accustomed sweetness when she shook hands with me. There was not the

faintest hint of any expression in her face which asked for pity, and yet I knew that she had passed through a time of dreadful trouble. I have had intuitions enough in my time to know that they can be true, and to be certain that they can be absurd. Yet not even the after-proof of knowledge added or could add to the certainty of her love for Pole, which at that instant flooded and filled my mind. I knew it, and I was, beyond expression, ashamed of myself for knowing it.

I contrived, in a roundabout way, to inquire if Miss Grantley were at home, and learned that she was out on a visit to some old friends of her mother's in the neighborhood. I do not think now that there was any intention in Miss Delamere's manner, but I thought so then; and between my own shyness and my pity for her I fell into a state of complete discomfort. Under these conditions, even the arrival of Jones was a thing to be welcomed. He came in with Mr. Delamere; and Mary, taking out some trifle of embroidery, assumed an abstracted air, and feigned to be closely occupied with it. I suppose it is not easy for a woman of brains and sensibility to throw her whole soul into the contemplation of stitches, and it was very evident to me that, however closely she might seem to be engaged upon her task, she followed the talk which took place among us.

Mr. Delamere was unusually magnificent that evening. He had an air of having done, or undertaken to do, some act of Christian magnanimity toward somebody, and was full of pitying condescensions to the world at large. Jones was in something of the same mood, but in him it was tempered by a rare hilarity.

"I suppose," said Mr. Delamere, "that there could be nothing more stupid than to be angry at stupidity. There is a sense in which patience is the best of the virtues. A wise discrimination lies at the root of a virtuous patience. One is not angry because a fifty-six-pound shot has not the lightness of a feather, or because a feather has not the ponderosity of the shot. In fine, one accepts things."

Jones smiled at this.

"One accepts things," he said, "on one of two conditions."

"Your conditions?" demanded Mr. Delamere, leaning back in his chair and setting the tips of his fingers delicately together.

"That the things accepted should be either unavoidable or in themselves acceptable."

They were both clever men, Delamere and Jones, but they were a weariness to my flesh and spirit. They would sit for

hours solemnly trotting out for one another's admiration their commonplaces of the philosophical copy-book, until I tingled from head to foot. It seemed to me that the kind of converse they took delight in was either not very acceptable in itself or quite unalterable, and I knew that they were working their way toward the question of Pole's marriage just as well as they did.

"Human nature," said Mr. Delamere, with that air of catholic wisdom and plenary allowance which is of all human aspects the most irritating and hateful to my mind—"human nature is a poor, mixed thing."

"Subtly compounded, sir," said Jones; "subtly compounded."

"Solomon touches it," said Delamere. "The fly in the ointment; the fly in the ointment. One may have known a man for years—have watched him, have analyzed him, boasted to one's self one's understanding of him, when there comes some unlooked-for injection, and the chemical character of the whole human mass is changed. Now, for instance—"

Miss Delamere was busy at her embroidery and I at a little distance sat watching her as I listened. She had looked up once, and until now once only, and then our eyes had encountered. A glance need not endure long to express many things, and for a very little space of time indeed, while she was unconscious of my gaze, her own expressed a most mournful lassitude and despondency; but becoming aware of me she gave one of her bright, customary smiles of recognition, and went back to her embroidery. Now again, at this "for instance" of her father's, she looked up from her work, her forehead faintly knitted, and her whole face pained and puzzled.

"For instance," Delamere went on, not noticing her, but turning with a gracious condescension upon me, "this affair of your friend Pole's, Denham. I rather pride myself, not altogether, as I fancy, without reason, upon being something of a judge of character. I should have supposed your friend Pole to have been a man whose whole instincts would have been diametrically opposed to the facts as we now know them. I should have regarded any such union as he has formed as being quite outside the sphere of possibility for him."

"May one ask," said Jones, "what virtues Mr. Pole was specially gifted with, which would have seemed to make this step impossible for him?"

"In the first place," said Delamere, "no man of lofty honor can contract a secret marriage. I had supposed Pole to be a man of lofty honor."

I said, in something like a tone of challenge, I am afraid, that Pole was a man of lofty honor. I added, warmly, that I knew no man whose code of honor was purer, or who better acted up to it. Before I had well spoken I was angrier with myself for having done so than I was at the stupidity of the pair who could not see that they were sticking pins and needles into the heart of their silent listener.

Mr. Delamere raised his glasses in a way that indicated that he was not to be disturbed from his own philosophical serenity by the intrusion of any inferior intelligence upon his sphere of thought. The observation of this helped to cool me a little, for it threw a touch of humor into my thoughts; and though the humor was a little bitter it was more agreeable than mere anger.

"A man who contracts a secret marriage," pursued Delamere, "necessarily imposes himself upon society under false pretenses. A man with such a tie upon him has no right to go into the world and move about in it as though he were unfettered. In a country whose social institutions resemble those of England—in a country, that is to say, where young people of both sexes meet and mingle in a constant innocent freedom of intercourse, and where marriages are made, not by the maneuvering of parents, but chiefly by the choice and free-will of the contracting parties, the secret marriage of a young man of wealth and position amounts to nothing less than a crime against society. You, or you," he turned from Jones to me, and addressed us each in turn, "may be excused for supposing that a young lady in her choice of an associate for life ought not to be actuated by pecuniary consideration, or influenced by rank. I do not stop to consider now whether a young lady should or should not permit her mind to be influenced by wealth and rank. I content myself by affirming that the very large majority are as a matter of fact so influenced."

I felt bound for two reasons, one of which was a great deal stronger than the other, to take a part in the talk and to fight Pole's battle. The first reason, though it counted very little for the moment, was founded on the friendship he and I had for one another. The second and the stronger was this: if I kept silence I was in danger of appearing to give a special significance to Delamere's attack, and I was afraid that his daughter might attribute my silence to a fear of hurting her. So, in my guilty knowledge of her own sad secret, I had to take my share in wounding her in order not to wound.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Delamere," I said, with as respectful an air as I could muster, "but you forget that Pole him-

self divulged the secret, just as soon as wealth and rank seemed to be coming his way. What his reasons for concealment were at first I do not pretend to know, but you argue what you do know into what you can't know in judging of a man as in judging of anything. Pole is a man of high honor—*ergo*, Pole had nothing dishonorable in his mind when he kept his marriage secret under conditions of which we are ignorant."

I was so placed that I could see Miss Delamere's face in the mirror, and I caught a look of gratitude for my defense of my friend.

"I, for one," said Mr. Delamere, coldly, "am not inclined to be overstrained in my ideal of social duty, but I think your friend's conduct inexcusable. Do you happen to know, Denham," he asked, a moment later, "who is the—the person he has married?"

I answered in the negative, looking as natural and unembarrassed as I could. Was it possible, I asked myself, that he could be blind to his daughter's pallor and languor and ignorant of their cause? Every word we spoke must have been a pain to her, but nothing could be so painful as to guess that I knew of what she suffered. The two complacent philosophers went on, and I was compelled to look as stupid as they were in fact. My only chance for tact lay in seeming quite tactless, and I succeeded well enough to disarm suspicion in Miss Delamere's mind.

"For my own part," she said, quietly and with complete self-possession, "I think Mr. Pole very much to be pitied. I do not know if he is to be blamed as well. That is quite possible, of course, but I don't think it very probable."

"My dear Mary," returned her father, "it is very necessary that you should form just views upon such a question as this. What are the conceivable reasons for a clandestine marriage? First, a *mésalliance* on one side or the other. Next, an evasion of authority on one side or the other. Then consider that the deceit is carried into life, and becomes a part of it. No, no; I can not conceive of a secret marriage as the act of a high-minded man. I can understand, Denham, that you find the theme a painful one, and I admit that it would be quixotic to quarrel with a friend who will one day be able so favorably to influence your own career."

I suppose it really would have been quixotic to have closed Delamere's doors against myself by resenting his implied opinion of the value of my friendship. Any way I kept silence, though Jones's smile of assent almost forced me to unclose my lips. I had hardly ever been so angry in my life as this dull

couple made me, but fortunately there came a diversion, and the question was laid on one side. Miss Grantley came in, and after a time, Delamere challenging Jones to a game at chess, they retired together to the smoking-room; and a little later Mary, gathering her belongings into a little basket of quilted silk-work, slipped from the room, leaving us together for a time.

Clara and I had come to that stage in which young people are aware already of what is uppermost in each other's minds and are forced into an unusual air of *camaraderie* and freedom. We talked with great gayety, with grisly silences between, and would rather break these pauses by any kind of nonsense than leave them to grow intolerable.

"You used constantly to talk of your friend Mr. Pole, Mr. Denham," said Clara, in one such moment of extremity. "You have not spoken of him all the evening."

"We were talking of him at the moment of your arrival," I answered. "Mr. Delamere spoke very angrily of him, and I defended him."

"You ought not to have defended him," she answered, warmly. "I think he has behaved—"

She went no further, but it was enough for confirmation.

"I can not see," I answered, "that he behaved ill in any way. I know that he is profoundly unhappy, though he allows nobody to see it."

"A man may be unhappy," she rejoined; "but he has no right—" And there she paused again.

I was guilty of an indiscretion, but I can find ample excuses for myself.

"No right to do what?" I asked. She gave no answer. "No right to make others unhappy? Do you think, Miss Grantley, that he ever guessed it? He is not a coxcomb who goes about in fear of breaking ladies' hearts."

"You say very odd things, Mr. Denham," she answered, with an air of fine simplicity, and the most barefaced pretense of not understanding me, and of having offered no provocation for this outburst. "I am not likely to be brought to your opinion of Mr. Pole. I think him very horrid."

"You are quite wise not to understand me," I answered, and turned the conversation. She was content to escape from her own share of the responsibility of entering upon it, but as our intimacy grew this broken beginning of confidence was taken up again. I don't know at this day how our own courtship would have grown if it had not been for the unhappy heart-affairs of Pole and Mary Delamere. We should have

found some other way to sympathy, no doubt, but, as it happened, that was the road we traveled. Her love for Mary and my affection for Pole led us back to the theme a thousand times, and by and by we talked of it openly to each other and with no pretense of disguise. She was Mary Delamere's one confidante, and even she, it seems, was left to guess a prodigious deal more than she was told. Of course I knew we were a sinfully indiscreet and curious young couple to talk of the affairs of others as we did; but then we had countless examples, and we were on such a footing of intimacy that we had no secrets from each other, with the exception of one which was rather less of a secret to our world at large then even to ourselves.

CHAPTER XIV.

JONES, who in Pole's phrase came Sebastian Dolmering into my chambers pretty often, came down one day about a month after the disclosure in a more than commonly sprightly humor. I had never liked him from the first hour, but he seemed to be altogether unconscious of a want of friendly warmth on my part, and was himself so uniformly amiable that it was impossible to quarrel with him. There was indeed nothing special about which we could have quarreled. Jones was a humbug, but then there are so many humbugs in the world that if a man took it upon himself to quarrel with all of them whom he encountered he would have his hands full. The sterner sort of moralist may, if he pleases, decline to hold intercourse with all men who do not come up to his own lofty standard. The average creature, conscious of his own imperfections, must rub along with such society as he can get, and take folks as he finds them. Considering how very little Jones ever cared for me, and considering that I had at best a dormant contempt for Jones, it was really remarkable to see how well we got on together.

He was always wonderfully attired, and his appointments were as finished and natty as those of the finest fine lady. He used to smoke cigarettes of scented tobacco bound in rose-colored paper, and he carried about him numberless little knick-knacks for personal use. One of his favorite occupations was to polish his nails, and for that purpose he carried about with him a tiny gold-plated box of some sort of powder and a little pad of leather. He would polish and polish while he talked of art and the destinies of humanity and other noble and inspiring themes, and would make his shining nails gleam this way

and that way by turning them against the light, and would admire them with his head on one side, while he paused for a descriptive phrase or rounded a denunciatory period.

Early in our acquaintance I used to have almost unconquerable impulses to assault Jones while he aired these engaging little ways of his. But in awhile they ceased to exasperate, and in a little while further began to amuse, and then to soothe. It was consolatory to reflect that in the depth of one's daily descents into imbecility one never fell to that; so that at the most despondent moments Jones came as a sort of invigorator, toning the moral system, and bringing encouragement to the feeble.

On this particular day he came in, as I have said, in an unusually sprightly humor. He cracked a gentle joke or two, and that bespoke the very highest spirits in him, an almost reckless abandonment to gayety. As a rule, Jones was afraid of a joke, and would almost as soon have sat in the same room with a humorist as with a mixed barrel of lucifer matches and fire-works. Pole, for instance, who had much more of a habit of thinking than of talking humorously, made Jones uncomfortable by his very aspect. He looked dangerous. There was never any knowing when, and in what direction, he might explode, and Jones's mental parlor was trim and decorous, and full of fragile curios. He had no liking for the exhibition of catherine-wheels and sky-rockets in that delicately furnished but limited inclosure.

I told him how bright he looked, and how uncommonly gay he was, and he smiled back, well pleased, pulling off his pretty lemon-colored gloves in the finest and most lady-like manner. He examined his finger-nails with scrupulous exactitude, smiled in the mirror to inspect his teeth, arranged his hair with a few dexterous feminine coaxings of the palms and fingers, and then lighted one of his pretty little cigarettes, and sat down. I was positively pleased to see him. For the first time I realized for myself the peculiar nature of his charm.

I felt it at once a duty and a privilege to make the most of him, and I tried to start him upon the question of the proposed revolution in the cut and color of evening-dress. Here he disappointed me. He spoke of it with a fervor which was too obviously unreal. The stream was too far from its source, and it flowed with a mournful paucity and languor. I tried to start him on the larger theme of the regeneration of the soul by means of Japanese lacquer and the best Dresden. Even here he would not dance to my piping with anything of his accustomed spirit and agility. In fine, it became evident

that there was something upon Jones's mind, and in awhile, after a circuitous fashion, it came out.

"Strange," said Jones, after a pause of some duration, "how closely the development of the individual soul follows the laws which govern the development of the inert conglomerate mass."

I assented, and, like Brer Rabbit, I lay low, and waited.

"Conditions," said Jones, "which even an acute observer would suppose to be permanent turn out to be transitory. When one says permanent," he added, with his explanatory air, which was always delightfully comforting to his listener's *amour propre*, "one doesn't use the word, of course, with any pretense to scientific accuracy. Permanence, like other conditions, is only relative, and is impossible in the abstract."

I said that it was very nice to know this; and Jones, who was too firmly seated on horseback to take note of any pebble in his conversational charger's track, rode on unregardful.

"I had supposed myself to be fully convinced upon one or two social questions upon which I now discover that my mind has undergone a change, imperceptible to myself in its processes, and yet radical."

I said that I was very pleased to hear it, I was sure; and he went on, taking no more note of me than if he had been the hero in a Greek drama and I the chorus.

"Take, for instance," said Jones, delicately, "the question of marriage. I am not, as a matter of course, so mad or so blind as to attach any value to the absurd sanctions of the Church or the fallacious conclusions of society."

I was quite sure that Jones was superior to those feeblenesses, and I said as much with warmth. For the first time he took notice of me, and seemed gratified by this testimonial.

At this moment Pole, who had been back from Worborough Court a week or two, strolled in without announcement of himself, and took a seat with one leg on either side a chair and his elbows on the back of it. He nodded to each of us, but said nothing. Jones, I thought, was momentarily disconcerted by the sight of him, but went on directly, with some exaggeration of his best lady-like tone and manner.

"Yet," he continued, "I have begun to think of late that it is not well too suddenly to combat the preconceptions of average mankind. One can, of course, use satire, but it needs to be delicate and veiled, and the average man is, I fancy, unsusceptible to satire."

"There are people," I ventured to say at this juncture, see-

ing that Jones was perhaps a little unsteady in his seat to his own fancy and needed bolstering there—"there are people on whom satire produces little effect. Some of them are clever in a way; rooted fools by nature, who bear a weedy little blossom of wit, and suppose themselves to flower all over, like rhododendrons in the season."

"There," said Jones, "you touch the very men I have in mind. The average stupid man is not half so bad to deal with as the man who bears that single flower of wit you speak of. For my own part, I am a bit of a philosopher. I am not merely open to conviction, which is the first attitude of common sense, but I am willing to give and take, to pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, even to the false deity of popular convention. I am willing to concede that though by lending the force of one's example to a doubtful practice one may delay the hour of its abolition, yet it is possible to subscribe to a social usage if it should not be too harmful to the general interest, and, having subscribed to it, still hold the right of holding up one's testimony against it. Marriage," he continued, passing his hand through his lustrous Italian locks, and dividing them tenderly, "has become precisely one of those questions to my mind, though a little while ago I should scarcely have thought such an allowance possible or desirable."

"He has come in out of the desert," said Pole. "He has consented to be taken in and curry-combed."

I do not think that the Rev. Laurence Sterne was likely to be one of Jones's literary favorites, and so it is possible that the true *nuance* of Pole's allusion escaped him. He went on, apparently unmoved.

"There are men," he said, "so pachydermatous by nature, and by cultivation or the want of it, that they are not to be touched by any shaft of reason."

"You might," said Pole, "explode a fifty-six-pound shell in the interior of some of them and they'd go on quite calmly without the merest notion that anything had happened."

Jones assented, cordially.

"Upon my word," he said, "there are people of that pattern. But, for my own part, as I said before, I am open to conviction. I am willing to give and take."

"I am willing," said Pole, who was evidently in a bitter humor, and ready to relieve himself by any persiflage which might occur to him, "to take anything I can lay my hands on."

Jones cast a sideway glance of friendly allowance at him.

"In this matter of marriage," he pursued, "the whole

question, as a matter of course, is a matter of contract. There are two personalities to be considered, and the stronger has, by reason of its very strength, a right to be allowing and indulgent to the weaker vessel."

I knew that there was nothing in Jones's speech up till now to give me the merest hint of the intention he was trying in his own roundabout way to express. But that phrase about the weaker vessel hit me hard I had used it to Pole by hazard, and it was its employment which had led to the explanation between us. I looked at Pole nervously, but he had evidently allowed it to pass without notice, as was only natural. I was so certain in my own mind of the truth of my own fancy, and was so embarrassed by it, that I began at once to move about the room as if the conversation had reached a natural end, and there was no more to say. But Pole, having no share in my fancies and no divination of them, carried on the theme. He had grown very mocking and bitter of late, even with me, though never against me.

"I suppose," he said, looking at Jones, "you haven't been so cruel as to make the tidings of your conversion public property?"

"So cruel?" said Jones, inquiringly.

"So cruel," answered Pole. "You haven't awakened expectations in a million tender bosoms which can only be fulfilled for one?" Jones said nothing, but smilingly lighted a new cigarette, and cast the remnant of the old one into the fire. "You're going to get married, Jones?" Pole went on. "I say, Denham, there's a public-house at the corner. Let's go down, all three of us, and drink a pot of stout apiece to the health of Jones's future missis."

"Upon my word, Pole," said Jones, "one would hardly think that you had been bred a gentleman."

"We're all of the same base metal, Jones," Pole answered, "but the electroplate gets rubbed off some of us. There's an *épergne* belonging to a bachelor uncle of mine in which all the cherub's noses are flat with their faces, though they are made of solid silver. I dare say they had the prettiest outlines once upon a time. There's no knowing what even you may come to. When I contrast what you are with what you might have been, and what you may be, I could weep, upon my word of honor."

It seemed to me so very probable that Jones would by and by become aware of Pole's intention to insult him, and the intention in itself was so very obvious to me, that I feigned suddenly to remember an appointment. At this, Jones got up to

go, and I left with him, bidding him good-bye at the end of the court, and darting into Chancery Lane as if in a mighty hurry. When the threatened quarrel was averted I was still very far from being at ease; and though I tried to attach no more value to my fancies than I could help, they clung to me with a ridiculous persistence. They worried me so much at last that, when I had dined alone, I betook myself to Cromwell Terrace. Mr. Delamere was dining out that evening, and Mary and Clara were alone together. When we had talked for a little while, our hostess slipped away, as she had got into a habit of doing, and left the two young people to themselves.

I had no ground to go on, but the question was so near my heart that I must needs approach it.

"Mr. Jones," I said, as lightly as I could, "honored my rooms this afternoon."

"Pray," returned Clara, with an acerbity and decision I had never noticed in her till then, "don't talk to me of Mr. Jones. I have heard enough of Mr. Jones to last my lifetime."

In spite of this command I ventured to ask if Jones had distinguished himself in such a way of late as to earn this marked increase of her displeasure.

"Now, Mr. Denham," said Miss Grantley, decisively, "I want you to understand that I shall look upon any pressure on this point as being unfriendly. I am literally dying to tell you all about it, and if you press me I shall give way. I know I shall, and I know that I ought not to. I'm sure that you are not the man to endanger a poor girl's self-respect."

Whether the reader chooses to believe it or not, I accepted this as a prohibition, and found another theme for converse. But Miss Grantley fidgeted, and if one can say it of so gentle a creature, grew absolutely snappish. The dull, inapprehensive male intelligence was at a loss. I was meek and submissive, but full of doubts and wonders, not guessing what I could possibly have done to ruffle a temper commonly so gentle.

"You are very stupid this evening, Mr. Denham," she said, with a voice of dreary resignation.

"Am I?" I answered. "I am afraid I am. You seem vexed. What have I done to vex you?"

I went on to say that I would rather do a variety of particularized things than cause her a moment's annoyance. She relented and explained, though still with a lingering touch of ill-humor.

"I tell you," she said, "that I am dying to tell you something, and I tell you that I ought not to say anything about it."

"You begged me not to press you," I answered, "and I did not."

"Precisely," she said, dropping back into a corner of the sofa in a sort of languid, comic despair.

"Oh!" I said, beginning to be enlightened, "I ought to have asked? I ought to have pressed you?" A gleam of returning cheerfulness displayed itself in her countenance, and was instantly dismissed. "Let me beg of you to tell me," I implored, with mock earnestness. "I am consumed by curiosity. If you refuse this prayer I can not answer for the consequences."

"In that case," she replied, demurely, "I can reveal my secret. I can not bear to see a fellow-creature suffer."

She clasped her hands, and, leaning forward, murmured, with a subdued intensity of scorn:

"Mr. Jones has had the insolence to propose to Mary Delamere."

"I hope with all my heart," said I, "that Miss Delamere will not throw herself away upon him."

"I told her, when I heard of it," said this resolute young person, who was sprouting this evening with unexpected characteristics, "that I would never speak to her again if she did. There was not the slightest need to say so, for Mary has no more thought of uniting herself to that tinkling cymbal than I have."

I confess that I was not in the least sorry for Jones's blighted hopes. I did not think that any purpose he might form was likely to take great hold upon him. His sentiments were not of the sort that plant a terrible fixed foot, and are not rooted up without blood. I could fancy Jones deserting any sandy anchorage he might find, and getting under way, with little compunction or regret, for other shores.

"Mary," said Clara, decisively, but with a touch of very warm and very real sympathy, "has troubles enough of her own and to spare already. As for what they are, that is no business of yours or mine or anybody's. I don't know, I'm sure, how such a girl came to have such a father. Mr. Delamere is wrapped up in his precious godson. They sit together, and the Sounding Brass flatters the Tinkling Cymbal, and the Tinkling Cymbal flatters the Sounding Brass, until I declare that my fingers itch to box the ears of both of them. I give you my word of honor, Mr. Denham," she concluded, with an air of deep contrition, "there are moments when the contemplation of that pair makes me feel quite unlady-like."

I had never allowed myself so much latitude of expression

with respect to Messrs. Delamere and Jones, but I accepted Miss Grantley's description with such cordiality that she was encouraged to continue.

"We have had a lecture from papa this morning," she said. "It was my privilege to hear it." She assumed, upon a sudden, so ludicrous a resemblance to the Delamere voice and manner that I laughed aloud. I saw the dangled *pince-nez* swinging to and fro in the imitative fingers. It perched at times with a solemn grace upon the pert and pretty little nose, which somehow, to my wonderment, contrived for the moment to look like the aristocratically refined beak of the great critic. But the words to me were the richest part of the imitation. "Strange," she began, in the Delamere voice, "how closely the development of the individual soul follows the laws which govern the development of the inert conglomerate mass."

"Wait, wait!" I cried. "Allow me. Conditions," I pursued, "which even an acute observer would suppose to be permanent turn out to be transitory. When one says permanent, one does not use the word, of course, with any pretense of scientific accuracy."

Her eyes glittered, and she rose to her feet, dancing in a very revel of mirth.

"He has been with you this afternoon," she said. "He has poured all this out upon you. Oh, they're delicious. They make me so angry that I feel ashamed and wicked. But oh! I wouldn't miss them for the world!"

On the very top of this declaration Jones entered smilingly. I blessed my stars for his sake that he had not arrived a moment earlier. He had the run of the house, and came in and out like a member of the family, so that perhaps it was a little dangerous to discuss him with too much freedom there. Miss Grantley's mirth was changed by a sudden transformation. To have looked at her a second after Jones's arrival, one would have supposed her incapable of merriment.

"Miss Delamere?" said Jones, in his silvery voice, smiling from one to the other of us.

"I believe," replied Miss Grantley, with a sudden overwhelming stateliness, "that Miss Delamere has retired to her own room. I think it is not her intention to return again this evening. I wish you good-night, Mr. Denham."

With that she sailed from the apartment, leaving Jones and myself looking at each other a trifle foolishly.

CHAPTER XV.

THE winter had been unusually severe, and the spring seemed to delay itself unconscionably. Every week the newspapers recorded the death of some elderly celebrity. Fog, rain, protracted frost, east winds, made havoc among the old and feeble. Lord Worborough was going. The impending title and great fortune hung over Pole, it would have seemed, like a threatening shadow. I am certain that he was so far from desiring either of them that if he could have seen a reasonable way of evading them he would willingly have taken it. Twice he went down to Worborough Court, and each time spent a week there in expectation of the old man's demise. His lordship rallied, and Pole came back again, melancholy and bitter. He told me, at a moment when his mood was a little less harsh than it had grown commonly to be in those days, that Lord Worborough laid that unhappy marriage very much to heart. He was the seventh holder of the title, and had hoped that it would be transmitted through a long line.

"It's a dream," said Pole. "It doesn't matter much to him, poor old fellow. Whether the line may be extended or cut short will make no difference to him when he is tucked away under his green bed-clothes."

He spoke very affectionately of the old man always, and to any one who had seen them together it was evident that his lordship, however disappointed he might be, had formed a very strong liking for the man who was to come after him.

It was raining heavens hard one memorable afternoon late in April, when Pole and I sat reading together, or making a pretense to read, in his chambers. A knock sounded at the door, and I, being the nearer of the two, rose to open it. The visitor, of all unexpected men in the world, was the little Jew solicitor, Goldsmith. He wore a mackintosh shining with rain from heel to shoulder, and carried a drippling umbrella in his hand. There was a very unusual and remarkable expression in his face, a look which impressed me very strongly, though I could neither analyze nor define it. He was pale, and laboring under some strongly suppressed excitement. He might, by the look of him, have been going to be hanged.

He walked past me into the room, leaving his umbrella in the stand, and when I had closed the door and entered after him, he was standing beside Pole, who, with an expression of surprised disdain, was looking at him over one shoulder.

"Well," said Pole, curtly and contemptuously, "what is your business?"

"Bister Pole," said Goldsmith, whose breathing was hard and thick, like that of a man who has been running beyond his pace, "there are moments when rancor comes to nothing betweed gentlemen."

"Are there, indeed?" asked Pole.

"There are, indeed," Goldsmith responded.

The little Jew's aspect had an influence upon Pole, as I could see plainly. He rose with an indefinable look, and, wheeling his chair half round, rested one knee upon the seat, and with both hands grasping the back, surveyed the intruder.

"I suppose," he said, "that you have some sort of business here. Will you be good enough to get it over?"

For sole answer Goldsmith, with trembling fingers, began to unbutton his wet water-proof. The noise of his breathing, the ticking of a clock upon the mantel-piece, and the clatter of a burning coal which fell upon the fender, were the only audible sounds. Either Goldsmith's agitation made him clumsy, or the buttons of the water-proof were unusually refractory. He conquered them at last, and, producing a pocket-book from an inner pocket, he advanced a step or two and laid it on the table. It opened with a spring clasp, and revealed a bulky mass of paper. His agitated fingers wandered among these, leaving wet marks upon them, until at last he selected one from the rest, opened it, and laid it upon the table before Pole. I looked at Pole's face, and saw a sudden dreadful change in it. He glanced from the paper to Goldsmith, from Goldsmith to me, and back to the paper again, like a man dazed by a blow upon the head. Then recovering, he took the paper—a long blue slip—in both hands, and stared at it for a minute. After this he stretched it out to me, saying nothing.

Goldsmith's strained manner, and Pole's extraordinary reception of the document, had prepared me to find curious matter in it, but I had not in the least expected what I saw. It was a copy of the certificate of the death of Adelaide Pole. I looked at the date, and saw that the event had happened a week ago.

"She seebs," said Goldsmith, who was more moved than I should have fancied possible about such a matter, "to have gone off very quietly at the finish, poor thing."

I glanced at the certificate again, and saw that spinal injury and shock were assigned as the causes of death. Pole took the paper from my fingers, and sat down, as if to study it. The

certificate rustled in his hands, and in a little while he laid it on the table and looked up at Goldsmith.

"How is it," he asked, "that I did not learn of this before?"

Goldsmith, before answering, turned over the papers from his pocket-book and selected another from among them. His hands trembling more than ever, and his face was curiously mottled.

"I was in the country when the thing took place, Bister Pole," he said, in a choked voice, "I was going about from one town to another on business, and my letters got delayed. I didn't hear of the melancholy circubstance till four days after it occurred. Then I dispatched this telegram to my chief clerk. I only got back to town this morning. I thought it was best to bring the news personally."

Pole took the telegram the little Jew extended to him, and, having glanced over it, handed it to me. It ran thus: "Moss, 215 Hatton Garden. From Goldsmith, Chester. Let funeral be decently conducted. Will myself communicate with husband."

"This," said Goldsmith, fumbling anew among his papers and selecting a third document, "is the certificate of burial. I don't know, Bister Pole, whether you'd care to have any sort of memorial set up, or whether you'll take that into your own hands?"

His voice grew more muffled and tremulous as he spoke, and he had some ado to gather up the papers he had scattered about the table. I had never expected to find such sensibility in the man, and I thought that his emotion did him credit. It was quite possible that he might have supposed Mrs. Pole to be a deeply injured woman, and that in the course of the services he had rendered her he had grown to be a partisan. The poor thing had no doubt told her story to her own advantage, had exculpated herself, and cast all blame upon her husband. That, of course, was natural, and it was not unnatural that Goldsmith should have believed in her, and have been shocked and grieved at her sudden and early death. He must at least, I thought, have cared vastly more for her than the ordinary solicitor cares for an ordinary client.

He had gathered his belongings together, and stood prepared to go. Pole had risen to his feet, and was walking slowly and thoughtfully up and down the room.

"There's a mere matter of business, Bister Pole," said Goldsmith, haltingly, "if I might bedtion it at such a tibe. I've sent your check for Mrs. Pole's quarterly income to my

bankers in the ordinary course. The poor lady only drew on me for a fortnight, and there'll be something left when everything is paid. I'll send in my account, and a check for the balance. I wish you good-afternoon, Bister Pole—good-afternoon, Bister Denham."

We both returned his parting salutation, and Pole's voice had a tone of unusual gentleness in it, almost of apology. The little Jew went his way, and we were left to ourselves.

For a long time not a word was spoken—I dare say, indeed, that we sat in silence for an hour. Pole had mechanically taken up his book again, and sat staring at the open pages; but he never turned a leaf. When at last he looked up at me his eyes were moist, and there was a softened look in his face.

"Jack," he said, "will you come out with me?"

I answering in the affirmative, he promised to join me in five minutes, and I went down-stairs to my own rooms, and there made ready for out-of-doors. It was raining in torrents, still when we turned out upon Holborn. Pole hailed a cab, and gave the cabman instructions to drive to the cemetery at Kensal Green. The rain pelted down monotonously, racing in little rivulets down the glass before us, and blotting out the landscape of the streets. We were both unusually subdued, and neither had anything to say to the other. It was too early after the receipt of the news to experience anything of that sense of relief which it was ultimately bound to bring, and for my own part I should have resented any such sensation in myself as an impiety. I thought of the poor creature's threat to Pole, "I will make your life a burden to you," and I reflected on its futility, and on the uncertainty of all human promise, whether for good or evil. Her life must needs have been profoundly wretched to have left such an impress on her face as I remembered. The certificate of death gave her age at twenty-eight years. I had supposed her to be much older, for the set scorn and hatred and hard misery of her face seemed scarcely possible for one so young. Looking back upon the face as I remembered it, it was evident that it had once been superbly handsome. I thought of youth and beauty defaced and ruined by self-will and the one vice to which the unhappy woman had clung, and now that she was gone, and could work no evil any more, I pitied that brief life-tragedy profoundly. I knew—there was no need of words between us—that Pole's thoughts ran in the same channel as my own. Once, his hand falling accidentally upon mine, he clasped it very strongly and firmly; but that was the only sign that was made on either side.

We reached the cemetery, and having made inquiries at the

lodge as to the whereabouts of the grave, we walked toward it. The rain-soaked mound of newly turned earth looked very raw and desolate. There is nothing in the world so desolate to look at as a new-made grave. I have looked on many since that day, and some of them have covered the remains of those who have been very dear to me, yet I have never felt the sense so clearly.

We turned away in silence and went home. The man at the lodge stood sheltered from the rain in his own door-way, and looked at us, I thought, a little callously. Yet, of course, it was no affair of his, and usage makes the griefs of others of little weight to us.

In my affection for Pole, and in the ardor with which I espoused his cause, I had gone as near to hating that unhappy wife of his as I had ever gone to hating anybody. But now that she could work no more mischief, my thoughts softened toward her. In the course of a day or two Pole began to talk about her in a chastened way, and it became evident that he had once held a very real affection for her. He told me, bit by bit, the whole story of their separation. It is not necessary to repeat it here, and there are too many cases like it in the world to make it novel enough to be worth the telling. The sordid, miserable history of drink and an ungovernable temper, the sorriest, meanest, ugliest of tragedies, a tale worth no man's relating and no man's hearing. He told it gently and with pity, and when it was once told we closed the page which held the story, and resolved (as we thought) to turn back to it no more.

My friend charged me with the performance of the last dues of respect, and went down to Worborough Court, leaving me alone in London. I followed the instructions he left with me, and in the meantime his letters bore but one allusion to the event of his wife's death. "Lord Worborough," he wrote, "was relieved at the news I had to give him, and I sincerely believe that the mere fact of this grief being lifted from his mind may add a year or two to his life. He has taken an extraordinary liking to me, and I could find it in my heart to wish that we had known each other longer. I shall probably spend most of my time with him now, for the old boy clings to me, and he is really such a fine and noble old fellow that I am almost as fond of him as he of me. He suffers a great deal, but he is very game about it, and altogether he is the very finest specimen of the fine old English gentleman it has been my luck to encounter anywhere. I hope he'll flourish for many a day to come."

It is not good to think of the death of any human creature being hailed, no matter with what inward reluctance, as a relief, but Mrs. Pole's departure lifted a dreadful shadow from the hearts of those who had been most concerned with her, and it would have been sheer hypocrisy to have professed to mourn her. To forgive, and then, as speedily as might be, to forget, was all she could have asked from the world.

Six or seven weeks later, when the skies had cleared, and the long-deferred early summer was upon us, shining with such a splendor as half obliterated the memory of cold and storm, I paid a second and final visit to the cemetery at Kensal Green. I had a companion—a companion too light and young for a visit to that home of mournful memories. But Clara and I had spoken so often of Pole's freedom, and in the mind of each there was so evident a result to spring from it, that she had grown as interested as I myself was; and when I made that final, necessary visit to the place to see that Pole's injunctions had been properly fulfilled, she needed little persuasion to accompany me.

When I had last seen the place it had seemed the very home of desolation; but now, with the bright May sunshine and the bright May flowers, and the chirping of innumerable birds, it had another aspect, and seemed to speak with a voice of tender reconciliation to the inevitable doom. God's Acre!

The grave was neatly railed. The new-laid turf was bright and green, and flowers shone above it and diffused their gentle odors. The stone bore a simple inscription—"In Memory of Adelaide Pole"—then the date of death and the age, and below the three words, "Here is Rest!" Rest was possible for the living as well as for the dead, and I suppose that Pole had chosen that brief inscription with some eye to its double meaning.

As we had walked together I had related to Clara, as far as I could do without shocking her, the story Pole had told me. She had been very strongly prejudiced against him, and had been more inclined to champion the wife's cause than the husband's. I had ventured to hint shyly of my certainty of Pole's affections for Miss Delamere, and I went so far as to indicate my belief that the affection was returned. We were both saddened and solemnized by our visit to the place, and yet there was a sense of our own affection in our minds. My wife has told me, long ago, that she was certain, even before that day, of my love for her, and I remember well a sort of trembling certainty of hers. We walked about the place of graves in the

sunshine with our own hearts beating to that eternal, beautiful tune to whose music the whole world marches. It was more solemn than it often sounds, and gentler, but it sounded all the same.

I pleaded Pole's cause with her. It was unlikely that he would speak for a long time to come, but I begged her not to use any influence she might have with Miss Delamere against him.

"If she cares for him," I urged, "you can only grieve her, but can never change her mind." And, standing before the tombstone, I appealed to her. "There is rest here," I said. "Let the living have rest as well."

She answered, in a subdued voice:

"I believe that Mary cared for him before she knew of his unhappy marriage. I believe that she will never care for anybody else. I am quite sure that nothing any one could say could alter her, for she is not a girl to be moved by anybody's words."

"Then, at least," I answered, "you will say nothing that could give her pain. There is no higher-minded, nobler-hearted man in the world than Pole."

"Why should I say a word to hurt her?" she asked me. "She is the dearest friend I have in the world."

CHAPTER XVI.

CALLING one evening at Cromwell Terrace, about a fortnight after the incident just recorded, I found Miss Delamere alone. I had not the slightest doubt in the world that she understood perfectly well the reasons for my frequent visits there, and yet I was too shy to ask if Clara were at home. She held me mischievously in suspense for a time.

"Do you know," she asked, at length, "that we have a visitor here? A lady arrived this afternoon to whom I expect you to pay great attentions. I want you very much to impress her favorably. In point of fact," she added, laughingly, "I expect you to pay court to her with great assiduity."

I said something to the effect that her wishes were likely to be disappointed; but she shook her head at this, with a perfect decision of certainty.

"You will no sooner have seen this lady," she told me, "than you will make love to her. You will endeavor, by every means in your power, to ingratiate yourself in her favor."

"Because you wish it?" I inquired.

"Not in the least because I wish it," she answered enigmatically, "though I do wish it, all the same."

While I was still wondering who this visitor might be, and for what object I was expected to be unusually polite and amiable to her, the door opened, and Clara entered with her arm about the waist of a lady of five-and-forty, whom I at once recognized from her portrait and from her likeness to Clara. Mrs. Grantley had snow-white hair, and at a little distance looked much older than she really was. But she had bright eyes, perfect teeth, and a dazzling natural complexion which made her, when seen near at hand, look much younger than she really was. She had something of the air of a pretty woman of eight-and-twenty masquerading as a matron.

I was introduced to her, and was cordially enough received, though the politeness of her demeanor barely seemed to cover the particular closeness of the scrutiny to which I was subjected. The bright eyes traveled swiftly and decisively all over me, and I felt as if I were being weighed in the balances, and, in all respects, found wanting. We four sat down together and talked. I was aware of a desperate attempt on the part of Clara and Miss Delamere to put me at my ease, and I am sure that if no such attempt had been made I should have got there much earlier than I did. Clara was in a state of such high good spirits, and was withal so shy and discomposed by moments, that I was sure that mamma had already been taken into confidence.

In awhile I grew to be more myself, and the remainder of the evening passed agreeably enough. I was invited to luncheon on the morrow, but I had no opportunity of seeing Clara alone that evening. She and her mother retired early while I was saying my good-byes to Miss Delamere; and Mary, who was looking brighter and happier than I had seen her for a long time, took me gently to task as to my *gaucherie* in the earlier part of the evening.

"Pray," I besought her, "never try to put me at my ease again. There is nothing in the world so disconcerting."

She laughed at this, but promised, and I went away, cheered by her assurance that I had not made an unfavorable impression. This comfortable belief did not linger long. As I walked homeward I recalled everything that had been said and done, and remembered how I had been silent in the wrong places and talkative in the wrong places. I reconstructed the whole conversation of the evening half a score of times, and came through triumphantly, delivering myself of the most profound and brilliant observations, and covering myself with

glory. Then once (to the profound astonishment of a lounging cabman on his box) I moaned aloud to think that my actual conduct had been so far removed from my ideal. I pursued this dreary and unprofitable exercise through half the night, and when I got to sleep dreamed that I had fallen so completely under the bane of Mrs. Grantley's disapproval that she was actually on her knees before Mr. Delamere, begging him, with tears, to use his influence in placing me in an asylum. Mr. Delamere declined, but Jones came suddenly from nowhere, and offered smilingly to do the thing at once, taking so evident a pleasure in it that my indignation awoke me. The satire of my dream was so far overdone that it did much to restore my equilibrium. Things would hardly come to that pass, I thought, and fell to sleep again, a little comforted.

I had never, so far as I can remember, been once assailed until now by the temptations of the demon of dandyism. But in the morning I was profoundly exercised as to my choice of garments, and I spent a good quarter of an hour among my neck-ties. When I was at last attired to my own complete dissatisfaction it was time to start, and too late to change anything.

Mrs. Grantley was just as amiable and just as watchful as she had been on the previous evening. She had impressed me from the first as a person of unusual resolution and decision; but I was hardly prepared for the exhibition of those qualities which she almost immediately afforded me.

"You and Miss Delamere," she said, addressing Clara after luncheon, "are going out shopping together? So I understood. Mr. Denham, I am sure, will be good enough to take care of me for a little time. I am going for a walk in the park, Mr. Denham."

I signified my assent with what I am afraid must have been a suspicious promptitude; but I saw Clara looking piteously at me through the glass with "clasped, petitioning hands." The glance and the attitude seemed to prophesy the ordeal to which I was about to be subjected, and for a moment I felt horribly nervous and depressed—very much, I fancy, as a physical coward would feel on being told off for a forlorn hope. In a minute or two I had rallied so far as to assure myself that Mrs. Grantley could hardly be in a greater hurry than I was to arrive at an understanding.

The girls went away together, and did not return. Mrs. Grantley disappeared for a minute only, and came back looking very young and charming, with her white hair concealed beneath her bonnet. We set out together in the early after-

noon sunshine, and talked of trifles until we reached the park. There she chose seats in a secluded place, and opened her maternal batteries at once with a self-possession which I envied, but could not imitate.

"I want to speak to you, Mr. Denham," she said, "very seriously."

I murmured something about being completely at her service, and awaited the instant massacre of my hopes.

"It seems," she began, "to be a recognized thing in the minds of Miss Delamere and my daughter that some understanding exists between you and Clara. Now, as Clara's mother, it is my duty to tell you that no understanding can possibly exist between you two young people as yet."

If she had been less brusque and straightforward it would certainly have been the worse for my self-possession. But her very outspokenness helped me to be at ease. I assured her that I did not as yet expect to secure any promise, and that I had not attempted to secure it.

"That is all very well, Mr. Denham," the lady answered. "I ought to have known better than to leave Clara so long alone under the guardianship of a girl so little older than herself. I am not going to blame anybody for the consequences of my own indiscretion; but I must tell you, Mr. Denham, that I do not think you have behaved at all well in this matter."

I could not see this, and I said as much, with great respect and diffidence.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Denham," said Mrs. Grantley; "you have not behaved well. You have been paying constant and marked attention to a young and inexperienced girl, without the knowledge and consent of her one natural guardian. Now I know all about the affections, and the heart, and that sort of thing, and I know that it is quite possible for a boy and a girl to think that the world is coming to an end and the sun going to be extinguished because a girl has a sensible mother; but my duty is to see Clara's happiness, her solid, lasting happiness, and not to encourage a mere whim."

If I have not made it clear by this time that I was at this period of my life a hypersensitive and abnormally shy young man, I have very insufficiently indicated my own most striking characteristics. But I woke up here. I can not recall the words I used, and I dare say that a great deal of what I said would sound exaggerated and romantic if it were written down. I hope so. It is no part of the business of a lad in love with an angel to have the reason and measurement in

terms of middle age. I told her, I remember, among other things, to consider what a beautiful and charming girl Clara was. In the frank simplicity and boyishness of this declaration I had, Heaven knows, no faintest idea of diplomacy, and yet I could hardly have done better if I had been the cleverest diplomat alive. I warmed to that entrancing theme and poured my heart out, and I know now that mamma was by no means displeased at my eulogy. Then I went on, as I recall, to say that I was not anybody in particular up till that time, but that I meant, if only time were allowed me, to be somebody very particular indeed. I would work and fight the world, and wait. I asked nothing but that she should not come between us, that she should give me opportunity to strive to become worthy of a life partnership with all those excellences I had so warmly pictured.

She listened with great patience and kindness, smiling now and then, and when I had done she said:

"You talk of your ambitions. What are they? Tell me about yourself. Tell me who you are and what you are, and what you hope to be."

I have known men to whom a conversational overture of this kind and the chance it afforded would seem to open up a glimpse of paradise. But I entered on it mournfully, and with deep misgivings. My father, I told her, had farmed his own land, and very little of it, in Warwickshire. In his day, my grandfather had farmed it before him, and his grandfather before him. On my mother's side there was pretty much the same tale to tell, a tale of dull respectability, extending over six or seven generations, and having its origin in fog. My parents having been gathered to their fathers years ago, my elder brother farmed the family acres, and I had a fortune of three hundred pounds a year. I had read for the bar, and expected to be called almost immediately. I had written for the magazines, and had added not less than a hundred pounds a year to my annual income for the past two years. I was preparing a book about social problems, and when I had finished my work of inquiry among the poor in London I meant to go over to Paris, and there to complete the work by a study on the same lines. In the meantime I should earn more than enough to live upon, since I was promised employment in Paris by the editor of an important London daily journal.

"Well, now, Mr. Denham," she said, when she had heard me out, "you see that your projects are very much in the air at present. You have been very candid so far; let me ask you

a single question. What do you know about Clara's position and prospects?"

I knew nothing whatever, and I said so. She looked at me with those bright eyes of hers, and I looked back at her in appeal and anxiety. I was not in the least thinking about Clara's position and prospects, and I suppose that she either saw as much, or thought she did. She smiled and nodded as she said:

"I am very glad of that. But my daughter, Mr. Denham, though she will never be a great heiress, will be in such a position that she will have a right to look far higher than any place you can offer her as your wife for years to come, however successful you may be. It would be cruel and useless to pretend to you now that you are not honestly in love with her, but you are very young, and can not yet be certain of yourself. Clara is still younger, and still less likely to be certain of her own wishes. You must go out and see the world of young women, which includes a great many charming young people, and Clara must see the world of young men, which includes many eligible partners. I shall not dream of permitting an engagement between you." And seeing that I clouded very much at this, and was indeed for the moment altogether heart-broken and desolate, she bent forward a little, and laying a pretty gloved hand upon my arm, she said, kindly: "You must not take this too much to heart. I am too worldly wise a mother, Mr. Denham, to allow myself to seem cruel to my daughter. It will all, no doubt, depend very much upon yourself. I tell you, quite candidly, that I like you. You have modesty, candor, ambition, and good sense. I think you may make a good man, my dear. If you do well in the world, and are of the same mind in three or four years' time, and if Clara is of the same mind in three or four years' time, you and I may have another talk, which may come to an end with another answer."

The threatened delay looked heart-breaking, but I answered that if the matter depended upon myself I knew very well what would happen; and she smiled again, rising to go.

"We have had our talk," she said, as we walked side by side, "and we understand each other."

I asked if I might be allowed to see Clara, and she answered, "Certainly."

"But," she added, "it will be best that you should not see too much of each other." She added, seeing that I was newly downcast, "Now, come, Mr. Denham, let us be sensible people. Suppose you see Clara now, and tell her what I have

said, and anything in your own behalf you please." Her voice was laughing here, as if she could guess pretty fairly what that anything else would be. "And suppose you say good-bye for three months. You will admit that if your affection can not endure a three months' absence, it is a great deal less robust than you fancy it. Suppose you agree to meet not oftener than once in three months, after that, until you have begun to do something which will really confirm my good opinion of you. Suppose that, if that time should come, we enter on a new arrangement. Come now, that ought to stimulate you to effort, and if you two young people are really and seriously attached to each other, the best thing for both of you will be that you shall get to work in earnest."

I admit that it all sounds reasonable and kindly now, but it was different then, and, not to put it too strongly, was like the reading of a warrant of despair. We walked back together, Mrs. Grantley and I, and Clara and Miss Delamere arriving shortly after us, we sat down to tea. I tried to behave rationally and bravely, but in spite of my best efforts my manner depressed Clara. After tea we were left alone together. I told her everything, and we sat hand in hand and cried a little, like the foolish, tender-hearted children that we were, and dried one another's eyes, and vowed never and never and never to forget or change. I have sometimes been happy since that heart-broken evening, I may have been actually happier once or twice, but not oftener. I find Mrs. Denham of the same opinion when I consult her memories, and whether, in the course of time, this will enable us to be worldly wise with our own children I can not guess. I only know that, if that blessed evening were to be counted sorrowful, I would ask nothing better than to be sorrowful all my days. We were parting for three months. Dim were the depths of that great gulf of time; far and far away, through the mist of tears, we saw firm land again beyond it, the land of promise, shining in a misty brightness. But, in the meantime, we sat side by side, hand clasping hand, and our arms about each other, and I told her how dearly I loved her; and she, in the sweet pain of that parting, banished all shyness, and told me how dearly she loved me; and Heaven knows that, if any foolish pair of people on whom the sun shone that day were happy while thinking themselves heart-broken, we were they.

CHAPTER XVII.

I TOOK a precipitate determination to start at once for Paris, and there to set on foot my researches for the second part of that volume which was to shake the pillars of social order in the two great centers of civilization. Since further meetings with Clara were for the time being forbidden me, I felt as if I could not bear to be near her. The barrier of distance seemed essential to even a bearable misery. Of course I was no sooner denied the house than I began to desire to go there with greater frequency than ever. So long as I had been free to call I had contented myself with visits of a ridiculous frequency, and now my thoughts tended in that direction every waking moment, and my feet led me thither every evening of the week.

Perhaps if Pole had been in town I might have confided my sorrows and hopes to the ear of friendship. As it was I had no confidant, and managed somehow to consume my own smoke in a fairly successful manner. But I used to wander up and down outside the house in the darkness, watching the shadows on the windows and the light in the chamber which I knew to be hers, making vows and protestations and verses, and generally enjoying myself profoundly with a rooted conviction that I was the unhappiest dog alive.

It was evident that all this had to come to an end, and so I determined straightway upon the commencement of my Parisian campaign. I went to see my friend the editor, and found my arrival timed most fortunately. I learned that there was a thoroughly experienced person in charge of the Paris office. Within his own limits this gentleman was perfectly trustworthy, and in all matters of routine and technique I was instructed to rely upon him implicitly. His colleague, a young fellow of unusual brilliance, had disappeared under circumstances not altogether creditable to himself, and since I was prepared to start at once I was to be allowed to fill his place on trial. If my work proved to be satisfactory I was promised a permanent engagement. The salary offered was not large, as salaries go nowadays, but it trebled my expectations at the time, and I closed eagerly with the offer. The post offered me double advantages. The salary was large enough to permit me, by extreme modesty of living, to save one half of it, and my position as a recognized journalist would immensely facilitate the inquiries I desired to make. I wrote

off at once to Mrs. Grantley, informing her of this unexpected stroke of good fortune, and I wrote my good-bye for the time being to Pole. Then I packed up my belongings, gave instructions for the reletting of my chambers, and started with all manner of tender regrets and high ambitions for the French capital.

The cheapest route to Boulogne was by the London boat, and in pursuit of economic resolutions formed beforehand I embarked upon it. There was nobody to see me off, and I felt desolate and exiled before the boat had left the quay. The bell was ringing, friends of intending travelers were saying their last good-byes and hurrying ashore, handkerchiefs were waving, and final messages were being shouted from deck to platform, and back again, as though we were bound for a voyage to the antipodes, when suddenly I recognized a familiar face, and Mr. Goldsmith, with a black-glazed portmanteau in his hand, came dashing through the crowd, stumbled down the gangway and reached the deck. He had only just set foot upon the boat when the gangway was slipped up from behind him. He set down his portmanteau, mopped his countenance with a gorgeous silk handkerchief, and gazed about him with a renewal of that beaming complacency which had marked him at the beginning of our acquaintance. He was magnificently attired in, I think, the check suit of the largest pattern and vividest colors I had ever, until that hour, beheld. He wore an embroidered waistcoat, with a great gold cable across it, which for size and weight would have served admirably to attach a horse to his manger; and he wore rings outside his gloves, and a pin with a horseshoe head, a size or two smaller than the original, and set full of brilliants, which, if they had been real, might have excited the cupidity of everybody on board. I believe that if fashion had only afforded him the least warranty for it he would have gone about with a jeweled ring in his nose, like some imaginable Crœsus of a porker.

He did not observe me for some time, and I had time to observe one proceeding of his which interested me more than a little. He had three or four rings outside his gloves already, and when once the boat had started he retired to a position where he fancied himself safe from intruding glances, and there drew forth from his purse a little tissue-paper packet containing half a dozen others. These he put on with an admirable slyness, and having demurely admired them, turned round and swaggered across the deck, coaxing his black little mustache, and adjusting that monumental horseshoe pin for their display.

At first I was not sorry to be unobserved by him, for I felt somehow as if his splendors were likely to be reflected upon anybody whose acquaintance he might claim, and fancied I might find that glory a thought too obtrusive to be easily endured. In awhile, however, I began to feel ashamed of this sentiment, and purposely put myself in a position in which he might see me if he chose to do so. He very soon remarked me, and as I chanced to be looking in his direction at that moment, I got something of a start. He positively jumped when he saw me, and his face, which had worn its very brightest and most self-approving smile until that moment, suddenly clouded over. A moment later he came up to me with a forced manner and accosted me.

"Who'd have thought of seeing you here?" he asked, in anything but a gracious tone. I remarked that it was no unusual thing in traveling to meet a man whom one had met before. He grunted a sort of unamiable assent to this, and asked where I was going. To Paris, I told him. He looked at me, as I fancied, with some suspicion, and moved away rather abruptly.

It happens, often enough, in the course of everybody's experience, that after-events set so clear a light upon trifles that we suppose ourselves to have observed them keenly at the time of their occurrence. It is quite probable that, if I had had no particular cause for recalling Goldsmith's suspicious glance, I should never have given it a second thought. And now, after the lapse of more than twenty years, I can see the fat little man peering shrewdly at me as clearly as if he were before me at this instant. "What the deuce are you going to Paris for?" said the beady eye, as plainly as if the question had been asked in words. Some foolish notion of Goldsmith's myrmidons having watched me, and of his suspecting me of watching him in return, assailed my mind, demanding only to be laughed at and dismissed. We sat next to each other at table at dinner-time, and since there was no other English-speaking person within conversational distance of him he talked to me. He drank champagne at the meal, and took a good deal of it, so that before we left the table he was a little flushed and inclined to be amiably merry. He was going, he said, speaking more through his nose than usual, to have a bit of fun in Paris. He was going to do a bit of business, too, he told me, winking one beady eye after the other with an ineffable knowingness. He had a client in Paris, so he said, and he put a certain air of arrogance into this statement as if the fact entitled him to uncommon consideration.

"She's a lady, my boy," he said, slapping me boisterously on the shoulder. "Wod of these days she'll occupy wod of the highest social positions. She'll bake a doise id the world, too. You see if she don't. Bark by words," he continued, poking me in the ribs with friendly familiarity, "that wobad will bake a doise id the world."

I said I hoped his expectations would be gratified.

"Do you?" he demanded. "Now do you really, Bister Dedhab? Upod by word that's very kide of you. I'b very much obliged to you, I ab, upon my living word of honor."

I attributed the fervor of his gratitude for this not too effusive expression of good-will chiefly to the champagne he had taken, but the exciting effect of the wine did not remain long upon him, and five minutes later, after having strutted up and down the deck, smoking a cigar, he came back to me with a complete sobriety of demeanor.

"I've been down to Kensal Green," he said, "within the last day or two, and I've seen the monument Pole has put up to his wife. To tell you the truth I didn't expect he'd do as little as that for her. She was an awful trouble to him, I've no doubt, and I dare say he's pretty glad to have seen the last of her."

I did not care to enter into a discussion upon Pole's feelings with Mr. Goldsmith, and therefore kept silence.

"I dare say," he went on, "he's told you a lot about her, and there's no mistake about her having been a Tartar. I wasn't tied to her in any way, but, bless your heart alive, she used to make my life a burden to me."

Still I said nothing, but Mr. Goldsmith, having once made conversational overtures, was not to be silenced by silence.

"I saw by this morning's papers," he continued, "that old Lord Worborough's very ill again. I suppose the old boy is on his last legs, or pretty nearly. Bister Pole'll tubble id to a good thing when his lordship goes off the hooks. He'll be getting married again, I shouldn't wonder, after a time. I think he's had his eye on a suitable party for some tibe past, down Cromwell Terrace way."

"Mr. Goldsmith," I rejoined, "I am very much delighted by your society, and very proud of it. But I would rather lose it altogether than continue the discussion of this theme."

"Oh, that's all right," responded Mr. Goldsmith. "I dever object to a man being a bit close about his friend's affairs or his own. I'm pretty close myself, when I want to be. I'm ready to supply anybody with the small change of codversation to any amount, but if I'm asked for the fiver of

fact I wadt five quid id exchage for it, money down. Only, you know, I happen to have had idstructions to keep an eye on Mr. Pole's proceedings. His wife was very jealous, poor thing, and I think between ourselves, Bister Dedhab, she had a little bit of reasod for it."

"I think, Mr. Goldsmith," I answered, rather coldly, "that I know Mr. Pole somewhat better than yourself. I can tell you at least that there never was the slightest reason for it."

I was half sorry a moment later to have taken the trouble to make this disclaimer in my friend's behalf. It was certainly little worth while to defend Pole to a man like Goldsmith. It might have been worth while, perhaps, while that sorrowful wife of Pole's was still alive, and Pole and Goldsmith were compelled to hold some sort of communion with each other. Now, I knew very well that Pole cared as little to have his honor vindicated here as he would have cared to have his height and weight proclaimed in the interior of China.

"Oh!" said Goldsmith, "you're a bit of an innocent, my boy. Excuse me for sayig so, but that's the fact. I don't suppose that Bister Pole meant mischief—"

"Now, Mr. Goldsmith," I broke in, very decidedly, "I have already asked you not to talk to me about this matter. There is more water here than was near us on a certain memorable occasion when you introduced this topic about this time last year."

"Oh," said Goldsmith, "if you're going to talk like that I've got nothing to add to the observatiods I've made already. I'll tell you what—I'll toss you for a braddy and soda. I'll toss you for a soverid. Come now! I always lose when I challage a man, and so there's a bit of a chadce for you."

How could a student of human nature be continuously wroth with Mr. Goldsmith? I never paused to analyze his charm, but sooner or later it asserted itself in almost all our interviews. The fact that I detested brandy and soda, and the other fact that I could not afford to toss for sovereigns with Mr. Goldsmith, debarred me perhaps from the full enjoyment of his society. But even as things were, I was more than contented with him. One paid a certain toll, to be sure, and I was ashamed of being ashamed to be seen with him. There is no perfect pleasure in this world.

Pole would have silenced the little man in a minute, but there was no terror in my threats, and but little force for him in my refusal to talk about the topic on which his heart was obviously set. The only thing I could do was to refrain from

answering him. Now and again I checked him, but I only drove him for a moment to a divergence from the route, and if he went out on one side he came in on the other like a conversational harlequin. He hastened me to my cabin by an hour or so, and in the bustle of landing in the morning I saw but little of him. He went on to Paris by first-class, and I, for economy's sake, traveling second, we met only at the Gare du Nord while our baggage was under examination. He had some little difficulty with one of the examiners, and called upon me to interpret for him.

"I've been over here time and again," he remarked, "but I never took the trouble to pick up the parly-voo lidgo. Stupid lot these Frenchmen are. Think of a crowd of grown-up chaps like these not knowing how to speak Iglish? I got on very well among 'em. Whedever I want to buy anything I put down less than the thing would cost in Iglad, and potter out the coppers till they've got enough. Sometimes they get tired of asking for more. I come through it pretty well. They can see I'm a foreigner, and they take pity on me because I'm yug and iddocent."

He accompanied and followed this statement with a meteoric shower of winks, and his bag having by this time received its cabalistic chalk-mark, he bade me good-bye, and disappeared. I drove to a little hotel I knew in the Rue Richelieu, and having bargained there for *pension* at eight francs per diem, took up my quarters in a lofty garret. I saw my luggage safely bestowed, dined, and walked toward the Boulevard.

How intimately I recall the night, and my own sensations as I wandered up and down. How alone I felt, how tender, how valiant, how resolved! What flashes of enthusiasm assailed my spirit every here and there! I touched, in passing, or seemed to touch, the spirits of great men who had trodden these pavements long ago, and of others who were alive and familiar with them at that hour. I sent out my whole heart to the girl I left behind me, with so much warmth and sincerity that I thought my feeling needs must reach her and its voice find an echo in her mind.

And so to bed, as Pepys says, to feel the whole great city palpitating round me, a mystery to be known, a problem to be solved, a fortress to be stormed. One of my last unmixed joys in London had been to accompany Clara to the English opera at Covent Garden. Sims Reeves had sung that night in Macfarren's "Robin Hood," and almost the last thing in my mind on that first night in Paris was the memory of the rejoicing lines and the triumphant voice:

"I know that love will lead me right,
With such a prize in view,
And happy omens bless my sight,
That must, that shall, be true."

Ah me! I had a vague and general notion through it all that my lot was not a happy one, and it seemed that I had to face the future with a bold heart to dare to look at it at all. I am (I own it with an humble heart, knowing my own poor deserts better than my most censorious neighbors) blessed beyond the average of men, yet, if I could, I would go back to those happy, happy, troubled times, and never ask to leave them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I HAD been about two months in Paris, burrowing into all manner of odd corners, and picking up all manner of strange acquaintances, when I received a letter from Clara. It came in a fat and bulky envelope, and consisted of no fewer than ten sheets of foreign letter paper, which were covered on both sides. In some wonderment at the voluminous nature of this epistle, I locked myself in and sat down to read it.

"MY DEAR JOHN," it ran—"Mr. Delamere was making a great preachment here the other night to mamma and Mary and myself about the rights of insurrection, and the only part I remember of it was that he laid it down as an indisputable proposition that anybody who rebelled without succeeding was wicked, and that anybody who rebelled successfully was worthy of all admiration. I took this lesson upstairs with me, and laid it to heart. I counted the chances, and then I rebelled. The rebellion has succeeded completely, and now, if you please, I claim to be worthy of your admiration.

"I had long been wishing to write to you, and mamma was very strongly against it. If ever I come to be a charming old lady and have a headstrong girl to manage, I dare say I shall come round to mamma's present opinions. But being myself the headstrong girl at present, and having to manage the charming old lady, I retain my own. She really is the most charming old lady in the world, and I tell you so with perfect frankness because she has made it a condition of her surrender that she shall read whatever I write before it is posted. Mamma has been spoiled by flattery all her life, but is still open to its influences.

"I suppose that you will begin to get melancholy about it if I tell you that I am in the highest possible spirits; but as a

matter of fact I am. We have been playing and witnessing the loveliest high comedy here ever since your departure. Mr. Jones, to use your friend's delightful expression, has been Sebastian Dolmering about the house in the most artistically inspired manner ever since you saw the last of it. We know now that he made a formal proposition to Mr. Delamere for the hand of his daughter. How stately that sounds, to be sure! Mr. Delamere appears to have given the word of command for the siege of the citadel, and Mr. Jones has been sitting down before it ever since. Mary used to have a much loftier opinion of Mr. Delamere's godson than I have ever found myself able to rise to. My wings always refused to carry me on that flight, though I really did at one time flap them quite industriously. But since the high-road of good opinion seemed likely to land Mary in the quagmire of matrimony, she does not travel on it any longer. I am told that it is a dreadfully unlady-like word to use, but I will write it in letters as small as my quill can make, and you may take it for a kind of shocked whisper. I am very much of opinion that Mr. Jones is a *humbug*. I have been burning for months to say this to somebody, and now that I have it off my mind my spirits are higher than ever.

"At first I was dreadfully anxious when I heard of this terrible proposal, and for a whole day or two I was left to wonder what would happen. By and by I began to observe that the suitor was less exalted and confident than he had seemed at first, and I was sensible enough to put a sound construction upon this phenomenon. How does a phenomenon look when you put a sound construction on it? It sounds as if it would be funny, like one of Doyle's grotesque fairy pictures. The elder Delamere seemed to take the thing almost as much to heart as the younger one, and the pair were deliciously gloomy and stately for a time. You would have thought that papa was suffering from the same pangs of blighted affection as afflicted Sebastian, and they both bore their sorrow with such a braggadocio meekness, and so wore their hearts upon their sleeves, that no daw with a touch of human nature in her could have kept herself from pecking at them. I am afraid that I have been a great trouble to Mr. Delamere and his candidate. I am almost afraid that at times I have really meant to be, but they have been altogether too inviting to be resisted.

"Of course Mr. Delamere's suffering silence did not endure long. He talks so beautifully that he really can't help talking, and I think it a bit of a pity that he is so excellent a conversationalist. If he had not been able to talk so nicely about

everything he might have seen his way to doing something. When once the ice was broken the fountain ran for days, and everybody in the house was drenched with the noblest maxims. Mamma in particular was so wet through with them that I could not touch her without squeezing two or three to the surface. His favorite theme was the 'Growth of Self-will in the Young and the Falling Off of Reverence for the Parental Ideal.' I am writing about it now as if it had been pure fun for everybody all along, but I assure you that it was nothing of the kind at the time. It is only in the contemplation of it, now that the trouble is all over, that one can see the comic side of it. I was so sorry for Mary, and so angry at that pitiless shower of words, that I sometimes found it hard to be merely civil to Mr. Delamere. The worst of it is—or perhaps it is the best of it—Mary believes in her father to such an extent that it would be quite cruel to try to lessen her opinion of him. Your friend Mr. Pole is very funny and amusing sometimes. We met him last night at the Revels', and he was describing somebody whom I do not know. He said that this gentleman, to his wife's mind, was such a very large potato that it would break her heart to see him pared. But for this lady's affection it appears that some friend of Mr. Pole's was quite prepared to pare the potato, and, judging from what he said, to reduce its dimensions very considerably. It brought Mr. Delamere and Mary irresistibly to my mind. I do seriously believe that if it were possible to peel all the pretense off that gentleman he would make a rival to Tom Thumb.

"But now I must tell you what has really happened. I am so glad of my liberty that I have been compelled to race round in these preliminary circles before sitting down to steady narrative, like a dog just unchained, or a pigeon starting for home, which, when I come to think of it, is a prettier and more lady-like simile. Mr. Jones had actually and formally proposed, and Mary had definitely and formally declined to accept him. Mr. Delamere, after the first frozen days of silence, had poured on us that deluge of eloquence of which I have already told you. But I have not told you that he had a second or alternative theme which dealt with the Crime of Concealment in Social Affairs. You remember something of this, but it was repeated as if its variety were as infinite as Cleopatra's, and it could neither be staled by age nor withered by custom. The text of it was, of course, afforded by your friend, Mr. Pole, and I heard him preached against so often that I ended by taking a liking to him.

"And now comes the fun of the whole position. Mr. Pole

stayed in the country with Lord Worborough for quite six weeks after your departure. Then he and his lordship, who is quite recovered, came up to town together, and Mr. Pole made a call at Cromwell Terrace. All this time Mary had been pumped on by the paternal pump until she could scarcely have had a dry moral thread to call her own, and she was getting quite depressed and thin under this hydropathic treatment.

"I think Mr. Pole has very decidedly improved in appearance. He does not look so stern and stony as he used to do. He is rather grave and quiet, but I am sure that he has a great deal more humor than he shows, for I have seen his eye twinkle very often when Mr. Delamere has been talking; and I have been conscious that if anybody had caught me at the same moment they might have seen the same signs. He stayed only an hour at his first call, and on the following day he came again, bringing his lordship with him. You did not at all exaggerate when you told me what a dear old gentleman he is. I never met a lord before, to speak to, though I have looked at a whole menagerie of them through the gilded railings at Westminster, and I was a little afraid of him at first. He is old-fashioned and stately, but there is such a beautiful courtesy in everything he says and does that I think him perfectly lovable. He is just what an old nobleman ought to be, and all our hearts went down before him like so many ninepins.

Mr. Jones, of course, is always about the house, and he and Mr. Delamere did most of the talking. His lordship seemed extremely pleased and interested by them, and you know that when you do not get too much of them they can both be very clever and amusing.

"We were treated that night to a new lecture, and it was such an unmixed blessing to get a change from the old ones that we all welcomed it with enthusiasm. At times it was really beautiful and affecting, and it was all about the Moral Advantages of the Territorial Sentiment. On the very next day his lordship called alone, and was closeted with Mr. Delamere. Mamma and I were out at the time, and I only heard of this afterward, but when I got home I met Mary, and I was quite certain at once that something had happened. I don't think I ever saw anybody looking so beautiful as she did. You know what very fine and speaking eyes she has. They were all sparkling and gentle at the same time, and when I had coaxed her a little she told me that Lord Worborough had spoken to Mr. Delamere about a marriage between her and Mr. Pole. It was like the dear, stately old gentleman to

come himself and to show that he approved of the match, for, of course, the future Lord Worborough will be very much above Miss Delamere in wealth and social station, though, after all, a lady can only be a lady, and Mary would have been an empress by now if emperors were sensible people.

"There are some things about which it doesn't seem the least use in the world to try to say anything. If I were trying to tell a stranger what happened next I should fall into pure despair. I know that I shouldn't succeed in conveying a shadow of the truth. But you are not a stranger, and I think that you have a little imagination. Pray let it loose, and try to picture to yourself Mr. Delamere that evening struggling in Mr. Jones's presence with the rudiments of a new discourse on 'The Blending of the Artistic and Territorial Ideals.' Poor Mr. Jones was very mournful under this, and though I could not help feeling that he has made us all suffer very much by his perseverance, I was sorry for him when his ally deserted him. He still comes to the house, and Mr. Delamere and he are a great deal together; but Mr. Pole calls every day, and the poor thing must certainly be excessively uncomfortable. He does not seem to have the strength of mind to go away. I wish he would, for as it is I can not help being a little unhappy about him at times. He dashes those high spirits I told you of, although I must confess that his airs of martyrdom are sometimes a little trying. What makes me pity him most is the altogether heartless way in which Mr. Delamere has turned upon him. Only last night we had a new discourse on 'The Philosophical Acceptance of the Inevitable,' which was so cruel and at the same time so funny that I really wonder how I lived through it and kept my countenance. I had to look hard at the table all the while, and I said to myself again and again that it would be most shameful to wound Mary by laughing. I succeeded in sitting through it, but I was quite hysterical in my own room afterward.

"So, now you see that, with the exception of poor Mr. Jones, everybody is happy. Mr. Delamere makes a pretense of coolness about the match, which sometimes throws a little shadow over Mary's spirits; but I can see clearly that he only does this to let himself down easily. There is no talk about an immediate marriage, and I suppose everybody feels that such a suggestion would seem a little indelicate, in view of what has happened.

"And now, since I have rebelled in your behalf and my own, you must answer this, and tell me all about yourself and your doings. I have never seen Paris, but I have read a pro-

digious deal about it within the last two months. I can not imagine what it is that has made me take so sudden an interest in the French capital. Perhaps you can. I have told mamma that it is all nonsense to talk or think of my changing, and beyond that I am not going to say anything, except that I am

"Yours, CLARA."

This epistle delighted me on many grounds, selfish and unselfish. A week later I got a letter from Pole, who I suppose had been too busy in his new-found hopes of happiness to write before. I wrote back, congratulating him with all my heart, and now that a means of communication between Clara and myself had been opened up, and the one creature in the world I loved best after her was going to be happy, everything seemed bright again.

Smiling seas and a steady breeze abeam, and gay skies and banners flying in the wind, and the gladdest music aboard, and "Land ho!" and the sweetest bay of the land of promise reaching forth its green arms in welcome. Then a crash, and the sunken rock that no man dreamed of has rent us from stem to stern.

CHAPTER XIX.

MY commanding officer and colleague was Mr. Alexander MacIlray. Our office was up four pairs of stairs in the Rue de la Paix. It has very pronouncedly blossomed out since then, and nowadays its gilded sign-board is visible from half-way down the Boulevard des Capucines; but at that time we were humble, and even a little bohemian in our ways and aspect. Journalism has grown of late years into a recognized profession. One feels, in setting that statement upon paper, guilty of an actual banality; and yet, as I remember the business a quarter of a century back, it was very little of a recognized profession at all, and a vast number of its followers were harum-scarum, clever, sociable, lovable, and good-for-nothing people, who dressed as it pleased them, drank habitually more than was good for them, kept the insanest hours, and generally conducted themselves as though they knew they were outside the claims and privileges of ordinary society. I am of a staid and sober turn of mind, and never cared greatly for the wilder sort of revelry; but I look back with an affectionate regret to some of the old times and scenes and many of the lost faces. I dare say I am getting to be an old fogy; but I look round in vain among the begloved, tall-hatted, frock-coated

contingent of to-day for the merriment, the jollity, the good-fellowship, the open-handedness which went along with the ramshackle life, the billycock hat, and the smoke-scented jacket.

There never was a personage in this world less bohemian than Mr. Alexander MacIlray. He was a particularly respectable Scot, who dressed uniformly in black, and whose gloves and linen were always perfectly clean and orderly. He seemed never to go anywhere unless called thither by affairs, and he lived without friends or acquaintances outside his business. He was by no means an ungenial little man, but he was always occupied, out of the hours of actual work, in "getting his tools together," as he phrased it.

"The besiness of a journalist, Mr. Denham, is to know everything that is to be known. Univairsal knowledge is perhaps empossible, is, in fact, empossible, for the endividual, but the mere truth that a theng is empossible has no right to debar a man from attempting it. Get your tools in order, Mr. Denham. Know everything that ye can lay your mental hand upon."

He broke out on me with this before I had known him for a week, and repeated it constantly with unction, and sometimes with a startling air of originality, as if the thought had just occurred to him and he was in haste to express it before it vanished. He had an odd way of expressing sympathy and a sense of companionship. Sometimes when we had been sitting silent for an hour or more, each engaged in his own task, he would push his work aside, and, gazing at me in a friendly fashion through his gold-rimmed glasses, would smooth his red hair with both hands and say: "Ay, ay, Mr. Denham! Ay, ay, lad! Ay, ay!" in a tone of cheerful certainty and conviction. Then he would turn-to again at his task of getting his tools together. I suppose he got too many tools together, and so filled his mental work-shop that he had no room to move about in it. He himself did next to nothing with the paraphernalia he collected. He used to remind me sometimes of some imaginable frantically generous ironmonger, who kept a prodigious stock of every sort of implement for every trade beneath the skies, knew the practical handling of no one of them, and gave away his stock all day among the passers-by. I got to have a superstitious belief in Mr. MacIlray's omniscience. He was a walking cyclopedia. I bepuzzled myself with problems for his puzzlement, and never caught him. People who have not met this sort of man hardly know how to believe in him. One would have thought that

nothing less than a life-time would have served a man to learn Paris, for instance, as MacIlray knew it.

"When I first came to this cetty I med up my mind that it was my duty to know it. So I just set myself down in the meddle of it and obsairved. Then, sir, in awhile I began to radiate. Now, as a matter of fact and experrience, it's not that easy to radiate as ye might fancy. Ye want a heap of preliminary knowledge. I'm thenking that if a man began his denner with his cheese, and worked back his way to the soup, he'd find his digestive organs getting out of order in a whilie. There's a way of absorbing a cetty or a subject just as there's a way of absorbing your denner, and ef you take the wrong ye're like to find yourself bothered by a sperretual endigestion."

In spite of this admirable exordium I found, when I came to try him, that he had formulated no scheme at all for the absorption of subject or city. He used to stand in that overcrowded warehouse of his, and survey his tools with a constant satisfaction, and used to lay down philosophical theories beyond counting for the increase of his armory, and at first I used to wait for the announcement of some great task, some herculean feat of letters or of learning to which he had set himself single-handed. The revelation never came.

He was a simple-minded little man, in spite of all his learning, and he had a boyish enthusiasm of admiration for faculties which lay outside his own range. He could flow out, measureless, upon paper, not in a stream which went anywhere, but in a sort of bog of mingled thought and fact over which no man could travel dryshod. But to get the gist of a thing inside the journalistic nutshell was altogether impossible for him, and since I was not long in perceiving the necessity of the trick, and speedily acquired the knack itself, he used to admire me in a way so candid and open that I blushed before him.

"Ay, lad!" he would say, "ye have but to get your tools together and ye'll make a workman." Then he would go to his own labors, or dive into the packed intricacies of his inward storehouse, and would emerge an hour later with a cheerful "Ay, ay, Mr. Denham! Ay, ay, lad! Ay, ay!" as if I had said something to elicit his most cordial sympathies.

He worked up four pairs of stairs in the Rue de la Paix, and he lived up six pairs of stairs in an eminently respectable boarding-house in the Boulevard Haussmann. As I got to be more and more intimate with him he took very kindly to me, but it was a week or two after the reception of Clara's letter

that I paid my first visit to his quarters. I had begun to think that we should never come to an end of the stairs when he paused upon the sixth landing and threw open the door which led to a tolerably spacious and very orderly apartment. His bed was snugly tucked away in one corner, and surrounded by a screen, and a great book-case filled the opposite wall from floor to ceiling. There was not one volume of mere entertainment on its shelves, but there were grammars and dictionaries, atlases and gazetteers, dictionaries of biographies and dates, huge bound folios of the "Entr'acte" cobwebbed all over with short-hand criticisms of performances, volumes of history by the hundred, works on chemistry, metallurgy, conchology, and on the lower shelves a battalion of encyclopedias.

"Here are tools for a journalist, Mr. Denham," he said, with a subdued pride, as he saw me examining his books. "Get the contents of those pages well into your mind, and there is no department of human effort into the consideration whereof ye will not be prepared to enter."

I suggested that the tools were there, and that it might suffice to take them down as they were wanted, but this seemed positively to shock MacIlray.

"Nenni, lad!" he exclaimed, warmly. "There's nothing that a man can call his own in this wide warld but that which is packed away in the head and the soul of him. Carry your weapons about with you, and then no man can catch y'unarmed at any moment."

I persisted in thinking that if a man would carry about with him arms enough for fifty people he might find himself embarrassed in a chance conflict which came suddenly upon him, but if my theories had been very koh-i-noors of practice it was too late to present them to MacIlray. I liked the simple-hearted, prim-spoken little book-worm very warmly, and he returned my liking. So we got on admirably together, and not infrequently I spent my evenings in his room. He gave me to understand, in a very friendly way, that I was to regard my first introduction there as a standing invitation.

"The place, such as it is, Mr. Denham, is open to ye. Wethin its compass I can say for it that ye'll find no more useful mass o' knowledge than ye see collected here. Ef ever ye're passing this way with an hour to spare and ye want to refresh your mind ye'll just walk upstairs as ef the place belonged to ye, whether I'm en or out. I'll give word to the concierge below stairs to that effect."

I accepted his cordial invitation, and in a little while the

house on the Boulevard Haussmann knew me almost as well as if I were an inmate.

The day before which I was forbidden by maternal authority to visit Clara came slowly nearer and more near. The nearer it grew the more the hours lagged to my impatient fancy, but at last I stood within four-and-twenty hours of starting. I had secured a two-days' holiday, and in the afternoon—I remember that it was a Saturday, and a day of exceptional slackness—I visited Mr. MacIlray to talk over with him one or two matters which would have to be attended to in my absence, for which no definite arrangements had been made. We talked things over, and then fell into some friendly discussion, so that I lingered for an hour or two.

We were still in the full flush and glory of the summer, but the staircases of the house were dark in places, where the illumination which struck through certain gloomy little skylights and port-holes could not reach. I was half-way down when I heard the silken rustle of a dress below me, and made myself small to let the wearer pass. She was in shadow, and a narrow stream of light, with the motes dancing thickly in it, played across the dimness and half obliterated all objects which lay beyond it. I stood in a corner and waited for a second or two while the wearer of the silken dress came, at a very leisurely pace, step by step along the stairs until all on a sudden, with such a shock as seemed to stop my heart, I saw the face of that dead wife of Pole's spring into the radiance shot across the staircase by the sinking sun. The proud, hard, disdainful eyes blinked in the sudden light, and the woman, seeing an instant later that some one stood by to make room for her, gave me a scornful, undiscerning glance from head to foot and went slowly by.

If I had not been supported by the wall I should have fallen in the horror of my amazement. I heard the silken rustle and the deliberate footstep pace the corridor above, and I heard the click of the handle of a door, and then the door itself slammed noisily. I do not know how, by any art of words, to convey to the understanding of another the sensations which assailed me. I think that among the chief of them was a swift and terrible certainty that nothing in the world was real, and that I was somehow sunk in the middle of an eternal emptiness of space.

When the first shock was over, I found that I was shaking from head to foot, and that my face and hands were moist. My head was whirling, so that the stairs were a kind of terror to me. I climbed to the landing, and stood there awhile,

striving to collect myself, and then, rather by instinct, as I thought afterward, than because of any definite purpose in my mind, I went back to MacIlray's room. The sound of my own knuckles as I tapped at the door and the brusque imperativeness of his "*Entrez*" in reply did something to dissipate the still lingering sense of the general unreality of things. MacIlray told me afterward that he had never in his life seen a face on which the expression of pure horror was fixed so vividly. I can well believe that, in the memory of the reflection of my own expression which I saw in his. He darted at me, and threw one arm about me.

"For all sakes, man," he demanded, "what's the matter? Where is it? Are you hurt?"

He moved me to a chair, and, kneeling down beside me, passed his hands over me from head to foot with a rapid, skillful-feeling touch, like that of a practiced surgeon. Then rising, and keeping a backward glance upon me, he went swiftly to a cupboard, and producing from it a bottle of cognac, poured out a wine-glassful, and, returning, held it to my lips. I drank it eagerly, and the spirit burned like fire and set me coughing. It steadied my nerves, however, and set my heart at work again with a more healthful action.

"Denham, my lad," said MacIlray, standing over me, wine-glass in hand, "ye look as if ye'd seen a ghost."

"I have," I answered.

He stared at me in pure amazement.

"I'm a believer in many things," he responded, "but I'm no believer in ghosts, until I can trap one for myself, and submit him to a chemical analysis. Just think it out, lad. What is it that's scared ye?"

I made a great effort and succeeeded in pulling myself together.

"I saw," I answered, "a minute ago, on the stairs outside, a woman over whose grave I stood more than three months back. I had the certificate of that woman's death in my hands. I saw the tombstone erected on her grave. I myself gave the necessary orders for it, and saw them carried out."

"You're talking naturally enough," said MacIlray, looking at me with a shrewd inquiry. "Are ye sure there's nothing—?" He tapped his forehead, "Eh?"

"If," I answered, "I am not mad, or if—and I know better—I have not been the victim of some wild hallucination, I have seen that woman. If she is an inmate of this house you can not fail to have noticed her."

"Tell me what she's like," he said.

"Dark," I answered, "with level black eyebrows and full red lips. She has a swarthy pallor, and she looks at you as if she would kill you if she had the power. It's a haunting face. No man who has seen it once and taken note of it could forget it. A cruel, proud, revengeful, self-disdainful face."

"Ay, man," he said, nodding at me. "There's such a woman in the house. Madame Damal she calls herself. She's uncommonly lively in the temper for a woman's that's been dead and buried."

"Madame Damal?" I answered, confusedly. "Does she speak French?"

"Speak French?" repeated MacIlray. "It's likely she would. She's a French woman born and bred. It's her native language. I suspect, my lad, you've just been hit by some extraordinary likeness. I confess," he went on, as if he wished to soothe me, "that I would not have thought that there had been two faces like that in the world. I thank my stars, at least, that I never saw another like it."

"These are no two faces," I answered, obstinately; "that woman is alive."

"Ay, ay," cried MacIlray, half pettishly, "that woman *is* alive. But the dead one isn't. I don't like these uncanny fancies, and I'll just tell you what we'll do, lad. It's dinner-time in half an hour." A bell clanged loudly through the house at this moment. "There's the warning for it. Ye'll calm your nerves, and come down with me to dinner. It happens, to my oft disturbance, that I sit opposite the lady. Ye'll have a chance for a good look at her, and ye'll sleep none the worse for being sure that you've been mistaken."

I am half ashamed to say it, but I shrunk from this ordeal with an actual terror. I fought it down, however, and resolved that I would go through with it. MacIlray fell into a reverie from which he awoke with his accustomed sonorous watch-word of sympathy and approval. "Ay, ay, Denham! Ay, ay, lad!" when the second bell rang.

"Ye're all right now, lad? Ye're not going to make an exhibition of yourself?" he asked me, as we went down-stairs together. I answered that he might rely upon me, and we entered the dining-room. MacIlray, with a flourish of politeness, introduced me to the lady of the house. "Monsieur Denham, *mon collègue, qui sera un de ces jours un homme remarquable.*" This gave me something of a start, but I suspected MacIlray a moment later of a friendly intention to turn me from the contemplation of the one idea which filled my

mind. He chattered with more than common fluency to the landlady, and dragged me neck and heels into the conversation.

We were among the first arrivals at table. By and by others came in, to the number of twenty, and we all sat down. The space opposite MacIlray was vacant, and remained vacant until the fish was served. Then the woman whom I had seen upon the stairs came in and took her seat there. I experienced no new shock, but her face held me with an urgent fascination, and I was compelled again and again, in spite of myself, to peruse every feature of her face even when I had arrived at a fixed and rooted certainty. She spoke once or twice in the voice that I remembered, but with an accent so finished and natural that it would have been impossible to any one to whom the language had not been customary from infancy. Sometimes the intentness of my regard drew hers upon me, but she never gave me once the faintest sign of recognition. The cruel, self-despising, all-despising eyes looked straight into mine, and were withdrawn with all their old indifferent hauteur. Certain as I was of her identity, the perfect indifference of her manner shook me once or twice, and even when it made the weakest impression upon me, served to sustain the tumult of my mind.

The dinner might have lasted a year rather than an hour; but at length it was over. The ladies rose and moved away. The men settled down about the windows and lighted their cigarettes. MacIlray and I were left alone, and he drew me by a gesture to the far end of the room. Standing there and looking upward at a print, with his head critically on one side, as if he were examining it, he let fall a single word of question:

"Well?"

"That is the woman!" I responded.

"Did she ever know you," MacIlray asked, "in the days before she died and got buried?"

"She knew me," I answered, "and had reason to remember me."

"She's a very pretty actress, in that case," he said.

I had had time to think this extraordinary matter over, and I had come to my own conclusions.

"That woman," I said, deliberately, laying a hand upon MacIlray's breast and looking him calmly in the face, "has entered into a conspiracy with a little Jew solicitor in London to spread abroad the false intelligence of her own death, in order that her husband, whom she hates, shall be entrapped into contracting a marriage with another woman. She promised, in my hearing, to make his life a burden to him, and this

is the way in which she has chosen to make that promise good."

I saw a change in his face as I spoke, and I saw, though I could not tell why, that he had abandoned his mistrust.

"Hold your tongue one moment, man," he said. "Don't speak to me. Let me think. A little Jew solicitor? An over-dressed man with white teeth. Ay, ay! He's been here."

"His name," I said, "was—?"

"Wait!" cried MacIlray. "His name was"—I could see him searching in his own mind, and the light in his face told me that he had recalled it before he spoke the word—"Goldsmith."

"That is the man," I answered, "and this woman is the wife, Heaven help him, of my dearest friend!"

CHAPTER XX.

I REACHED London in the gray of a dismal morning, and, carrying my portmanteau with me, made my way on foot through the silent streets toward Pole's chambers. So far as I remember to have noted, nothing whatever in the aspect of the court was changed, and yet somehow all was changed. A difference had fallen upon everything, and the place had that look of unfamiliar familiarity which is the most damping and disheartening of all aspects to one who revisits old and well-remembered scenes.

The court was quiet and deserted, as was natural at that early hour. The gate-keeper slumbered in his sentry-box, outside the iron gate, and I passed through the door which led to Pole's rooms unnoticed. I could read through the half gloom of the passage the white letters in which his name was inscribed upon the black paint of the door, and I stood indeterminately, not venturing to disturb the silence. I had spent a sleepless night and had been unhappy enough all the journey through. It was no light or pleasant task to have laid upon one's self—the task of pulling one's dearest friend's house of happiness down about his ears.

I set my portmanteau down stealthily, and sat down upon it for a time, resolved to wait. There was no use in disturbing Pole, no need to hasten the delivery of the dreadful intelligence I carried. But by and by the singing silence of the staircase, the creaking noise the old stairs made under the tread of invisible feet, and the uneasiness of my own mind got the better of me and made my continued watch there almost an impossibility. I stole down-stairs quietly, like a thief, to look at the

door of my own old chambers. An oblong streak of black paint, fresher than the rest, obliterated my name, and over it was painted that of W. Whitehouse. I shall never in the least know why, but I figured W. Whitehouse as a man in spatterdashes and a light waistcoat. He wore a white hat with a black band, and looked fast and rakish. In the absurdest vague way in the world this visionary Whitehouse seemed to double the depressing influences which already rested upon me, and I stole silently down the court again, and went back into Holborn. Signs of life were already visible there, and the few passers-by had such an interest as one feels for strangers when living in a village. Everything was comfortless: the long, unbroken perspective of the streets, the white sky, the smokeless chimneys, the closed windows of shops, like dead eyes with weights upon them to keep the eyelids down. I was in a mood wretched enough to be fantastic, and weary enough to be irresponsible in fantasy.

I stood at a late coffee-stall and drank a cup of coffee, and then went back to the outside of Pole's door. I waited there until I fell into a little dreamy doze, and was awakened by the laundress, who came clanking upstairs with a broom and pail. She stared to see me, and I felt ashamed of being detected, as if I had been bound on some foolish or dishonorable enterprise.

"La! Mr. Denham," said the laundress, "whatever are you a-doing here, sir?"

I told her I had not cared to disturb Pole at so early an hour, and was waiting for a more seasonable time to arrive.

"Mr. Pole, sir," she said—"Mr. Pole is in the country. The gate-porter's got his address, and sends his letters to him regular."

This was a respite, after a fashion, and to a very slight degree I was unreasonably lifted by it. The news had none the less to be told because of it, but the disclosure was delayed. If it had been anyhow possible to delay it altogether, it would have taken a dreadful weight from my mind, but that of course was altogether out of the question. I determined to quarter myself upon Pole in his absence; and the laundress having admitted me to his rooms, I made my toilet there, and then sat down to think out what I should do. I thought it out so successfully that in five minutes I fell fast asleep. It was high noon when I awoke, cramped from my strained posture in the arm-chair. My mind was cleared and strengthened by these few hours of repose, however; and when I had ascertained from the gate-keeper who was on duty for the day that Pole was staying at Worborough Court, my own way lay quite

plainly before me. I found that there was no train for the west of England until six o'clock, and since my only opportunity of seeing Clara had to be taken before that hour arrived, I started for Cromwell Terrace.

Apart from my discovery I should have had nothing but good news and high hope to carry with me, but that discovery gave its own miserable color to everything in my mind. I made a resolute endeavor to look bright and cheerful, and determined that I would express nothing but the most hopeful sentiments. It would be quite early enough for Mary Delamere to know that this shadow had fallen upon her way when I could no longer hide the knowledge from her. At present she lived in a happy blindness, and though she must needs soon be rudely awakened to the truth, I was glad of every minute's delay.

It appeared afterward that Mrs. Grantley, Mary Delamere and Clara were together at the moment when my arrival was announced, and that Clara was at once for flying to meet me, but that mamma laid restraining orders upon her. The elder lady came in alone and received me, as I fancied, with a rather icy kindness.

"I hope, Mr. Denham," she said, "that you have not been dissipating in Paris. You are not looking so well as you were when you left London."

I tried to answer this implied accusation lightly, and feeling that the attempt was a dismal failure began to look awkward and probably a little guilty. She shook her head at me severely, and said she was assured that I had been keeping abominable hours. I answered that I had traveled from Paris without pause, and was a little tired by the journey. She shook her head once more with a doubtful aspect, and drew her lips to an expression which announced plainly that I was a melancholy example. This was so bad a beginning that I was spurred to make amendment for it, and I entered upon an account of my labors and successes, which by and by became enthusiastic and carried some conviction with it. She relaxed a little, and after a quarter of an hour's talk, observing doubtless my frequent and eager glances toward the door, she sailed away and dispatched Clara to me.

Clara was not long in remarking that I was somehow changed and depressed. She, unlike mamma, was confident that my sustained and heroic efforts in the cause of love and letters were answerable for my altered appearance. I must have been a poor dissembler, for in spite of all that I could do she found me out in the first five minutes, and was convinced that something dreadful had befallen me.

"You can't deny it, John," she said, looking at me with frightened eyes, and holding one of my hands in both her own. "Tell me what it is. You wicked boy! you have somehow been getting into trouble."

That at least I could and did deny with a clear conscience. I painted my own prospects in the rosiest tints, and did my painting with so hang-dog an air that she would have been less shrewd than I knew her to be if I had succeeded in deceiving her.

"It is of no use to pretend with me," she told me. "You are the worst actor I ever saw in my life. There is something on your mind. I insist either that you shall lay your hand upon your heart and declare solemnly that you have nothing in the world to be annoyed or disturbed about, or that you shall tell me what it is."

She said this with an admirable air of lightness and vivacity, but her eyes were troubled, and she was very serious beneath her pretense of comedy. I yielded so far as to tell her that I had very disturbing intelligence, though it in no way concerned my personal affairs.

"In no way?" she demanded. "If it doesn't concern you in any way, why should you be disturbed by it?"

"It concerns me only," I replied, "inasmuch as it must make others whom I value dearly very unhappy."

Thereupon I began to feel that it was a dreadful thing to find myself in the act of wishing that the news of anybody's death should be confirmed, or regretting that the intelligence should be disproved. Yet there was no disguising it. In all honesty the news of that wretched woman's death had brought relief to everybody concerned with her, and the certainty that the news was false would be the most dreadful blow that could possibly be inflicted upon two innocent people, who had never wished her harm or tried to wrong her. The common sense of the position was as clear as daylight, but the sentiment natural to the circumstances hung a veil before it.

"You are bound to hear the news," I said, gloomily, at last, "and my only reason for not telling it now is that I see no good in forestalling trouble for some one else who would be sure to hear it from you."

"Who do you mean?" she asked me.

"Promise me," I said, "that you will keep the news to yourself, and that you will show no sign of it to anybody in this house."

"In this house?" she repeated. I nodded in answer, and she, seizing my arm nervously with both hands, looked at me

for a second or two in an alarmed perplexity. "You have bad news for Mary," she said, then, with eyes suddenly widened with terror. "You have heard something about Mr. Pole. What is the matter with him?"

"His wife," I answered, "is alive. I saw her the night before last in Paris."

Clara sprung to her feet with clasped hands, and a cry of dismay and terror. Before the words had well left my lips I had seen the handle of the door turn, and before I could make a sign to repress the ejaculation which burst from her lips the door opened and the surprised face of Mary Delamere appeared at the entrance to the room. Clara heard the opening door, and, turning, made an impetuous movement toward her friend.

"What is it?" cried Miss Delamere, advancing swiftly. Clara and I stood miserably silent before her, looking helplessly one at the other. Some sort of explanation was unescapable.

"I am the bearer of strange news," I said. "Clara was startled by it."

To say that Clara was startled was but feebly to describe her condition. She had grown deathly pale, and so trembled from head to foot that she could hardly stand. Mary set an arm about her waist, and led her to an arm-chair, and there knelt beside her.

"Give me a glass of water, Mr. Denham," she said, quietly. "There is a carafe on the sideboard."

I obeyed her, and Clara sipped the proffered water and dropped a tear or two into the tumbler. Then she handed the glass to me with an appearance of recovering her composure, and suddenly crowned my misery by bursting into tears with her arms about Mary's neck.

"I think you had better leave us for a moment, Mr. Denham," said Miss Delamere, looking round upon me with a glance of keen inquiry.

"No!" cried Clara. "You mustn't go away, John. You must stay here. I was surprised and shaken at first, but I am better now." She composed herself by an obvious effort, and, embracing Mary anew, begged her to leave the room for a minute or two. "John," she said, "has brought very strange news indeed, if it should prove to be true. But it is not yet proved to be true, and I am not going to distress those who love me for what may be only a fancy. Go away, dear, for a little while, and let me find out whether I really have anything to be afraid of. You need not look that way at John, Mary." She tried to say this with an air of merriment, which

threatened for a moment to result in hysteria. "It is no fault of his, even if the thing is true."

She threw her arms about Miss Delamere again, and embraced her almost convulsively. Then she half led and half pushed her from the room, and, closing the door, turned toward me with a white but resolute face.

"What do you know?" she asked, twining her fingers hard together. "Tell me what you know."

I told her in as few words as I could find of my visit to MacIlray, my encounter with Mrs. Pole upon the staircase, and of her manner at the dinner-table. She was deeply impressed at first, but when I mentioned my own bewilderment at the change of name the woman had adopted, and at the complete purity of her French accent, I could see Clara's face brightening.

"You have been frightened by a resemblance," she said.

"No," I answered, "the thing is only too certain." And I went on to tell of MacIlray's identification of the little Jew solicitor. Her face fell again, and I saw that she shared my own certainty, though she strove to combat it. She was evidently resolved to be calm and strong, though in spite of herself her voice trembled as she spoke.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I am going," I answered, "in the first place to telegraph to Paris to say that my return to-morrow is impossible. Next, I am going down by the six-o'clock train to Exeter. I shall wire to Pole to meet me there. I shall tell him the story, and leave him to act upon it as he may see fit."

"I suppose," she said, "he will see fit to go to Paris, but that woman, if she is really Mrs. Pole, is not likely to be in the same house when you get there. Wire to your friend Mr. MacIlray, and tell him to have her movements watched. She would be at least as certain to know you as you were to know her. You did not disguise yourself by speaking an unexpected language."

Now I had done nothing but chase up and down in my own mind the sensible, necessary, and practical things to do, and yet it had never occurred to me to think that the woman on whose identifiction everything depended might choose to complicate our difficulties by evading inquiry. Yet, directly the thought was suggested to me, I saw that there was nothing more certain in the world. The chances against her lying there waiting to be caught were a million to one. I was for starting at once to repair my stupidity as far as possible by a

telegram to MacIlray when Clara bade me wait a moment, and rang the bell.

"We will see Mary together before you go," she said, with a self-possession which did her infinite credit in my eyes. "She will be less likely to be alarmed or disturbed if she knows that we have come to an understanding to do something, and if we seem to put a bold front upon the matter. A day or two is not much, John, but I should value a day or two's ignorance if you and I were going to be parted."

The maid, appearing in answer to the bell, was instructed to summon Miss Delamere, and a minute later Mary entered the room. Clara, who was by this time quite mistress of herself, relieved me of the task of explanation.

"We have talked things over," she began, with her arm about the other's waist, and looking at her with a smiling, mournful tenderness. "John has brought very serious and surprising news, but we are not yet certain that it is true. We can know all about it if we exercise a little patience; and he is going to make inquiries."

"If the news is bad news, dear," said Miss Delamere, "I hope it may be contradicted. If it is very bad news I am sure you bear it bravely, and I am sure you will bear it bravely, even should it prove to be true."

"I should never bear trouble so well as you would," Clara answered. There was a meaning in her words for her and me which could hardly be expected to reach Miss Delamere's mind. "We must dismiss all thought of this," Clara continued, "until we hear decisively; and you must promise not to ask any questions about it until I speak of it again."

The promise was given, and, as I knew afterward, was kept, though one hears occasionally of feminine curiosity, and there was probably enough here to excite it to considerable activity. I took my leave almost at once, and went off to dispatch my telegrams. I delayed my message to Pole until I could lay hands upon a Bradshaw, and could find in its pages the name of a hotel in Exeter. I found what I wanted at an old-fashioned tavern where I made a pretense of dining. Then I sent off my message, making it as urgent as I could without expressing Pole's actual concern in the affair, and took the evening express.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was dusk already within the limits of the station, but the train glided into a new day outside, and the autumn sunlight

was clear and beautiful. Once beyond the line of houses, and rushing through the peaceful fields, I surrendered myself to the contemplation of the scenery with that curious indifference which I suppose everybody has experienced at times of mental tension or trouble. I remember that when, years before this story opened, I was awaiting news of my mother, who lay in the room above me, hovering between life and death, my whole heart and thoughts were concentrated on the effort to set a flower-jar in the exact middle of the window-sill it stood on. Nothing in the world seemed to me so important as a mathematical accuracy in that poor achievement. As I rode westward I recalled that episode in my history, and likened my present condition of mind to my feelings of that hour, so that I was able to know that I was less indifferent than I felt. There was a gorgeous sunset, which gilded all the fields and made the face of one of my fellow-passengers glow like hot metal, burnished. Then the night came down. My fellow-travelers left me midway in the journey, and I tried to compose myself for sleep. This I soon discovered to be an absolute impossibility. The jolting of the carriage and the rolling of wheels took up all manner of senseless and irritating refrains, and sung them over and over again until I was sick and angry. One in particular, the chorus of a song supposed by the general populace to be comic, and in reality not more or less idiotic than a hundred others of its kind which I have known before and since, insisted on returning with such a perseverance as no cheering, enlightening thought, or fancy anyhow reasonable and human, has displayed since the world began—"Slap, bang! here we are again." I tried to remember and to repeat verses, and before I had traveled through the first four lines of Poe's "Raven," "Slap, bang! there we were again, there we were again, there we were again; slap, bang; there we were again; what jolly dogs were we!" I got out my note-book, and tried to study its pages by the light of the sickly yellow lamp, but the oil washed to and fro in the dirty glass basin and made the very flame wink to that abominable tune and those unmeaning words. The wheels ground them out remorselessly, and the carriage creaked and rattled, and complained all over. For we always were "so jolly, oh! so jolly, oh! so jolly, oh! we always were so jolly, oh! what jolly dogs were we!" I gave up trying to do anything, and traveled on to Exeter in a dumb and anguished resignation to that brutal melody.

I hardly knew whether I was shocked or relieved to find Pole standing on the platform at two o'clock in the morning to re-

ceive me. He was ordinarily very cool about his demonstrations of friendship, but he shook me by the hand with what was, for him, an unwonted show of warmth, and clawed me affectionately by the shoulder. At our first encounter his face was in the light, and mine in the dark, and I could see a marked difference in him. He had grown quite handsome in this last three months, and a look of settled, strong serenity had taken the place of the stern air of self-control which had been used to characterize him. He had brought a fly with him from the hotel, and, laying hold of my portmanteau, he carried it out of the station, and set it down on the front seat of the vehicle. We mounted, and the man rumbled away.

"I am glad to see you, old chap," said Pole, cheerily, clapping his hand upon my knee. "I suppose you have been having fine times in Paris."

It was evident that he suspected nothing unusual as yet. I could see that he supposed me to have run down to Exeter simply for the pleasure of spending an hour or two in his society.

"I was out when your telegram came," he went on, when I had answered his last question with some commonplace, "but I got in an hour after it was delivered, and found that I just had time to catch the up-train. So, guessing that you wouldn't have a great deal of time to spare—your last letter told me that—I thought it best to run up at once, and catch you on arrival. When have you to get back again?"

"As soon as possible," I told him. "I exceeded my leave to come down here."

"Then," said he, "if you're not too tired, we'll make a sober night of it, and have a good, long, satisfactory jaw. You can sleep going up by train to-morrow. I've been on the point of making a dash over to look at you half a dozen times, but, what with the poor old fellow down at Worborough and a certain affair that holds me in London when I get a chance to go there, I've missed doing it."

My arrival seemed to have put him in unusually high spirits. His voice was changed, and had a ring of jollity in it I had never heard before. It cut me to the heart to think of the message I had to deliver to him, and for the moment I recoiled before my own enterprise with a complete cowardice. My cowardice was so complete, indeed, that I did at one moment actually resolve not to deliver my tidings at all in person, but to go away and write them. This abject condition did not endure long, however, and by the time at which the hotel was reached I had recovered my courage.

"I have taken a sitting-room," said Pole, cheerily, "and there's a bit of a cold spread laid out there in case you're hungry. Carry the portmanteau to this gentleman's room, John, and then, so far as we are concerned, you can go to bed."

He led the way upstairs to a cheerful apartment, where candles burned upon the table and the mantel-piece, and a small fire glowed upon the hearth.

"Would you like a wash first?" he demanded, laying both hands upon my shoulders. For the first time he saw my face clearly, and he looked at me with a sudden anxiety. "Jack, old man, what's the matter with you? You're looking quite ill, and worn, and miserable. What is it? No ill luck, I hope?"

I could scarcely speak, and I do not know to this hour in what words I broke the news. I can see his ghastly face, of mingled incredulity and horror, clearly—as clearly as I saw it then.

"You're mad, Denham!" he said. "I saw her grave. You were with me when Goldsmith brought the certificate of her death."

It was, I told him, a most wicked and abominable plot. What means had been employed I could only guess at, but the object of the cheat was clear. His wife had effaced herself for the time to trap him into marrying again, and then to make his life a burden, as she had promised in my hearing. Goldsmith had entered into the scheme, as I surmised, partly from hatred, and partly in the hope of levying blackmail. I set the narrative of my discovery before him clearly, and told him of MacIlray's memory of Goldsmith's visit.

"There is but one thing," I said, "which seems to go against her identity. She speaks French as only a French woman might be supposed to speak it."

"She spoke nothing else," he answered, "until she was twelve years of age. She was born in Paris."

When the first shock of my intelligence was over, he had taken one of his old lounging poses in a corner of the apartment, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets and one foot thrown across the other. He listened with bent head to all I had to say, and when I ceased to speak looked up at me.

"Well," he said, with an odd laugh, "I suppose it's true. It's like my luck. You'd better have a glass of wine, Denham. You're a bit knocked up, old man."

He lounged over to the table on which the supper was laid out, with its white napkins and glittering electro-plate, and there uncorked a bottle. He filled two wine-glasses, and held

one out toward me. My shaking hand spilled half its contents on the carpet, but he drained his own, and, sitting down, drew a cigar-case from his pocket, and, having lighted a cigar, sat smoking with apparent tranquillity, inspecting the ash of the tobacco and the texture of the cigar as if his judgment on its quality were a matter of some importance. Recalling once more my own youthful experience at the time of my mother's illness and its renewal of that very night, I knew so well what that seeming indifference covered that it looked heart-breaking to me.

"For Heaven's sake, Pole," I besought him, "don't take it that way."

I think I was half beside myself with pity, and a foolish, unavailing remorse that it was I who had struck this blow.

"My dear boy," he said, "it's got to be taken. I must take it how I can."

I sat watching him in an unhappy silence while he smoked, and seemed to take no note of anything. When the cigar had dwindled to a mere stump he threw it into the fire-place, and sauntered up and down the room, pausing here and there to inspect the prints upon the wall. Twice he laughed to himself, with a mockery which was dreadful to hear, a bitter, mirthless chuckle of half a dozen notes.

"Suppose," he said, at last, "that I don't believe this story, Denham? There's more than one Jew named Goldsmith in the world."

"You can't act," I answered, "as if you didn't believe it."

"No, no, no," he said, as if he were repelling some uninteresting and commonplace stupidity. "I can't act as if I didn't believe it. But all the same, I won't believe it till I know. You're going back to Paris?"

"Yes," I said, "I must get back as soon as possible. I should have been on my way now if I had not been obliged to see you."

"Well," he answered, calmly, "it couldn't have been a very pleasant task for you, and I'm very much obliged to you. I'll go to Paris with you, and we'll look into things. There's an up express at eight. We'll take it together."

I had not formed any conception of the manner in which he would receive the news. I could hardly have conceived him as accepting anything unless with self-possession and like a man, but the spectacle of his extreme quietude was harder to endure than any outbreak from a man of softer fiber would have been. We sat the remnant of the night through, keeping silence for the most part, though sometimes Pole would open

an indifferent theme, and talk upon it for a moment or two. When sounds about the house assured us that the servants were astire, he rang the bell. The candles had burned down in their sockets, and the morning light already stole in grayly upon our haggard faces, on the unmoved dish-covers and the gray ashes of the extinguished fire. The waiter, who appeared in morning *négligé*, stared at us in a faint wonder. Pole wrote out a telegram, gave the waiter instructions to remove the untasted meal, and ordered breakfast. His message was addressed to Lord Worborough, and stated simply that I had brought news of prime importance which took him away for a day or two. We filled up the time of waiting for breakfast in our separate bedrooms. I was not conscious of any wish to sleep, but a cold bath removed a good deal of the fatigue which naturally lay upon me, and dissipated for the time a heavy headache, which had felt to me like a part of Pole's unhappiness.

Neither of us eat much when the breakfast came, and the time drawled on wearily, the very ticking of the clock seeming to have slowed down on purpose to retard our departure. The express sauntered idly Londonward—nothing could have seemed quick enough to my unreasoning impatience. There was no delivery beyond, no relief nor hope to hasten to. Yet if I had had wings as swift as meditation I could not have gone faster than I desired.

Pole, who had supplied himself with necessities for the night only, went to his own chambers, and there packed a portmanteau. He was fond of having everything which appertained to his own personal requirements fine and rich, and he got together all his pretty trifles with a mechanical precision. We dined at a restaurant, and took the evening train. In my own case nature asserted herself after all the fatigue I had undergone, and I slept uneasily most of the way to Dover, and again after the passage of the channel. Whenever my slumbers broke I opened my eyes to see Pole sitting opposite to me grave and impassive. The old, hard look was back upon his face, and was intensified tenfold. He looked as if he were going to lead a forlorn hope, or to be hanged, and was determined to take the inevitable without a sign. He was in all my waking thoughts, and in all my dreams. I fell over scores of yawning precipices on that mournful journey, but never once without Pole having fallen over the edge before me, or his falling with me, or his cry, as he followed, startling me to a waking knowledge scarcely more endurable than my dreams.

Reaching Paris, we repaired at once to the Boulevard Hauss-

mann, and there, leaving our portmanteaus in the fiacre at the door, we mounted to MacIlray's room. I had told Pole of my message to him, and my fear lest Mrs. Pole should have vanished in the certainty that I had recognized her, and we had decided to visit MacIlray first of all. That good Scot was already up and half attired, pottering about his room in dressing-gown and slippers. He recognized Pole at once from a portrait of him he had seen in my possession, and said as much with an amiable cordiality.

"You got the message I sent you by wire?" I asked.

"Ay," he said; "I got it; but I got it an hour too late. The birdie's flown, lad."

I glanced at Pole and saw, by his face, that he accepted this as strong confirmation of my story, though I knew well enough that at the bottom of his mind the story had no need of confirmation. He drew a leathern portfolio of rather unusual size from his pocket, and from this produced two or three photographs. The photographer's art had not reached to anything like its present excellence of delicacy, but the likeness in these sun-pictures, though a little hard, was unmistakable.

"Two identifications," said Pole, quietly, "are stronger than one. Is that the lady Mr. Denham believed himself to recognize?"

"The verra woman," MacIlray declared, when he had found and polished his gold-rimmed spectacles. "There's no mistake in the world about that. The likeness would just hang her. I suppose," he added, with a manner which robbed his speech of its apparent brusquerie, "I suppose, sir, ye'll be the unhappy husband. Denham named no names, but ye're always on his tongue, and he said she was the wife of his dearest friend, so that I was inclined to suppose 'twas you." There he fell into a little reverie over the photographs as they lay upon the table. He rubbed his red hair fretfully until it stood up everywhere, and came to his unvarying conclusion, "Ay, ay, Denham! Ay, ay, man! Ay, ay!" It was spoken with a tone of profound melancholy, but he brightened into eagerness a moment later. "I hope," he said, "that I've done the right thing. These police in Paris are just demons, and if once they get hold of a thing they'll worry you to death about it. I evitated them, and went to a first-rate *maison de confiance* within an hour and a half of the lady having left the house; and I've one other bit of news for you. I found this—" he rummaged in his coat-pockets, and by and by produced a telegram, dated from London, addressed to Mme. Damal, and bearing these words only: "*Partez sans délai pour*

Lyons." "She dropped that upon the table," he said, "and left it behind her."

"That," said Pole, taking it up and letting it flutter back to the table, "is nothing but a blind. If she leaves word in that way that she has gone to Lyons, Lyons is the one place in the world she will not go to."

CHAPTER XXII.

We found, upon inquiry, that the private agent employed by MacIlray had already been at work to some effect. Knowing the precise hour at which Mrs. Pole had left the house, and having a fairly accurate description of her personal appearance and attire from MacIlray, he had had little difficulty in finding the driver who had transported her and her luggage to the Gare de Lyons. The driver remembered the lady perfectly well for one or two reasons. In the first place, she was strikingly dressed in a Mephistophelian mixture of black and scarlet; in the second place the *cocher* seemed to have an eye for a handsome woman, and described his fare as "*fièrement belle;*" finally, her curious proceedings at the station had excited his wonder. At the moment of his arrival there a train had just discharged its passengers, and the man had lingered in the hope of picking up a new fare. He saw the lady whose luggage he had just assisted in dismounting from his own vehicle in the act of chartering another fiacre. He saw the luggage placed upon the roof, and heard the lady's order to be driven to the Gare de l'Est.

The agent, being supplied with the photographs, sought the driver a second time, and Pole and I accompanied him. The man recognized the face at once. That was undoubtedly the lady he had driven. Pole, who looked less interested either than the driver or myself, less interested even than the agent, held out one of the photographs for the coachman's observation, and bade him look at it attentively. Was it not possible, he asked, just possible that he had been misled by a strong likeness? The man shook his head.

"If I were to tell you," said Pole, "that this lady is dead and buried, what should you say?"

"Nothing at all," the coachman answered; "I do not permit myself to say impolite things."

"You would not believe it?"

"Assuredly I should not believe it."

Pole feed the man for the trouble he had given him, and then, having surrendered the portrait to the agent for his

assistance, he went away to the hotel he had chosen for himself, and left me to the pursuit of my ordinary avocations. I am free to confess that McIlray and I consumed a good deal of the office time that day and for some days afterward in the discussion of this surprising topic.

"He's a cool hand, yon," said MacIlray, referring to Pole. "I was at a loss with the man to begin with. He's one of those people that would like you to think they've a cannon ball in their bosoms instead of a heart, but it's my opinion that he's a trifle more feeling than he'd have ye thenk him. There's a kyind o' man that has just a savage idea of pairsonal degnity, and that lives in a house with every window close shuttered. I'm not sure that there isn't the wildest sort o' high-jenks going on within doors, for all so quiet as the house may look on the outside."

I told him that this was very much my own opinion, and indeed that I knew Pole to be a man of very profound and sensitive feeling.

"The lady has the pull of him there very distinctly," said the Scot. "Not that she hasn't her feelings, too, but she makes a luxury of them. A real flaming quarrel to a pairson of that desposition is nothing less than a Heaven-sent blessing. I wish the poor young gentleman well through with the business. It's a mighty petty to see a fine, straight-grown young fellow like yon in such a strait."

MacIlray took the story, so far as he was allowed to know it, very much to heart, and his contemplative "Ay, ay, Denham" grew much more frequent than of old, and took a mournful and almost despondent tone.

Pole had given me no invitation to join him, and I took it for granted that he would have preferred to be alone. I did my best to keep away from him, and for one whole day succeeded. At the end of that time I could wait no longer for a message from him, and I went to see him. He had taken apartments high up in a big hotel of the newer fashion, and when I entered his room he was seated, pen in hand, at a table by the window. He glanced at me across his shoulder and bade me wait a minute or two while he finished his letter. I sat down at the opposite side of the table and could see his face clearly. It was stern and composedly set, but, unless I was much mistaken, there were signs in it of a recent surrender to his troubles. A handkerchief lay upon the table near his hand. It was much crumpled and very moist, and I drew my own conclusions from the evidence which it and his eyes afforded.

I heard the rapid scrawl of his signature following on the more deliberately written text, and he looked up at me.

"That's over," he said, laying a sheet of blotting-paper upon the letter and smoothing it with a resolute and heavy hand.

I did not answer him in words, and when he had folded the letter and enveloped and addressed it, he tossed it across the table to where I sat. I saw that it was addressed to Delamere, and I could guess at once the nature of its contents, and the emotions Pole had endured in writing it.

Neither of us said anything of this, however, and each was certain that the other understood.

"The agent was here," said Pole, "a couple of hours ago. He came to tell me that he had been to the Gare de l'Est with the photograph, and had made inquiries there. He found a booking clerk who remembered to have given her a ticket, but unfortunately he was not able to recall the place for which she started. The man proposes now to take the line, station by station, to show the photograph everywhere, and make inquiries until he lights upon her."

"Is there," I asked him, "any lingering doubt in your mind which makes you pursue this chase?"

"I don't know," he answered, with an air of great weariness, "that I should care to call it a doubt. As a matter of fact I don't suppose I have any doubt about the matter. But there's a sort of fantastic fancy that I may be chasing a phantom. It is just strong enough to keep me going till I find her. It is not strong enough to keep me here, for I am going back to-night. I was coming round to your place to say good-bye before starting."

"Are you going back to Worborough?" I asked, chiefly, for the sake of saying something.

"I am going back to London first," he answered, in a tone of weary boredom. Then he straightened himself, and added, in a changed voice: "I am going to see Mr. Goldsmith."

What there was in the tone, or what I saw in his face to inspire me with so incredible and so wild a fancy as shot into my mind at that moment I should find it difficult, if not impossible, to tell. If that mad imagination did him wrong, as I do now most sincerely believe it did, it has at least long since been confessed and forgiven.

"For what purpose?" I asked him, speaking as calmly as I could, though I knew that my voice trembled.

He did not answer me, but took two or three paces up and down the room.

"Pole," I said, laying a hand upon his arm. He turned and looked at me. "If," I continued—"if you go to see that man, I go with you. You shall not visit him alone."

"Very well," he said. "You can come if you please. I supposed you had your work to see to."

"I can arrange for that," I answered. "There are more important things than that in the world; and you sha'n't see Goldsmith alone just now if I can help it."

"Very well," he answered me again; "you shall have your own way."

He looked at me with a strange smile, more mournful and more tender than any human expression I can remember to have seen.

"What is the good," I asked him, "of going to Goldsmith at all? What purpose do you propose to serve? If he is in the cheat at all—and we are as certain that he is as we can be of anything—you will only put your wife upon her guard, and make your discovery of her more difficult. Look the whole thing in the face: What is her motive for running away from Paris? Fear of you?"

"No," said Pole, "she is not afraid of me, nor of anything."

"She has been seen once," I continued, "and has gone away in the hope that by her complete disappearance she might delude you into the belief that I had been mistaken. I can trace the workings of her mind as clearly as if they were the action of my own. She argues that the wish is father to the thought. She knows you had the solidest grounds for believing her dead, and she thinks that in awhile, with the passage of time, you will bring yourself to believe my certainty a mere suspicion, and so will fall into the hideous trap she set for you."

"Does it matter what she thinks?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered; "it obviously matters much. If she knows that you are absolutely certain of her existence she knows that she has no purpose to serve further, and if you desire to find her for the satisfaction of that lingering doubt you spoke of you will do it far more easily by not giving her warning than by giving it."

"I mean to see Goldsmith, all the same," Pole answered.

"In that case," I told him, "I shall go at once to MacIlray and make arrangements for another day or two of absence."

"That's agreed upon," said Pole. "I would as soon have you for a looker-on as anybody."

It was agreed that I should call upon him in time to catch the northward express, and so, for a time, we parted. I found MacIlray at the office and told him of my purpose.

"Ye're a verra reasonable youth," said he, when I had made my statement, "and I'll suppose that ye have a reason for this. But there's two or three things to be looked after, and I'm thenking they'll be getting a little wild in London. They seem to have less appreciation of my leterary style than I honestly think I desairve, and they'll be missing that compact hand o' yours. Ye'd best give the chief a look-up in town and offer an explanation."

I promised to take that duty upon myself, and was making ready to go away when he crossed the room with an air of mystery and understanding.

"I've been taking," said he, "a sympathetic look round, and for the space o' some ten seconds I've been mentally occupying your friend's position. I'm of openion that ef I were in his place I'd be sorely tempted nine tenths to slay that blagyard lettle Jew creature. Keep an eye on your friend, Denham. He's a bit of a volcano. He's tall enough to wear ice on the top of him, but that's no argument against the existence of the fire below."

I told MacIlray that it was precisely this reflection and no other which had persuaded me to accompany Pole to London. Hearing this, he shook me warmly by the hand.

"There's a heap o' wesdom abroad," he said, "but there's a wonderful small amount of it finds its way into the British jury-box. It's honest human nature to give a fellow like that sore bones, but it might go unduly hard with the man that ded it. Ye're on an honest errand, ye're a decent lad, Denham, and I'll just do my best in your absence."

There is nothing to tell of the return journey to London, except that Pole's manner throughout it kept that mad inquietude of which I have spoken alive and active. We went straight to his own chambers, and there refreshed ourselves, and at about eleven o'clock Pole began to draw on his gloves, and announced his intention of starting forthwith to visit Mr. Goldsmith.

On one of the walls of his bedroom a series of brass-headed nails had been driven in to form a rack for a considerable collection of walking-sticks, hunting crops, and riding-whips. Pole, lounging up to this with the thumbs of his gloved hands stuck into his pockets, surveyed the collection with a critical eye. By and by he selected, and laid upon the sitting-room table a whip with a handle of twisted whalebone and a loaded

head of silver. As he stood passing a brush about his hat I took hold of this weapon and balanced it in my hand. Pole looked at me with a face of no expression, and without saying anything to him I took back the whip and put it in its original place. Pole, setting his hat nonchalantly on the back of his head, sauntered after me and took it down again. Looking me full in the face with that same marked absence of any legible expression, he lowered it firmly and slowly toward the table, and finally deposited it there with a bang. I laid hands upon it once more.

"There's no knowing," I said, balancing it anew, "what damage this thing might do in the hands of a strong and angry man."

A second time I placed it on the rack, and for the third time he took it down.

"Now," he said, "if you are ready we will go and see Goldsmith."

CHAPTER XXIII.

As everybody knows, it is easily possible to be mightily fond of a man, and yet to be angry with him. I was angrier with Pole than I had ever been in my life with anybody, and I walked by his side in hot indignation at his obstinacy. If he could have employed the whip he carried for Mr. Goldsmith's benefit without danger to himself it is quite likely I might have felt differently about the matter. A mere flogging would have been slight punishment for Goldsmith's rascally offense, and I could even have taken some righteous pleasure in knowing that it was to be administered. It was quite natural that Pole should wish to administer it; but it was no part of my business to stand by and allow him to get into new trouble. Even if he failed to regret the flogging itself, he was certain to regret its consequences. Perhaps at the bottom of my heart I was as anxious that Goldsmith should suffer as Pole himself was, and the very knowledge that he could not get his deserts without bringing more suffering to the man he had tried so vilely to injure helped to increase my anger.

We marched side by side down Holborn toward Goldsmith's offices in Ely Place, without a word on either side. An outer door was open, and a dapper little city man was in the act of exchanging a final word with a clerk, and half blocked up the door-way. Pole, who had got a yard ahead of me, set this personage on one side without apology and walked past him, I following. There were two other people in the room, and

one of them with a pen behind his ear made a step or two forward as we entered. Pole, without paying any heed to him, went straight to a door marked "Private," turned the handle, and entered the further room. I still kept at his heels, and was in time to see the start of amazement with which Goldsmith half arose from the chair he sat in. I had no sooner entered than Pole slammed to the door, turned the key, withdrew it, and put it in his pocket. I took advantage of the time afforded me by this movement to place myself between the two.

Goldsmith went very white, and those jetty little eyes of his glanced hither and thither in a rapid, unavailing search for a way of retreat.

"What do you mean by this?" he demanded. "That's a very curious way of entering a business office, Bister Pole."

"Yes," said Pole, "it's a curious way of entering a business office, Mr. Goldsmith. But it's a curious sort of creature that keeps the office, and I have a curious little bit of business to transact with him."

There was a tone of relishing badinage in Pole's voice, but there was no suspicion of humor in his look, and what with the bantering tone and the sternness of the gaze he encountered, Mr. Goldsmith saw such excellent reasons for fear that he turned paler still, and his hands began to tremble visibly.

"I don't understand you," he responded, nervously.

"I think you partly understand me," Pole answered, in the same mocking voice. "I think we shall understand each other very thoroughly before long."

The offered prospect of a perfect understanding was evidently unpleasant to Goldsmith. He must have known perfectly well that there was no way of retreat for him, but the jetty little eyes went on seeking for one all the same. He made a great effort to pull himself together, and partially succeeded.

"Have the goodness to explaid yourself," he said.

There was a big ruler lying on the desk, and his hand reached out furtively toward it. Before I had a chance to move Pole made a swift step forward and possessed himself of Goldsmith's defensive weapon. I was afraid that the promised understanding was coming about precipitately, but Pole merely dropped the ruler into a waste-paper basket out of Goldsmith's reach, and then seated himself.

"When my friend, Mr. Denham, here," Pole began, "had the distinguished honor of crossing the channel in your company, you told him, as I learn, that you were on your way to see a client in Paris."

Goldsmith must have known pretty well already what was

coming, and he was pale enough in all conscience already. But at this opening of the case against him such color as his face still had deserted it, and his moist and pulpy lips took a bluish tinge.

"You described that client as a lady. You said that she would one day occupy a high position, and make a noise in the world. I suppose that you are already aware that Mr. Denham met that client of yours four days ago?"

"How should I know that?" asked Goldsmith. "And, if I did know it, what is there id that to make a row about?"

The manner of his inquiry was utterly unsuccessful, and it was evident that he knew as much.

"Now," Pole continued, "since you visited your client personally, it is only reasonable to presume that you were aware of her identity."

"What are you trying to talk about?" cried Goldsmith, with a wretched attempt to look surprised and puzzled. "Of course I've been aware of her identity. I got a letter from her odly yesterday. I don't know what business it is of yours, or what you come here and talk about her for."

As often happens, the sound of the little scoundrel's voice seemed to lend him courage, and I fancy he saw a glimmer of hope that the lines of his defense might shield him after all if he were only allowed to get behind them. His shaking hands made a search among a little heap of documents pigeon-holed in one of the compartments of the knee-table at which he sat. He produced one of the papers with a frightened, blustering flourish, and slapped it on the table as if he would have said that that alone would clear him of any possible aspersion.

"There's the letter," he said; "it's got nothing to do with you, so far as I know, but you cad look at it if you like."

Pole extended his hand as if asking for the document, and I, standing between him and the table, passed it to him, and, slightly changing my posture, was able to read it with him. It ran thus:

"LYONS, 64 RUE DE LA REGENCE.

"DEAR SIR,—During few days my addresse will be as here above. I myself have found forced to quit Paris, and am myself here established. Behold me absent of my documents of affairs, and it must that you wait my return for a fifteen of days. Agree, dear sir, my salutations regretful for the pain I give you. MARIE DAMAL."

"That's the kind of stuff she writes," cried Goldsmith, as Pole handed the letter back to me. "She picks the words out of the dictionary."

"This document, Mr. Goldsmith," said Pole, "is of no interest to me. It is not in my wife's handwriting."

At this Goldsmith gave a great start, and tried hard to feign amazement.

"I say, Bister Dedhab," he said, appealing to me, "if he's like that you ought to have him taken care of. It isn't very likely to look like your wife's handwriting. It's quite enough that there should have been such a surprising personal likeness between them. D'ye think it's that"—he appealed to me again—"that's turned him queer? Has he seen the lady?"

"I myself," I answered, impatient alike of Pole's savage banter and Goldsmith's shuffling, "I myself saw Mrs. Pole alive on Monday last in Paris, and dined at the same table with her."

"Well, upod my word," cried Mr. Goldsmith, with a very creditable assumption of amazement this time, though his success was achieved too late to be of much service to him; "the pair of you are mad together. There's a likedess, I admit. that there's a likedess, but it ain't so strong as that comes to, not by long chalks."

"Very well, Mr. Goldsmith," said Pole, "I will tell you what you shall do. You shall put yourself in my charge from this moment; you shall conduct me into the presence of this client of yours, and you shall be so watched that you shall have no opportunity of warning her of our arrival. If your statement is true I will pay you your own claim for wasted time and for expenses."

This proposal made Goldsmith more uncomfortable than ever, but he affected to treat it as a mere piece of madness.

"I'm not going gallivanting off to France on a fool's errad with a couple of madmen," he declared. "I've got my busidess to see to, and I'm goig to see to it."

"My good Goldsmith," said Pole, with a cruel suavity, "I will give you my check for five hundred pounds at this moment. It will be honored on your return."

"What a piece of nodsense!" cried Goldsmith. "What do I want to rob you of five hundred pounds for? There's the lady's address, 64 Roo de la Regedce, Lyods. Go and make a call on her."

"You won't earn five hundred pounds so easily?" asked Pole.

"No!" shouted Goldsmith. "I won't be bothered any more with such a pack of foolery. Go and see the lady. Go and see her."

"Will you earn five hundred pounds," Pole asked, "by a ten minutes' drive in a cab?"

He drew from his pocket a copy of the photographic portrait he had left with the agent in Paris, and held it up before Goldsmith.

"No, I won't," snarled Goldsmith, without waiting to hear what might be proposed to him. "I won't have anything to do with you."

"I think it possible," Pole said, in the same unrelenting, quiet voice, "that we may have much to do with each other by and by. I offer you five hundred pounds if you will drive with me to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and declare that this is a portrait of the dying woman whom you identified there as Adelaide Pole. Will you earn the money?"

Goldsmith returned no answer this time, but his breath grew thick and husky, and his glance darted hither and thither in a panic-stricken renewal of his search for a way of escape. There were curious, dry-looking little flecks of foam upon his lips, and his hands no longer merely trembled. They shook like those of a man with the palsy. Pole returned the photograph to his pocket and rose to his feet, buttoning his coat as he did so. He held the whip tightly clinched in his right hand meanwhile, and the little Jew cowered in his seat before him. I put myself between the two, and looked Pole in the face.

"This man," I said, "has done you too great a wrong to be paid for in this way. You shall not put yourself in the wrong if I can help it."

"Let me get by, Jack," he said, in a tone of quiet commonplace.

"If you will have a little reason," I answered him, "you will know what must come of this. If you lay violent hands upon this pitiful little rascal here you disgrace yourself publicly. You can't keep out of the exposure some names that are sacred to you."

"Let me get by," he said.

"I will not let you get by," I answered. "I am too much your friend."

"You don't want to quarrel with me, Denham?"

"Not I; but you shall only do this mad and useless thing by making me unable to prevent it."

During this contention Goldsmith had risen and stolen to the waste-paper basket, where he secured the big ruler. Then he intrenched himself behind an arm-chair in a corner, and

stood to watch the progress of events with a natural and excusable anxiety.

"Wait a moment," Pole said, with an odd gleam at me, half humorous, half mournful, and altogether affectionate. "Perhaps you and I may arrive at a compromise, old fellow. I don't want to make this visit altogether profitless, and I have a proposal to make. I am going to ask Mr. Goldsmith my wife's real whereabouts. If he will give me that I will let him off so far as this goes, and if he will not I shall ask your indulgence while I flog him till he does."

I think there is nothing so tragic in this world that it can altogether exclude the element of humor. The whole of this business was tragic and bitter enough, but if I had had to change places with Goldsmith for it, I could not have saved myself from laughter at the sight of his countenance when I acceded to Pole's proposal.

"Yes," I said, "I consent to that, because I know he is not the sort of man to take a thrashing for anybody's sake."

The little man in the corner had obviously experienced a beautiful relief at my interposition. But now he fell into a state of terror altogether abject.

"I shall take it fighting," he quavered from behind his arm-chair, and made a paralytic show with the big ruler. "I ain't goig to be knocked about and not retaliate. You can't expect that, Bister Pole, now can you? I put it to you. You can't expect me not to retaliate."

"You pledge yourself, Denham," said Pole, "not to interfere between this fellow and myself if he refuses me an answer?"

"Certainly," I replied; "if he refuses the answer I leave him in your hands."

At this response Goldsmith gave an exasperated little whine, and snatched the arm-chair closer.

"Now, Mr. Goldsmith," said Pole, sternly advancing upon him, "you know what I want. Will you give it to me peacefully, or shall I be compelled to thrash it out of you?"

"How should I know what you want?" Goldsmith asked, watching Pole's riding-whip with comfortlessly expectant eye.

"I want you to give me my wife's address."

"Her address," said the wretched Hebrew, "is at Kedsal Greed."

"Come from behind that chair," said Pole, with a sudden sternness. "Take a seat at your table. Take this pen. Write the address upon that envelope. I give you sixty sec-

onds. If it is not done by that time you shall take the consequences."

He drew out his watch, and looked at it fixedly, his right hand swishing the riding-whip up and down with a threatening and disturbing sound.

"Fifteen seconds," he said, after what had seemed a much longer pause. Then, after a pause, which seemed even longer, "Thirty seconds." Goldsmith dipped the pen, and groaned. "Forty seconds," said Pole. Goldsmith groaned again, and the pen began to travel rapidly.

The address was written, and Pole, taking it from the table, read, "Madame Damal, 28 Rue Racine, Quartier de l'Odeon, Paris." He pressed it on the blotting-pad which lay upon the table, and placed it in his pocket-book.

"And now," he said, "you know better than I to what penalties you have made yourself liable by joining in this conspiracy. Your safest way will be to put me in possession of the whole plot and its purpose."

Goldsmith seemed to realize this, and in awhile he began a confused and intricate narrative, which being unraveled and plainly told, amounted to this: On a certain day, between four and five months earlier, Mrs. Pole had witnessed a street accident. She had followed the woman who was injured to the hospital, and had there professed to identify her as Adelaide Pole. She had given a false name and address, and had come at once to Goldsmith to inform him of the move she had made, and to tell him its purpose. The woman was, beyond doubt, fatally injured, and the hospital surgeons gave no hope of her recovery. Mrs. Pole induced Goldsmith to assist in the pretended identification, and it was he who had found money for the funeral expenses. He had, since that time, supported his fellow-conspirator, in the belief that Pole would remarry, and that they would then be able to blackmail him to almost any extent. Mrs. Pole's object was mainly to be revenged upon her husband. Goldsmith professed to have been more than half frightened into the transaction by her threats.

"She's got ad awful temper, Bister Pole," he said. "She's an extremely violedt person. You know she is. I wouldn't live with such a woman for the world. I can sympathize with you, sir, I can indeed."

"I will not decide at present," Pole answered, disregarding, not unnaturally, this novel sentiment of Mr. Goldsmith's. "I may take criminal proceedings against both of you."

"Oh," cried Goldsmith, "I hope that better coudsels may prevail with you."

"If," Pole pursued, "you give one sign to my wife of my knowledge of her whereabouts, I shall enter on those proceedings at once. You understand that I make no promise of refraining from them in any case. I only warn you that any communication from you to my wife will precipitate matters."

Goldsmith was so thoroughly cowed by this time that the warning seemed unnecessary.

"I've washed my hands of the whole busidess," he exclaimed. "I'll have do bore to do with it. I'd never have put a finger to it if you hadn't chucked me idto the river. But look here now, Bister Pole. You look at it, Bister Dedhab. Suppose anybody chucked either one of you idto the river and you got a chance to land him one on a dark night three months after, and if you thought it was quite safe to do it, do you think you'd let the chance go by? I put it to you, gentlebed. I put it to you as hodorable and high-binded men."

Pole unlocked the door, and we left this query unanswered.

When we came upon the street, with the clerks in Mr. Goldsmith's employ staring after us, as well they might, he passed his arm through mine, and gave a little friendly pressure.

"I'm very much obliged, Denham. You have saved me from a very grave folly."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE days and the weeks went by, and winter was back again. I heard but little of the people with whom this history concerns itself. I had bidden good-bye to Pole sorrowfully and reluctantly, and had returned to my duties in Paris, leaving him to go back to Worborough, to tend the last days of an old man who had been nearly all his life a stranger, and to abandon the dead and buried hopes which lay behind him in London. It is never a useful or an admirable thing to rave against the unescapable. The common sense of the proverb is final, and the last word which is to be spoken on that question lies in its curt jingle—what can't be cured must be endured. Endured it has to be, after one fashion or another, and Pole took his share of the inevitable, to my thinking, like a hero. It is a common cant of opinion, as often falsified as justified by fact, that the men and women who take misfortune or joy most calmly taste the bitterness of the one or the sweetness of the other with a fullness of suffering or pleasure unknown to the more expansive and explosive sort. I have always combated this judgment, perhaps because I am myself a rather expansive kind of person, but I know that in Pole's case it

would have found as strong a confirmation as a general theory can gather from a single instance. He said nothing, and he felt the more. Words would have eased him if he could have brought himself to speak, but he was one of those who have to break before they can bend, and any revelation of his own feelings would have been too terrible. He wrote me now and again, simply and briefly, and his letters made no allusion to the past. They spoke of Lord Worborough's failing health oftener than of anything. I never knew, as a matter of actual fact, but I was fairly certain that Pole had told him of the plot his wife had laid. I dare say the discomfort of this knowledge weighed considerably upon the old man's enfeebled spirits. These letters of Pole's, with their monotonous news of a monotonous life, were infinitely mournful to me, and Clara's communications by and by became, for various reasons, almost as disquieting. One lies before me now, the foreign letter-paper discolored at the folds and edges, and the ink gray with old age. I transcribe a part of it here, premising that it reached me within a day or two after my parting with Pole and my return to Paris.

"The whole household," Clara wrote, "has been so unhappy for the last few days that I really have been unable to find the heart to write to you. Mr. Delamere himself is miserable enough, but for him I can only have a very modified sort of pity. It is only natural to suppose that he feels a great deal disappointed, but he has dealt in nothing but table eloquence all his life, and anything which brings him a new subject for it seems to be welcome, more or less. I am sick of variations on the 'Vanity of Human Wishes,' played in the major key, played in the minor key, played with both hands, played with one hand tied up behind him. The man is exasperating beyond endurance, and he treats his daughter's nerves —I say nothing of mine, because they don't matter, and he has no great reason to consider them—as if they were an instrument constructed for no other earthly purpose than to show what tunes he can play upon them. I have broken out once about it to Mary, literally because I could not help it, and have pained her so much, poor thing, that I spent a whole night in crying, and am a horrid, red-eyed specter at this moment, with a swollen nose. If he were anybody but Mary's father I should say something to him which would shake him out of his hateful self-complacency for a day or two.

"I suppose you know that Mr. Pole wrote a letter relating your strange discovery in Paris to Mr. Delamere. It came

while we were at the breakfast-table, and all in the highest spirits. We had been out late the night before, and were late at breakfast, the letter coming by the second post. Mr. Delamere's reception of it was really and seriously tragic, and if he had not talked my sympathies to sleep since then, and talked every nerve of our minds into absolute rawness, I should have still been sorry for him. As it is, I should have left the house but for Mary. The thing that weighs upon her mind most of all is the silly fancy that it is sinful in her to think of Mr. Pole now that she knows that his wife is still alive, as if it were her fault that that wicked and abominable plot was made, or as if one could turn the whole current of one's thoughts in an hour. She does not say much, even to me, but she suffers dreadfully. She has quite lost the sense of taste, and I have read of that somewhere as being a sign of mental suffering, or, at least as going with it very often, especially in girls. I don't know why girls especially should be made to suffer as they are, but they really do seem to get the worst of it.

"Mr. Pole had given her a number of beautiful presents, and one of the first things she did after the news was to pack them all up together to send back to him. Mr. Delamere dropped the letter on the table when he had read it, and blurted out the truth at once, though one of the servants was in the room. Mary went as white as a ghost, but she said nothing at all, and when she went up to her own room I had to help her. If she had cried or given way at all I should have liked it better, but she was so stony about it that she really frightened me. She began in awhile to creep about the room and gather the presents into a little heap.

"I have to stop writing, for it has made me cry to think about it. I have been crying, off and on, for days past, and now anything sets me going. Then, sometimes, at the silliest thing in the world I giggle until I cry again for very shame at my own cruelty and heartlessness. But I don't want to write about Me, and Me gets into everything, though I do try every hour to be more like Mary. She is a downright angel. She never thinks of herself, or talks of herself at all. All her thought and care is to save other people from sorrow and trouble, while, as for me—but there is Me again. I would tear up this sheet and begin a new one, only that would be a sort of hypocrisy. I shall leave it, so that you may see what I really am. I don't want to *seem* better than I am, but I want, oh, I *do* want, to *be* better.

"I wouldn't tell anybody else these things for the world, because they seem too sacred to be talked about. But she

kissed the bracelets and the rings, and the little watch he gave her—she kissed everything as she put it down on the dressing-table, and every time she gave a pitiful little moan as if her heart were breaking. And all the while she never shed one tear. It was really awful to look at her, and I had not the courage to speak a word. I don't believe she knew that I was there.

"You won't think me flippant or unfeeling for writing these things to *you*, darling. They seem to be the measure of something I feel inside myself, and that, I think, is the real reason why I write them."

I know that at the time I read a great deal into this simple narrative which no other reader could have found there, and I know that, after this lapse of years, I still read into it the knowledge of the generous, tender, loyal little creature who penned the lines. I am not in the least ashamed to own that I cried in reading the lines my sweetheart had cried over in writing. As for poor old Pole, my heart used pretty constantly to ache about him in those days. I have given up forming lofty estimates of new acquaintances on insufficient provocation, but I am glad to have had a friend in youth whom I could scarcely find a flaw in. It is a good thing for a lad to have a human idol if he choose a strong and honest nature for his worship, and though I am writing of myself I have no fear in proclaiming that this same youthful faculty for hero-worship is as good and gracious a sign in a young fellow as any I know how to look for.

Things went on in a dull and uneventful way for some months, until, as I have said already, the winter was round upon us in its course once more. I got then another letter from Clara, which brought strange news indeed. It was in searching for this that I lighted upon the one I have just transcribed. The first sentence of this new letter struck me like a blow. The very place from which it was dated had an unfamiliar look to me.

"Grantley Holme, Cheshire.

"My dear John,—The Delamere household has broken up, after the strangest and most unexpected scenes, and mamma has taken me up to the house of my uncle, Major Grantley. You have often heard me speak of him. For quite a month it was evident that there was something in the air. I was unable to guess its meaning, but I saw it and felt it constantly. First of all there was some trouble between Mr.

Delamere and Mary. She had resolved to join a sisterhood belonging to the Church of St. Mildred. She often spoke to me about it, and I thought it on many grounds a very excellent idea. It is one of those common-sense, good sisterhoods where the sisters devote themselves simply to nursing the sick poor, and generally helping the poor to be good and happy. She spoke about her wish to Mr. Delamere, but he made such eyebrows over it, and became so very wordy about the 'Degradation of the Social Ideal by Contact with Common Things,' that she relinquished her own ideal at once, as she always did, if that grand sultan did not immediately and entirely approve of it. I am sure the work would have done her good, and would have given her an object in life. I believe the great Turk's main objection was to the costume, though I am sure that Mary would look perfection in it, and the white, though it would be a shame to hide such beautiful hair as hers, would put a little color into her pale complexion, by contrast. To hear Mr. Delamere talk about art and costume, you would think that at least he would have been able to understand that. I am *not* trivial, as you think I am. I am only showing you what a hollow mockery Mr. Delamere is, even where he is supposed to know something.

"Mary gave up the idea, and instead of going out and getting new interests in life, and gladdening the hearts of the poor, and doing good to hundreds with her sweet ways, she had to stop and mope at home under the ceaseless cataract of æsthetic and philosophical chatter from the Turk. Oh, I am glad to be away from it, and to know that Mary is away from it.

"But I have something more serious than all this to write about. The servants grew actually impertinent, and once when Mr. Delamere ordered the cook upstairs to complain of something in his majestic way, the woman jeered at him quite openly. I expected the dining-room floor to open and let her down into the basement, but it did nothing of the kind. Mr. Delamere at once gave her a month's notice, and the cook said: 'Give me my money for the last six months, and I'll go this instant minute.'

"'You shall have a check at once,' said Mr. Delamere, but the cook snapped her fingers at him, and put her hands upon her hips. I had no idea that she could be so impolite and vulgar, for I had always thought her a rather superior woman for her station.

"'You'd better send it to the bank and have it cashed

first,' she said. 'I don't want a two-mile walk through the mud for nothink.'

"Mr. Delamere ordered her from the room, and she went away declaring that she would have her money or her money's worth before the left the house, even if she had to take it out of him. I suppose she meant to say that she would rob him.

"Mr. Jones was present at this dreadful exposure, and, would you believe it, he has not once been near the house since then. I am very glad to learn from mamma that it was arranged between herself and Mr. Delamere all along that my maintenance should be paid for. She says that the arrangement was on a very liberal scale, and as mamma is not stingy in such matters, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I was a help rather than a burden to the household in that respect.

"Very soon after this I began to see a dreadful man about the house, and I did not at all understand who he could be. I think he lived down-stairs, but he was very often in the hall, looking strangely suspicious, as if he thought that I had something about me that did not belong to me. He called Mr. Delamere 'governor,' and at first I thought he might be an humble member of the Moral Tone Association. Mamma, however, says that he must have been a bailiff—and a bailiff is an officer of the law, though I am sure he did not look like one. I always thought that his clothes looked as if they must have been drowned at one time in their history—his hat and boots particularly. The servants were more impertinent and inattentive than ever during this man's presence in the house, and Mr. Delamere was so depressed that he did not even lecture. Mary was unwell at the time the man came, and did not see him until the morning he went away.

"Mr. Delamere spent every hour of the day, except from dinner-time onward, out of the house, and spoke in the morning very hopefully of having business in the city. He came home at night much downcast, and sat a long while alone in the dining-room after dinner.

"When Mary recovered from her cold and came down-stairs I was with her, and she saw the man in the hall. She asked him what he wanted, and the man seemed abashed, and scraped his feet on the oil-cloth. Mr. Delamere came out of the dining-room and told him that he had better go down-stairs. Mary was frightened, and I am quite sure that she understood the meaning of the man's presence. Up to this time I did not. But when I saw her so alarmed it unhinged my own nerves a little. After breakfast, which passed off very silently and sadly, Mr. Delamere said that he wished to

speak to Mary alone. I went into the library and stayed there, reading all the morning. Mr. Delamere went out, and shortly afterward the postman came. The parlor-maid came into the library without knocking and threw a letter on to the table so unceremoniously that it skimmed right over the smooth leather and fell on the side I was sitting, at my feet. The girl bounced out and slammed the door behind her, making a sort of defiant inarticulate noise as she went. I should describe it as a snort. You can have no conception of the extreme discourtesy of all the servants at this time.

"Well, I picked up the letter, and in doing that it turned out that I was the innocent cause of all the unpleasantness which followed. I am quite certain now that if I had known what was going to happen I should have been justified in doing what I really did in ignorance, and I think that when you come to know everything you will applaud Mary's conduct as highly as I do. I saw at once that the letter came from Mr. Pole. Nobody who has ever seen that pike and saber handwriting of his, with those dogged-looking crosses to the t's, could ever mistake it for any one else's. It was addressed to Mr. Delamere from Worborough Court, for I saw the seal and the postmark. I went back to my reading and tried to think no more about it, though I wondered very much what it contained.

"When Mr. Delamere came home again only an hour later, he looked really wretched, and, in spite of my dislike, I could not help feeling sorry for him. I showed him the letter, and at the sight of it his face changed in a startling way. He was so agitated that he could scarcely open the envelope. He went to the window to read the letter and came back radiant. I never saw so great and rapid a change in a face. He ran out of the room and down the hall, and in a second or two I heard the hall door open and close noisily behind him.

"Then came my real indiscretion. I am as glad of it as I should be if I had known everything. In fact, I am a great deal more glad, for I am almost certain that I should not have had the courage to do my duty. I ran upstairs to Mary, and I hugged and kissed her, and danced about her like a mad thing, until she insisted on knowing what had changed me so. Then I told her what had happened, and you may guess my surprise when she took it all gravely and solemnly, and seemed even to be made more sad and thoughtful by it. We had luncheon by ourselves, or rather we sat down to it, for I don't think anything was eaten, and, an hour later, Mr. Delamere came in, smiling all over, and as majestically condescending as ever. For quite a long time he had fallen from his old

magnificent manner, and had been going about as if somebody had suddenly convinced him that he was an ordinary person. His clothes seemed to have changed. I can hardly describe to you the difference there was in him. He had not been in the house five minutes when the humble member of the Moral Tone Association went away by the area steps. Mamma conjectures that he was dismissed, paid. Shortly afterward Mr. Delamere held a conclave with the servants, who were all beautifully admonished, and also paid.

"While this was going on in the library Mary and I were in the dining-room. She was more agitated than I had ever seen her during the whole of her troubles, and once or twice she clutched me nervously, and I could feel that she was trembling all over. I did not understand what was going on in the next room until later, but Mary evidently understood it all. About five minutes after the servants had gone down she got up trembling, and went out of the room. I could hear her voice and Mr. Delamere's, and I could tell that he was angry. That mellow voice of his can grow very sharp and sour, it seems, and he soared into as high a treble as an angry woman's.

"I sat in the dining-room, and felt more and more uncomfortable while he scolded; and I grew so angry at the tone he took, though I could not hear the words, that I was actually fighting against a temptation to go in between them, when Mary came into the dining-room, and her father followed her. His face was red with anger, and he was puffing from having talked so much and so rapidly. I think that of the two Mary was the more angry, and she looked at her father when he spoke with an expression which surprised me, it was so full of scorn. He went striding up and down the room, stopping every now and again in a jerky and undignified way to tell her that she was ungrateful, or that he stood amazed. You know his phrase; he always 'stands amazed' when people differ from him in opinion. He has been standing amazed more or less ever since I have known him. But he was too angry to be smooth and lordly about it, as he generally is.

"At last he said, growing more and more angry because she would not answer him, 'And *you* pretend to feel humiliated? You? I accepted the humiliation for your sake. Do you suppose it has cost me nothing to subdue my pride and ask a favor at this man's hands?' Mary had taken up a newspaper which lay upon the table, and was making a pretense to read it, when Mr. Delamere actually snatched it from her hands. 'Listen to me,' he said; 'I will not endure these airs of disrespect.' Mary looked at him, and said quite quietly

that there was nothing more to speak of between them, and that they did not understand each other. Then she left the room, and he positively made a dash at the door to stop her. But I stood between them, and he stood so very much amazed to see me assert myself in that way that he stopped stock still and allowed her to go.

"Of course I understood everything by this time. Mr. Delamere had been borrowing money from Mr. Pole. Can you imagine anything like it under the circumstances?

"And now I have told you everything except the close of the whole business, and that, I think, I told you at the beginning of my letter. Mary sent for me and told me that she was compelled to leave home. She said nothing about the cause, and of course, knowing what I did I could not venture to ask her any questions. She asked me to wire to mamma at once. I did so, and mamma came up to town next morning in a state of great astonishment, and took me away. She begged Mary to accompany us, but it was of no use to try to persuade her. She said she had plans of her own. What they are I do not know, but she has a little fortune of her own, which belonged to her mother, and brings her in not more than a hundred pounds a year, poor thing. I am certain that out of this she means to pay back to Mr. Pole the money her father borrowed from him. Then I think she will join the sisterhood, but that will be a very different affair for her now, especially if Mr. Pole's loan was a large one, and she has to impoverish herself to pay it.

"I have told mamma what I am going to write down now. She says it is a most indelicate and unlady-like proposition for a girl to make, and that I have no right to allude to such things. But if other people care to be so exquisite about their own delicacy, when they can do good by sacrificing a little of it, I *don't*. The proposition, my dear John, is this. You are to work your very best and hardest, and to get as soon as possible into a position to make a home of your own. Then I suppose you will marry a certain undeserving young person whom you profess to be very, very much attached to; that young person will have her own money, and be quite rich when she is married, and she and you will make the darlingest and best girl in the world come and live with us. That doesn't sound quite grammatical, but I think it says what I mean. The grand Turk may think what he pleases, and may shower his cataracts of drizzle on anybody he can find. Think of Mary Delamere, of all girls in the world, living on bread bought with borrowed money, and that money belonging to Mr. Pole!"

Then came certain lines which concern myself alone, and then, in a hastily written postscript, followed this:

"I was on the point of sending this to the post, when mamma came in with the news of poor old Lord Worborough's death. She had found it in 'The Times,' where there was a short article about his career. We had all looked at the paper and none of us had noticed it until then. So now Mr. Pole is Lord Worborough, and a millionaire, and the owner of I don't know how many thousands of acres. Poor young man! I am afraid that neither his title nor his millions will make him very happy."

CHAPTER XXV.

A DAY or two after the receipt of this intelligence came a black-edged letter from Pole, dated from Worborough Court, the envelope and letter-paper marked with a coronet. It simply repeated the news with which everybody had now grown familiar and gave no hint of its writer's future intention. There I am wrong. One clear hint it gave, in what I thought a very friendly and pleasing fashion. The brief epistle was signed "Walter;" and I understood from this that, though Pole no longer had a use for his old familiar name, he was indisposed to fall upon me with the unfamiliar title, which must needs have stared at me rather forlornly from the paper. It is rather hard to become suddenly rich and distinguished, and to retain one's poor and undistinguished friends. They are likely to be on the lookout for airs of coldness, and will be ready to read signs of hauteur everywhere. So, the wealthy and ennobled has, if he wants to retain their friendship, to be a little warmer, a little more intimate, and friendly, than of old.

After a lapse of two or three weeks my old friend came unexpectedly to Paris, and found me out there. I had changed my quarters, and had taken a pair of rooms in the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs, in which, at the house of dead-and-gone M. Terré, Thackeray eat his *bouillabaisse*, and drank the famous Burgundy "with yellow seal." I took my coffee there of a morning, and dined upon the streets, as the cheerless, unhome-like, and most aptly descriptive phrase expresses it. Pole —I can find no other name for him, except for the back of an envelope or in conversation with others, unto this day—was of course in mourning, and looked somehow statelier than of old, as if his responsibilities had laid a hand upon his shoulder.

He was as far from taking airs as it is easily conceivable that a man should be, but his new position marked him, to my mind, though in a way not easily definable. His face brightened delightfully as I jumped up to meet him, and he shook hands with great cordiality. The animation of his manner did not last, however, and when we had settled down into talk I saw that his face was care-worn, and so colorless as even to look unhealthy.

When we had chatted for half an hour or so he fell into a little quiet, and, as I guessed, was rather gravely turning over some speculation in his mind.

"I've been in Cheshire," he said, looking up at me suddenly. "There's some land there which the poor old man wanted to buy for sentimental reasons. I called at Grantley Holme. Do you know of such a place?"

I answered that I was aware of its existence, and he smiled. His smile had always been a pleasant thing to see, but now that his face had fallen to so settled an expression of melancholy it was brighter than ever; a transient gleam of sunshine breaking through dark slouds.

"I had a talk," he went on, "with Mrs. Grantley, in the course of which your name was mentioned. She made a little pretense at first of regret for your engagement, but she soon threw that up, and began to show that she was quite proud of you. The book's a hit, Jack, and deserves to be. I saw a couple of columns in 'The Times' about it, and I'm told there is to be an article in 'The Quarterly.' But that's all apart from what I was going to say. I had a talk, not only with the old lady, but with the young one, about that—" (He threw a letter on the table.) "Read it."

I took the letter, a business-looking document, and found that it was addressed to Lord Worborough by a firm of London solicitors. They desired to know the amount in which Mr. Delamere stood indebted to his lordship, and stated that they were instructed to pay it without delay.

"I shouldn't show you this," he went on, "if I had not had that talk with Miss Grantley. She was in the house when Miss Delamere left it, and she confessed to me that she had told you the whole history."

I found Clara's letter, and read it aloud to him, with certain omissions, and he listened calmly and attentively.

"Well, now," he said, "since you know all this, I suppose you can guess pretty clearly at whose instigation that letter was written?

I answered that it was evidently written at the instigation of Miss Delamere.

He tried to speak of her as he would have spoken of anybody who was indifferent to him, and was so far successful that a stranger would have noticed nothing.

"Yes," he said, "it was written at the instigation of Miss Delamere. I felt myself justified in making inquiries, and I have learned that she has three thousand in the three per cents. She and her trustee are empowered to use this if they act jointly. The trustee is Robert Foljambe, a cousin of her mother's. He has three or four times refused, even at Miss Delamere's urging, to put this money under her father's control. I have been to see him since I received this letter. I was with him, in fact, the day before yesterday. He wants to refund what Delamere borrowed, and I told him that for the time being, until I could take advice about it, I should decline to give him any particulars."

"How much," I asked, "did Delamere borrow? Don't answer me unless you meant to tell me."

"I meant to tell you," Pole answered, "because the amount happens to be the vital part of the whole affair. He borrowed just three thousand pounds. If it had not been for Lord Worborough's death it would have crippled me to lend it. I did not, and I could not, count on that, but I got the money, and I let him have it."

"And what did you think of him?" I asked.

"Oh," he replied, "it would take a good deal to change my opinion of Mr. Delamere. Foljambe," he added, "is as honorable a man as you can find, but he's as poor as a rat, and has seven children, all girls. If he could, I believe he would pay the money for Miss Delamere's sake, but that's out of the question. Now, I want your advice in the matter. What am I to do?"

I dare say there are people to whom this may appear a very simple problem, but I found it one of the utmost difficulty. It seemed, on the one hand, that it would be an altogether shameful and brutal thing on the part of a millionaire, under any pressure in the world, to take the last penny of the woman he loved. Put in that way, the thing looked preposterous and incredible. It was unthinkable, impossible. It was out of the question. Then, on the other hand, Mary Delamere was smarting under as bitter a humiliation as a woman of high spirit could be called upon to endure. To her, I could see plainly, it would be ten times more terrible to face Pole's refusal of the money than to endure the poverty its payment

would entail upon her. She would carry the sting of that humiliation always, unless her offer were accepted. It looked impossible that a high-minded man should insult her by its refusal. The old Greeks, who were fond of foolish puzzles, had one which posed this question! When the irresistible meets the impregnable, what happens? It is easy enough to respond that the irresistible ceases to be irresistible when it meets the impregnable, and that the impregnable ceases to be the impregnable when assaulted by the irresistible. But here, for once in my life's history, I seemed to be set in sight of the two, and was likely, I began to think, to have a bad time of it between them. How should I counsel Pole to insult the one creature he held most dear in the world? How could I counsel him to reduce her to poverty?

I got an inspiration on a sudden, and thought I saw a way of evading the difficulty.

"Clearly," I said, "you can't take the money, and clearly, you have actually got to take it."

"That is a brutal exhibition of the actual facts," said Pole. "I have seen those two contradictory positives staring me in the face ever since I got this letter."

"Very well," I said; "you must do neither, and do both. Delamere is not a very lofty person, and he will be glad to exchange his daughter's contempt for his own. As I judge him, he won't greatly mind despising himself, and will very strongly object to any other living creature taking the same line."

"My judgment goes with yours," Pole answered. "What do you propose to do?"

"*Imprimis*, you don't want the money? It can make no difference in the world to you to have or not to have it?"

"No difference in the world."

"Well," I continued, feeling vicariously ashamed for the specious piece of meanness I was plotting for another man's performance, "Delamere can not in all probability have spent the whole of the sum he borrowed. Give him your check for a thousand pounds. Make him draw a check payable to you for the same amount against it. Let him forward that to Miss Delamere with instructions to send it on to you through her lawyers. Then, in three months' time, send him five hundred to be employed in the same way, and so on until the whole debt is paid. It's a fraud, but it's a pious fraud, and, so far as I see, it's the only way out of the difficulty. You can complete your share of it by writing to the lawyers and saying that the debt is in rapid process of repayment, and can leave Dela-

mere to such gentlemanly, dignified, and high-spirited flourishes as his nature craves."

"Denham!" cried Pole, "you are a rogue of genius. What might you have done if you had devoted that splendid intelligence for fraud to the purpose for which it was bestowed upon you?" He had brightened at my plan, but his face fell suddenly.

"What is it?" I asked him.

"You have forgotten one thing," he returned. "The good man earns no money. He toils not, neither does he spin. If we excite Miss Delamere's suspicions the fraud is useless."

"He must be made to spin," I answered. "He is a great draw as a lecturer. Let him lecture to his soul's content. He will flourish about that too, and perhaps be able to restore Miss Delamere's good opinion of him—though that would be a fraud with a vengeance."

"She would be the happier for it," Pole said, with a reflective melancholy in his voice. "She would be the happier for it. She has need of somebody to believe in. I think I can manage Delamere," he continued. "Of course he'll pretend that he's going to pay me afterward, and if he likes to salve his conscience that way I can make no objection. Of course it wasn't very lofty in him to want to borrow the money from me, and I wish he could have kept it from Miss Delamere's knowledge. We must do our best to rehabilitate him in her eyes."

In this manner our plan was laid, and though I have had more than a score of years in which to reflect upon it, I can not say that I have even yet arrived at any definite conclusions about its moral aspect so far as we two were concerned. Pole, who was staying at Meurice's Hotel, asked me to go there and dine with him, and since it was a Saturday, and therefore a journalistic holiday, I consented. After dinner we concocted a letter to Delamere, setting the facts before him with a frankness which I fancied he was likely to find distasteful. This done, Pole wrote a short letter to the lawyers, saying simply that the amount of Mr. Delamere's indebtedness to him was three thousand pounds, adding that he thoroughly appreciated the motives which dictated the inquiry, and that he sincerely hoped that no action whatever would result from his response to it. The letter to Delamere inclosed a check for a thousand pounds.

Thackeray has accustomed everybody with the slightest turn for self-examination to an irritating, tolerably constant inquiry as to whether he is, or is not, a snob. Was I ever so little of

a snob, I wonder, when I caught myself admiring the pike-and-saber signature and the bluntly written "One thousand pounds," and did I, or did I not, feel a British flush of pride in the reflection that my closest friend was a peer of the realm and a millionaire? I know I can honestly say that I valued Pole himself neither less nor more because of these qualifications. But if I had a mind to be honest I might plead guilty to a little better appreciation of myself because of them. I can blush now to remember what I thought about what the waiters might think about me, when I dined in such intimacy of companionship with the wealthy Lord Worborough. But I was hardly five-and-twenty, and I can find excuses for myself. After dinner we drew up our chairs beside the log fire and had a long and unrestrained talk. There was a hard black frost upon the ground without, and a high wind was blowing, so that there was comfort in the very sputtering of the wood, and the warm glow was grateful. I asked what news there was of his wife, and he told me simply that he had taken matters into his own hands. He had writtten to her at the address Goldsmith had given, telling her that her plot had been discovered, and that hereafter, in order to keep her within his knowledge, he should send her allowance in a weekly check. He had placed no control upon her movements, but had left her to choose what *habitat* she pleased. As for Goldsmith, Pole had left that worthy to digest his own reflections, and make what he could of his losses. The little Jew had maintained his fellow-conspirator from the time of her supposed death until the date of her discovery, and was probably some hundred and fifty pounds out of pocket as the result of his nefarious scheme.

"I don't think it likely," said Pole, "that he will proceed either against my wife or me for the recovery of the money." He added that he had received no word of answer, but that the checks had been presented and bore his wife's signature. "And now, Jack," he went on, "I have something to say that concerns you personally. Poor old Worborough took a prodigious liking to you, and he and I talked about you a good deal in the last month or two of his life-time. He stood very high with his party, and had considerable influence. He proposed to me that he should use it in your behalf, and before he died he had got things in train. In four months' time an appointment will be open for your acceptance. If you don't care to take it you can have a second choice a month later. Number one is a sinecure, or thereabout. It will bring you in fifteen hundred pounds a year, confine you to London while Parliament is sitting, bring you a pension after sixteen years

of *dolce far niente*, and it opens up no avenue to distinction. Number two takes half the salary and say, roughly, a thousand times the labor. It opens the way to almost any ambition. There's no political difference to hold you back, and you can have which you please."

I thanked him warmly, and told him, what I knew very well, that though he charged the old lord with these benevolent intentions toward myself, it was he who had inspired them.

"Well," he said, with one of his rare, bright smiles, "I didn't let the fire go out for want of fuel. Which do you go for, the fifteen hundred with nothing to do, or the hard work and the eight hundred? Don't be in a hurry to play Quixote, Jack. If you were a fiery young politician eager for a chance you might be tempted by the smaller salary and the wider field of ambition. If you choose that, you will have little time for literary labors, and by and by, in all probability, you'll get rapt away from them altogether. In the other case you have a chance that falls to few men of following your own bent and doing your own work in the world."

That was a very delightful prospect, and the bait looked tempting, but I recalled certain burning prose passages of my own which, to my infinite pride and delight, had found their way into the columns of the "Reamleigh Weekly Banner" some half dozen years before. In these early effusions I had been most savagely satirical and denunciatory about the wicked and contemptible idlers who fattened on the life-blood of the starving poor. I had been amazingly in earnest. One gets amazingly in earnest at the age of eighteen or nineteen, and wonders later in life at the pother one made in those enthusiastic days, and the sound and fury. I told Pole, with an ingenuous blush, of the attitude I had taken with regard to this question.

"Well, my boy," he answered, "your past deeds may rise against you, and some future demagogue in his first pair of trousers may scathe you by a reproduction of your own fervor in the columns of that same journal. It has a world-wide circulation, I believe."

I answered that it might be world-wide for all I knew, but that the circulation in my day was limited to some two hundred copies.

"In that case," Pole responded, "the inhabitants of the whole planet may not yet be infected with these radical notions. Slip into the berth, Denham, and be snug there before the storm evoked by your own utterances shall burst upon your head."

I wanted time and chance to think. I had no taste or liking for active politics, and I had a conscientious objection to the acceptance of public money without an equivalent being given for it. I was conscious that this objection had lost greatly in force within the last half hour. I began to feel that if another man had accepted that tempting sinecure I should have been very mild in my condemnation of him. I even began to think that if the imaginary other man had great ideas boiling in his head which for want of time and ease would be lost to the world, he would be, after a fashion, criminal in refusing the position. The acceptance of a sinecure grew infinitely less objectionable in aspect than it had ever seemed before.

"I can see where your thoughts are traveling," said Pole, evincing less penetration than he commonly displayed. "Don't be foolish, Denham. Take the chance that comes to you, and accept things as they are. The world is very much out of joint, I dare say, but the cursed spite, as Hamlet calls it, only comes in when the man who wasn't made for any such adventure thinks that he was born to set it right. There the post stands, waiting to be filled. Somebody will have it, as like as not a fellow infinitely less worthy than yourself. Nobody will get it as the reward of private merit or public virtue; and, in plain English, if my advice has any weight with you, you're an ass if you throw it over. Take it, and marry your sweetheart, and settle down and write your books in comfort. You think you'd be doing more of your duty if you took the worse berth of the two? Vain dog! What will your political efforts do for the country? Some fellow made for the rough-and-tumble of politics will take it and make it a stepping-stone to fortune, and have a baronetcy. You're not cut out for that kind of life. Come, the berth's going, going, going—"

"Gone!" I said.

If I had any conscientious qualms about that sinecure after this acceptance of it, I smothered them as remorselessly as the wicked Richard smothered the tender little innocents in the Tower. I dare say other men have had similar scruples on like occasions, and have prescribed just the same murderous remedy for their own disquiet. There are men in the world who would have risen in hot indignation against such a proposal as I accepted. I have heard them say so. I have a sort of memory that I said something to that effect myself in the columns of the "Reamleigh Weekly Banner." I am not the hero of this narrative, and even if my acceptance of the position offered to me were unheroic, I came down on to the plain,

level highway of life into excellent company, and found quite a crowd of good fellows there before me.

CHAPTER XXVI.

I LOST but little time in letting my English chief know of the surprising good-fortune which, by Pole's kindness, had overtaken me, and I soon found myself liberated from my post in Paris. MacIlray, I am inclined to think, regarded me with a kind of awe from the moment at which I announced to him the news of my social advancement. When one day Lord Worborough's black-edged visiting-card found its way to those lofty offices in the Rue de la Paix, the good Scot retired to a little apartment of his own and there furbished himself with hair-brushes and clothes-brush, and then, returning, possessed himself of a pair of gloves. He had evidently an idea of putting them on in order to receive a peer of his native realm in befitting state, but Pole entering before he could put this purpose into execution, he stowed them away in his coat-tail pockets, and offered his congratulations on the nobleman's accession to wealth and title with an almost hysteric alacrity and effusion. Awaking to the fact that Pole had not come upstairs on horseback, was accompanied by no herald bearing a coat of arms, and was, in fact, in no way changed from the rather sad-mannered, simple gentleman he knew already, he grew more sober in demeanor.

"I had a kyind of fear upon me," he told me afterward, "that the lad would be transmogrified out of knowledge, and he's not the least bit altered. Ah'm thenkin' that ef any magical pooer laid a hold upon me and made a millionaire and loard o' me, I'd just be a spectacle for goads and men. I'll be thankful to them to leave me in my native obscurity. I'm best where I am."

He showed a tendency to alter his demeanor toward myself, and falling shortly after this speech into one of his accustomed reveries, and emerging from it with his customary "Ay, ay!" he checked himself at the habitual "lad," and substituted for it "Mr. Denham." I laughed at first, but I soon found out that MacIlray meant no more by this than to intimate that if I were not prepared under my own changed conditions to continue on the old familiar terms he was prepared to abandon them. I do not suppose for a moment that he formulated this to himself, but he felt it all the same and acted upon it, until his Scottish sense of independence was assuaged by the

certainty that no overwhelming sense of my own grandeur had run away with me.

When I finally bade good-bye to my Paris duties he was extremely warm and friendly.

"Ye're a very fine, unaffected pair o' lads, the both o' ye," he said. "I'm not looking forward to a dwalling in the tents of prences for my own part, nor to set down with the great ones o' the airth. I'd be clean spoiled if I had a notion of it, I know very well that I would. And you two, that are younger in the warld's ways than I am, are just as natural as death, though ye stand there with all your blushing honors thick upon ye."

As a matter of fact I had no mean inward idea of the worldly importance which the possession of that wicked sinecure would confer upon me, and if I did not crow about it, it was only because I was restrained by the fact that the post was gained by no merit of my own.

I say I had lost no time in conveying information to my chief, but there was one person to whom I wrote even earlier. I had no sooner left Pole on that memorable, unforgettable evening than I fell to work to construct the terms of a letter to Mrs. Grantley. I rehearsed the letter all the way home, and wrote it immediately on reaching my chambers. Before I could get away from Paris, or my successor was appointed, I received a letter of congratulation from mamma, who withdrew all objection to my suit, and assured me that she had never entertained any but such as were prompted by the consideration of my youth and the limited character of my worldly prospects. She exhorted me to new efforts in my new calling, and seemed to think that I had undertaken what might have been an eighth labor for Hercules.

My first business was to see the chief of my department, to whom I carried a letter of introduction from Pole. He was a genial old gentleman with a courtesy title, and he had been a life-long friend of the late Lord Worborough. He was very kind in his manner, and he talked about my duties, which were to be within reach of two subordinate personages between the hours of eleven and three for five days in the week and six months of the year. The duties of these subordinates were to be within reach of their subordinates from ten till four. My chief's duty was, in an easy-minded and unsettled way, to be in reach of me. I praise the bridge that carried me over. It was a pleasant office, and, mockery apart, there was just enough work to do in it to prevent one from feeling like an actual impostor. I learned this afterward, but for the mo-

ment my one desire was to get down to Grantley Holme and claim Clara. We corresponded every day. We wrote reams of letters, but the consolations of the post are but a poor substitute for the actual presence of your sweetheart, and I made all possible haste to join her.

I went down to Cheshire, and came back in a day or two, accompanied by Mrs. Grantley and the major, a soldierly and gallant gentleman, and Clara. The three took up their abode at a hotel, and I lived in Pole's chambers. We spent days in house-hunting, and having found a perfect little jewel of an establishment, we spent weeks, and very happy weeks they were, in the search and purchase of furniture. Both Clara and I were resolved not to give ourselves into the hands of the demon upholsterer, and, with due regard to the sentiments of mamma, who had excellent taste, we pleased ourselves in the decoration of our home.

It had been decided that our marriage should take place when the house was ready. There were one or two good reasons for this dispatch, and there was nothing whatever to be urged against it. Naturally enough, I was eager for it, and I urged with some tact, as I flattered myself, that my duties would begin in three months' time, and I should have no chance of a honey-moon for at least six months further. Why not utilize the time now in hand?

"You give me credit for no motherly desire to retain my daughter," said Mrs. Grantley.

I said nothing of the fact that my charming future mother-in-law had already managed to live without her daughter for a full year and a half, but Clara supplied the omission. The conflicts of mother and daughter amused me often, but I had sense enough to avoid participation in them, and they always said the keenest and plainest things to each other, with an amiable good-humor and mutual understanding.

The major had hired a carriage, and one day we all drove eastward to the Strand. At the top of one of the riverward running streets the carriage halted.

"We will call for you in half an hour," said Mrs. Grantley; and Clara, tapping my hand with a gloved forefinger, motioned to me to alight. I rose to obey, but I suppose I looked inquiry, for Mrs. Grantley demanded to know if I had not been told where I was wanted to go.

"Not yet," said Clara, and, the word being given to the coachman, the carriage rolled away. Clara passed a hand through my arm, and led me down the street toward the river.

"We are going to see Mary Delamere," she said. "I have been here three times already. Your duty, if you please, is to act like a good *fiancé*, and second all my proposals."

I promised that I would do so, not being greatly in the dark as to what they were likely to be. The street was not inviting to look at. It wore an air of middle-class respectability grown sordid, and no house-painter seemed to have visited it for half a generation. But, behold, on a sudden there gleamed upon us a house of mellow newness, with the neatest and whitest of curtains and blinds, and door-knob and knocker of burnished brass, so refulgent with constant polish that they might have been taken for gold. The snowy doorsteps cried aloud with a voice of reproach to the whole neighborhood. I rapped, with the highly polished little brass knocker, at Clara's bidding, and in a minute, with a smiling, rosy-cheeked alacrity, a girl of eighteen or thereabouts, in the costume of a *religieuse*, opened the door. She greeted Clara pleasantly, as if they were already known to each other, but regarded me somewhat shyly and doubtfully, as if the intrusion of the male element were a thing unheard of in her experience of the place, and not to be too kindly looked upon as an experiment. Clara asked for Sister Constance, and the small nun-like personage led us into a fresh-looking, sparely furnished apartment of infinite order and cleanliness.

"Who is Sister Constance?" I asked, when we were left alone here for awhile.

"Sister Constance," Clara answered, "is Mary Constance Delamere."

I asked, in some consternation, if she had taken the veil, but a smiling shake of the head was the only answer I received, for at that moment a large and motherly woman in conventual garb sailed into the room like a breeze. She also was known to Clara, and exchanged friendly greetings with her.

"Sister Constance," she said, "will be here in a moment or two."

She invited us to be seated, and said something about the weather, so brightly and breezily that the air of the room seemed the fresher for it. Mary Delamere came in almost directly, and submitted to be hugged and kissed by Clara, who received her with a voluble and tender vehemence, while the elder lady looked on smiling. I had had a sort of general notion that all human emotions, except for a kind of tranquil, cold pity for human troubles in general, were left out-of-doors; but the elderly lady smiled as if she were well pleased, and

Sister Constance endured and returned the caresses lavished upon her in precisely her old manner. If it is not profane to say it, the garb of this harmless and helpful society became her very much indeed. Her pale looks were warmed a little by their neighborhood with the contrasting black and white. She greeted me in a friendly fashion, and we all four sat down to talk together.

"The sister superior," said Clara, glibly, indicating the elderly lady by a little bow, "knows already why we are here, and will have no objection to the proposal I am going to make. Mr. Denham is also aware of it, and has adopted it with the enthusiasm which might have been expected from him. We shall be at home and settled down in eight weeks' time." She blushed at this, delightfully to my thinking, and Sister Constance and the sister superior smiled like an average brace of ladies well pleased, and looked no more like their costume than a country June like a London November. "You can carry on your good work," Clara continued, "without let or hinderance. Mr. Denham knows all about the London poor. He is quite an authority now about their condition, and he can tell you that there are crowds of them in our neighborhood, and that there is hardly anybody to look after them. You will be able to work among them, and so far as my own duties will allow me"—she was more matronly here than her own mother—"I shall be charmed to take a part in your work. Besides that, John will be engaged in his new duties. Mr. Denham," she explained to the sister superior, "has accepted an appointment under government—from eleven to three. That is to say, that from half past ten to half past three I shall be alone, and I want to know what I am to do with all those dreary hours if you won't come and help me to pass them profitably. There are some people," she addressed the superior once more, "who might perhaps tell you that I am frivolous. I shall always deny that. But, even if it were true, it would only be an additional argument why Mary should come to me."

"We think your offer very generous and affectionate," said the superior, in her own crisp yet motherly fashion; "and for my part I like you very much for it, my dear. It remains for Sister Constance herself to decide."

"I sha'n't, I can't, and I won't be happy without her," said Clara. "If Mr. Denham will speak his mind he will say precisely what I do."

I spoke my mind warmly, and said with truth that I should be sincerely grateful to Miss Delamere if she would do what

Clara asked her. The "Sister Constance" stuck somehow on my tongue, and I could not rid myself of a slight but irreverent impatience of it. The elderly lady looked toward her, awaiting her decision.

"You know, dear," Mary began, "that if I refuse it is not because—"

"But you shall not refuse," cried Clara, with a face and voice of dismay. "I shall think it an absolute cruelty if you refuse."

"You see, dear," Mary answered, gently, "you must see, that I can not consent to become a burden upon you—"

"A burden upon me," Clara answered, spreading her hands abroad and turning on the superior with a look of resignation to unmeasured wrong. "Did you ever hear anything like that?" the gesture said. "I actually lived," she continued, with excellent hypocrisy, "in Miss Delamere's house for the greater part of two years, and now she refuses to live in mine. I shall think it cruel if you dream of refusing me," she added, turning anew to Mary, "I shall think it unfriendly. I shall never believe again that you care for me at all. It's of no use," she was back at the superior again, "to talk to Sister Constance of her own happiness or her own welfare. Those are quite absurd considerations to her mind. And she has been housekeeping all her life and I have had no experience. There are a thousand things I want to learn, and she will leave me to kill my husband with rheumatic fever through unaired linen, or poison him with an indigestion." There was a cold tragedy in this announcement which might have touched the most obdurate heart. Mary was evidently anxious to speak, and had already made two or three movements in that direction; but Clara would not permit her to be heard. "I am willing," she went on, "to leave it all in the hands of the sister superior. You are not so undisciplined and so hardened in your opinions that you will refuse to follow her advice. I am sure that she will support my petition."

The artful young person, as it afterward appeared, had arranged with the sister superior beforehand. That motherly, good creature smiled, and answered that, really, she thought that Sister Constance could hardly be better employed. The matter was, of course, entirely for her own consideration. But— The pause and the gesture were alike significant.

"If I could be useful to you," Mary began—

"Useful!" cried Clara. "You'll be invaluable. Oh, thank you, darling." She ran at her with impetuous haste, and laid hold of both her hands. "I never thought you could

refuse, but you don't know what a load you have lifted from my mind."

"But," began Mary, smiling, "I haven't promised."

"There!" cried Clara, piteously. "It's all to begin over again. You *have* promised—" with a sudden new vivacity. "You have! You have!" Then turning brokenly to me: "Now, John, has she not promised?"

Since the sister superior had expressed her opinion upon the matter, I had hardly regarded the situation as being doubtful. She interposed again at this point, and carried the day for the petitioners.

"Suppose," she said, "that you give your friend the benefit of your experience for half a year. You need not lay aside the work you have taken to heart. You will be doing a good action I am sure."

Clara poured out thanks upon her ally, and new entreaties upon Mary. I joined my own, and just as the major's carriage rumbled over the cobbled pavement to the door the treaty was concluded.

Certain telegraphic signs passed between Clara and her mother before the carriage had borne us back to the Strand, and the elder lady was evidently almost as much gratified as the younger. She had her daughter's interests at heart, but she was quite willing that so excellent a mistress as Mary Delamere should save her the trouble of initiating Clara into the details of housekeeping. For my part, I was in my own way as satisfied as either. If I had had my world to choose from, and to search for a friend and companion to my wife that was to be, I should have chosen Mary Delamere. To have absolutely what you would have chosen is a fortunate thing, and I reckoned myself and Clara very happy in this matter.

In due course the bans being already put up, the guests were invited, and we two young people got married, and went away for a six weeks' sojourn in Elysium. We spent our moon and a half of honey in the Riviera, and then came back to settle down in smoky London with Mary Delamere as my wife's companion.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THAT section of the great world which lived by faith in old china was deeply stirred by the news that the eminent art critic's collection was about to be offered for sale by public auction. Jones, who came now and again to see us in our new

home, was actually pathetic about the threatened dissipation of an assortment which had cost so much skill and patience and money in the gathering. Not only the crockery ware, but the bronzes, the Japanse lacquers, the Eastern ivories, the rare engravings, rare editions, and rare coins, were all going. The chief passion of this tragedy to Jones's mind was that certain pictures of the Italian school, which had never been brought together before, and which illustrated a certain development and phase of art, would have, in all probability, to be sold separately, and might be scattered the wide world over. He wrote letters to the daily papers about this, and was as sad and angry over the laxity of the government in not securing this treasure for the nation as Jeremiah was in his day concerning the backslidings of his people. I have no doubt that, to people learned in such matters, these works possessed a high value of their own; but to the uninitiated, who cared for art-work chiefly because of its beauty, they could hardly have been less pleasing than they were. It is always dangerous to attack the enthusiastic specialist, and I was careful to disguise my own ignorance and to leave Jones alone.

Delamere had expended quite a considerable fortune in amassing his collection, and had, in fact, been impoverished by it. He had for years past paid to the insurance companies a larger annual sum than it would have cost him to live in bourgeois comfort and to indulge in those commoner signs of wealth which he despised. The house in Cromwell Terrace was dismantled, and bronzes, books, coins, ivories, pictures, and china were all ranged, catalogued, and exposed to view in the rooms of a great West End auctioneer famous for his knowledge of such things and his conduct of their sale. Such part of fashion as was at that season of the year to be found in town thronged the rooms daily, and valetudinarian collectors were borne swiftly home from remote health resorts to be present at the sale. Many of the objects were beautiful even to the eye of ignorance; and to the learned there was nothing in the whole extensive collection which had not some high special value, beauty, or interest of its own.

Clara and I went to see the collection. The rooms were almost empty when we got there, for the first flush of public interest was over; but at the far end of the long chamber in which the principal treasures were exposed to view I saw and recognized the stately figure of Mr. Delamere. I could not help glancing at him from time to time as he wandered hither and thither among his belongings, as if taking mute and

mournful farewell. He saw us at length and came over to us, looking extremely dignified and stately, as a martyr might if he were let out on bail the night before an *auto-da-fé*.

"You know my little collection already, Denham," he said, with a gentle, noble sadness. "There were many larger, even among the private treasures of the world, but not many so complete within its own limited lines. A life-long interest in these things, a life-long study, enabled me to acquire many objects of interest and value which wealthier collectors were compelled to pass for want of money. This intaglio, for instance, cost me a mere thirty pounds. It may realize ten times that sum to-morrow."

He told me all about the object to which he drew my attention, gave me a little sketch of its history, of the life of the artist who brought it into being, and of the special artistic purpose it served in relation to the rest. On a point like this he always knew how to be charming. For, whatever else he pretended, I never knew anybody bold enough to charge him with inaccuracy or ignorance about the precious objects in his possession. He had spent his life in learning all that was to be known of them, and all the enthusiasm and feeling of which he was capable were expended on them.

"I would fain have kept these things," he told me, looking about him with his air of mournful dignity. "It is a wrench to part with them, but I can afford to keep them no longer. It is too much to hope that all of them will fall into good hands. The newly rich begin to hanker after these possessions, and many of them are so sadly ignorant that one fears, one fears."

I waited for him to make some inquiry about Mary, and did not for one moment imagine that he knew nothing of her present whereabouts. I made no allusion to her, and he made none. He had been too much occupied, as I found out afterward, in the classification of his belongings, and too much saddened at the thought of parting from them, to find time for mere domestic considerations. Clara, after lingering for a little time, had continued her round of observation alone. She had been very cool in her manner toward him, but Mr. Delamere did not seem to have noticed that. His heart was in the coffin there with his crocks and other *bric-à-brac*, and he must needs wait until it came back to him.

On the third day of the sale we went again, and bought two or three of the least expensive trifles, partly to have some record of the home in which Clara had lived so long, and partly because they were the things that had pleased her most.

Delamere himself was there, and was buying in some remnant of his own, for the sale had achieved an unexpected and surprising success, and it was a matter of common rumor that the proceeds had at least doubled the estimate of the auctioneer. Delamere was well to do again. He had impoverished himself by his purchases and by the prodigious insurance money he was compelled to pay, and now it turned out that he could hardly have made a more fortunate investment of his money. For years after people learned in such matters quoted the prices realized at the sale of the Delamere collection. Even now one hears casual mention made of them at times.

A week or two after the sale the bereaved gentleman found time to think about his daughter, and to discover her present whereabouts. He made a solemn call upon us, and inquired after her welfare. Clara at first was indisposed to meet him, but I succeeded in persuading her that it was better to do so, and after a little time she succumbed to argument and entreaty. When I entered the room in which Delamere waited, he was bending caressingly over a Dresden shepherdess which had not long ago been one of the least-prized objects in his own possession.

"She is divorced from her surroundings, poor thing!" he said, with a mournful smile; "divorced from her surroundings. By the way, Denham, I learn that you have given an asylum to my daughter."

This was a little startling. The divorced shepherdess really seemed the more important personage of the two.

"Miss Delamere is visiting us," I answered, "and is so good as to give Mrs. Denham some lessons in housekeeping."

"That," said Mr. Delamere, with eyebrows raised in mingled allowance and astonishment, "is not a position I should have thought her willing to occupy."

This staggered me so completely that for a moment I could only stare at him. I told him then, and I am afraid that I told him somewhat hotly, that his daughter was with us as an esteemed and honored guest. He put on his gold-rimmed *pince-nez*, and said, smilingly, that I was an enthusiast.

"You have a warm and impetuous nature, Denham—a warm and impetuous nature. Is Mary within doors?"

It was nearly five o'clock, and she was expected momently. I told him that she might be expected immediately, and added that she spent most of her time among her poor.

"Her poor?" he asked. "She has that fancy still. Well, well."

Clara came in at this point, and she and Delamere met with an icy courtesy by no means comfortable to witness.

"I learn from your husband, Mrs. Denham," he said, sinking gracefully into a chair, "that Mary is laboring among the poor. I should suppose that, with her breeding and inherited instinct, she finds that self-imposed office at times a little trying."

"My dear Mr. Delamere," Clara responded, "we can not all spend our lives in the contemplation of the beautiful."

"No, no," Delamere assented. He saw as clearly as I did that my wife was a partisan, and likely to fight in the interests of her own side if she had but the slightest provocation that way. "There are sterner duties in the world."

"Indeed there are," said Clara, with perhaps unnecessary warmth of emphasis.

"I should be the last to deny it," he answered, smoothly. "One or two of us live out of the hurly-burly of the plains, and invite sometimes a casual eye to our surroundings. The rest go their way in pursuit of meaner needs—"

"All of them?" Clara asked, flushing at his tone.

"Is there," he asked in turn, "any nobler or more elevating employment than the pursuit of beauty? Is it not at least worth while that a few should devote themselves to that pursuit; should strive to show the world at large that beauty and utility are not antagonistic; that the simpler and less elevated forms of life need not necessarily be sordid?"

"The world is a big place, Mr. Delamere," said this truculent wife of mine, "and there is room enough in it for some of all kinds of people. There may be room, perhaps, even for a young woman who goes about nursing the sick poor."

"Room?" cried Delamere, avoiding combat. "Room, indeed! Who denies honor to the social martyr? The heart is touched, the sympathies are fired, by the contemplation of a thousand silent heroisms."

Now, this was too bold a taking away of the mouse from pussy's claws to be endured with patience.

"Give me," said Clara, "the people who live in the hurly-burly of the plain, as you call it. The soldier who fights for his country, the poor man who breaks his back over his spade, the chimney-sweeper who sweeps a chimney honestly—"

"My dear Clara," said Delamere, "I would give you a chimney-sweeper gladly if I had one. I have no taste in chimney-sweepers, and if such a person were upon my hands I would part with him willingly to any lady who might choose to ask for him."

"That is a poor retort," said Clara, "from a conversational fencer so skillful as yourself."

"Ah, really," said Delamere, with a smile, "if we are to take off the buttons from our foils and fight in earnest, I decline the combat."

"Out of pure pity, one supposes?"

"Out of pure fear," he answered.

"I do not think," she said, with a little indrawing of breath and a slight pinching of the nostrils, "that either of us would hurt the other much."

"I am sure," he answered, half rising to bow to her, "that neither of us would desire to hurt the other."

What end this fencing bout would have found had it been continued I can hardly say, though I fancy that a scratch or two might possibly have resulted on both sides. It was ended by the entrance of the chief cause of conflict. She came in with her pale cheeks somewhat flushed with exercise, and her eyes, which were commonly sadder than one liked to see them, brightened by the same cause. She started when she saw her father, and Delamere for his part cast a horror-stricken glance at her costume. He was evidently quite unprepared for it, as she was for his visit.

"I had not expected to find you here," said Mary.

Her manner was grave and reserved, but it was easy to see that she was inwardly agitated by the encounter.

"Do not leave us, Mrs. Denham," said Delamere, seeing my wife make a movement toward the door.

Then he moved across to his daughter.

"Pray allow me to offer you a chair, my dear. You will stay with us, Denham. Thank you. I have something to say which, as it seems to me, demands to be said in the hearing of all here present."

In spite of his invitation Mary remained standing, but she laid her hand upon the rail of the chair he had placed for her. I noticed that it trembled as she set it down, but she waited for what her father might have to say with a look of calm attentiveness.

"I think," said Delamere, "that I am not mistaken in supposing that the cause of severance between you and me is known or guessed by Denham and his wife."

"Not a word has been spoken between Mary and myself upon the subject," said Clara. "I can't pretend not to know it, but I know nothing of it through her."

"I should have believed that of my daughter," returned Delamere, "even without your authority. It would be futile

in a man who has just made public confession of his poverty to pretend to delicacy in a case like this, with respect to bygone financial embarrassments. I have never had much knowledge of business, and I have proved now to my own satisfaction that I have a rather curious incapacity for it. My old friend Chetwynd, who was in the habit of advising me, died half a dozen years ago, and since that time I have tried to manage my own affairs. The world is not made up of honest and high-minded people. I was plundered on all hands, and but for the little collection of artistic treasures with which I had surrounded myself I should have been almost beggared."

He delivered all this with a sort of proud humility, as if he took it, as I really believe he did, as a sort of distinction to be ignorant of business affairs. He reserved himself from boasting of it, but that was only because he would not boast of anything.

"In these conditions," he continued, "a gentleman for whom I had never professed any especial sympathy or regard made me an offer of pecuniary assistance. He did it in a manner most unexpectedly delicate and friendly. I accepted his assistance. There were circumstances which made that acceptance so distasteful to my daughter that she left her father's roof."

Apart from a certain dignified querulousness which he had sometimes shown, I had never seen a touch of emotion in him until now. He quavered a little on the final words of this portion of his speech, and made a motion as if to draw out his handkerchief. He put this impulse by, however, and went on again with a complete resumption of his common manner:

"I was enabled, by an unlooked-for occurrence, to repay a portion of the loan much sooner than I had dared to hope. I was the more rejoiced at this inasmuch as my daughter had made arrangements to ingulf the whole of her own very small fortune in the immediate repayment of the borrowed money. My purpose in coming here now is to place in your hands, Mary, a check for the balance of the loan, and to request that you will forward it to the solicitors of your trustee."

He unbuttoned his frock-coat and produced a pocket-book, from which he took the check he spoke of. Mary accepted it with a murmur of acknowledgment, and he flowed on:

"I trust that there is no feeling in your mind, my child, which will prevent us from reassuming our old relations toward each other. I had not intended that you should become aware of the obligation under which I had placed myself. It was one I should have had no fear of offering had the conditions been

exchanged or exchangeable, and it appears to me that a service which one honorable man may offer, another man of honor may accept. I have never, for its own sake, regretted my acceptance of that proffered help. I regretted its discovery, and I have had reason to regret the construction which was placed upon it. Next to my own good opinion it is not unnatural, perhaps, that I should value yours. Next to that I valued the labor of my life-time. That small monument to beauty which I had so patiently and fondly reared I have sacrificed. I have scattered it to the four winds to regain your daughterly sympathy and affection. The Delamere collection exists no longer. The labors, studies, travels, of a life-time will leave no record to the world. I had hoped," he continued, a little moved again by his own eloquence, "to have bequeathed it to the nation. It was small, but in itself it was complete, and it might have taught a lesson. '*Ex pede Herculem.*'"

Now, I dare say that if we had not all three been perfectly well aware that the Delamere collection had been sold from an altogether different motive than that which Delamere claimed, we might have been affected by his sacrifice, and have taken him to our hearts with instant affection. For my own part I should have preferred to have been miles away, for on Mary's behalf I found the scene difficult to endure.

"I am very glad," she said, "that the money is repaid, and I am very sorry that the collection had to be sold."

What made the thing a little worse for me was that I knew, on the best authority, that Pole had never offered Delamere anything, or had indeed so much as known of his necessities until Delamere himself had written to him about them. I fancy, from the look his daughter gave him when he spoke of the generous offer made to him, that she shared my knowledge. It was a beseeching and frightened glance, and I read into it a prayer on her part that he would not lower himself in her eyes.

Delamere had evidently made less by his motion than he had anticipated. He looked surprised at Mary's brief and simple answer.

"Do you leave me to conjecture," he demanded, "that anything in the nature of a barrier remains between us?"

"Would it not be better," she asked, "to talk of this when we are alone?"

Delamere reddened and walked to the window, where he stood for a moment looking on the street. The click of the door-latch seemed to reach his ear, for he turned at the mo-

ment at which Clara and I were slipping quietly from the room.

"Denham," he cried, in a louder voice than he often used, "I desire your presence. Mrs. Denham, I beg you to remain."

He strode over swiftly to us as he spoke, and holding the door so as to prevent my closing it, drew us back into the room.

"I appeal to you, Denham," he said, then closing the door and standing with his back against it, as if to bar any further attempt at egress. "Those who know you best speak of you as an honorable man. I appeal to you as an honorable man to say if, in this matter, in your judgment, I have done anything unbefitting."

I have often been placed in embarrassing positions, but so far in the whole course of my life I have known nothing to equal the extreme awkwardness of that moment. I could only answer that I would infinitely prefer not to be appealed to, and that in these matters another man's opinion was quite valueless. I added that I would accept no man's judgment as to my own acts or character.

"It is Mary's wish," said Clara, decisively, putting her arm through mine as she spoke, "to continue this conversation alone. I am sure that that is the best and wisest course. Perhaps Mr. Delamere will be so kind as to open the door. Thank you."

Mr. Delamere opened the door, and closed it behind us, and that was the last Clara and I saw of him for a considerable time. We could hear his voice below us in stormy or persuasive tones for something like the space of half an hour. At the end of that time he went away.

"I wish," said Clara, "that he would ask me for my opinion of his conduct in Mary's absence. It would be a positive relief to me to let him know it."

Plainly, Delamere's sense of honor differed widely from that of the common run of men, and where that happens it is always a misfortune. I do not think he ever rose to a clearer conception of the case than to suspect vaguely that he *might* have acted less delicately than he would have preferred to do if he had taken time to think about it. No doubt it seemed to him that a considerable hubbub was being made about a very simple matter. It was a long time before he brought himself to forgive my preference for silence.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I HAVE already had occasion to mention a certain weekly publication which called itself a journal of society, and was the forerunner of a large and important family with which the world is now familiar. The existence of this journal was brief and stormy. While it continued to appear it made a considerable noise in the world, but until it finally made so loud a bruit that it fell to pieces in the shock of sound itself created, it made no greater sensation than by its articles on "The Buried Lady of Title." It was a scandal-loving print, and as different from its decorous successors as chalk from cheese. Those who bought it and read its pages did so in the unfailing hope, not often disappointed, of finding something to the disadvantage of people in high places. Its conductors had never before had so piquant, so exciting, and so strange a story to tell as this of the buried lady of title. They made the most of it, doling out the story in installments week by week, and asseverated so stoutly that the narrative, curious as it was, was made up of simple facts, that even the most doubtful began to take a sort of speculative interest in it, and to look forward with curiosity for next week's revelations.

By whatsoever means the tale had come to the ears of the man who wrote it, there was no denying its accuracy or its completeness. The story of Pole's unfortunate hidden marriage was related in detail. No names or places were mentioned, but to one who knew the history already the identification of the people concerned was not merely easy but unescapable. The parting of the ill-assorted pair was slurred over somewhat, but from that point the narrative became once more precise and clear. There is no need to repeat it, for it tallied with what has already been set down in these pages. The writer, loath to part with so interesting a theme, dragged it on from week to week, until at last, in large type, he announced the presence of the buried lady in London. He stated that a representative of the journal had been admitted to an interview with her, that she declared the plot to have been invented by her husband, and was prepared to take such simple and immediate steps as were necessary for the establishment of her own position.

Now, this was a very remarkable statement, and if it could possibly have been true would have been disquieting; but there was so little doubt that Pole's wife had already surrendered

herself into the hands of the law that the threat of return was preposterous. The thing was evidently a *brutem fulmen*, and demanded nothing but to be left to itself. I got letters from Pole, who still lingered in Paris, and had heard the news there, to this precise effect. I wrote to him in the same strain, and it was agreed between us that there was nothing to be done but to let the rumor die.

The rumor obstinately refused to die, and coming at a season when not much in the way of public interest was stirring, it grew to be probably the commonest topic of conversation in London at that season. A startling murder chased it for a week, or nearly, but the criminal was caught, and the buried lady of title came into vogue again. Then, though the discreet journalist still found no names, the world at large got hold of them, and Lord and Lady Worborough were in all men's mouths. If Clara and I had been disposed to be as communicative upon this topic as our friends would have desired, we might, I verily believe, have made ourselves the lioness and lion of the hour. As it was, we grew rather unpopular by reason of our reticence.

Our world at large made such a pother about the revelations of the society journalist, and appealed to me as Pole's bosom friend with so much pertinacity, that almost anybody who did not talk about this one disagreeable theme would have been welcome. Jones, who was superior to all sorts of vulgar interest, came by times, and talked upon the questions, with which he particularly concerned himself. When he first appeared I was inclined to be afraid that he intended to renew his unavailing pursuit of Mary Delamere. Clara shared this belief or doubt of mine, and so I thought it best to come at once to an understanding. I invited him to my study under specious pretext of consulting him as to the authenticity of some prints I had lately purchased, and, having decoyed him thither, opened fire upon him at once.

"Jones," I said, with the solemnity and solidity befitting a family man, "you are aware of the fact that Miss Delamere is at present residing here." Jones admitting this, I put it to him as gently as I could that in his capacity of old friend Miss Delamere and ourselves would be very glad to welcome him. But—Jones took the hint with a smiling alacrity.

"Ah," he said, "I remember to have spoken to you about that matter in those queer old rooms of yours in Gray's Inn before anybody supposed that you were going to be one of her majesty's commissioners, and when I seemed likelier than yourself to wear the rosy hymeneal fetters. You remember

that I expressed some doubt about the wisdom of the course at the time, even though I actually proposed to embark upon it."

I told Jones that I remembered his remarks at that time to have been characterized by his usual wisdom and excellent good taste. I had found out long ago that it was quite impossible to wound Jones in that way. No faintest suspicion of a want of sincerity in people who took that tone with him ever crossed his mind. It relieved me and left Jones unhurt, so that there was a kind of mild double pleasure in it.

"Well," he said, "it is given to a happy few to blunder and not to be punished for their blunders. I was saved from the results of my own indiscretion, and I am not likely to renew it. Miss Delamere need not fear that I shall play the part of the disconsolate lover. I do not think," he added, with a conquering smile, "that it is a rôle for which I was cast by nature. I do not think it a part in which I should be likely to shine."

In that case, I told him, he should be welcome to the general bosom of the household. I was glad to know that he was cured, and even expressed a hope that his sufferings had not been at any time abnormally severe.

"No," he said, with the same conquering smile, "I think not. Do you know, Denham," he continued, in his philosophico-confidential manner, "I have been rather devoting myself of late to the observation of the youthful male of our species. I have more especially directed my studies to the point at which he is said to be in love. I am assuming no airs of superiority. I am quite conscious that not very long ago I trenched with a perilous nearness upon his position. But if I were not putting myself into an insolent competition with the general opinion, I should be very much inclined to say that the youthful male, absurd as he commonly and inevitably is, is more absurd at that moment than at any other of his whole foolish and futile existence."

One never knows the truth about one's self, and I may have been as great a prig in laughing at Jones as Jones was in deserving to be laughed at. I did laugh, however, with great heartiness, and he was pleased—so pleased, in fact, that he set up as a social humorist for the rest of the evening, and exerted himself to be delightful. It was not unnatural, finding himself the cause of so much innocent and admiring hilarity, that he should make his visits pretty constant. He told me once, I remember, that he was at his best in my society. It was not, he was good enough to say, because I lent any additional brilliance to the conversational fire-works of the evening by any

effort of my own. I was receptive. I was appreciative. I gave him courage. He felt safe in my presence and knew that he was understood—not wholly, perhaps, but fairly well—lest I should grow too proud.

It happened one night when we were dining that Jones came in in evening-dress to announce the possession of a box at her Majesty's. Some considerable person of Jones's acquaintance had taken the box, and finding himself unable at the last hour to use it, had sent it to him. Would Mrs. Denham and myself accompany him? The new prima-donna, who had taken the world by storm, was to sing that night. Royalty would be present. Jones was certainly superior to the coarse, unreasoning sentiment of loyalty which touched the crowd, and yet had a furtive liking for a prince. Would we go?

The point was under discussion when a loud double knock sounded at the front door, and a telegram was brought in to me. I asked Jones's leave to open it, and this being graciously accorded, I read it, and found that it came from Pole. He was back in town, had gone to his old chambers, and begged me earnestly to meet him there with all possible dispatch. He would stay in his rooms till midnight awaiting me.

I passed the telegram to Clara, who gave a little start on reading the name by which it was signed, and a veiled glance at Mary, who sat opposite. She passed it back to me and assumed a face of comic dismay to hide, if need were, the effect the name had made upon her.

"John," she said, "it is too bad. I had set my heart on 'Rigoletto.' Of course you must go. The business must be urgent, or he would not use such terms."

"Could you intrust Mrs. Denham to my care?" Jones asked, "and join us afterward?"

"We should be leaving you alone, dear," said my wife to Mary.

"I am not at all afraid to be left alone," she answered, smiling. "You must let me help you to dress. There is not much time to lose."

So Jones's suggestion was adopted, and I having answered Pole's dispatch, hastily changed my attire, and a hansom having been got to the door, departed, in some wonder as to the object of my friend's return and the meaning of his pressing desire to see me. It was not long before these questions found an answer. Pole was waiting for me in his rooms, and at the sound of my hurried footsteps on the stair he opened the door and admitted me.

"You must forgive me," he began, "for disturbing you

with my affairs. You are the only man in the world who knows the whole story, and you are the only man with whom I can bear to talk about it. Sit down and look at these, and tell me what I ought to do."

"These" were a little sheaf of bills, made out to the Countess of Worborough. Most of them were receipted—all but two, in fact, which I found at the bottom of the pile. I glanced over them hastily, and found one from a milliner, one from a jeweler, another from a job-master, another from an upholsterer. There were eight or nine in all, and roughly they amounted to between two and three thousand pounds. Of this sum, fully two thousand appeared to have been paid.

"Tell me what it all means," I said.

"Read that first," he said, with a groan, throwing a crumpled note upon the table.

It was still warm from his hand when I took it from the table, and it was so tightly pressed together in places that I had some difficulty in opening it without tearing the paper. When I had succeeded, I read in an excited-looking scrawl that the Countess of Worborough presented her compliments to the Earl of Worborough. She was informed that she had committed forgery in signing his name to the checks by which the inclosed bills were paid. If the Earl of Worborough chose to encounter the scandal of a prosecution, the countess would be unfeignedly delighted. That was all.

It appeared that, by some means as yet unknown, Lady Worborough had become possessed of a check-book from her husband's bank, had signed his name, and being confronted by the tradesmen, had calmly announced the forgery, and had sent this note through Pole's solicitor. Two of the tradesmen had accompanied her to the lawyer's office, and all had agreed to wait for an answer from Lord Worborough himself before taking further proecedings. Pole had arrived in town that morning, had spent his day in settling the accounts, and now wanted counsel.

"It's not the money," he said, walking agitatedly up and down the room. "I had enough and to spare before the money came to me, and if she would only go away and be quiet with it, she should be welcome to it, every farthing. I would rather break stones at the road-side, and live on a shilling a day, than live in constant dread that this kind of scandal should be sprung upon me."

In all my acquaintance with him I had never until now known him to lose his self-possession. But now all his old nonchalance was gone; his voice shook with shame and anger,

his footsteps and his gestures were disordered, and his whole bearing was changed.

"If I gave her all I had," he went on, "I can guess what use she would make of it. I have half a mind to do it and take an alias, and go away to California and make a living there by my own hands."

In awhile he began to recover himself again, and he resumed, in something like his accustomed manner:

"But you see, Jack, the money isn't mine. The next heir has as good a right to it as I had. And even if it were absolutely mine, to do as I pleased with, there are grave responsibilities attaching to the mere annual income. It's possible to do a prodigious amount of good with such a sum. It's possible to do a prodigious amount of harm. I can't run away; I can't turn tail and hide myself. You forgive me," he said, suddenly, "for throwing my miseries on your shoulders." He laid both hands upon me and rocked me to and fro a little after his old fashion, and then, turning away, began to pace the room again, but more slowly and despondently than before.

I told him truly, that I wished, above all other things, to be of use to him. Could we, I asked him, decide upon anything, and could I act as his emissary?

"I tried to face the lawyer about it this afternoon," he said, "and I had not the courage to do it. I had to face the tradesmen, and that was shame enough for one day. She knows," he went on sadly desperate in voice and face, "that I will bear anything bearable rather than endure any public scandal which can draw another name into its ugly coils, and she presumes on that."

"You told her once in my hearing," I responded, "that you held one power only over her, and that you would use it. You can make an arrangement with her, an arrangement which all men would admit to be generous, and if she will not accept that with reasonable conditions, all men will hold you justified in using your power."

"I can threaten her with it," he answered; "but how can I carry the threat into action? How could I leave my wife penniless, let her do what she would?"

"Offer her," I answered, "a fixed allowance, on condition that she refrains in all ways from annoying you. If she refuse that allowance, you are not responsible for the refusal. The position is unhappy, but you are not helpless in it. You have only to decide and to be strong."

"That," said Pole, "is the plain common sense of the case,

and I know it as well as you do. But it is not easy to decide, nor easy to be strong. Strength and decision may end in bringing an innocent creature within reach of common gossip and offensive pity. I tell you," he added, passionately, "my wife has this hold upon me, and she knows it. In her life-time, by that horrible plot of hers, an innocent, pure-minded, high-bred woman promised to become my wife. I would rather die —I would rather go on dying every day than drag her name into publicity."

I argued with him, long and earnestly. I showed him that until he took some such step as I counseled he could not hope for a moment to be free of annoyance, or even free of the danger of disgrace. I got him at last to assent to this proposal: That I should make it my business on the morrow to secure an interview with his wife, and to make an offer to her of an income of five thousand pounds per annum, on condition that she quitted England, and undertook in no way to molest her husband.

"Suppose," he asked me, "she should accept the offer and break her promise?"

"Let the agreement," I answered, "be drawn up by your own lawyer, and let him be answerable for your side of it. Let her be answerable for her own. No man can blame you. No man can have anything but sympathy for anybody who suffers as you do."

So far, then, the thing was allowed to stand as if decided. The matter and the manner of an interview had afforded but a poor prelude to a night's enjoyment at the opera. But life has to be lived somehow, and it is an old commonplace that sad hearts often find themselves in haunts of pleasure. After a good deal of persuasion Pole was induced to accompany me, and when he had dressed we set out together. Jones was pleased to find a place for Lord Worborough in his box, and Clara welcomed him with evident heartiness.

We heard but little of the music, and were disturbed on more grounds than one. The audience shared a part of our disturbance, for there was a party in the next box whose members persisted, in spite of indignant cries of "Order!" in loud conversation and laughter. Once or twice there arose a considerable clamor, and at one moment an indignant official of the house knocked at the door of the box in which we sat, and being admitted, requested us to keep silence.

"We," said Jones, "are among the chief sufferers from the disturbance, not the creators of it. The noise comes from the next box."

A louder burst of laughter than we had heard before confirmed the statement almost at the moment at which it was made. The indignant official melted for one moment into apology, grew instantly indignant again, and withdrew. We heard him rapping at the next door, and after this the noise became less marked, though conversation was still carried on in a higher key and with less restraint than is usual in such places.

I tried to fix my attention upon the business of the stage, but my thoughts wandered from it persistently, and I went back in fancy to the interview just over, and forward in fancy to the business of the morrow. I disliked that coming interview less than I should have fancied, and even felt something of the glow of battle as I contemplated it. I was just resolving in my mind how uniformly courteous I would be, yet how firm and decisive, and was rehearsing the speech I meant to make, when the music, which had all the while been swelling and swelling, and no doubt helping my martial thoughts by its cadenced clash and roar, stopped suddenly as if a cataract should have ceased in full bound. A voice sprung out of the sudden silence, and every creature in the theater must have heard it. What words came before, or what words were intended to follow afterward, I could not guess. But the words that struck through the sudden silence were neither more nor less than these—"Lady Worborough."

They were spoken in a shrill and ill-bred female voice, and were, as I have said, audible to every person in the theater. People turned and stared, and there was a hubbub of cries of "Order!" "Shame!" and "Silence!" and voices called from the gallery, "Turn them out!" From that moment a hush fell upon the noisy occupants of the box, and we heard no more of them. At the sound of the words we had all turned to look at one another in a common astonishment. Pole's pale face flushed crimson, and then went gray. We sat afterward in a confused and comfortless silence, and the final descent of the curtain was a relief to all four of us. We delayed a moment in quitting the box, and the lately noisy people, our neighbors, went out before us. Pole laid a hand upon my arm and detained me for a moment, while Clara and Jones passed out upon the corridor.

"She was there," he said.

"No, no," I answered. "The name has been on everybody's lips for a week past." I could have bitten my tongue off a second later for my stupidity, but he did not seem to notice it.

"She was there," he said. "I heard her voice half a dozen times."

Clara was looking brightly back at us, smiling at something Jones was saying as he arranged her cloak. She beckoned me with her fan, and we went out and joined her. The corridor and the stairs were fast emptying, but there was a crowd in the vestibule, and the usual clamor of voices sounded there. It was raining slightly out of-doors, and people were pausing to put up umbrellas. We made our way through the concourse slowly; and as we came out upon the colonnade a man with a stentorian voice bellowed, "Lady Worborough's carriage!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

I HAD no difficulty in escaping from the light duties of my office, and at noon on the following day I sought out Lady Worborough at the address her husband had given me. Judging from the upholsterer's bills I had seen, she had begun the furnishing of a house, but she was for the time being residing in a hotel; a quiet, solid, old-fashioned, and expensive house, of which I could only remember to have heard that it was commonly used by a very distinguished person in my own part of the country on his rare visits to town. It had the severest sort of aspect when I reached it, and the solemn old butler who came forward to inquire my business would have been at home in the establishment of a bishop. I gave him my card and asked for Lady Worborough. A little to my surprise, he showed me upstairs without inquiry, and conducted me into the ante-chamber of what turned out to be a splendid suite of rooms, very large, very solemn, and lonely looking. Here he left me for a moment to look about me, and passed into a room beyond. He came back after a very little time.

"Lady Worborough will receive you, sir," he said. "Will you be so good as to walk this way, sir?"

He led me through a room much longer than the first, into an apartment where a table had been laid for breakfast. The breakfast paraphernalia was still there, in some disorder, and beyond the table stood a gaunt woman, something over middle age, of unmistakably French aspect. She had almost a dragoon-looking mustache, and her tall, spare figure was rigorously embraced by a tight-fitting bodice of dull black silk. Her cuffs and collar were of a gentlemanly pattern, and her black waveless hair was parted on one side. For a mere second on beholding her I was uncertain of her sex.

"Will monsieur give himself the trouble to be seated?" she said, addressing me in French. "Madame la Comtesse will be here immediately."

She sat down in a military attitude, and I took the chair her gaunt finger had indicated. The elderly butler retired, closing the door behind him, and we sat in a chill, prim silence for perhaps five minutes. The lady smoothed her cuffs and her mustache, and looked at me uncompromisingly, as though she were a military person who carried a cartel of defiance. At last the door opened, and Lady Worborough swept upon the scene for all the world as if the foot-lights had gleamed before her. She was attired in a gorgeous dressing-gown of scarlet silk and black lace, and she wore white lace at the throat and wrists. The door had been thrown open for her by some person out of my range of sight, and was closed behind her as she entered. She threw the skirts of her dressing-gown about her feet, and stood, posed for a second or two, as if waiting applause. Then she inclined her head to me, and made a motion with her hand to her companion, who obediently placed a chair behind her. She sunk into this, and settled herself leisurely, with the same stage exaggeration of common manners which had marked her entrance. With all this sorrowful affectation there was no abatement in the bitter and disdainful hauteur of her look, and whenever, in the slow, purposed stage majesty of her movements, her eyes encountered mine, they glided away with the old, insufferable hate and pride.

"To what," she asked me, "am I indebted for the honor of this visit?"

"I am afraid," I responded, "that I can not speak of the business which brings me here in the presence of a third person."

"Madame Surel does not understand a word of English," she said, with a sort of scorn and impatience in her tone, as if she had expected me to know this. "You may tell me your business and begone."

"I will not detain you," I answered, "a moment longer than is necessary."

"You detain me unnecessarily in saying so," she answered. "Let us have no flourishes. Say what you have to say, and go."

Thus exhorted, I made myself as brief as possible.

"I am here, Lady Worborough, as your husband's messenger." At this first mention of her title I saw the first touch of complacency I had ever seen upon her features. She repressed it instantly, and looked, if possible, more proud and

self-disdainful than before. "He desires me," I continued, "to lay a proposal before you which he hopes may close all contest between you and him. On his side he is willing to pay to you during your life-time a sum of five thousand pounds per annum, and on your side he asks an undertaking that you will leave England, and that you will not in any way molest him. He will pay the debts you have incurred until now, and will make over to you all properties you may have acquired in making them. But he will be answerable for nothing further."

If I had seen the faintest hope of succeeding by persuasion, if I had been tempted by any little fancy that she could have been touched by appeal or reason, I would have taken another tone, and have chosen other words. As it was, I simply laid my message before her dryly, and kept all feeling out of it.

"You will tell Lord Worborough," she said, "that I reject his contemptible offer with the scorn it merits."

"I am instructed," I returned, "to say that no other offer will be made, and that in case of the refusal of the conditions now proposed to you, Lord Worborough will feel compelled to leave England—"

"And leave me," she interjected, "to my own devices? I know what to expect from Lord Worborough. It will be quite as well that Lord Worborough should know what to expect from me. You bring me his ultimatum. You may carry back mine. I will take nothing less than the position which is justly due to me."

I asked her to define that position.

"Since Lord Worborough decides to live apart from me," she answered, "and since I would on no grounds consent to hold any avoidable intercourse with Lord Worborough, I claim that my solicitor and his shall meet to ascertain the amount of his yearly income, and that it shall be strictly halved between us. I claim to live in England if I choose, and to spend half the year at Worborough Court and half the year in my house in town. I claim at such times to invite whom I please."

It was not with the slightest hope of reasoning with her, or bringing her to see her own side smaller than she saw it by the light of nature, but out of pure curiosity to know how far her contemptuous disregard of others would carry her, that I asked where Lord Worborough was to live. She raised her eyebrows with a theatrical pretense of indifferent astonishment.

"What is it to me where Lord Worborough lives, or where Lord Worborough dies? If Lord Worborough should cease to live I shall have my claim upon the estate."

I hastened to close the interview.

"The agreement of which I have spoken will be drawn up by Lord Worborough's lawyer at once, and submitted to your ladyship."

"Lord Worborough's solicitor may save himself the trouble of drawing up any such document. If it is submitted to me I shall put it in the fire."

"That is your last word upon the matter, madame?"

"That is my last word upon the matter, sir."

I rose and turned to go, but recollected that I had not delivered the whole of the message intrusted to me.

"I am to say," I added, pausing half-way to the door, "that an advertisement will appear to-morrow morning in every London daily journal to the effect that Lord Worborough will not hold himself responsible for any debt whatever contracted in his name. He will make arrangements with his men of business for cash payment in respect of everything that may be required by them, will abolish his own personal banking account, and draw solely upon his steward."

She turned a little pale at this, and I thought that I had made an impression upon her. I waited in silence for a considerable time, but she gave me no answer. Her hands, which I noticed for the first time were glittering with heavy and valuable-looking rings, clutched at the scarlet silk of her dressing-gown with precisely such an exaggerated motion of anger as an actress would have employed upon the scene.

"Permit me, Lady Worbourough," I said. "There is no desire to be harsh or overbearing. The offer I am empowered to make is generous, and no court of law in the world will find it inadequate to your position. The offer will never be withdrawn upon your husband's side, and upon signature of the document I have named you will be able at any time to realize the allowance made to you. But no further offer will be made, and no penny will be paid until the document is signed."

"Very well, sir," she answered, "you have my answer, and you may go. I will starve in the streets rather than accept this wretched pittance."

She rose to her feet, and strode to and fro about the room, swinging her trailing gown about her as she turned, with a hand obviously trained and skillful. The old sense I had of her having rehearsed the scene came back upon me, and I could see that she had, in her own fierce, self-hating way, a relish and enjoyment for the airs she practiced and the tones she used.

"And who are you?" she cried, pausing suddenly in a statuesque attitude, with both hands drawn backward clutching her robe and her chin high in the air. "Who are you who dare to come here to insult me with this infamous message? You, my husband's hanger-on and toady, who owe the bread you eat to the generosity of Lord Worborough."

"That, madame," I answered, "is no part of the question I was empowered to discuss. I have the honor to wish you a good-day."

She flashed between me and the door in an instant, setting her back against it with simulated pantings of rage and scorn, and eyes wide open. All the airs were simulated, but there was evidently a real passion behind them. Pole had told me something, though not much, of the manner of her rages, and I began to see that I was fated to witness at least one of them. She rated me at first with a slow and measured tone, which gradually increased in volume and rapidity, until it grew to an inarticulate shriek. She tore the laces from her neck and wrists, and rent them with teeth and fingers into fragments. Whatever pretense she had begun with, she had got past her own guardianship by this time, and was embarked upon the full tide of a mad hysteria. The gaunt female who acted as her companion seemed accustomed to this display. She marched quietly and with a determined air to her mistress, and then moving suddenly behind her, pinioned her elbows, and, in spite of her raging resistance, drew her from the door.

"*Allez-vous-en!*" she said to me, in one of the pauses of the mad, screaming voice.

I needed no second bidding, but slipped out hastily, closing the door behind me. In the next apartment the wild cries sounded almost as fiercely in my ears as they had done at first. I closed a second door, and they were fainter; a third, and they were barely audible. I could still hear them, or fancied that I heard them, in the hall; but the solemn old butler, who may, for all I can tell, have been a little hard of hearing, gave no sign, but opened the door and bowed me out upon the street with an unaltered gravity of politeness. I had not arranged to meet Pole again until the evening, but, according to agreement, I made my way to his solicitor, and gave him instructions for the preparation of the document. He promised, under pressure, that it should be ready for delivery on the morrow; and I returned to my own duties, such as they were, and remained in my office till the customary hour of leaving.

If ever Pole had stood in need of justification to my mind,

the scene in which I had just taken part would have amply served his turn. As it was, it served only to confirm an opinion already sufficiently fixed and solid.

When we met that evening I told him the result of the interview.

"I expected as much," he said. "She will not yield, and I dare not. She must go her own way and dree her weird."

We drew up between us the advertisement we had decided upon, and sent a *commissionaire* in a cab to the advertisement offices of the various London papers, and next morning the announcement appeared, and was naturally much talked of. Pole lingered in London long enough to complete his instructions to his lawyer and to give directions to his steward. It was decided to close Worborough Court and to leave only the servants absolutely necessary for its preservation from decay; and the unhappy master of the stately old place went abroad again, to carry his burden as best he might.

Before he went it was decided that in case of any new movement on the part of Lady Worborough I was to be consulted by the lawyer before action on our side was taken. Pole was going to move about, not knowing as yet in what direction, and caring as little as he knew.

At our parting he named Mary Delamere of his own accord for the first time since the discovery of his wife's plot. He asked after her health and general welfare with a quiet, sorrowful composure, and I answered him with perfect truth and candor. She suffered, but she suffered very nobly, to my thinking, and I told him that he might be sure that in awhile she would find a tranquil happiness. That was our good-bye, for the train started as I spoke, and we had time for no more than a final shake hands.

About a week later I was seated in my office, when a messenger announced a visitor. The visitor, being ushered in, appeared as a sandy-haired and pale-complexioned man of middle age, who had a jaunty manner and an air of humorous enjoyment of things in general, tempered by a habit of respectfulness. He announced himself as coming from Pole's lawyer, and he brought with him a curious and embarrassing history. Lady Worborough had, it seemed, taken up her quarters at the Court, had taken her companion with her, and had proclaimed her right to stay there. The messenger appeared to find a certain not easily discernible drollery in this history, and smiled outright half a dozen times in telling it. My glance seemed always to quell this unseasonable tendency to mirth on his part; but if I turned from him for a moment it was only

to find him inspired once more to a broad grin by the hidden humor of the situation.

"The steward circulated the advertisement, sir, among the local tradespeople, but Lady Worborough has so far paid in ready money, and of course nobody has refused to serve her. She doesn't seem to spend much, her ladyship doesn't. She has killed quite a number of the cocks and 'ens in the back premises"—here the broad grin flashed out again, was struggled with, under the influence of my unsympathetic eye, and with difficulty dismissed—"and we learn, sir, that she has given orders for a dozen pigs to be killed and salted down, as if she had made up her mind to stand the siege. Of course it costs her nothing to maintain the servants, because they are on board wages, and are paid regularly by the steward. Mr. Wantage would very much like to know, sir, what, in your opinion, ought to be done under the circumstances."

I could think of nothing that could be done under the circumstances, but to leave Lady Worborough in possession of the Court until circumstances compelled her to vacate it. The lawyer, when I came to confer with him, shared in this opinion; but when it came to our ears, as it did later on, that articles of value were being sold, we deemed it our duty to interfere. The dull and stupid contention went on for six months, and then her ladyship, tiring of the business, disappeared. There were occasional paragraphs in the newspapers, by which one learned that the eccentric Lady Worborough was at Bath, or that the eccentric Lady Worborough was at Scarborough. But by and by these flickered out, and for a full year no intelligence of her doings reached me. I supposed that she was living upon the proceeds of her last raid upon her husband, and I looked forward with certainty to her reappearance when her store should be exhausted.

CHAPTER XXX.

In the rear of my house there was a garden, not at all a large affair, for land in that part of town is too expensive to be set apart for anything so unprofitable as mere health and pleasure. It measured eleven yards by eight, and was bordered by a brick wall, into which the smoke of thousands of household fires seemed actually to have entered. When we first took possession of the house this wall looked exceedingly raw and desolate, and there was even a suspicion of squalor about it, which was altogether out of accord with the aristocratic character of the neighborhood and the magnitude of the

rent. But as the spring advanced certain forlorn-looking creepers began to bourgeon, and the bare trees, not only in my own garden but in the gardens of my neighbors, took a hopeful show of green, and by the time the kindly summer reached us the dingy wall was three fourths hidden with flowers and foliage, and a screen of live emerald folded round us so completely that by dint of a little imagination we could fancy ourselves in the middle of a country solitude. We had a gayly striped tent erected here, with a boarded and carpeted floor, and there, when my official duties for the day were over, we held revel over five-o'clock tea. Sometimes, on very bright mornings, we made a pretense of a picnic, and breakfasted out there, to the particular satisfaction of the page-boy, who adopted the picnic idea more completely than any other member of the household, and decorated his face with London blacks by rolling on the grass behind the tent, out of sight, in the intervals of duty.

It was pleasant, in the summer dusk, to take one's after-dinner coffee and cigar in this retreat, or to lie upon a rug on the limited scrap of lawn, staring up at the smoke-softened sky, which, in clear and tranquil weather, is more beautiful than the average Londoner seems to know or dream.

It was near dark one evening after a day of sweltering heat when I lay thus engaged, thinking in a hazy fashion of many things. Clara and Mary had been seated beside me, talking quietly, and now, perhaps for a quarter of an hour, my wife and I had been alone together. We had not exchanged a word during this time, but I was filled with a pleasant sense of her nearness and companionship, and it has always seemed to me to be a rather poor and thin companionship where people must needs be perpetually talking. It was an understood thing between us, though nobody spoke of it, that a battle was near at hand. In a week or two Mary's promised stay of six months would come to a close, and we knew that though she was far happier with us than she would have been elsewhere, she would make an effort more or less determined to return to the sisterhood. Personally I was resolved to make a very determined effort to retain her, and I was the more resolute because I thought I had seen now and again a cloud upon Clara's spirits which I attributed to her fear of the approaching parting.

She sat at the door of the tent, with a book, which it was too dark to read, held laxly in one hand beside her, with a finger between the leaves, still unconsciously marking the page at which she had put it by. I, lying close beside her, within

easy hand-reach, could see the book and the hand with the wedding-ring upon the finger; but her drooping face, as she seemed to look down upon me, was dark against the shining pallor of the sky. I rolled idly over, and possessing myself of the book, took the little ringed hand in mine, and to my terror and astonishment, a large warm tear fell. I rose to my knees and asked what was the matter. I thought of that possible coming parting, and could imagine nothing else as a cause for tears; but had that been a reason for her grief, the answer would have come easily, and here, for awhile, I could get no response at all. To find my poor little wife hugging me round the neck with both arms, and weeping in a sort of resolved despair, without being able at all to guess the ground of it, was pitiable and almost terrible.

"What is it, darling?"

"Oh, John! My poor, dear John! What will you do without me?"

Without her? I had no thought or fear of being without her. What did it mean? I asked her over and over again, and for sole answer there were the clinging arms and silent tears, and now and again the little figure shaken by a sob. I insisted, I besought, I prayed her to be brave, and tell me everything. I cudgeled my brains in a troubled bewilderment for any reasonable explanation of the grief and fear with evidently beset her. At last she told me, crying more and more softly, with her arms about my neck and her flushed wet cheek pressed against mine, that she would not live long, and that it broke her heart to think of leaving me alone.

Not live long? She was in the very pride of health and strength. She had been a little odd and fanciful of late, unreasonably depressed at moments, gayer and brighter than usual sometimes, without apparent reason. But in danger? I know that if there had been any solid fear, my heart, in its natural rebellion against the thought of severance, would have banished it to the latest moment. I could realize that certainty even then, but I saw no cause for alarm at all, and tried my tenderest best to laugh her out of this singular fancy. Finding that at least it was no fancy to her mind, I became aware of a vague terror. I am no more superstitious than the average run of men, but I remembered all manner of legends of fulfilled presentiment.

I helped her into the house, and having bestowed her in an arm-chair and covered her with unnecessary wraps, I found Mary, and begging her to stay with my wife until my return, I ran off in haste for the nearest doctor. Happily for the end-

ing of my anxiety, the nearest doctor chanced to be a man of high repute, and was at home. I told him the nature of my trouble, and he heard the narrative with an inhuman smiling calm, assumed his gloves and hat, and set out with me. He was closeted with his patient for the space of some five minutes, at the end of which time he found me waiting feverishly in the hall. I drew him through the dining-room door, and questioned him. Was there any danger? Was it anything but a feminine fancy?

"My dear sir," he responded, rubbing his hands and smiling, "it is a feminine fact. There is not the faintest cause for anxiety, but ladies in Mrs. Denham's condition are liable to these attacks of despondency. You must do your best to keep her mind upon a level—a level, my good sir." He described a level in the air with two white plump hands, stooping a little as he did so, as if to indicate that he would rather have the level a little low down than otherwise. "Her present condition is everything that could be desired. Positively everything that could be desired. The one thing I should feel disposed to recommend would be that you should find for her, if possible, a discreet, calm-minded, experienced, and affectionate companion of her own sex."

I dashed instantly at the bell, and rang, not the mad peal I might have rung if I had not suddenly remembered myself, but a modest tinkle barely audible.

"You know such a lady?" asked the doctor. "You are about to send for her?"

"She is in the house," I answered. "She is thinking of leaving us. My wife is most tenderly attached to her, and I traced her despondency to that cause. Pray persuade her to stay. You have only to tell her what you have said to me, and I know that she will not dream of leaving us."

The maid entering the room at this instant, in answer to my summons, I sent a message to Miss Delamere, asking her to come for a minute to the dining-room. When she entered, her face brightened at the sight of the doctor, and the doctor's face brightened at the sight of her.

"Sister Constance!" he said, in a tone of great pleasure. "I think we have found a duty for you. I have just seen Mrs. Denham, who has been alarming her husband by a touch of low spirits and despondency, very natural in her present state. He tells me that this despondency is due to the fear of your departure. Now, a fixed despondency, my dear Sister Constance, is a danger in a case like this. We must avoid it if we can."

As soon as the doctor paused I hastened to say that much as Clara and I had valued her companionship, we would be a hundred-fold more grateful for it now. I was so urgent, in my fear lest Clara's mind should quit that level which the doctor seemed to think desirable for her, that she gave way at once. I thanked her with all my heart, and begged her without delay to tell Clara of the promise she had made.

"That," said the doctor, "will be her best medicine." When Mary had gone, in obedience to my request, he added, with a queer kind of *brusquerie* which I understood better later on, "I'm glad she's left us, because I wanted to say a word about her. That woman, Mr. Denham," laying an impressive hand upon my shoulder, "is an angel." He seemed almost angry about it, and looked as if he would have liked me to contradict the statement, but I assented to it warmly. He lingered for a minute or two, while he drew on his gloves, to say that he had met her often in the pursuit of his professional duties, and had formed a high opinion of her. "The loftiest, sir," he said, "the loftiest," with the same tone of *brusquerie* and defiance. With this, he went away, staying only for a minute in the hall to tell me that I was not to trouble him again unless I saw actual need for it.

I was not all surprised when Mary next morning expressed her delight at my having fallen upon Dr. Mason.

"I think," she said, "he is the kindest-hearted creature in the world. People speak of him as one of the hardest-working men in London, but he spends a third of his time in doctoring patients who can not pay him a penny."

There are many such men in the ranks of his profession. I remember when I got to know him intimately, as I did, telling him one day that doctors were the only people in the world who spent their lives in an earnest endeavor to leave themselves nothing to do. He twinkled over this, and answered: "My dear sir, we are all engaged in providing work for generations of our successors. We patch up the feeble." I cornered him directly afterward, by asking whether, if a medical man found a means by which all disease and sickness could be ended, he would make his knowledge public. He thundered: "By Heaven, yes, sir!" but added, "We can be quite easy on that head. Nobody will ever find it."

To get back to my story: Mary stayed, and was of infinite use and comfort, as wherever she went she seemed to be. She, at least, seemed to have found the level necessary to a tranquil mind. Her mood could rise sometimes to a gentle gayety, but if this had any corresponding depression, no one

but herself was allowed to know of it. She went about the world in a placid, equable, sweet calm, not sad, and yet with a touch of sadness always in my contemplation of it. Clara recovered her usual courage and good spirits almost immediately with the certainty of not losing her companion, and though of course her despondencies came back again from time to time, she fought an easier battle with them than at first.

Mrs. Grantley and her brother, who was a childless widower, were moving about Switzerland. We heard of them from Basel, from Zurich, from Thun, from Chamouni. There was no knowing at any given moment where they might be. They followed no settled track or plan, but seemed to flit wherever fancy led them. Clara's letter, announcing the coming event, followed them about from place to place for a month; but when once it reached her, Mrs. Grantley came flying over with matronly solicitude, and in my own house I became a cipher. It is a fact in arithmetic that if you put any other figure before a cipher that hitherto inexpressive sign takes an immediate value. In household affairs it is not so. I was the cipher, and every other figure in the house, if it were but clothed in petticoats, was before me. But I acquired no value from this circumstance.

I heard all this while, at considerable intervals only, occasional news of Pole. He had been to the Piræus and to Constantinople; thence he had wandered to the Crimea, to look at the fields over which the fancy of the whole world had hovered a few years before. His letters expressed but little of his feeling, but he woke up somewhat about Inkerman and the Alma, and the empty battered fortress of Sebastopol. Next I heard of him as being bent back for Paris, and in case all should go well at home I promised myself an early meeting with him there. Then a month went by without a word from him, six weeks, two months.

I had kept up a friendly correspondence with MacIlray, and it was from him that I heard my first news, after this pause, of the missing wanderer. It caused me a good deal of anxiety.

"Your friend, Lord Worborough," wrote MacIlray, "is back this seven weeks in the capital of sin and foolishness. He is a bright, manly fellow, and unless I am a greater fool than I commonly am, he has plenty of natural, rational lights to guide him. But if half the stories that Paris is ringing with just now are true, he has cut the last tether of reason, and gone astray altogether. He has taken a hotel, and has set it up in a very grand fashion, and he has gathered about him the wickedest, cleverest crowd in all the city. He is not

the lad to go to the mischief with fools for his companions. His heart's in the right place still, I'm thinking, and I'll tell you a very characteristic thing of him, though I must not be held as expressing my approval of the expenditure of money so gotten in a holy cause. The facts of the case are these, and I have taken the pains to ascertain that they are facts before writing them. There's a certain blackguard here who's called the Marquis de St. Marci, who's no less than a fiend with the cards and dice and other such like tools of evil. He's a man of great wealth—as rich, they say, as Lord Worborough himself. The two sat down together this night week, and played so high that Worborough won from the other body two hundred and seventy-five thousand francs. If you'll put this into English money you'll find that, bar the loss on the rate of exchange, its total is eleven thousand English pounds sterling. They played till noon, and then the marquis gave it up. Lord Worborough distributed the money among five Parisian charities next day. There's a saying in my part of the world that what's got over the devil's back is spent under his belly; and though I'm far from arguing, as I'm sure you know, that the money had better have been put to base uses, I have a feeling that it's out of accordance with the general fitness of things that a sum so acquired should be spent in such a fashion."

I knew something of this Marquis de St. Marci, and was strongly of opinion that any money which found its way from his exchequer to that of a charitable organization had changed hands with advantage to the world at large. I was sorry to hear of him as being one of Pole's companions, but I could hardly believe that the connection was likely to last long or to be familiar. MacIlray's code of morals was of the strictest old-fashioned Scottish sort, and I knew so well that many things condoned by the world at large would seem wicked in his eyes, that I was able to make considerable deductions from his story of Pole's wildness. The news of this gambling feat of his disturbed me profoundly, however, though in my love for him and my knowledge of his circumstances I was quick to find excuses. The spoiled life, in which it was so easy for him to fancy that every avenue to happiness was closed, the great wealth suddenly acquired, the rebound of spirit and enterprise natural to his years, all made apology for him. I fancied him grown desperate, and seeking distraction from the emptiness of his own soul in these questionable ways. I found some comfort in the reflection that whithersoever his troubles might drive him he could never cease to be a gentleman, and an English gentleman to boot. The English gentleman's creed

is sometimes a little heathen, but it saves him from a good many things which the creed of people otherwise bred and nurtured inspires no repulsion for.

I had my own anxieties, and for a time at least they were urgent enough to drive even Pole's affairs from my mind; but in the end all went happily, and my establishment was increased in strength by one. The addition to the garrison was an addition to the majority, for the baby was a girl. She is now, unless my fatherly partiality deceives me, a very charming and beautiful young woman, of the perter order of beauty. Having defended myself beforehand by this statement, I may be held excused for saying that I was disappointed, and even shocked, by her earliest aspect. I had been interested in most things which had come into my sphere of observation, but I had never before found any real and inviting opportunity of becoming interested in a baby. Her complexion struck me as being far too florid. I had doubts which were almost tragic as to the future of her nose. The darkling scowl she cast upon me at our first interview lingered on my memory for hours. I never dared to mention my misgivings, but the chorus of approval raised by the whole feminine contingent sounded in my ears like the hollowest of mockeries. I examined, I criticised, I inquired within myself; faintly, I dared to hope. But, while grandmamma—the world, I think, never held a prouder, or one more conscious of her dignity—proclaimed with sparkling eyes and heightened color that the baby was the living image of her mother, and when the mother, with a certainty of faith no doubt could have shaken, cried aloud her discovery in that terra-cotta colored scowl of a resemblance to me, I felt that both my wife and myself were humiliated and maligned.

There are few things in the world which introduce themselves with so little promise to the masculine mind as a baby. But is there anything else in the world which so quickly knits itself about the heart? I can give voice to my misgivings now without shame, because I know them to be common to my sex. At that time I hid them, because I honestly thought that I was a fiend among fathers, a creature denaturalized, and void of the insight of affection.

The sister superior from that little, half-conventual establishment off the Strand had been several times to see us. She came one special Saturday afternoon, when by rare hazard Mary was absent from her ordinary duties among the poor. Clara, a little fatigued by a morning drive, had gone upstairs to rest, and Mary was nursing the younger Clara, by this time

between two and three months old, when the sister superior was announced. I was looking on—I dare say with a very visible fatherly complacency; for by this time the terra-cotta complexion had changed to a delicate pinky white, and the scowl had given place to the most innocent and engaging expression—when the motherly lady entered. Baby was crowing and gurgling in an inarticulate ecstasy about something or other which neither of us could understand, and Mary was bending over her like some mild Madonna in a picture, with a smile so tender and innocent and radiant that it fitly matched even the infantine beauty of the child.

The motherly sister superior gurgled at the baby, and stooped to kiss it. When she raised her head she kissed the nurse, and putting a plump, withered hand on either cheek. looked at her affectianately, and said:

"This is your place, my dear."

CHAPTER XXXI.

When the following August brought the second of my annual vacations, my whole household uprooted itself, grandmamma, mother, and baby, with all their inevitable belongings, and started off for Switzerland. Clara and I had spent an infinity of argument on Mary, and had at length succeeded in persuading her to accompany us. In old days she had traveled a good deal with her father, but he had led her chiefly to those places which were of interest to himself, and she had never seen the Alps. It was one of the dreams of her life to see Mount Blanc, but she would have resisted our invitations to the last if we had not found an ally in Dr. Mason, who insisted that a holiday was necessary to her. On her visits among the poor she still wore her half-conventual garb, but she had long since set it aside for ordinary occasions.

We made our first halt in Paris, and my wife naturally knew well enough that I meant to call upon Pole there. Neither she nor Mary made any allusion to him in my hearing, and when, on the day after our arrival, I set out from the hotel alone, no inquiries were made as to my proposed destination. We were staying at a hotel in the Rue de Rivoli, and I had but to cross the Place du Carrousel, to walk a couple of hundred yards to the right, and to cross the river to reach Pole's residence on the Quai d'Orsay. I had written from London, telling him of the day on which I would call, and had expected him to be alone to receive me. I found him entertaining a dozen gentlemen at breakfast, but he jumped up from his seat

at the head of the table when I was shown into the room, and came forward to meet me with a genuine friendly warmth. While his face was lighted up at the first sight of me, and for a moment or two afterward I did not notice the change which had come upon him. But when a seat had been found for me at the table, and he had settled down again, I had time to observe him. There were no actual lines in his face, but, as it were, a preparation for them. His expression in silence was very mournful, and he looked tired, and, as I could not help thinking, cynical. He had always been a fair linguist since I had known him, and now, after his lengthy stay in Paris, he had achieved such an ease and elegance in French as Englishmen rarely attain to. Excepting himself, I was the only Englishman at the table, and I had known beforehand that he associated but little with his countrymen.

The talk was wonderfully bright and light, with now and again a touch of seriousness in it, which, though it was never more than momentary, served to give it a flavor of reason. The names of most of the guests were familiar to me, and were familiar to everybody who knew anything of art, letters, and politics in Paris. During my own brief journalistic sojourn there I had seen, on first nights of theatrical representations, in famous studios, and in the parliamentary ranks in the Chamber of Representatives, most of the faces which surrounded me, and I was pleased to find myself one of an assembly so distinguished.

The table was spread with a sumptuous refinement, the wines were something to remember, but the talk was the best part of the meal. It was self-conscious and wary, like the dangerous dexterities of a tumbler, but like those same dexterities, it was graceful and assured, and looked so easy as to tempt one to the belief that one's self could do it. It glanced and glittered, and posed, and everybody laughed at its pretty, daring, wayward ways; but keeping a watchful eye on my old friend, I could see that below his surface gayety there was a deep-rooted and constant sadness. He was as keen and ready as any of his guests, but his good things were biting, and at times almost savage. Several times in the course of the breakfast I heard one or other of his cronies allude to him as the pessimist, and that indeed seemed to be his accepted title.

Breakfast over, we adjourned to an apartment in which the arrangement of the furniture struck me at first sight as being curious. The room was large and sumptuous, but from the center of it every article had been cleared away, with the exception of a small table with a green-baize top, and a brace of

chairs, which stood one on either side of it. Other chairs there were in plenty, lounges, causeuses, and what not, but these were all drawn away, as if for the accommodation of a standing gallery round the little green-baize-topped table. Among the guests was one man, and one man only, whose face I mis liked. He was handsome, after a Mephistophelian, wicked fashion, but he was prematurely wrinkled and elderly, and looked altogether cruel, cunning and untrustworthy. I was not long in discovering that this personage was no other than the Marquis de St. Marci. I was not long in discovering either that the whole object of the gathering was to witness a match between the marquis and Lord Worborough at écarté. Pole, it appeared, had been challenged to a game of three hours' duration at stakes almost unheard of, and, since he had won heavily from his opponent, had accepted the defiance.

Cigars and cigarettes were lighted, two men were appointed, one in the interest of each of the players, to mark the score, Pole and his opponent took their seats at the table, and the game began. I made my first acquaintance with écarté that day, and have never followed up the introduction, so that I am unable to describe the play. I suppose it to have been very skillful on both sides, from the rapt eagerness with which it was watched by the little crowd about the table. There was a noble pendule upon the mantel-piece, with a bronze figure, half life-size, poised upon the top of it, and when two o'clock sounded the first deal was made. I did not like the proceedings at all, and, in point of fact, I felt a kind of inward protesting rage against them, but before the game had gone on for a quarter of an hour I was as passionately and eagerly absorbed as any devotee at the shrine of chance there present. At first the run of luck was all in Pole's favor, but the marquis was as calm and cool as if he had been playing for farthings. Many of the men standing round had little note-books, in which they cast up the results of the game as it progressed. They showed these at intervals with shruggings of the shoulders, lifted eyebrows, and pale excited smiles to other men, who had kept no count. In a mere half hour the total of Pole's winnings doubled my annual income from all sources.

I do not know whether it is so with all men, but for myself, though I am not, nor ever have been anything of a gambler, there is an extraordinary fascination in looking on at games of mingled chance and skill. This particular encounter is historical in gaming circles, and, I suppose, it is no wonder that it excited me, even apart from my interest in one of the players. When Pole had a reverse I trembled lest the whole

course of events should go against him; when he won I trembled with triumph, and between *coup* and *coup* I trembled with excitement. The players sat quiet, like a pair of fates, and were apparently the least moved and interested of all the people there. Only I began to notice a certain strained look about the eyes of Pole's opponent. He had had a clear and rather hectic flush of color on the cheek when he sat down first at the table, and this flush of color spread gradually until the under and upper eyelid were charged with it.

He called for new cards at the expiration of the first half hour, but they brought him no better fortune than the old. The game still went against him, and though every minute was filled and overfilled with interest, the plaintive voice of the pendule chiming three fell upon my ear long before it was expected. Again the Marquis de St. Marci called for new cards, and still the run of luck went against him. I was beginning to pity him when it turned, and for a clear hour thenceforward he took everything before him, at such a pace that the positions of the two began to be reversed, and Pole became a loser. When four o'clock sounded Pole was some twenty thousand francs to the bad, and after that the game fluctuated in brief rushes, each one of which, to my overstrained fancy, seemed likely to lead to final victory and defeat. It became evident at length that Pole was losing beyond all doubt. Allowing for the best possible good-fortune in the last half hour, he could not expect to make his losses good; and when five sounded and the game was over he rose the loser, in round money, of twelve thousand pounds. It appeared that he had prepared himself for this contingency, for he drew out a check-book and wrote a check for the amount before rising, and passed it over to the marquis, who accepted it with smiling thanks, and buttoned it up in his pocket-book.

After this the little assembly of celebrities melted away with great rapidity, and in half an hour Pole and I were left to ourselves. He lighted a cigarette, and threw himself upon a sofa with a worn-out air.

"It's a pretty game," he said, laughingly, "but écarté's like life. No man can play against the cards. I began too well to go on well, and I knew at the end of the first half hour that I was bound to lose. Win first, lose last. That's as true as anything can be in a world where everybody's predictions are bound, more or less, to be falsified."

I have confessed already that I had been carried away by my excitement over the game, and it is quite possible that if Pole's success had continued, my interest in it might have en-

dured until the close; but during that last half hour in which he had been obviously doomed to failure I had found ample time to cool, and I had come back to common sense, even if, as often happens, I had taken a roundabout way to it. One takes the wrong way to common sense at times, and gets switched back to it in a surprising fashion. In point of fact, common sense lives in so many places that even the most errant of travelers can hardly avoid an occasional encounter with her.

"You look severe, John," said Pole, raising himself on one elbow idly, and regarding me across the little cloud of smoke which had just left his lips. "You disapprove of these things? You would rather see a man with my income and position engage his fortune in the amelioration of the world at large? Why, so would I; but then, you see," he went on with an idle bitterness impossible to describe, "one develops, as philosophers are teaching us, in the direction where one encounters the least resistance."

I was somewhat wearied by the excitement of the afternoon, and a little abashed inwardly by the memory of my own share in it, so that for a minute or two I found no heart to answer him. By the time I had recovered myself enough to know what my own honest and natural emotions really were, the time for an answer seemed to have gone by, and I kept silence, though many things occurred to me as being worth the trouble of saying.

At the beginning of the play the sun had shone into the room so brightly that it had been found necessary to draw the curtains as a shield against it. Half-way through the game they had been partly retired again, and now a single broad beam glared upon the pier-glass and its gold border, near the ceiling. The plaintive, silvery voice of the pendule chimed again, and the room seemed to sink into the shadow of the great house which stood at the west and to the rear. The last glow of broad day departed from the chamber, and Pole and I were left in a half twilight, which seemed the more obscure because of that lately vanished blaze.

"I can't see how," he said, "whether you look severe or not, but I suppose you feel severe."

"I feel sorry," I answered him.

"That," he responded, "is a little worse than feeling severe. I'd a great deal rather that you didn't feel sorry about me, Jack. I think, all things considered, it might be happier for you and me if we missed each other altogether, and made up our minds to take different ways."

I asked him if he thought it likely that we could forget each other if we lived ever so far apart, and, rising from the sofa he was lounging on, he crossed over and took a seat near me. I do not know that it is necessary at any time to analyze memories and emotions, but I know distinctly that his dim figure lounging across the room at me, with his hands in his pockets and his head thrown backward, the very manner in which he dropped into the chair he chose, and the attitude he took there, reminded me of a time when he and I had both supposed his troubles to be over. I do not think, calling to mind our whole career together, that at any moment in it I had loved him so well or pitied him so profoundly. We are bound nowadays to keep cool, and to hide, even when we can not choke, our emotions, but if I had followed the instinct of my own heart at that moment I should have put my arms around him and have cried like a child or a woman. As it was I burst into an unreasonable anger. It was my only refuge from myself. But I think he understood me.

"You have no right," I said, "to make this kind of thing the occupation of your life."

"Granted," he answered. "So far as I can see, one has no right to anything. When the beaten mule has no pleasure left him but to kick over the traces, and when he always gets beaten for doing it by that angelic monitor which tries to govern mules—eh, Jack, isn't it rather hard for him if his fellow-mule comes to bray reproach at him?"

I understood it all, and told him so.

"It's only the superior intelligence that understands," he said. "Don't you think you're a shade too young to be able honestly to take that tone with me?"

I was silent at this, and sat in a sort of sick amazement at it.

"Don't be angry, Jack," he said, suddenly. "There's a kind of stuff that is purified by many fires. You can't give it too many to burn the dross out of it. But there's another kind of stuff that gets to be all dross if you burn it too long and too often." We were quiet for a time, and then he asked me: "Did you ever hear me growl till now? Look here, Jack," he went on, "I've looked at it pretty often. What have I got to do? Go and take my seat in the House and make speeches and make a name? I've thought about it. Turn philanthropic landlord and interest myself in the cause of the tenant farmer and the laborer? I've thought about that, too, and I think I make my people pretty easy. But Lady Worborough's in the police court now and then, and I can't show up. I have to hide myself. I have to sing small. I

have to exile myself from my own country and the work I would do, if I had the chance to do it."

"Lady Worborough in the police court?" I cried. "What do you mean?"

"One comes from home to learn news of home," he answered, bitterly. "You haven't heard?"

"I have heard nothing," I answered. "I have had no news of Lady Worborough for the greater part of a year."

"You read only the respectable journals," he responded. "You don't know the 'Flag of Liberty,' the palladium of the people, the weekly sheet which proclaims to its own public that everybody with a handle to his name is a scoundrel by rule of Magna Charta. I have the advantage of reading an occasional column about her ladyship and myself. The indignant writer demonstrates the fact that I am a personage of the basest extraction, and therefore have a right to be virtuous; but he shows also that I am a lord, and by accretion of title and income, vicious. He proves the same things of her ladyship, and is eloquent about the closing phrase of the police reports, 'The fine was paid.' I have a round dozen of printed documents upstairs. I'll show them to you, if you care to see them. I owe them to some anonymous friend of mine, who sends them to me by the earliest post, and sometimes writes beforehand to advise me that they are coming."

He might, by the sound of his voice, have been talking about the most indifferent theme in the world. Finding that I answered nothing, he arose and strolled out of the room, returning after a brief absence with what turned out to be a pocket-book in his hand. He threw this upon the table, and told me that if I wanted intelligence of Lady Worborough it was there in plenty. He drew the curtains wide apart, and the room was light again. I took the pocket-book from the table and glanced at its contents—scraps of newspapers of different dates. The merest look was enough, and I returned them.

When you know that a man is as thoroughly persuaded of the folly of his own course as you yourself can be, it is of little use to argue with him. I bethought me of Pole's declaration about the trust in which he held his fortune; but I was certain that he also remembered it, and it would have been gratuitously stupid to remind him of it.

"Since I had to pass through Paris," I said, lamely, "I couldn't help looking you up."

"No," he said; "I expected you to call."

There was a change in both of us since the hearty reception at midday; but I knew that my own cold unhappiness grew

out of the change in him, and that my presence at the spectacle of his extravagant gambling was answerable for that.

"We are going on to Brussels to-morrow," I said. "Clara wants to make a flying call upon some friends there. I suppose we shall see no more of each other for awhile?"

"No," he answered, "I suppose not. Are you alone, you two?"

I told him that Miss Delamere was with us, and Mrs. Grantley.

"Ah, well," he said, "that ends it;" as if he had had some thought of joining us until he knew of Mary's presence.

I said something about having to get back in time for dinner, and added that my absence would already be wondered at. We shook hands as though we were the most commonplace of acquaintances, and he descended into the hall with me. We repeated our good-byes there, and I went away as unhappy as I can remember to have been at any time. No comment was made by any member of our party upon my absence. We dined at the *table d'hôte*, amid a loud chatter of talk and the wild rushes of overworked waiters, and there was bustle and noise enough to distract attention from me. To have sat out a quiet dinner without my forced hilarity and frequent depression being noticed would have been impossible, but in this scene of noise and animation I escaped. The ladies had been sight-seeing in my absence, and were all a little tired. I was glad to get away from them, and sauntering in the fast-growing darkness under the shade of the trees in the Champs Elysées I thought over the day's experience. Over and over again I made up my mind to go back to Pole and speak my heart out to him, but the purpose always failed me.

When it had grown quite dark I made my way back to the hotel, and as I emerged from the broad promenade into the street I became aware of a solitary somber figure standing there. It moved on as I approached, and I recognized Pole's step and carriage. The street was very quiet. In the rear the innumerable lamps of the Place de la Concorde, themselves invisible, made a yellow haze upon the darkness, and the long, single line of lights upon the streets twinkled away into the distance with a diminishing brightness. Pole walked on and I followed, half resolving at almost every footstep to accost him. He took no note of my footsteps behind him, and I gradually allowed myself to fall further and further in the rear. I saw him pause opposite the hotel and look up at its windows. He raised his hat and stood bareheaded for an instant, and then moved on again. I walked after him until he

had passed the hotel by a hundred yards, when he turned, and we encountered each other. He was going by without recognizing me, but I hailed him.

"That you, Jack!" he said, in a different voice from that in which he had last addressed me. He passed his arm through mine, and we walked for a considerable distance without speaking. My heart was so hot with friendship, and so sore and tender with regrets, that I could not trust myself to speak. He led me back to the Champs Elysées, where the moon, which was late in rising, had just begun to make an uncertain glory in the sky.

"Tell me about Mary," he said, suddenly. "How is she? What does she do? Is she happy, or contented? Tell me all about her."

There was not much to tell in the story of that life of silent heroism, self-conquest, and self-denial, and what little there was I told badly, being indeed afraid to trust myself too far.

"I believe," he said, simply, "that she cared for me as much as ever a woman cared for a man in this world. Heaven knows I was never worth it, but then a man's worthiness has nothing to do with such a matter. There isn't a trouble I have that she doesn't share, and she has enough and to spare of her own. They're better than we are, Jack. They're stronger, and purer, and more patient."

Finding him in this changed and softened mood, I opened out my heart to him. There is no need to try to repeat here what I said to him. I had no right to preach, but every man, however weak he knows himself to be, has the right to hold out a hand of help and fellowship.

"You're right, Jack," he said. "Say no more about it. Paris is no place for me, and mine for this year past has been no life for an honest man to lead. I have known it all along. I shall get away to-morrow. I don't know yet where I shall go or what I shall do, but I'll try to find something worth doing, and I'll try to do it. Good-night, Denham. Don't come any further with me just now. Good-bye, and God bless you."

We parted there, and I watched him as he walked away in the gathering moonlight until he was hidden in the shadows of the avenue.

CHAPTER XXXII.

EXCEPT for the fact that it led to my encounter with Pole, the family trip to Switzerland would have found no place in

this history. It was enjoyed and left behind, and late in the autumn we all came home again, every one of us brimming over with health and energy, from grandmamma to baby. We settled down into our accustomed courses in a day or two. My valuable services not being required again by the country until Parliament met, I devoted myself to my literary work. Mrs. Grantley took friendly leave of us, and went back to Grantley Holme and her brother the major, Clara settled down to the superintendence of the household, and Mary resumed her suspended labors among the poor. She would, as I learned from Clara, have abandoned her distinguishing dress altogether, but for the fact that the people among whom she labored had grown accustomed to it, and to part with it would have been to invite curiosity.

My own inquiries had so long led me to a tolerably close acquaintance with the class among whom she labored that it was out of no curiosity with respect to their condition that I sometimes availed myself of an unoccupied hour to accompany her upon her rounds. I had an idea when I first offered her my companionship, that it would be pleasant to see how she dealt with the people, and I certainly found that idea verified. It *was* pleasant to see how that mild presence brought comfort to the sick and troubled, and to witness the unfailing respect with which the roughest blackguards of her quarter greeted her. I had a talk with one gentleman, I remember, who was the terror of Green Hill Lane, a rather difficult neighborhood for any single individual to be a terror to. What this gentleman did for a living during the limited periods for which he kept out of jail I am unable to say, but he took a pride in dressing like one of the old-fashioned tribe of coal-heavers, in shorts, high-lows, and gray worsted stockings. He was sunning his ponderous calves on a doorstep, and smoking a short clay there one afternoon when Mary and I came upon him together. He was a sulky, ill-conditioned-looking fellow, but he gave her an actual smile of welcome as he got up to make way for her to enter the house.

"You again, mum?" he said, with gruff civility. "I thought we'd seen the last of you, mum." Mary answered that she had been away for her health. "I 'ope you've got it, mum," he said. "You are a-lookin' better than you was."

She thanked him, and passed within doors, and I, waiting for her in the street, tried to enter into converse with her acquaintance. He received my advances with marked distrust, and resuming his pipe, sat down again upon the doorstep, and

smoked with an obviously contemptuous disregard of my presence. When I endeavored, in spite of this unpromising beginning, to continue the conversation, he looked up at me surlily.

"Look 'ere," he said. "Who are you? What are you? What are you drivin' at? Who are you tryin' to get at? I didn't address my conversation to you, did I? What do you want to address your conversation to me for?"

I told him I did not like this pride and stand-offishness between man and man, and added that if a duke were to speak to me I should try to treat him civilly.

"That's a noo lay," said my new acquaintance. "Anything does as long as you can edge the patter in, don't it, guv'nor? Just get a start, so as a cove can't stop you, then you can sling it in to your heart's content, can't you? What's the line? Is it gospel, or teetotal, or the papers? I knows 'em. Don't you talk to me. I can get as much o' your kind o' chin-music as I wants when I'm in quod."

"Do you care to know what my lay is?" I asked him.

"No, guv'nor," he responded. "If you puts it plain, I don't."

"Come," I urged, "you didn't treat the lady in this way."

"No," he said, dexterously expectorating without removing his pipe from his lips, "I didn't, guv'nor. But you see you ain't a lady. And if you was, it's about a hundred million to one as I shouldn't."

"You wouldn't treat me in that way if I were a lady?" I asked him. "Why not?"

"'Cos," he answered, as sulkily as ever, "it 'd be a thousand million to one as you wouldn't be a patch on her. When I meets a lady as knows how to be a lady, why then I takes my 'at off to her like a man. Why not? Do you think a cove can't tell a lady when he sees her? There's plenty of 'em comes round here a-pickin' up their petticoats, steppin' fine, and talkin' thin and pretty. Ladies? Ladies be blowed! I knows 'em when I sees 'em. Don't you talk to me."

After this, he subsided to a bull-dog silence. I always made a point of carrying a well-stocked tobacco-pouch with me upon this sort of journey. I produced it now, and held it out to him with a request that he would help himself.

"I don't ask," he observed, "for no man's charity. I can always buy as much backy as I wants, and if I couldn't I should nick it."

When Mary emerged from the house, this uncompromising personage seemed abashed in the memory of his former politeness, and merely growled, "Good-arternoon, mum," as he

stood aside to let her pass. I told her as we went along together of the testimonial to her ladyhood which I had just received. She seemed rather pained than pleased by it, and she told me that there were some obviously well-intentioned people visiting in the neighborhood, who spent both time and money in the service of the poor, but, she added, I could hardly imagine how little tact they had.

"If you want to get near these people," she said, "you must not remember such a thing as social difference. You must forget that it exists. If you only pretend to forget, they are very quick and keen to find you out. But if you really forget it they are at ease at once, though they never for an instant forget it themselves. I am afraid that you may think I am growing democratic, but I really think there are as nice people here as one meets elsewhere. Their manners and their ways of speech are not ours, but apart from those things, which matter a good deal, of course, there are some real ladies and gentlemen here."

One hears this sort of statement made in pure cant sometimes, by people who do not in the slightest little degree believe it in their hearts. But Mary did believe it, and I suppose that her belief afforded one of the truest reasons for her success.

"There are some among them," she went on, "who have really been ladies and gentlemen. A good many, of course, are pretenders, and exaggerate the better times they have seen, but some have really fallen from complete respectability."

As she talked thus, we passed by a noisome well of a court, where a group of women were loudly discussing some topic of general interest. I caught the voluble, shrill rattle of an Italian voice, and one woman, with her hands waving high in the air, was screaming, "*Mais, madame, je vous juré,*" as we went by. This court was the sorrowfulest part of Green Hill Lane, though the whole thoroughfare was sorrowful enough. The fronts of its houses seemed to have known no cleansing or renovating touch since the hour of their erection. From the pavement to the sills of the shop-windows the walls were caked with the mud which had been splashed upon them by the feet of generations of wayfarers. The paint of the woodwork was smothered with bubbles like a sort of sea-weed, and the window-panes were incrusted with the residuum of hundreds of fogs, and smeared with the rain of uncounted storms. The houses huddled together from one end of the lane to the other without a single break on either side, except the one made by that noisome well of a court, and the lane was so nar-

row that a single hackney-carriage would have filled it from curb to curb. The inhabitants of the lane did at home what little washing they had to do, and the windows of the wretched houses were always garnished by vandyked rags of dingy white, as if in satire of festivity, or as if the King of Poverty's Miseries were coming that way on a ghastly gala day, and his subjects were in readiness to receive him.

We were perhaps twenty yards beyond the court when a slipshod footstep sounded behind us, and a shrill voice cried out, "*Sœur, sœur, ma sœur!*" Mary and I turned at this call together, and I recognized the French woman who had been exclaiming in the court.

"You speak French, my sister?" said the woman. Mary answered in the affirmative, and she poured out a story so voluble and in so marked a southern accent, half patois and half French, that it was almost impossible to follow her. We made out enough to know that somebody was in urgent need of help, and we turned round with the woman at once, and accompanied her into the court, she talking all the while with a passionate, voluble eloquence only half comprehensible. At a sign from Mary I remained in the court, while she entered at a low-browed door, and disappeared. A little Italian man on crutches, with a dark, wrinkled, wizened visage like that of a preternaturally wise and amiable ape, clattered across the broken pavement of the court, and opened fire upon me in his own language. He had talked for a minute before I could make him understand that I spoke no Italian; but addressing him in French, I discovered that he had a fair mastery of that language, and asked him to speak in it.

He went on, more slowly, but with an eagerness which made him stumble at every phrase. Let monsieur figure it to himself then, that a person so exalted should thus have fallen. There are those who would not believe, though the skies fall about them. They would have the birds in their fingers, and would not believe that the skies had fallen. But, for himself, he had traveled the world. He had been here, there, and everywhere. Monsieur might not credit, finding him in surroundings so degraded, yet monsieur was obviously a gentleman, and had perhaps traveled and made himself acquainted with the reverses of fortune. He, the crutch-supported cripple, had once been a concierge in an hotel at Naples. He knew the world. He could tell a gentleman when he saw him, and a lady—*gran Dio*, a lady!—who that had once had the habitude to behold ladies of the great world could doubt when he beheld one? Monsieur had, without doubt, remarked the pride

in their faces. What right had the poor with pride? The great and the rich were born to it. When once he had found the person between these two eyes—very bright and piercing and eloquent eyes they were—he had heard a voice within him which had said, behold no vulgar person! In his own land, the thing was impossible, because the cause was impossible.

I arrested this voluble old Italian, and offered him leading questions. There was a lady here, a lady, heavens, yes! a lady. The blind and foolish derided her claim, and people made a scoff of her, and pointed at her, and hooted after her because of it. Who was she? He could not tell. These foreign names were so long and so rough. The tongue stiffened and the teeth flew before they could be spoken. What was she doing here? Doing here? Great heaven! she was dying here. Dying, of hunger, of want of medicines. The hospitals had rejected her, professing that she was cured.

I was standing with my back half-turned to the door-way by which Mary had entered, when the crippled old Italian stopped short in his swift, stammering speech, and stared across my shoulder. Before I could turn, his crutches and the withered legs they helped were skimming over the broken pavement. I swung round in some amaze at this, and there, in sudden terror, I saw Mary, with one hand feebly clutching at the door-jamb, her face as colorless as the bands of white which surrounded it, and her figure half-supported by the woman who had but a moment before summoned us from the street. I ran forward swiftly, and relieved the woman of her burden.

"What is it?" I asked. "What is the matter?"

She wrung her hands together, and made a little incoherent moaning noise, before she turned upon me. I was as unsuspicious then of the staring truth as I had been an hour before.

"You are ill," I said. "Let me help you into the air."

I half assisted, half carried her into the court, and one of the women brought a rickety chair, and another a cracked tea-cup of water. I helped her to the seat, and held the cup to her lips. She drank a little of the water, and was revived by it. She made an effort to rise, but I checked her, and she kept her place. Her gray eyes, looking extraordinarily large and dark, met mine, and I saw that they were full of pain and trouble. She made a great effort to collect herself.

"Get first," she said, "some extract of beef, and a bottle of wine. Take the first turning to the right that way, and you will find a street of decent shops. Bring the things back at once, and then go for a doctor. Oh, pray don't wait to think of me. I was shocked for the moment, but I am well

again. Pray go! go at once! You see I am well. There is no need to stay here."

I could only suppose that some one was hovering between life and death, and had instant need of support and stimulus. I tore out of the court, ran the length of the lane in the direction she had indicated, and searching up and down, came upon an Italian warehouse, where I bought a tin of beef extract, and a grocer, from whom I bought a bottle of port. I ran back with these, and found that Mary had already re-entered the house. The French woman who had accosted us in the street took the things from my hands, and rushed upstairs with them, returning almost immediately with instructions to me to find a doctor. I hurried back into the street, and by good hap finding a cab there, drove at once in pursuit of Dr. Mason. He was not at home, but the servant who answered my summons at the door was able to tell me where to intercept him, and ten minutes later we were driving back together. I was considerably disquieted about Mary, and told the doctor that he might expect to have more patients than one. The French woman was eagerly waiting for us when we arrived, and began to rain down blessings on the doctor, who, as I then discovered, was already known in that quarter. The two ascended together, and I was left alone once more, this time for the space of some ten minutes. Then the doctor came down alone.

"Miss Delamere is all right again," he said, "and you need have no fear about her. She seems, however, to have made a very extraordinary discovery, and she wants you to go upstairs and verify it. You're not easily shocked yourself, are you? Wait a bit; I'll tell you the story. There is a woman upstairs suffering from spinal paralysis. She was knocked down by a cab in the street some two months ago, and was taken to St. Bartholomew's Hospital. She stayed there a week or two, and was then dismissed as cured. Since then she has been very queer at times, and now, for nearly a week, nobody has seen her until an hour ago. Then her fellow-lodgers, breaking into her room, find her almost dead. The lower extremities are useless, and want of sustenance has so far prostrated her that another day might have done her business. You're a personal friend of Worborough's, and that's the reason why I take the trouble to prepare you. She claims to be Lady Worborough."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I WALKED up and down the court for an hour after Dr. Mason's departure, an object of interest to all the boyhood of

the neighborhood, and all the slatternly little girls who nursed babies. These thronged the narrow entrance of the court, scattering with screams whenever I walked toward them, and gathering compactly together again whenever I walked away, until at last long immunity gave them courage, and they stood in rapt wonder at the apparition of gloves, a new hat, and clean linen in that unexpected quarter. Mary appeared in the door-way, and I hastened to meet her. To a casual and unobservant eye there would have been no sign of excitement in her aspect, but I who knew what strange reason she had for amazement and emotion could see that she had not yet recovered.

"Have these people," she asked, "or has the doctor told you anything of the sick woman's identity?" I answered with a mere motion of the head. "She is asleep," Mary continued, in a half whisper, as if there had been already need for caution. "You may see her. You will know her?" I signified assent again. "Come this way. Tread softly."

The air in the court itself was foul and heavy, but it was free and pure by comparison with that which crawled about the staircase. The gloom there seemed a natural part of the air's weight and closeness. The wretched stair creaked and complained beneath our footsteps. We mounted to the third story, and there Mary slowly pushed open a door which jarred and shrieked upon its hinges in spite of all her caution, and motioned me to enter. I went in on tiptoe, and took in the squalor of the chamber at a glance, the smoky time-stained walls, green in places with some by-gone winter's rains, the cracked, uneven floor, the broken plaster of the ceiling, where the bare laths showed like a desert map of unknown countries; the single window, with a shattered pane stuffed with rags, the grate, with the dead ashes of an old fire in it. There was no bed in the room, but on the floor a huddled heap of sacking, with wood shavings thickly spread below it. A cloak that had once been elegant covered the form of a woman sleeping on this miserable couch. The face was hidden, but a mass of disorderly black hair streamed across the impoverished coverlet, with a small ear shining in ghastly and exaggerated whiteness among its disordered coils. Between the couch and the door was a small table, drawn a little to one side, so that it did not intercept the view. I advanced, still on tiptoe, and laying my hands on this, bent forward, and surveyed the sleeping woman's face. It was strangely changed from the face I had seen when I had last parted from her, but I knew it instantly. By what wild recklessness or what disaster she had so far stripped

herself of the means of livelihood as to have fallen to such a refuge as this in so short a space of time I could not guess, but there was no doubt as to her identity.

Once assured, I turned away, and cautiously retraced my steps. Mary stood in the half gloom of the landing, and when she saw me her eyes asked a question. Mine answered it, and with a swift and nervous gesture she took both my hands, and held them tightly.

"You are sure?" she whispered.

"Sure," I whispered back again.

She motioned me down-stairs, and I obeyed her, she following in my footsteps. Half-way down she laid a hand upon my shoulder and arrested me.

"I must not leave her," she said. "I must not leave her for a moment. She is so nearly exhausted that nothing but the most constant care can save her. Tell Clara that I shall not be able to get home to-night."

She spoke even now in a guarded tone, and I instinctively answered her in the same fashion.

"You must have help," I said. "You must not be allowed to wear yourself away. I shall call at the nurses' institute, and send you an assistant. Then when your relief arrives, you must come home."

"I do not think," she answered, "that I shall dare to leave her, for a time. You forget: I have had experience lately. I shall be glad of assistance. It was thoughtful, and like you, to think about it. Go now, and be sure that Clara is not alarmed."

I was half-way down the remainder of the stairs when I heard the rustle of her dress again behind me. When I turned I could see dimly a pained and confused look upon her face, and I fancied she was blushing, though I was uncertain in the gloom.

"I have no money, John. Things will be wanted. Lord Worborough will repay you."

So far as I knew, that was the only mention of his name she had made since she had learned of my discovery of Pole's wife in Paris. I gave her my purse, and told her to spare nothing that was needful, and she went upstairs again. For an instant, before the first turning took her out of sight, her beautiful pale face hung in the gloom like the pictured head of a saint. The black robe melted into the surrounding shadows, and only the face, with the band of white across the forehead, was half visible. Then this floated away, and I went down the steps and out of the court alone.

It had never entered my mind to believe that the miserable woman I had just left behind would have pushed her resolution not to accept the allowance her husband offered her to such a point as this. I had supposed, as almost anybody would have done in my place, that we had but to wait until she felt the first touch of necessity, to receive her capitulation in form. We knew perfectly well that her desire for vengeance on Pole weighed far more heavily with her than any sense that she was being defrauded of her rights. At the time of her marriage with Pole, if she had ever contemplated a separation from him, a fifth part of the income I had offered in her husband's behalf would have seemed an actually munificent allowance.

I wondered how Pole would take the news of this victorious obstinacy, and on my way homeward I called at a telegraph station and sent off two dispatches, each addressed to him, the one through his steward, and the other through his solicitor, requesting his immediate presence in London. I had just loose silver enough to pay for the messages. It was quite uncertain when I should hear from Pole, for he had closed his house in Paris, and was wandering again, I knew not where. It might even be weeks before he would communicate with either of his men of business, and it was possible that even the most serious events might happen without his knowledge. It is curious to notice how even in one's thoughts one shrinks from the actual confession of certain things. I know now, and I knew then, that the most serious events meant nothing more or less than the one great serious event of all. Brought face to face with a problem which happily but few people can ever have to look at seriously, I felt a something strange and dreadful in the sense that it was the bounden duty of every creature concerned to strain every intelligence and every effort to conserve a life which cursed its owner and spread a blight on all who knew her. Not the best loved, not the most useful and most highly honored, not the very center of benevolence and wisdom, would lay a greater claim upon skill, patience, tenderness, than this self-scorning center of unhappiness. The very knowledge of her own poor deserving would have to be a spur to conscience, lest there should be even an inward self-accusing whisper of neglect.

Clara was disturbed by the news I had to give her, chiefly on Mary's account.

"I know what will happen," she said. "She will take this as a case of conscience, a thousand times more even than any other, and if she is not taken care of she will watch herself to

death. Where is this place, John? You must find a professional nurse and get Mary away."

This reminded me of my own undertaking, and I told Clara of it.

"See to it at once," she said. "You will find a nurse immediately. Take her with you in a cab, and bring Mary back with you."

It was easy to give orders in this impetuous manner. "But what," I asked, "if Mary will not come?"

"Tell her," Clara answered, "that I myself will go and compel her to come home and take her natural night's rest. I know, John, it's very angelic, but it isn't common sense. I'm not going to have the life of that darling girl, who sweetens the world for everybody who knows her, thrown away, or even risked, for a worthless creature who only lives to make herself and other people miserable. If the poor woman is in such a den as you describe, we must take her out of it as soon as the doctor will allow her to be moved. If more than one nurse is necessary we must get more than one, and if it's safe to go, Mary can superintend them. Anything more than that I will not listen to."

"My dear," I ventured to respond, "you are the very genius of good sense."

"Don't be sarcastic, John," she answered. "I am sure I am right. Go at once and find a nurse, and take her with you. And above all, don't fail to bring Mary back again. Tell her that if she refuses I will come and stay with her. Tell her that you can't stop me—you know you can't stop me, John—and that you will hold her responsible. She knows how delicate I am."

Thus armed, I borrowed money from my wife, and set out again. Dr. Mason gave me the address of an institute for nurses, where I was almost certain immediately to find a trained and trustworthy woman. I drove thither, without delay, was introduced to the presence of the matron, explained to her as far as was necessary the circumstances of the case, and in a quarter of an hour was bowling away toward Green Hill Court, in company with a professional nurse, so bounteously proportioned that she nearly filled the cab. She was a calm-looking woman of obviously amiable temperament, and had a mother-of-a-family air about her which was eminently assuring. When we arrived at the court together, and I had paid the cabman, I caught her looking at her surroundings with an air of surprise and almost of dismay, so that I felt constrained to take her partly into confidence.

"The poor lady who lives here," I said, "has been in hiding from her friends. She was discovered by a providential accident this afternoon, and we shall remove her as soon as the doctor thinks it safe to do so."

"Well, sir," she answered, with an air of philosophy, "the greater the need, the better the deed. It looks needy enough hereabouts."

With that she seized a small black portmanteau with which she had come provided, and waddled resolutely into the court and up the stairway. It was pitch dark there by this time, though it was still light outside, and I had to illuminate the way by striking wax vestas one after the other, so that we had two pauses on our upward passage. The light revealed the excessive squalor of the building. The stairs were incrusted with old filth, and the painted walls were deep in a sort of half-dry mire which came off, friable and clammy, at the touch of the fingers. The cracked door, ill-fitting and warped from its original shape, guided us by a score of glittering crevices to the room we sought, and it was somewhat surprising to find, when I had knocked and we had been called upon to enter, that this brilliant illumination proceeded from a single candle. One would have thought, from the intensity with which the light streamed out upon the darkness through the cracks and crevices of the door that the whole chamber was alive with light. As we entered Mary rose with her finger on her lips, and recognizing me with a glance of some astonishment, looked inquiringly at my companion. I advanced stealthily, and the nurse, in spite of her ponderous proportions, slid upon the crazy floor like a list-slippered silence.

"I have found a nurse," I whispered, "who will take your place. Clara insists upon your coming home at once, and declares that if you will not do so, she will share your watch. You know what a resolute young person she is, and you know that she will keep her word."

The nurse had already, with a systematic air, taken off her tidy bonnet and handsome mantle which was ornamented by a profusion of black glass beads, had laid them neatly on the table, and now slid into the chair which had been occupied by Mary before our entrance. She took the black portmanteau upon her knees, opened it by a spring, and, drawing from its depths a roll of worsted stocking with knitting-needles thrust through it, set the portmanteau on the floor again, and began at once to knit, with a silence and rapidity astonishing to contemplate. She had not been there a minute, and contrived to look as if she had been born and lived there.

"Doctor Mason," said Mary, speaking in the same careful tones I myself had used, "promised to bring a local practitioner to watch the case, and said that he would be here to meet him at nine o'clock. I must stay till then."

"You will come away then?" I asked.

"Certainly," she answered. "I will come away then."

The nurse, hearing this conversation, rose from the place she had assumed, but there was no other chair in the chamber, and I had to stumble down-stairs in search of one.

"And now," said Mary, "go home and tell Clara that she need have no anxiety on my account. When we have Doctor Mason's further instructions nurse will know what is to be done, and I will leave at once."

"I will be here at nine o'clock," I answered. "If the doctor will allow it, we will move her in the morning to some decent place where she can have good air and quiet."

The rickety place swarmed with life and noises.

"Are you quite fresh and strong, nurse?" Mary asked the comfortable woman at her side. "It will not be pleasant watching here. Do you think we might get an arm-chair for the nurse, John?"

I answered "Certainly," and set out in pursuit of that necessary. I found it in the neighboring street, a great, roomy, cushioned thing, fit for the nurse's generous proportions, and modestly priced at seven and sixpence. I came back again, bearing this trophy in my arms at considerable inconvenience; but I excited no man's attention, or woman's either, and it would have seemed as if it were not at all a startling or unusual thing in that neighborhood to find a man cumbrously embracing his household goods in the public thoroughfare.

This duty discharged, I had still ample time to search for a new hansom, drive home with the news of Mary's consent to Clara, snatch a hurried apology for dinner, and get back to Green Hill Court by nine o'clock. Dr. Mason had arrived a moment before me, and what with the certainty that the sick woman's apparently wild stories of herself were true, and with the advent of so many well-dressed strangers, the court was in a turmoil. The crippled Italian swung rapidly forward at the sound of my approaching cab-wheels, and intercepted me whether I would or not. He had been certain all along that the patient was a *gran dama*, and the other people had scoffed at him. Yet now—aha! Why did people of consideration come from the four quarters of the winds to visit her, unless his thoughts were true? Who but people of the first consideration were visited by two doctors at a time? He hovered

round me on his restless crutches with a surprising agility, and I was obliged to be excessively gingerly in my movements, lest I should overthrow him in the dark as I walked toward the bottom of the court. I made one or two observations in answer to his rapid, broken chatter, and the English contingent of the court's inhabitants made a chorus to us, chiefly inspired by wonder that anybody out of poverty's kingdom should be able to understand his language. I know it will seem an absurd statement to many, but I know for a fact that the very poor of London suppose all inhabitants of foreign countries to be poor and helpless, and regard a foreign tongue as the last badge of poverty.

I escaped him at last, and found my way up the desolate and broken stairs once more. There was a low murmur of voices in the room, and when in answer to my faint and scarcely audible knock I was admitted, Dr. Mason was giving instructions to the nurse. The humbler practitioner, who was a man of three- or four-and-twenty only, and had a face of keen intelligence, listened respectfully, and accepted the great man's dicta with as evident a worship as a student of painting might have for the president of the Royal Academy, or a subaltern for the directions of a field-marshal. The patient was awake, but very feeble. Her illness and her prolonged half-willful abstinence from food had peaked her features and brightened her great black eyes unnaturally. She looked all eyes, and the eyes looked a sad complaining nothing, as if she had fallen away from all sense of feeling and emotion.

The doctors left with Mary and myself, and we walked together into the nearest respectable thoroughfare. Talking of the case, at present, Dr. Mason said, he would not authorize the unhappy creature's removal. Perhaps it might be possible to-morrow. It would, of course, be well to secure cleanliness, pure air, and quiet, but her condition was for the moment so critical that he could only leave her where she lay.

"You have seen her now," he said. "What do you think? Is she the woman she pretends to be?"

"Yes," I answered. "She is Lord Worborough's wife."

"Ah, well," rejoined the doctor; "she'll be no great loss if she goes, though we've got to do our best for her. Have you communicated with Lord Worborough? He ought to know."

I told him that I had already dispatched two telegrams, but that I was uncertain of the time they would take to reach their destination. He drew me further back, and allowed Mary and the young doctor to walk at some distance ahead of us.

"Sister Constance is Miss Delamere, isn't she?" And when

I had answered in the affirmative, he nodded several times, and said that it was a curious conjunction of circumstances, when you came to think of it. "Between ourselves, you know," he added, "I'm a little bit uncertain. We'll do what we can for her, but I don't think she'll pull through it. I don't *think* she'll pull through it."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

In two days' time the patient, under the influence of warmth and nourishment, so far rallied that we were able to transport her to a clean and comfortable lodging. She gained more in willfulness than she gained in strength, and the nurse so far confided in me as to tell me that she had never before encountered so intractable a subject. For four or five days I went regularly to see her once a day, to ascertain for myself what progress she was making, and she seemed at first to regard my presence as being quite natural and in the common order of things. I dare say she had been too weak to wonder much, or to take interest in her own surroundings. On the fourth or fifth day she had recovered something of her habitual scorn, and asked me point-blank what business her condition was of mine. I tried to let this query go by unanswered, but she grew angry at my silence, and fearing lest in her weakened state she should do herself a mischief by an outburst of temper, I did my best to soothe her. I told her in what way I had learned of her accident and her whereabouts, and I added that I had wired to her husband. She lay looking at me with her greatened eyes for a time, and then with a faint motion of her head upon the pillow, as if she would have nodded to emphasize her words, she said:

"I am not so easily conquered as you fancied. I shall have my way."

A little later the nurse offered to do some small service for her, and was rejected angrily. She took no notice of this, but went tranquilly on, and the patient broke into a rage, which, though feebly expressed, was so intense and unassuageable that the woman was compelled to desist.

At this moment, Mary, whom I had accompanied to the house, entered the room with a cup of beef-tea, which she at once proceeded to administer. Lady Worborough still cast glances of anger and aversion at the nurse, and muttered angrily about her, but she accepted Mary's attentions, though with a sufficiently ill grace. From that time forward she seemed to do her best to make the hired nurse's position un-

bearable. That excellent woman bore with the vagaries of sickness and ill-temper with a phlegmatic good-humor which irritated the patient more than I think any other reception of her angry and contemptuous ways could have done. One of the purposely irritating devices Lady Worborough adopted was to beg Mary, in a tone of amiability, to reperform for her any little office the nurse might already have done.

"I dare say she means well," she would say, "or might mean well if she did not give way to temper, but she is a clumsy creature, and quite out of place in a sick-room."

The nurse was not to be persuaded into any show of anger, whatever devices her ladyship might adopt, and the patient being one of those people who above all things loathe defeat in this direction, the good woman became utterly hateful and unbearable to her. If she could but have been persuaded to retort, the two might have got on together. Even if she had handled a tea-cup with unnecessary emphasis, or have poked the fire with more than needful vigor, the sick woman would have found some solace. But to lie there and spend the weary, painful hours in the vain attempt to irritate that placid, irresponsive, obstinately good-humored person was to aggravate her own native ill-humor beyond endurance.

One day, when she had been installed in her new lodgings for about a week, I called to make my customary inquiry. I had been received with so little grace, as was only natural in the circumstances, that for a day or two I had not intruded upon her ladyship's presence, but had simply made my inquiries at the door, where I had had a momentary interview with Mary. On this occasion I learned, a little to my astonishment, that Lady Worborough missed me, and desired me to be shown to her room.

"You are very regular in your inquiries, it appears, Mr. Denham," she said, when in answer to this invitation I presented myself, "but you should come in person to see what progress I make. It will be so much more satisfactory to your friend if you can tell him at first-hand how sure I am to live and be a comfort to him."

She was quite helpless below the waist, and I am inclined to think, from one or two phrases she had let fall already, that she believed this terrible affliction likely to last her life-time. She did not seem at all quelled by the prospect, or even in any marked degree to rebel at it, but my own reflections upon it helped me to be patient with her bitter temper.

"His lordship takes his time in coming," she said, a moment later, with a feeble mockery. "You and he, Mr. Den-

ham, have rather a poor opinion of a woman's strength of mind, I think. I have heard so often that a little resolution, a little firmness, a little judicious patience, would work wonders. But, you see, I have not given in. I should have died if I had not been found, no doubt. But dying is not giving in; it is not even being beaten."

"If you could have been persuaded," I answered, "that your husband had no wish to enter into any warfare with you, it would certainly have been happier. If you could be persuaded now to arrive at any compromise, I am sure that he will be willing to do anything in reason."

"I do not mean," she responded, "to accept any compromise whatever."

Feeble and wasted as she was, there was a kind of triumph in her manner.

"You think that because I am paralyzed you have me in your power, but the fact is completely the reverse of that. I accept what you offer me at present, and I will continue to accept it for a reasonable time. I wanted to see you, Mr. Denham, chiefly in order that I might tell you this. When the reasonable time has expired, I shall refuse to take anything further from you, and will either have my rights or nothing. We will see whether or not my husband is villain and brute enough to allow a paralytic wife to starve."

"Can you fairly speak of your husband as allowing you to starve when he offers you five thousand pounds a year?" I asked. I was in sore dread lest this question should excite her, but on the whole it seemed very reasonable to put it, and I ventured the experiment. It was a relief to find that she could answer it tranquilly.

"You observe, Mr. Denham, that when a thing is offered to you on such terms that you would rather die than take it, it might almost as well not be offered at all. I will have my right or nothing."

There was a flash of fire in the last phrase, and I had already had too clear an indication of what her temper could be to dare to push her further.

The young doctor came in a little later, and she welcomed him, as she had welcomed me, with a graciousness of manner very unusual in her. I was not long in being allowed to understand the meaning of this changed manner.

"You will find a seat upon this side of the bed, doctor," she said, indicating the position by a slight motion of the hand. "Pray come and tell Mr. Denham how much better I am. He will hardly believe me when I tell him. He is in-

clined to be a little out of spirits about me, and it will cheer him to know that I am really getting stronger. Mr. Denham is a great friend of Lord Worborough's, doctor. He will be able to convey the news to my husband, and to ease *his* mind."

Neither her tone nor her manner gave any indication of the real meaning of this speech. It was spoken smilingly, and even with a kind of coquetry. If I had not known the truth so well already, I should have supposed the words to have meant neither more nor less than they expressed in themselves. The young doctor felt her pulse, and made several commonplace inquiries about her condition, to all of which she answered with the same amiable calm.

"Lady Worborough certainly gains in strength, Mr. Denham," he said, looking up at me—"gains considerably in strength. If you could contrive, now," he added, looking down at his patient, "to preserve your present spirits, your advance might be much more rapid."

"Oh," she answered, smiling at him, "I shall not lose my spirits. You must know, doctor, that I am a most unconquerable person, when I choose." Then she turned to me: "You will let his lordship know how I progress, Mr. Denham. You must write quite a flourishing account of me. I should so like to see his dear face when he reads your letter. It would be a comfort to me. I am a little tired now, Mr. Denham. I have talked too much. Good-day. Send Sister Constance to me."

I thought at the time that this request was made with no other object than to prevent me from inquiring further into her condition. I obeyed it, nevertheless, and went my way, wondering at the woman's implacability and bitterness. So far, as I devoutly believe until this moment, the wrong which had separated her husband and herself was wholly on her side. I have often thought that this may partly have accounted for her hatred, for there is, unhappily, no philosophy truer than that which teaches that you have to hate to justify yourself from the victim of your own ill-doing.

Clara and I naturally thought the matter over pretty often, and she, with her usual directness of statement, declared Lady Worborough to be altogether a horrible and hateful person. I recounted this particular conversation to her faithfully, and she was moved to great anger by it.

"Do you wonder," she demanded, "at your friend refusing to spend his life with a woman of that character? She would rather die than take the allowance he offers her? I think if I

were in his place I should be inclined to put that to the test. I would engage a man to wait upon her every day with the money and the necessary document. She would yield if she had the chance to yield."

I represented that she seemed fairly well to have accepted the test already. Even before her accident rendered her helpless, she had sunk so low as to live voluntarily in one of the vilest slums in London, and now her helplessness gave her a new strength, and she knew it.

Clara turned upon me with flashing eyes.

"Do you mean to tell me, John, that you will counsel your friend to yield to that woman's demands?"

I answered that I should so counsel him if he asked my advice. It would be ignominious not to yield in such a case.

"Well," my wife declared, with a kind of despairing resignation, "it would be of no use for us to quarrel about other people's quarrels, but men don't seem to see things as women do. Suppose it were a man who chose to act in this way. Suppose a man did all that lay in his power to make his wife's life a burden to her. Suppose outside that expressed intention he drank, and had a hideous temper. Suppose the wife offered him five thousand pounds a year—he having not a penny in the world—to go away and merely cease to be a torment to her, whose side would you take then? Would you advise the wife to yield?"

I thought not, but then, as I pointed out to her, I had never been one of the advocates of equal rights between the sexes. In such a case as she chose to imagine my opinion was that a stout horsewhip might be employed with great advantage; though, even if the husband had been the sinner and not the wife, it would have been difficult to deal with him, when he became physically helpless, if he insisted seriously on dying or on having what he conceived to be his rights.

In the case of this hypothetical personage of her own creation Clara felt herself at liberty to be altogether resolute and unbending.

"I would allow him to insist upon dying," she declared. "I would tell him with absolute plainness: 'If you choose, out of your own wicked obstinacy, to die in the midst of plenty, you must do it. There is your money. Take it and use it, or leave it and starve, as seems good to you.' Is the world to be turned into an asylum for spoiled children who have gone mad with the indulgence of their own selfish passions? If Lady Worborough had *me* to deal with she—" She paused there, so fired by that prospect that she was afraid of

saying too much, I fancy. When she had walked up and down the room for a minute or two she stopped short before me and opened up a new attack. "The fact is, John," she said, "that your absurd yielding to this wicked woman is part and parcel of the enormous injustice your sex perpetually heaps on ours."

This statement astonished me so much that I could find no reply to it, but she gave me no time for wonder. Her next sentences enlightened me.

"You propose," she went on, "to give way to this woman's monstrous claim. You admit that if the cases were reversed, and it was a man who made it, he would deserve to be horse-whipped. That is, you admit that her conduct is utterly base and despicable. But you don't resent it; you don't fight against it. And why? It is beneath your dignity to fight with her because she is a woman. Your *mépris* of women is so profound that it seems beneath you to meet them on equal ground—the equal ground of justice, and honor, and common sense."

"My darling Clara," I urged, "the dear creatures wouldn't endure it for a moment. And besides, they don't deserve to be treated in that way. A woman is not made for the rough-and-tumble of the world. It is no part of a man's duty to treat women as if they were men, any more than to treat men as if they were women. You think our honest worship degrades you? You think that, because even a bad woman carries about with her something of the sacredness with which we look at her happier sisters, men scorn your sex? That is poor logic."

"I don't care," protested Clara. "I would never yield to that woman's monstrous claim. I shall think it very unmanly in you if you advise Lord Worborough to take that line."

This proclamation alarmed me very little, for even thus early in my married life I had made one golden discovery. I commend it here to all young husbands who may find themselves in need of advice upon this point. Follow thy conscience, oh, young husband! Be just, and fear not, and the wife of thy bosom shall respect thee more a thousand times, and love thee the more honestly, and think the better of thine understanding, than if, seeking to please her, thou shouldst depart from the law of thine own soul. For the just man, who does that and that only which seems good to him, is a pillar of strength for a woman's heart to lean on, and she would rather him who can resist her for the sake of honest judgment than a thousand noodles who will melt at her tears

or flutter away at her sighs in any direction in which it may please her to blow them. So that, whether I were right or wrong in respect of this matter, I was at least persuaded that I was right, and could do no less than hold to my own persuasion. Clara and I had many a battle about it, but neither could shake the other's conviction. The one point I was profoundly convinced upon was the one thing she refused to believe, and that alone was surely enough to keep two reasonable people from agreeing with each other. I knew of a certainty that Lady Worborough employed no figure of speech when she said that she would rather die than give way. She would have found a savage satisfaction in seeming to die of her husband's neglect, and to have fixed on him the stigma of an actual brutality would have been a solace to her last hours. Whoever else gave way she would not.

The time went by and brought no news of Pole. I wrote to his steward at Worborough, and called upon his lawyer in London, but neither of them had any tidings of him since he had given instructions for the sale of his hotel and effects in Paris. At the expiration of a fortnight Mary brought home a message from Lady Worborough to the effect that she would be obliged if I would call upon her on the following day. I complied with this invitation with no light heart, for I guessed what was coming, and it happened that I guessed rightly.

When I reached her room she was sitting propped up with pillows in bed, and her face wore all its old expression.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Denham," she began, "to tell you that this must come to an end. I have waited a reasonable time; I shall wait no longer. After noon to-day I will take neither bite nor sup at the hands of any pretended charity which aims at holding me from the possession of my rights."

I told her that there was no pretense in the matter, and since, in anticipation of this resolve of hers, I had carried the letter from the steward with me, I was able to place it at once in her hands. She glanced over it with a disdainful face, and let it fall contemptuously upon the coverlet.

"What is that to me?" she asked. "It is easy to concoct a story of that kind, and might be easy to keep me waiting here forever, if you had a fool to deal with."

"Madame," I responded, "you must take what course you please. I give you my word of honor as a gentleman that all reasonable means have been employed to ascertain your husband's whereabouts."

"Understand me," she said, "I have not a word to add."

"Understand me also," I replied, as I rose to go. "You

may do whatever reckless and foolish thing you may decide upon. But I will at least take care that my friend suffers no blame from your conduct. I have no fear that you will be allowed to do yourself a real damage. The doctors and the nurses will see to that. I am certain that when Lord Worborough returns he will give way to your unjust demands rather than continue so undignified a struggle. In the meantime I have consulted Doctor Mason, and if you will allow me, I will report his judgment in his own words." I paused there for a moment, and she lifted her eyes, with the old menace and contempt I had had so many opportunities of reading, but she made no verbal answer. "I am sorry," I went on, "if I seem to be brutal, but you force me to absolute plainness. Doctor Mason's statement was given me in the words I give you now: 'If Lady Worborough chooses to behave like a mad-woman she must be treated like a mad-woman. She will not be allowed to hurt herself.' So soon as your husband receives my communication he will return. Until then you may safely reserve your forces. Until he comes there is nobody to coerce."

This time she did not so much as answer me by a look. She had closed her eyes, and though I waited for a considerable length of time in silence she continued to ignore my presence. I left her there and went home, deciding in my own mind to say nothing of our interview to Clara. It would only have strengthened her opinion as much as it strengthened mine; and since we were far enough removed upon that point already, it was wisest to keep silence. If I had been in Pole's place, and had had a woman of that sort to deal with, I would at this pass have surrendered everything, rather than continue a strife so completely ignominious. The woman was vulgar to the core, and if, as the poet tells us, the gods themselves fight in vain against stupidity, what shall it be said they hope for against a vulgar heart, which is stupidity in essence, plus greed in essence?

I was sitting in my study, revolving these things in a mood more than sufficiently imbittered, when a knock came to the front door, and a servant brought me a telegram. It came from Pole, and was dated "Geneva," and its contents ran: "Telegram received. With you in forty-eight hours.—WORBOROUGH."

I carried this at once to Pole's wife, and having gained admission to her room, handed it to her, telling her that it had just arrived. She read it with a smile of mockery.

"Do you think," she asked, "that I am a child or a fool

that you play this comedy with me? I win, you see. You may bring me my beef-tea, nurse. Not you! How often am I to tell you that I will take nothing at your hands. Where is Sister Constance? Let Sister Constance bring it. I tell you I will not take anything except from Sister Constance."

Mary, hearing her impatient patient's voice raised in this feeble anger, entered from the adjoining room.

"Send that creature away!" screamed the sick woman. "I will not have her about me!"

I left Mary standing over her, quiet and persuasive, and the shrill, feeble, denouncing scream followed me down-stairs.

CHAPTER XXXV.

When Mary returned home that night Clara happened to be absent, and she and I sat alone. She was sewing at some coarse garment for one of her poor, and I, revolving in my own mind how best to approach the theme I had in my thoughts, sat for awhile pretending to read. At last I set my book on one side and announced, in as commonplace a voice as I could command, that I had received a telegram from Lord Worborough, who would be in England the day after the morrow. It was not easy to mention his name in her presence, mainly because of the facts themselves, but partly because there had been a conspiracy of silence among us, and we had all grown used to the avoidance of that topic in her presence. She trembled ever so little, and the motion of the needle grew unsteady and inaccurate. She was more accustomed to controlling her feelings than to concealing them, and was by nature curiously frank for a woman, and almost at once she laid down her sewing and looked up at me, with nothing but a slight pallor to indicate the emotion this news had caused her.

"Yes?" she said, simply. "Your message seems to have taken some time in reaching him."

"He was not far afield," I answered; "no further away than Geneva."

"Does he know," she asked, "your reasons for calling him home?"

"Not yet," I told her. But I supposed that he would have guessed that it related to Lady Worborough.

"Do you think," she asked, "that he will grant the claim she intends to make upon him?" I dare say I looked somewhat surprised at this, for she added, in a voice of explana-

tion: "Lady Worborough talks a great deal to me of her own affairs."

"I think he will do anything," I responded, "anything within the bounds of reason, to put an end to the struggle which is going on between them."

I heard a faint sigh as she took up her work and bent over it anew. It seemed to indicate relief, and I asked if such a course on his part would be approved by her.

"I do not know," she said. "I think that Lord Worborough will try to act for the best."

She was so tranquil and self-controlled that I began to feel safe in discussing the subject with her.

"Of course," I told her, "I should not think of pressing my advice upon him if it were not asked for, but he and I are such close friends, and he has so invariably consulted my judgment in this matter, that I have no doubt it will be asked again."

"And if it should be," she asked me, dropping her sewing to her lap and looking up at me anew, "you would advise him to surrender?"

"I should advise him," I answered, "to end a quarrel with an opponent who has neither generosity nor decency. It is impossible to conduct a dignified warfare with such a woman as Lady Worborough."

"She is a woman of a strange temper," Mary said.

"Strange, indeed!" I echoed, and then we were both silent for a considerable time.

Mary took up her sewing but did not go on with her work. I could see that she had fallen into a reverie, and the stuff dropped back to her knees with both hands clasping it. I made a pretense of reading, and in awhile she awoke from her own thoughts and arose.

"I would rather not meet Lord Worborough," she said, quietly. "If he should resolve to see his wife will you let me know of it?"

I promised, and she left the room. The subject was not renewed between us until Pole actually reached England. He sent a telegram from Dover, and I met him at the London terminus. We drove at once to his old chambers, where we found a fire already lighted, a table spread, and a Swiss servant, who appeared to have been dispatched in advance, in attendance. I had told Pole the story while driving homeward, and the man being dismissed, we sat down together to consider it, and to decide upon the course to be taken.

"I must acknowledge," I said, "that the present condition

of things is partly due to the advice I gave you. Without that advice Lady Worborough would not have fallen into the condition in which she was discovered."

"You blame yourself?" he asked me, in a voice of surprise.

I did not blame myself, but I accepted the responsibility of the advice I had offered.

"She has herself to blame," said Pole, "and herself only. For my part I disclaim all responsibility. I took your advice before, and if you will give it now I will take it again. I am sick of the whole business, and only anxious to end it."

I represented that there was no way of ending it except by acceding to his wife's demand.

"And you advise that?" he asked, standing before me with his hands clasped behind him.

"This is rather a hard matter," I said, in answer. "It looks a thought too easy for one man to be generous with another's fortune, but I see no other way to end it; and I do see very clearly that it ought to be ended."

"You advise me to give her what she asks?"

"I advise you to give her what she asks."

He walked up and down the room abruptly once or twice before he spoke again.

"There is nothing to be gained," he said, "by discussing with her. If I make up my mind to do this I shall do it without bargaining or haggling." He sat down thoughtfully, and, consulting some memoranda in a pocket-book, made a few penciled notes. "I shall strike," he said, then, looking up at me in the act of returning the book to his pocket, "while the iron is hot. I will see her to-night, and I hope with all my heart that it may be for the last time."

"To-night?" I asked him. "Will it not be better to think so serious a matter over?"

"No," he answered; "it will be time enough to consult the lawyers when the business comes to be arranged. Give me the address, and I will go at once."

Now, both for Mary's sake and for his own I was anxious that he should not go at once, because I knew how painful to both of them a meeting would be; and if he should reach his wife's chamber before I had time to give warning, an encounter was inevitable. I had of set purpose withheld her name from the narrative I had given him.

He threw off his coat and walked into the bedroom, where he began to wash his hands, looking round the door-way at me meanwhile.

"Give me the address," he said, "and I will go and get it over."

"I will leave you, then, for a time," I answered. "I have business which I must see to immediately."

I scrawled the address upon an envelope which lay on a side-table, called his attention to it, and seized my hat. He called to me to meet him there again in an hour's time, if I were free, and throwing back a hasty affirmative I hurried away. Before I left his chambers I was guilty of another mean expedient. There was a catch upon the outer door which could be liberated, as I knew from old experience, by a mere touch of the finger, but gave considerable trouble and demanded considerable patience for its readjustment. I let this slip, and having slammed the door behind me, ran swiftly down the stairs, along the court, and into Holborn. There, as chance would have it, I found a cab waiting by the curb, and leaping in, gave the cabman the address and bade him drive his hardest. Like most people, I had tried Time's different paces, and have known him at one time or another to gallop and amble and crawl. But he never crawled with me as he did in the course of that wretched twenty minutes' drive. If I had painstakingly gone about to discover the worst-horsed hansom at that hour in London, I could hardly have found anything to excel in badness the mournful brute I sat behind. A hundred times I was on the point of leaping from the vehicle, but the cabman had made a turning into a neighborhood where I was extremely unlikely to find another conveyance, and I was uncertain of the shortest route between the point I was at and the one I desired to reach. I bullied and implored the driver, and the man responded by thrashing the miserable steed until I was ashamed of myself for abetting the cruelty. Even thus we achieved only the wretchedest pace, and by the time we had reached the house I was burning with a feverish impatience.

Even when I had rung and knocked the misfortune of delay pursued me. The servants of the house might have been deaf, or dead, or miles away. I was in the act of ringing the third or fourth distracted peal when the door was opened by the landlady in person, who regarded me with a frozen air of hauteur, as if I had been guilty of a personal impropriety. I hurried past her without explanation or apology, and, mounting the stair, knocked at the door of the ante-chamber. The nurse answered here expeditiously enough, and I demanded Sister Constance. I was in the very act of speaking when the knocker on the street door came into play again, and this time

the call was responded to without delay. I had been so pressing in my speech to the nurse that she ran to the door of the sick-chamber. She opened it slightly, and threw in a hasty and expressive whisper.

"Sister Consance, Mr. Denham must speak to you a once."

It is very commonly said that one can not listen to two things at the same time. But after the experience of that moment I knew this to be a fallacy. I heard Mary's response, even the rustle of her dress as she approached me from the next room, while I listened for, heard, and understood, Pole's voice below.

"I believe Lady Worborough is here?"

"Yes, sir," said the landlady.

"I am her husband. I must see her, if you please."

"This way, your lordsip," said the landlady. "Mind the mat, my lord. You will find the poor lady very ill, my lord."

Mary Delamere and I stood face to face, both hearing this. She was white and trembling, and looked about her as if searching a way of escape from the inevitable encounter. The room opened flush upon the landing at the top of the stair, and there was no exit from it save that which led into the bedroom. The bedroom and the anteroom were isolated, and to retreat was but to defer the meeting for a moment.

"I came to warn you," I said. I could say no more before Pole, still my lorded by the landlady, entered the room. The gas-light shone full upon Mary's face, and in spite of the change in her attire, he recognized her at the very instant when he crossed the threshold. They stood, pale and palpitating, for a moment, looking at each other, but the common surprise and emotion lasted but for an instant. They were lovers confessed, and bound to each other by all ties of mutual respect and tenderness, and severed in this strange and tragic fashion, but they were English lady and gentleman, and whatever either or both might feel, they would have no scene for unsympathetic eyes to make a feast of. Pole was, I think, the first to recover, though his surprise was the swifter and more astonishing. He came forward with outstretched hand.

"I had not expected," he said, "to find you here. It is like your goodness. I am very grateful."

Mary took the hand he proffered her. Probably she divined with native feminine tact that I had told my share in the discovery without mention of her. She shot a swift glance at me, and answered him with apparent perfect self-possession.

"Mr. Denham and I were together when I heard of your wife's illness."

She made a motion to release her hand, and that I thought was the first intimation he had that he still held it. The landlady and the nurse looking on could have gathered nothing from this interview, but the fact that they were old acquaintances.

"It is like your goodness to be here," Pole said again. "I am very grateful."

"Lady Worborough," said Mary, "does not know that you are yet in England. You wish to see her?" He nodded gravely. "Shall I tell her of your arrival, or would you prefer to announce yourself?"

"It will be best, perhaps," he responded, "that she should be prepared."

Mary passed into the bedroom, and Pole sat down in a chair by the table which stood in the center of the room. The landlady withdrew lingeringly, and the nurse followed and closed the door behind her. Pole had not until now seemed to be aware of my presence, but as the door closed he looked round upon me with an odd smile, and laid a hand upon my shoulder.

"I spent two minutes over the latch, Jack," he said. "Was that your work?" I answered nothing, but I suppose I looked somewhat embarrassed. "Well," he continued, giving my shoulder a light grip before he dropped his hand, "you are good people, and I don't know why such a worthless pair should trouble you."

I made no answer to this, but one thought which demanded instant expression flashed into my mind.

"You must give no hint," I told him, "that your wife's nurse is Miss Delamere. She is known here simply as Sister Constance."

I had scarcely spoken when Mary stole back from the sick woman's chamber.

"She knows that you are here," she whispered.

Pole walked into the bedroom, and Mary closed the door behind him. We who stayed behind rested in silence and could hear the deep tones of his voice and the shriller notes of hers, though the words spoken by each were alike inaudible. When we had stood thus for a mere moment Mary made a motion toward the outer door, and I, obeying that indication of her wish, opened the door for her, and accompanied her into the street. We walked for some distance without any exchange of words, and when I had found a cab and had directed the driver homeward, I walked back to Pole's chambers, and awaited his coming there. He arrived sooner than I had expected.

"I have surrendered all along the line," he said.

I asked him how his wife had accepted the surrender.

"Triumphantly," he answered. "She is a good deal changed. I have had no experience in such matters, but she looked to me as though she had a sort of fatal mark upon her. I don't think she'll last long, the poor Adelaide. She wasn't always like that, Jack. I remember her—it isn't so very long ago—when she was bright and handsome, and only prettily willful. I feel as if it were a thousand years ago."

He walked up and down the room very much in his habitual fashion, with his hands in his pockets, and pausing now and then to loll against a book-case or a door-jamb, but it was easy to see that these airs of nonchalance were half an affair of habit, and half assumed.

"You have done everything for the best, of course," he said. "Who is attending her?"

I mentioned Dr. Mason, and he, recognizing the name, nodded approval. A little later he asked the doctor's opinion, and I gave it him as well as I was able. The case was doubtful, and might drag on for a year or two, or might have an early termination.

"Poor girl!" said Pole. "I wish that something or somebody would kill that mocking devil she nurses and seems so fond of. She lay there to-night, and told me so quietly that at first I thought she was in earnest, that this was a judgment upon her for her plot against me. The woman she personated was knocked down by a passing cab, and was taken to the same hospital."

"She jested about that?" I asked him.

"Yes," he answered, "she jested about it. She has a great deal of humor—of a sort."

Then again he was silent, and went wandering up and down.

"And this is what she has brought her life to. And this is what I have brought my life to. Here I am at thirty, where I never hoped to be or expected to be, without a use in the world or much of a hope in it." His voice began to tremble, and, as I could see clearly enough, he ceased to speak for fear of breaking down. By and by, when he had controlled himself, he began to talk again. "There are all sorts in the world, good, bad, and indifferent. That girl's an angel, Denham," he cried, almost wildly. "I think of her goodness, her loneliness, her patience, the unselfish tender charity of her heart—"

He could go no further. His voice broke, and he walked into the bedroom, leaving me alone. When he came back he was master of himself again.

"I shall see my lawyer to-morrow. My wife wants that fellow Goldsmith to see to her affairs, and since she wants him she must have him, I suppose. I have an undertaking that there is to be no more scandal or trouble, and I shall settle down in London here, and try to find work of some sort. I don't care much about politics, but they're better than nothing, and by and by I shall find something to hammer at. *Sursum corda.* Eh, Jack? We set out thinking that it is easy to beat the world, and when we find ourselves beaten we console ourselves with the reflection that we might have had a much worse licking after all."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was one thing to decide that Lady Worborough was at liberty to take up her residence at Worborough Court, and another thing for her ladyship to get there. The mere shock of the accident from which she had suffered would have killed some women outright. The bout of starvation by which she was content to follow it might of itself have resulted fatally. She must have been blessed with a noble constitution to begin with, though in one way at least she had been doing her best to ruin it for years past, and even now her passionate and imperious will continued to assert itself. She would go to Worborough Court. The doctor assured her that she might die upon the way, and declined to sanction her removal. All the same, she would go to Worborough Court.

"My dear madame," said the doctor, "it is at present impossible for you to make a journey. Perhaps in the course of a week or two it may be safe to remove you. At present it would be little less than criminal to attempt it."

My lady hereupon became certain that the doctor was a member of that widespread society which conspired to rob her of her rights—her right by this time being clearly defined as the right to do, at any given moment, precisely what she wished. He had entered into a compact with Lord Worborough to keep her a prisoner in that horrible house. She stormed and raved herself into a condition of utter weakness, and for four or five days afterward lay quite helpless at the benevolent mercy of doctors and nurses. When she had recovered strength enough to venture on a second outburst she indulged herself. She would go to Worborough Court or die. They had almost killed her by throwing her into a rage. They knew her infirmity of temper, and they all worked upon it and traded on it. They wanted to find a means to kill her safely,

but she would disappoint them, banded cheats and villains as they were. She threw the whole household into choas on this occasion, and refused to be quieted until she had raged herself once more to a standstill, and could no longer articulate a word.

I learned all this, and something more, from Dr. Mason, who now made a call upon the patient daily. There are few people whose passive endurance of foolish whims and unreasonable rages can be compared with that of a doctor, and Mason, who had had an experience extraordinary alike for extent and variety, had at one time practiced in lunacy, and was as little affected by her ladyship's wild tantrums as glass is affected by water.

"The fact is," he told me, "there is an actual discernible touch of madness in these displays of rage. The woman begins, so far as sanity is a thing to be measured, in a frame of mind as sane as yours or mine. But she starts with the definite intention of handing herself over to delirium, and she does it. If she likes to kill herself nobody can be very sorry, and nobody can prevent her from doing it."

This talk took place in my own study, rather late one night, when the doctor had seen his last patient for the day, and could afford to smoke his sole cigar. He prized that nightly enjoyment very dearly, and as he was in great request among ladies, it was only possible for him at a time when he could make tolerably sure that none of his patients would send for him. Knowing my intimacy with Pole, he was pretty free in his comments on the situation, and Lady Worborough's character appeared to interest him deeply.

"It's a queer room, that," he said, "with its two opposites in it. It's really a little astonishing to reflect that they belong to the same species. Lady Worborough doesn't guess who her nurse is, and in an odd sort of way she's developing a liking for her. Not that there's anything astonishing in that, *per se*. Almost anybody might be excused for taking a liking to Miss Delamere. By the way," he interjected, "I have been once or twice in danger of making trouble. Meeting Miss Delamere here without that Sister of Mercy raiment of hers, I have been half-inclined to forget my old acquaintance, Sister Constance. She dives in my mind as Miss Delamere. I think of her as Miss Delamere, and my instinct is to speak of her as Miss Delamere. Now, that instinct might bring about an awkward position if it were yielded to in Lady Worborough's presence. You understand me, Denham. I'm not disputing the goodness or beauty of the action. But women

have a curious love of romance. They like to find themselves in romantic and picturesque situations. It is meat and drink to a woman to be a living part in a moving story. We drudge along, contented with our daily duties, and after four- or five-and-twenty have no particular desire to be mixed up with wonders. But a woman is never tired of the romantic aspect of things. I'm a great believer in the sex myself, and a great admirer of it, but if you'll look at the question, a great many of the best feminine qualities are bound up with this love of romance, and are almost a part of it. A woman of ninety is just as ready to discover a romance as a girl of sixteen. They never tire of it."

For my part I have never been too fond of analyzing human motives, when they happen to be either good in themselves or to lead to good results. It may be worth while to analyze the motives of a rascal, and to discover the grounds he has for self-excuses, and thereby to minimize one's natural loathing for him. But though some find it amusing and instructive, I have never cared to macerate the motives of the good in search of the one possible thread of folly or of meanness which may run through them. There are plenty of people in the world who are willing to take up that task, and I prefer the other. So I declined to follow up the question of feminine romantic instinct which the doctor had started.

"You really think," I asked, "that Lady Worborough is growing attached to Miss Delamere?"

"Bless you, yes," returned the doctor, who, though profoundly good-hearted, was yet a bit of a cynic in his way. "I've seen a sort of affection displayed by a rattlesnake for its keeper."

I had hardly intended to put the question in that light. I had been bred in the belief, though I have since had to abandon it, that there is in every human creature somewhere to be found a touch of goodness, and I was certainly very far from believing Lady Worborough to be among the most inhuman of her kind. She was passionate and scornful and self-willed, and had been guilty in intention of one most cruel and terrible crime, but it had not occurred to me to place her outside the reach of human sympathy. Indeed, I thought it very likely that if the key to her heart could but be found, there might be a chamber in it somewhere yet, where some relics of affection and tenderness were stored. I thought that Mary Delamere was as likely as any creature in the world to find that chamber, and even to be welcomed into it.

"We have had to pack off the hired nurse to-day," the doc-

tor continued, as he nursed his solitary cigar, and made the most of his enjoyment of it. "She is an excellent woman, and I have sent in a report of her conduct which I fancy will be of use to her. But her ladyship either couldn't endure her, or made up her mind that she wouldn't endure her. The nurse stuck to it like a Briton, but when at last it was decided that she should go she was the happiest woman in London. I have sent in another to succeed her, but she is a copper-haired lady of peppery temperament, and I fancy there will be another rupture very soon. In point of fact, her ladyship's shindies with the nurse were not intended to do much more than to express a preference for Miss Delamere. If ever she grows strong enough to be removed to Worborough Court, she will want Miss Delamere to accompany her. She's quite sufficiently ungracious and disagreeable with the companion of her choice, but with everybody else she is a constant brash of bitter waters. There are loads of people in the world who, if they were invited to discriminate between Richard the Saint and Robert the Sinner, couldn't for their lives endure to say that Richard was better than Robert. They'd say that Robert was worse than Richard, and find it soothing to themselves to indicate the difference in that fashion. In a really benevolent humor they might say he was a great deal worse; but they wouldn't get higher than that. It's Lady Worborough's fashion of complimenting Miss Delamere to fly into rages with the paid attendants. It's noticeable that she never flies into a rage with her."

He went on smoking with that air of subdued, intense enjoyment which is only displayed by the self-denying devotee of tobacco, and shortly resumed.

"There's another thing, my boy. Miss Delamere's a lady, and Lady Worborough is not a lady, and in her secret soul she's afraid of her attendant's breeding. She dare not launch out on her as she does at everybody else. It's curious, when you come to think of it, how important we all are to ourselves. It hurts us to be despised, and above all things in the world we can't afford to despise ourselves. To despise one's self is a thing that most men of sense arrive at, at one time or another; but nobody does it willingly, any more willingly than he puts his hand in the fire. And, don't you see, when you want to conserve your own good opinion, it's useful to have just a little shred of somebody else's to train it by. Anything will serve. The blankest, barest wall in the world is good enough for ivy to cling to, or the rottenest old tree-trunk that ever got ready to tumble. But the healthiest hop or scarlet-

runner won't grow without what we call a risel in my part of the country. It must have a stick to hold on to."

He took a long pull at his cigar, and after rolling the smoke about enjoyingly in his mouth, expelled it by the nostrils, and went on again, with the air of a man satisfied with his own philosophic attitude.

"If I were a betting man I'd bet a million sterling to a half-penny that in case Lady Worborough should ever be strong enough to go down to Devonshire, Miss Delamere goes with her. I can see her winding her coils about her closer and closer day by day. I doubt if she'd care to take the trouble if she knew her nurse's real name; but she's making up to her bit by bit, and leading her on to believe that she's the only creature in the world to cling to, and flattering her with the belief that she can soften her, and believing in it just a little bit, mind you, and being softened just a little bit in reality. There's a lot of human nature in man, my young friend, and we are mostly made up of humbug."

"Come, come, doctor," I urged; "is there any humbug on the other side?"

"Did you ever," the doctor asked me in return, "read Pascal's panegyric on salt? I could write a similar panegyric, if I were to give my mind to it, on humbug. It holds the world together. Kill it outright, and you would kill benevolence, philanthropy, love, and friendship. Everything includes a bit of make-believe."

I fought hotly against this shameful heresy; but the doctor refused all challenges to personal example, and sheltered himself behind the ample breastwork afforded by generalities.

"Well," he said at last, "you fight in defense of your goddess very pluckily. Of course I have the best of the argument, and have had all along. That goes without saying. But if you need it for your comfort, I don't mind admitting—she isn't a goddess; but she's a rare good woman, and if we were all like her we should be ready for the millennium."

"We should be more than ready for it," I responded; "we should be living in it."

"Well," he answered, with a deep, rolling laugh, which I had discovered to be in him a most expansive expression of good-fellowship, "if you set any store by Miss Delamere's society, you'd better keep an eye upon the patient. She's trying her best to wean her away from you, and to enlist her in her own cause." He rose, and threw the remnant of his cigar into the fire, stretching out his arms afterward in an abandonment of rest, looking smilingly at me the while.

"Denham," he said, with sudden seriousness, "I don't often talk about these things. It's my business to attend to ailments which are purely physical, and I don't pry into the spiritual machinery any further than is necessary for my purposes. But I saw a sight this afternoon. I have told you already how Lady Worborough's twining herself about Miss Delamere. When I went in to see her this afternoon she was sitting propped up on a bed-rest in a heap of pillows, and Miss Delamere was sitting at the bedside. They were holding each other's hands, and Miss Delamere was reading out of the Bible. Nice, pretty, clear, grave voice she has." He said this with an air of transparent commonplace, which I took to be somewhat exaggerated.

"There is a good deal of humbug in the world, doctor," I said, quietly. He pretended for an instant not to see my drift, and then responded:

"You're quite right, Denham. There was a little bit of it there; but it was all on one side."

I asked him why the unhappy woman should not be drawn toward some tender and sacred thoughts by Mary's constant patience and kindness.

"I dare say she is a little bit," he answered. "But she pretends to a good deal more than she feels. She wants to have a lady about her. She wants to feed her own sense of self-esteem. There may be some affection mixed with it, but it isn't very real. And when you know, as well as I do, what a general hash alcohol can make of the human emotions, you may come to be of my opinion about a good many pyrotechnic displays which excite admiration and wonder just at present, and set your own internal fire-works going by the mere contact of a spark."

"I shall have some hope," I said, "if Lady Worborough begins on any ground to care for Miss Delamere. Do you think she will ever be able to go to Worborough Court?"

"If she could command her temper," he responded, "she might gain strength in a week or a fortnight; but the whole thing is a question of time. She won't last a year, and if she goes on fretting herself as she does, she'll wear herself out in half the time. *Tant mieux*, say I. But then I'm a brute and a cynic, and a believer in the doctrines of Utopia."

I saw no more of him, and learned no more of the actual progress of this history for a week. At the end of that time he came again. Clara had some slight ailment which really demanded no particular care, and he came more for the pleasure of a chat with me than for professional reasons. I was

able to offer him the cigar he liked best, for in that matter, as it happened, our tastes agreed, though we found ourselves differing widely on matters of far greater importance.

"Her ladyship will take possession," he said. "There is a mighty change for the better in her ways and manners. She goes now like sweet-oil upon a whetstone. She has got a kind of mania to the effect that we are all in a conspiracy to kill her by pretending that she can't go down to Worborough Court because she isn't strong enough, and so leading her on to outbursts of temper. Now, with a kind of half-crazed cunning, for in point of fact that's what it actually comes to, she has made up her mind to defeat our machinations, and has taken up the line of the resigned and suffering martyr. She does whatever she is told to do. She takes her medicine and her food with the most touching submissiveness, always with a plainly expressed belief that they are poisoned for her, and she clings to Miss Delamere with a surprising tenderness. She hasn't slanged the copper-haired nurse this four days, and everybody is touched by her resignation and new-born gentleness. Meantime I have discovered that a little servant has been bribed with promises to smuggle in brandy and laudanum. I anticipate an outburst, but I have been compelled to see that young woman out of the house. I offered to bet you a million sterling to a half-penny that Miss Delamere would accompany her. Now, I will give the solar system against a used lucifer match Miss Delamere will go if Lady Worborough goes."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It was not only from Dr. Mason that I had news of the change which had taken place in Lady Worborough. Night after night Mary returned full of it, and opened her heart to Clara and myself without reserve. She had none of the doctor's practiced knowledge of the world, and I do not believe that all the knowledge of its own ways the world could bring her could ever have taught her his fashion of looking at things.

"She is softening," she would say. "She is so changed I hardly know her. She clings to me in a way which I find very touching, and sometimes the poor thing makes allusions to the past and the sad mistakes of her own life, which almost bring tears into my eyes. She is very unhappy and very much alone. I asked her this afternoon about her friends. She gave a little dreary laugh. 'My friends! I have worn them out years ago. I have no friends.'"

This, I am fain to confess, sounded more real than Dr. Mason's account would have led me to think it. But then, in this story as in every other, so much depended on the telling. The doctor told it cynically, and was more than half right, I dare say. Mary told it sympathetically, and I fancy she was not much more than half wrong.

By and by, to my own surprise, came an invitation to myself. Why, the sick woman demanded, did Mr. Denham keep away? The most obvious answer to that query was that Mr. Denham had had no reason for going; but when the inquiry was once made there was nothing for it but to accept the invitation it indicated, and to pay Lady Worborough a visit. I was the readier to do this because of the conflicting nature of the testimony I received about her. I was a little anxious to see for myself how far the change in her manner was real and how far assumed, if assumed at all. I made my way to the house the following afternoon, and after a little pause was shown into her ladyship's chamber. She was certainly a great deal improved in aspect since we had first lighted upon her in Green Hill Court, and the memory of what she had looked like then made so strong a contrast with her present aspect that she looked much better than she really was. When the first effect of surprise had left my mind, I saw that there was still something of that same ghastly fatal look which I had remarked before. Everybody who has been in close attendance upon an invalid doomed to a long and lingering illness, and doomed past recovery, sees these strange fluctuations of expression. The sick face brightens and fills out, but visible under that surface improvement the unmistakable marks lie scarcely disguised.

She held out a weak, thin right hand as I approached her, and I confess that, as I took it in my own, the unexpected gesture of amity and welcome made a considerable impression upon me.

I asked after her health, and she responded with a feeble lightness that she was better, much better.

"The doctor shakes his head, but then he is not here to encourage me. That is no part of his business, but I know from my own feelings that I am mending very fast. By and by I shall be running about again."

One could say nothing to kill a hope like that, or even to chill it by a breath, but ignorant as I was I knew better than to believe it. I managed to say something about courage being of infinite use in such a case, but she seemed to take little heed of my answer, and only motioned me to a seat.

"Sister Constance tells me," she said, "that she has known you for quite a long time. You are not like the others. I can see that for myself. You are a great friend of Lord Worborough's?"

In one interview already chronicled she had alluded to my intimacy with her husband in terms which were anything but flattering. I recalled them now, and though it would have been absurd enough to remember them with malice or with anger against a creature so afflicted, the remembrance certainly saved me from accepting her present overtures with too great alacrity. I answered simply that her husband was the greatest friend I had in the world, and waited to hear further.

"You look unsuspicious," she said, "and you are not very old. But I wonder that you have not found him out." I thought that I knew most that was to be found out about him already, but I said nothing. "That, however," she went on, with a martyred smile which gave me the first real clew to her temper and intention, "was not what I wanted to talk to you about. I want you to carry a message to Lord Worborough. Will you take it for me?"

"Certainly," I answered.

Mary was standing gravely at the foot of the bed with a piece of sewing in her hands. I gave an involuntary glance at her, which she did not see. I had a feeling of awkwardness in conducting any conversation about Pole in her presence, but it was not to be avoided, and the only thing to do was to go through it without betraying either her or myself.

"You will not believe what I am going to tell you," said Lady Worborough, "but it is true all the same." Her manner bespoke so remarkable a resignation, so profound a certainty beforehand of being misunderstood, or even maligned, and gave so ostentatious a prophecy of forgiveness, that I was ready for almost anything in the way of mischievous suggestion. "I have resolved not to be disturbed by it any further, because I can see that my only hope of safety lies in keeping quite calm and quiet. Doctor Mason and Nurse James, who went away, and the nurse who is now here, and one or two others whom I could name, have had instructions from Lord Worborough. The doctor was so foolishly candid as to tell me that my only chance of recovery lay in keeping quiet, and since he let that slip I have contrived perfectly to battle his lordship's intentions."

"And his lordship's intentions are—"

"Lord Worborough," she answered, with a smile which expressed at once knowledge of her own short-comings and for-

giveness for this injurious husband, "Lord Worborough knows my infirmity of temper." I thought that very much more than probable. I thought of one or two of the horrible scenes Pole had sketched for me, and I recalled the exhibitions I myself had seen. "He has instructed his creatures to do their best to betray me into fits of violence, and his object, of course, was to bring about his own freedom. You know how anxious he has been to be rid of me, Mr. Denham. When that absurd and groundless report of my death was circulated, he made no inquiry. He set up a stone to my memory over the body of a stranger."

I answered that I was intimately acquainted with the whole history of that episode, and she gave me just one swift sidelong glance in quite the old fashion. It was as quick as a glance well could be. It lasted no longer than a flash of lightning, but it illuminated everything, just as a flash of lightning will. Her ladyship, however, was not playing to me alone. She had an audience of two, and I suppose she fancied that she was carrying half of it with her. She must have known beforehand that I knew too much to be cheated in that barefaced way.

"I have asked you," she said, "to carry a message to Lord Worborough, and you have promised." I inclined my head in silent assent to this, but I began to guess what the character of the message was to be, and to think it very unlikely that her husband would receive it at my hands. "You may tell him, if you please," she continued, "that sickness has not had the effect upon me which he anticipated. I am a good deal subdued by it, and in place of being more easily angry, I find that I am growing patient. The doctor's indiscretion was a great help to me, and Sister Constance helps me continually. You may tell Lord Worborough that I am armed against any annoyance he may bring to bear upon me. I am resolved to live, and I am resolved to get strong enough to go to Worborough Court as soon as possible."

Mary had taken a seat near the foot of the bed, and was sewing with apparent tranquillity, though the red spot which burned upon the pallor of her cheek told me something of what was going on within doors.

"That is the message you desire me to deliver to your husband?" I asked her. It would be futile to pretend that I was not angry, but it would have been more futile still by far to have shown anger there. I took a leaf out of her ladyship's book, and was almost as meek and long-suffering in manner as herself.

"That is my message," she responded.

I told her I would willingly do anything in my power to oblige her. "But your ladyship will see," I urged, "that if I take this message—if I even so much as name it to him, I shall at least give myself the air of thinking it worth mention."

"You decline to take it, then?" Her voice was quite sweet and amiable; but I got another quick illuminating glance before she spoke.

"I am afraid," I answered, "that I must decline to take it. I can not even appear to share in your belief."

"Will you ask Lord Worborough to call upon me?" she asked, "so that I myself may give him the message?"

"I must beg your ladyship's pardon still," I answered.

"Oh, my ladyship, my ladyship!" she said, in a tone of gentle irony, "what has a poor stricken creature like myself to do with earthly titles of honor?"

I answered, "What indeed!" in a tone as near her own as I could make it. It was not kindly, I dare say, but I was growing a little sick of the savage farce she played, and was willing to end it as soon as might be. Mary glanced up at me with a startled and almost frightened look, and half arose as if in anticipation of an outburst. But Lady Worborough merely turned her head upon her pillows, and looked at me with a glance of amused intelligence. It was the very first sign of humor I had seen in her, and I was both relieved and pleased. I had regretted my words as soon as I had spoken them, but her ladyship was in the mind for self-control, and was evidently determined not to be shaken from it.

"So," she said, "you will not even ask Lord Worborough to come here?"

"To listen to that accusation? No, madame. I can not undertake to do it. Lord Worborough is in London, and if you have any serious reason for wishing to see him, I am sure he will come to you with all reasonable speed. But you are armed so strong in patience that you can afford to allow these wicked machinations to go on unnoticed."

"I should like them to be put a stop to," she said, with a resigned sigh at failure. "I know my own infirmities, as I have told you. My temper is not of the best, even now."

I was wise enough to keep to myself my own opinions upon that matter, and when I had sat in silence for some time she stretched out her weak and wasted hand again with an expression of tolerance and meekness which would have done credit to a saint. I was unregenerate enough to rejoice in the cer-

tainty that she was greatly disappointed in not having made me angry, and that she was boiling inwardly beneath that sanctified calm of hers. I had a more legitimate ground for satisfaction in the fact that the interview had come to an end with no outbreak on either side.

"I am not angry at your refusal, Mr. Denham," she said, "though I am disappointed by it. I had hoped that you would take my message. I like you, and I hope that we may see more of each other."

This was a wish I could not echo, but I got over my leave-taking with as good a grace as possible, and left the house, glad that the ordeal was at an end. Walking homeward, I had time to think things over, and I came to two definite conclusions with respect to her ladyship's condition and intentions. She had about as much belief in that story about Pole and the conspiracy between him, the doctor, and the nurses, as I myself had. But the change in the manifestation of that remarkable temper was real, and had a real purpose. She had discovered that it was possible to get almost as much satisfaction out of the act of maddening other people as by maddening herself.

It was so much more wholesome, so much safer in her present condition, that the discovery naturally tempted her toward experiment. Then, above all other things, she wanted to get down to Worborough Court, and to establish her reign there. Thinking how brief her triumph must be, attended with how many pains of mind and body, I began almost to wonder at myself for having grudged it. When your enemy is strong and knows how to be harmful, and you have a right to dread his implacable, unsleeping hate, it comes natural to the heart to hate him in return; but when he lies vanquished and helpless, or even when his capacity for mischief is strictly measured and confined, you can begin to pity the gnawing miseries of his disappointment. I have disliked one or two people very strongly in my time, but I have never hated anybody. I have thought sometimes with Hamlet that I was pigeon-livered and lacked gall to make oppression bitter. But I have known good haters—without loving them—and have, in a vague and shadowy way, no doubt, savored in imagination the bitterness of the gall which poisoned life to them. Of all people in the world I know none so pitiable. Hate is the true Tantalus torture. It can not be slacked. Of its very nature it refuses to be satisfied. To satisfy it were to kill it, and it craves for immortality, alike for its victim and itself. I am not speak-

ing of dislikes which pass for hatred, but of the real, royal thing itself.

As for poor Lady Worborough, it was surely worth no man's or woman's while to stir her venom, let her make what outward show of it she might. I am not master of the technicalities of the case, but if I remember rightly what Dr. Mason told me, the paralysis was mounting, seizing little by little; like an enemy advancing across a whole country, slowly, driving life before it step by step. Her general aspect, to the untaught eye, would have seemed all the while to improve with considerable regularity, and she herself was fully persuaded that her ultimate recovery was certain if she could but repress those outbursts of passion which she now recognized as being dangerous to her.

In the course of two or three weeks Mary brought intelligence of the doctor's permission for the desired journey. We got news of clasped petitionary hands, and prayers and tears from Lady Worborough to Sister Constance. She would not, could not, go without her. She was bent on going, would brave death itself to go, but the great lonely friendless house frightened her. It was quite conceivable even then, though I did not realize it until later, that her ladyship's lie had grown into a reality for her, and that she really dreaded to be left altogether alone among strangers for other than merely sentimental reasons.

Mary took the whole matter with that direct simplicity which was a part of her.

"I have promised to go with her," she said, in answer to Clara, who at first was strongly opposed to the idea. "If I had met her in another way, or had learned of her suffering in another way, it might have been different. I can not leave her now. I believe," she added, frankly, "that I am the only creature in the world she cares for, and the only one she trusts. I must stay with her until the end."

It was so impossible, all things considered, to discuss the question, and the whole position of affairs was so unprecedented, that we were compelled to say very little about the decision. I received another message from Lady Worborough, requesting me to call upon her, but I was convinced that she was using me as a sort of instrument through which she might possibly play upon her husband, and at first I sent back word that I was otherwise engaged, and could not then find time to visit her. The message was repeated, this time through Mary.

"She wants John," said Mary, turning upon Clara, "to accompany us to Worborough Court. For my part I should

be glad if he would do it. I do not think that she will try to make things uncomfortable by the way."

"Go," said Clara. "I should like to know that Mary was comfortably installed there. And mind, my dear"—this was addressed to Mary, and spoken with much vivacity and determination—"you are not to make a martyr of yourself down there. That woman is quite capable of asking you to accompany her down there for no other purpose than to make your life unbearable. And now I come to think of it, I shall be very glad if Lady Worborough has taken a fancy to John and wants to see him often. I don't care much what her purpose is if the freak only brings me pretty constant news of you. You will go and see Lady Worborough, John, as often as you are asked, and you will keep your eyes open and let me know the truth about what is going on down there. I am not going to lose Mary, or have her hurt, for all the Lady Worboroughs in the world."

I called on Dr. Mason that evening, and learned from him that his permission for the journey had actually been given. The doctor who attended the case under him was to accompany the patient, and to spend a day or two with her. He would carry with him notes of the case, and instruct any local practitioner Lady Worborough might choose. There were three or four great houses within a radius of four or five miles, and a considerable number of wealthy residents, so that it was quite certain that there would be some really capable medical man in the neighborhood.

During this time I saw but little of Pole. Notwithstanding the close friendship between us, it was impossible that he should be a visitor at my house during Mary's stay there, and he had taken up his residence in a dreary little villa by the river a dozen miles from town. On his invitation, I visited him there the day before the intended emigration to Worborough.

"My wife," he said, "has refused to sign the document of peace between us until she can sign it at Worborough. You are going down with her? I heard as much from the lawyer. Goldsmith is to be there to meet her. I shall take my seat in the House at the beginning of the session, and start on work of some kind. I have two or three ideas floating about in my mind, but I haven't decided yet. Miss Delamere is well?" He put the question with an odd abruptness which it was easy for me to understand. I told him all about her, and I told him also of the engagement his wife had attempted to lay upon me. It was one thing to tell him that I had refused the

office, and another to have been her ladyship's messenger. "That would look a little like madness," he said, "and I would rather think that she had not been altogether responsible for herself all along. Mason tells me that her life is a question of months only, and it would help me to the state of mind I want to get into if I could think it was not herself who has done all the mischief. It's a hard matter to trace responsibility at any time, and the people who sin are in the main the people who are punished. She has suffered enough for all her sins, even if she went to them with her eyes open, for they were of a sort which bring their own punishment."

I believe that after this until the end, and beyond the end of that tragic episode, when he was happy and useful, and found full scope for the exercise of all his gifts, he never nourished an angry thought or spoke a bitter word about his wife. I had not been sure of my own wisdom in telling him the story, but since it persuaded him that she had all along been irresponsible, and since it helped him to forgive her, and to be tender and pitiful in his thoughts of her, I could hardly have done a wiser or more friendly act.

Next day we started off, Mary, the young doctor, and I, accompanying the invalid toward that installation for which Lady Worborough longed so passionately. Pole had sent his carriage to convey the patient to the railway station, and her eyes glittered with pride at the sight of the equipage and the liveried servants. There was another servant in waiting for us at the terminus, deputed to accompany us upon our journey, and at the few halting-places on the way he appeared at the door of the railway carriage to know if his services were in any way required. After each of these visits the poor woman brightened perceptibly, and when we had once passed Exeter her spirits mounted almost to fever heat. The sight of two other carriages waiting for her at the local station, and of more liveried servants, so excited her with pride and the sense of conquest that what with triumph and fatigue she had to wipe away a tear or two.

She had been to Worborough Court before, but not under similar auspices. On her first visit she had conquered the place, as it were, by sudden stealth and stratagem, now she came like its mistress, and was received with honors which, to her eyes, must have seemed almost regal. She was carried to her own carriage and laid down in it amid the wondering gazes of a score of on-lookers and loungers, and then we were all borne swiftly and smoothly off, the young doctor and I bringing up the rear. The lodge gates swung open before us, and

we drove up the long, curved avenue between the stately trees, which stood grim and gaunt against the fading brightness of the upper skies. The house gleamed with lights, and the hall, from the outer dimness, shone with a golden splendor. The doctor leaped down from my side to superintend the conduct of Lady Worborough to her room. She carried a fan in her hand, and as she was borne past the lintel she stretched out her arm and struck it, as if to say that she claimed it for her own.

She was extremely prostrated by the journey, but she rallied for the moment, and turned her face toward Mary with an exalted smile.

"You are welcome, my dear," she said, "to Worborough Court."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SHE was carried at once to the chamber which had been made ready for her, and I was left alone. The housekeeper personally conducted me to my room. She had been there in the late Lord Worborough's time, and she and I were already acquainted with each other. I thought she lingered about me unnecessarily, and supposed that she was very curious, and eager to talk if I had but given her an opening. I made no conversational advances, and she was too well disciplined by long service to initiate operations, though I dare say it cost her a considerable effort to repress her desires that way. I sat for a long time alone, thinking of the paralyzed woman brought to live in that great, lonely house, and in that solitary, miserable splendor. There had been something melancholy from the first in the mere prospect of Pole's accession to wealth and title, and she, poor thing, had been the sole cause of the shadow which rested on that brilliant fortune. Even she herself became pitiable in the gloom for which she was herself responsible. She had only triumphed by force of her misery, and to have all and to enjoy nothing is surely a bitter and pitiable lot. I found my own thoughts such poor and unexhilarating company that I was well pleased indeed to be joined by the doctor. He also had begun to find the place oppressive, and he confided to me the fact that though he had never been so handsomely lodged or paid in the whole course of his life, he would be glad when he could get back to places less mournful, if less distinguished.

Goldsmith, who started from town an hour or two after our arrival at Worborough, appeared next morning rather less

glossy and smiling than usual, after a cold night's journey. Pole's lawyer traveled by the same train, but the two reached the Court by different vehicles, though within a few minutes of each other. It fell upon me to receive them both, and Goldsmith was evidently unhappy at my presence, which he could hardly have expected. When he had changed his dress and breakfasted, his native courage reasserted itself a little, and he made some faint overtures to talk. Pole's man of business was a very stately personage, who might himself have been the owner of the place, and he and Goldsmith were so far asunder that they might have been born in different planets. The little Jew solicitor was by no means as ready to recognize this difference as the man of higher standing, but it existed, and it made an impression, even upon him. Pole's lawyer was a little ruffled, in a lofty way, at meeting a person of Mr. Goldsmith's aspect and manners, and once at least he gave him to understand in my hearing that their meeting bore an exclusively business character.

"Old cock's a bit stuck-up, don't you think, Bister Dedham?" said Goldsmith, appealing to me. "He's been longer in the professiod than I have, and I dare say he has a more profitable connectiod; but a solicitor's a gentleman, and nobody can be any more."

He was propitiatory with me, and ill at ease in the remembrance of our last interview. I told him roundly that if Lord Worborough's solicitor knew what I could tell him he would have refused the meeting altogether. I added that nothing but his lordship's dread of scandal had saved Mr. Goldsmith from the ignominy of being struck from the rolls, and that I wondered somewhat at his audacity in coming there, even at Lady Worborough's command.

"Well," he said, with a sort of desperate resignation, "I shall never get anybody to understand what happened. You wait till you get Lady Worborough about you, Bister Dedham. There isn't much she couldn't make you do if she set her wits to work about. She ain't a bit like ad ordinary womad. Ad ordinary womad wouldn't have let me idto such a risk. You're no fool, you know, Bister Dedham, judging by the look of you. You'd dever have dreabt of taking on a risk like that. If anybody had told me *I* should do it I should have kicked him. I've kicked a man before to-day od a question of outraged honor. But Lady Worborough is exceptiodal. She's a very rebarkable persod, is Lady Worborough."

Pole's lawyer, as I could see, was anxious to get his business over and be gone, though since he could only catch the night

train at earliest, and had no other affairs in the neighborhood, he was as well placed at Worborough Court as elsewhere. Her ladyship certainly appeared to think so, for she made no haste to see him. The morning was, for the season of the year, particularly mild and sunny, and a little before noon she caused herself to be carried from her rooms on the first-floor, and was set into a bath-chair, which had been by her orders disinterred from the coach-house. It was a very ancient affair, and though it had been cleaned and furbished as completely as the time permitted, it sent a certain ghostly odor abroad upon the clear wintery air. Nothing less would satisfy Lady Worborough than that I should push her about the graveled drive in this cumbrous and ancient vehicle. I received the request certainly with some surprise, and at first, as I confess, with a little anger; but it did not seem worth while to argue it, and I obeyed her wish. I had arranged already to go back to town with Pole's lawyer, and since my stay was so extremely brief, it seemed on the whole worth while to humor the stricken and self-willed creature.

"I want to drink in this lovely place," she said, when I presented myself in obedience to her wish. "Push me to a little distance, please, so that I can admire the house. I feel very well and strong this morning, and the fresh air will do me good. I shall soon be walking about again; the doctors are quite confident of it."

As a matter of fact the doctors were quite confident in an opposite opinion. Neither of them believed that she would ever walk again; but she so clung to her own belief, and so emphatically reiterated it in their presence, that she had to all appearance persuaded herself that they shared her view. She brooked no contradiction, and the slightest sign of it in respect to a desire so dearly cherished as this would arouse a dangerous paroxysm of anger.

When I had wheeled her to a distance of a hundred yards from the house she asked me to turn her round. She was buried to the chin in a dark fur rug, and she wore a black bonnet trimmed with scarlet. The somber color of her surroundings and the bright scarlet ribbon between them threw her face into a strongly accented pallor. Her thinned features and bright dark eyes had an eerie and almost preternatural look. She called me to her side, and sat looking at the house, without speaking, for quite a considerable length of time. Then she turned her eyes upon me with a repetition of that same strange and exalted smile I had seen the night before.

"That is Worborough Court," she said, nodding her head

almost imperceptibly, "and I"—with a repetition of the same slight gesture—"am Lady Worborough."

There was something so odd in the tone and in the words that I could not help looking at her rather keenly. She took note of this, and answered my look with another smile, which seemed to cover a meaning of some sort, though I could not divine it.

"I am Lady Worborough," she said, "and that is Worborough Court. Those two gentlemen at the windows are the lawyers, I suppose. Oh, yes, I recognize Mr. Goldsmith. Will you signal to them, if you please? Wave your hat to them. They are bound to see you."

I did as she requested, but the signal brought out Goldsmith alone. Pole's lawyer had either not seen it or did not recognize it as being meant for him, or did not care to answer that informal summons.

"Wheel me a little further," said her ladyship. "They will follow."

I obeyed her again, and wheeled her away from the house with extreme slowness. Turning my head, I saw that Goldsmith was following us at a more rapid pace, and would soon overtake us. He came up with us in awhile, panting somewhat, and her ladyship once more demanded to be turned round.

"That is my house, Mr. Goldsmith," she said. "I am pleased to offer you its hospitality."

Goldsmith glanced at me, and a little later slipped behind the chair, and whispered: "I say." He said nothing further, but tapped his forehead significantly. I feigned to take no notice of him, and Lady Worborough asked in a cold, clear voice:

"What do you say?"

Goldsmith, with a sidelong look of dismay at me, answered confusedly that it was a very beautiful mansion.

"I am very glad," she said, in a voice of satire, "that it enlists your approval. Mr. Denham, let Mr. Goldsmith take your place. Come and talk to me. Mr. Goldsmith, wheel me toward the lodge. Stop when I tell you. I want to secure as many points of view as possible. It is one thing to watch the house as you approach it and another to turn round and secure different points of view when you are going away."

Goldsmith followed her directions, as I had done before him, turning and pausing when she bade him, and turning round and going on again when she bade him. At each survey of the house she named it—"That is Worborough Court"—in a

placid triumph. I did my best not to look at Goldsmith, but I knew that he was making faces to attract my attention, and whenever I did look his way he touched his forehead with a forefinger, and his lips inaudibly shaped some word, always the same word, as I could see, though I could not hear it. By and by, when we were within a little distance of the lodge, I suggested that it might be wise to go back again, and, to my astonishment, she consented.

"Turn me round, Mr. Goldsmith. The air is a little chilly. It is very kind of you, Mr. Denham, to be so careful of an invalid. I am very much obliged to you, I am sure."

There was a tone of mockery in this, as there was in most things she had said in my hearing but I was getting used to her by this time, and paid no heed. As we turned slowly round I saw for the first time that Mary was approaching us, and I supposed she came to warn her patient that it might be unsafe to stay too long in the open air.

"Well," said Goldsmith, bringing the chair to a sudden standstill, "that's the rummest start I ever knew in my life."

"What is?" her ladyship demanded, without making an effort to turn.

"Why, that is," Goldsmith answered.

I made a gesture, and gave him a look to silence him, but Lady Worborough observed me.

"Come here, Mr. Goldsmith," she said. "What is it you describe as a rum start?"

He came round, staring in bewilderment from me to the advancing figure of Miss Delamere, and Lady Worborough's glance followed the direction of his eyes. I had never guessed until that moment that Mary was known to Goldsmith, or had any reason to guess it.

"What is it," she demanded, "that you find surprising in the appearance of that lady?"

"I don't know," said Goldsmith, evidently bewildered by my gesture, and, as I can well guess, by the expression of my face. "I don't know that there's anything surprising in the young lady. Only, she's the last person id the world I should ever have expected to see here."

"Indeed!" said her ladyship, with set eyebrows, and keen, glittering eyes. "And why?"

Goldsmith spread his hands abroad with a deprecatory gesture.

"It's no affair of mine," he said. "If she's pleased to be here, and you like to have her here I've got dothing to say to it"

"Are you mad?" she asked him, scornfully.

"Dot much I ain't," responded Goldsmith. "If you choose to have Miss Delamere about you, of all the yug ladies in the world—"

"What?" she shrieked, turning madly round on me, and tearing at the rugs which were folded about her. The cry was so shrill and piercing, so full of rage and amazement and terror that I seemed never to have heard anything like it before from human lips. Mary came forward swiftly in alarm at this wild cry, and the wretched woman, who had released her hands, waved them threateningly at her with a mad repulsion.

"You will do yourself a mischief," I cried, and made an effort to return the furs to their position. She repulsed me with an unexpected strength, and then clutching the rug tightly in her thin, ungloved hands, sat, wordless at first, glaring at the new-comer. Then her lips began to move over the white teeth clinched below them, and in a little while she spoke with a self-repression which was no less than horrible to look at. The white teeth were never opened, and she had a look of thinking that she had them fast set in something she was eager to rend.

"So you are Miss Delamere," she said. "You have came here watching to see me die that you may marry my husband. That is the meaning of your Christian charity and goodness, is it? You have come down to this great, lonely house to poison me. Oh, you traitress! You wicked, smiling traitress. If I could get at you I would pull you into pieces with my hands."

At first Mary was so bewildered at the cry, and so overwhelmed by this mad accusation, that she could answer nothing. In the very midst of its impossibility the accusation itself had a hideous kind of probability in it. Even to me, the fact that it could not in any distorted dream have entered my mind, carried no weight against it. It was hideous and unimaginable and beyond all conceivable madnesses untrue, and yet I really think that for the moment it struck as heavily as if it had been truth itself.

"You must have been a very wicked woman, Lady Worborough," said Mary, tremblingly, "to think such thoughts. You can not really think them. You do not really think them. John"—she stretched out her hands to me, and I took them in my own—"do you think that she can really believe a thing like that of me—of anybody?"

"You shall take nothing from the house," said Lady Wor-

borough, still speaking with her teeth clinched together, and the same dreadful set expression of her rage. "You shall not go from here until everything you have is searched. We shall find poisons, and there is a law to punish you. Oh, you wicked, wicked, smiling traitress!"

"What are you talking about?" said Goldsmith. "Nobody wants to poisod you."

"Are you in the plot?" she demanded, turning her eyes upon him.

"Yes," said Goldsmith. "I suppose I'm in about as much as there is of it. You'd better get id out of the cold at odce. You'll be catching your death if you don't, and thed there'll be no need for anybody to poisod you. Put that rug up, and let me wheel you into the house."

Goldsmith's stolid indifference did something toward calming the rest of us. His disdain for her ladyship's suspicion was so real and unaffected that even she was a little disarmed by it. But she had at least a woman whom she recognized as a rival in her presence, and having never been easily placable in her own life was not likely to allow herself to be readily pacified here.

"You shall go," she said, "but you shall be searched before you go. You meant to poison me. Why else should you come here?"

"I never asked to come," Mary answered, stooping gently over her, her voice and manner in strangest contrast with those of the woman she addressed. "I came because you asked me, because I thought you clung to me, and would rather have me near you than anybody else you knew. I came because I was sorry for you."

Lady Worborough looked darkly at her without answering.

"Go on," she said, dryly. "Wheel me back to the house. You go before"—addressing Mary. "I won't lose sight of you. You meant to poison me."

Goldsmith set the chair in motion, and Mary and I went on a mere trifle in advance, a foot or two only.

"Keep your eye upon her, Goldsmith," said her ladyship. "She wants to drop behind and run away."

Mary paused for an instant and laid her hand upon the wheeled chaise in which the poor thing sat.

"I do not know," she said with great gentleness, "how you can have thoughts so foolish and so wicked. I will go, if you wish it, and if you wish it you may have everything belonging to me examined."

Lady Worborough shot out a hand and clutched her by the wrist.

"Go on!" she cried to Goldsmith. "I have her now. She won't get away from me!"

Mary laid her free hand upon the hand which held her, and I saw that her eyes filled suddenly with tears.

"Can't you believe, poor thing, that I was sorry for you—that I was very, very sorry for you?"

Her ladyship suddenly released her, with a curt command to go on in front again. One of Mary's tears had brimmed over, and had fallen on her hand. She brushed it away hurriedly, as though it had scalded her, and folded herself tightly in her rugs. I offered my arm to Mary, seeing that she was in need of some support, and begged her not to give this monstrous accusation a moment's thought.

"I am not troubled by it," she answered. "How could I be? But I am very sorry for her."

I said something about its being a poor reward for all her kindness, but, to my momentary amazement, she answered that it was not unnatural, and, turning round upon me, demanded if she had been in the wrong to come here. I told her very warmly that she had acted throughout the whole matter like a saint, and after that we went on to the house without exchanging a word. I had known minutes before that the servants had heard Lady Worborough's first cry, for they had gathered in a knot at the hall door. Some of them were still standing there when we arrived. They were silent and respectful, but attentive. It was easy to see that they were curious as to the cause of the scream, and the set face of their mistress, and the traces of Miss Delamere's tears must have been enough in themselves to confirm their natural suspicion of a scene. I dare say that I myself showed some sign of disturbance, though I did not think of this at the time. The invalid-chair which we had brought with us from London was standing in the hall, and was ready on our arrival.

"Lift me out," said her ladyship, "and carry me to my rooms. Let that woman go on before, and watch her, so that she can not run away."

I conducted Mary up the stairs, and left her at the door of Lady Worborough's apartments. We waited there in the corridor until the invalid was brought up in her chair, then the door was thrown open, and Mary entering before her, she was carried into the first chamber.

"Come in, Mr. Denham," she said to me in passing. "Come in, Goldsmith. Stay here, all of you."

Goldsmith had followed the chair upstairs, hat in hand, and now stood the most self-possessed of any one of us, waving the hat to and fro, and grinning, as if amused, though his smile was certainly a little uneasy.

"Send everybody here," cried her ladyship to one of the servants when he had entered. "Send Lord Worborough's lawyer here and all the servants. Go some of you to this woman's room, and bring down everything she brought into this house. Everything! Do you hear?"

"Lady Worborough," I said as quietly and as firmly as I could, "I will not permit you to place any indignity upon this lady."

I turned upon Goldsmith and the servants, and bade them leave the room, and, a little to my surprise, they obeyed me. I had been there before in the old lord's time as his guest, and in close intimacy with their present master. A good many of the old servants had been re-engaged, or had never actually been discharged, and one of the men who had assisted in carrying her ladyship upstairs remembered me. It was he who led the way, and the others followed him. Her ladyship raved, and commanded them to stay, and one of them did actually linger until I pushed him gently out from the room. When our accuser had gone quiet again I told her that since Miss Delamere was pleased, in face of this monstrous accusation, to have her belongings examined, I had no objection to offer. The examination, however, should be made decently and in order. It was in itself sufficiently shameful and insulting, and nobody should witness it except they two, the doctor and the woman appointed to make the search. She, after a long battle, consenting to this, I rang for Lady Worborough's maid, and instructions were given to her to gather the whole of Miss Delamere's belongings, and to bring them to that room. Next I dispatched a message for the doctor, and he and the maid arriving at almost the same instant, I left the four together.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

I DO not remember to have been often so angry and so grieved at once as this scene had made me. I wished to cool myself, and walking straight into the open air, I encountered Goldsmith, who had lighted a big cigar, and was now swaggering with it on the drive with an eye to the impression produced upon the domestics by his raiment and his jewelry.

"What's the meaning of all this, Bister Dedham?" said the little man. "What's it all about?"

I asked him in return how he came to know Miss Delamere, and he beckoned me on one side.

"Mrs. Pole," he said, "set me to work to find out whether her husband was at all in cobbunication with the lady. I'm one of those sort of med, Bister Dedham, who want to do a thing thoroughly when they do it at all, and I wasn't goig to have a lady watched udless I knew her myself. I went down and had a look at her. I went dowd two or three times, and had a look at her. Charbing yug lady, ain't she? I think, you know, that Lord Worborough displayed uncobbon good taste."

I told him that I did not wish to listen to his opinion upon that question.

"That's just as you like," he answered, "but I've got the opidiod all the same. I went dowd to see her, because I foud out that the fools had followed you instead of goig after Pole. But look here! What's the move? What's she want waiting on Lady Worborough? I suppose she wants to get a dotion of how long she'll last."

Perhaps if I had been in less heat of temper than I was, I should not have answered him at all; but being angry already, and freshly angered by his coarseness, I told him that Miss Delamere had nursed Lady Worborough simply and purely because she was a saint by nature.

"I ain't so green as that," said Mr. Goldsmith. "No, Bister Dedham, that cock won't fight; not with me, adyhow."

It is not of much use to assault a man for being himself, but Goldsmith tempted me sorely. I moved away from him and walked up and down alone, aware that the servants were discussing the curious incidents of a quarter of an hour ago, and that they were consumed by curiosity. In a little while one of them emerged from the hall and came directly toward me. He was charged with a message from Miss Delamere, who desired at once to see me. I found her in a room neighboring Lady Worborough's. The doctor was with her, and was standing over her in an attitude expressive of embarrassed sympathy.

"You must take me away at once," she said, agitatedly. "I can not stay here after what has happened."

"I wonder that you submitted to such an indignity," said the doctor. "Without your express charge I would not have stood by to witness it. I have been thinking for a day or two past that Lady Worborough is not entirely responsible for her actions, and the last ten minutes has confirmed me."

I asked if her ladyship gave any sign of being convinced of the falsehood of her supposition, and he answered, "None."

"We left her in a towering rage," he said. "She will do herself a mischief."

It was obvious that the first and only thing was to move Mary with all possible expedition from the house. She herself had already given instructions for the packing of her baggage, and I left her for a moment only to arrange about my own, and to order a vehicle for the little hotel in the village, near the station. When I returned she had almost altogether recovered her self-possession, and we waited quietly until we were informed that our joint orders had been fulfilled. Then we drove away. I thought it wisest to make no allusion to what had happened, and Mary herself spoke of it but once.

"I am very sorry for her," she said then. "It must be very horrible to live with such thoughts about one's fellow-creatures. I should never have chosen to nurse her, but it was not left to me to make the choice."

The carriage set us down with our belongings at the little hotel, and we were shown into a comfortless, fireless room there. We had four hours to wait for the train, and when, in obedience to our instructions, a fire was lighted, the chimney smoked so badly that we had to throw open door and windows, and to sit, as it were, in the open air. Altogether it was a cheerless waiting. The hotel was very small, but it was at least four times bigger than there had been any reasonable ground for making it, and it was no more homely than a desert. When the solitary waiter of the establishment, who looked as bored as Robinson Crusoe must have felt, walked about the unclothed corridor, he made such echoes there in the uninhabited and, I suppose, unfurnished solitudes about him, that I felt as if we were in some house of huge proportions, some Castle of Otranto, with a lonely giant footstep wandering up and down in it. The waiter was shy of strangers, and so unaccustomed to them that he was embarrassed by our arrival. There was absolutely nothing to read in the place, and neither of us was in the mood for conversation. So we waited dismally enough, and anything, however slight, that happened in the road on which our windows looked became an object of contemplation, and took an exaggerated interest. It was not in the least surprising, therefore, that we should both have caught early the sound of a horse's hoofs, going apparently at a headlong gallop. The noise traveled with the wind, and came nearer with great rapidity. I stationed myself at the window, and to my considerable astonishment, the doctor,

followed closely by a groom, appeared in sight. The two checked their horses immediately below me, and I ran downstairs to meet them.

"I hardly have the cheek," said the young doctor, speaking rather pantingly, "to tell you what I have come for." He had ridden like an unaccustomed horseman, and was blown by his exertions. "One of the carriages is coming after us, and Lady Worborough wants Sister Constance to return. She doesn't merely want her to do it, but she's actually wild about it. You know enough about her to know what she's like, when she wants anything."

"She has utterly thrown over that mad suspicion, then?" I asked.

"Completely, for the moment," the doctor answered. "She declares that Sister Constance is an angel, and that she herself is a fiend. She says that she never believed it at all for an instant, but that she was tempted to say it simply because Sister Constance was so good and beautiful that she hated her for it and was jealous of her. That's a problem," the young doctor added, "for some men's reading, but it certainly isn't for mine."

I could do no less than take these strange and unexpected tidings to Mary. The doctor mounted with me, but left me to tell the tale.

"I feel impertinent," he said when I had told it, "in coming here at all. I should feel intolerably impertinent if I were to say a word to influence you, but all the same—"

He paused there, and made a little apologetic gesture as he checked himself.

"You think," Mary asked him, "that it will be better for me to go?"

"It will certainly be better for her," the doctor answered. "Of course you know that she makes a very violent display of any emotion. But she seemed quite dangerously agitated when I left her just now. If you could possibly persuade yourself—"

He paused once more, and made again that little gesture of apology with both hands.

"I will go," Mary answered, "if I can be of service."

"You have always had an influence over her from the first," the doctor answered. "Pray don't think me impudent; I can't help saying how good you are."

His eyes sparkled and his cheek flushed. He was obviously very much in earnest, and if he could have dared would have said more. He had not witnessed her sweet and noble patience

all these weeks for nothing, and I had more than once suspected him of setting a higher value upon her than was quite consistent with his happiness. He never spoke a word, as far as I know, to indicate as much, but he had a worshipful way of following her about with his eyes which looked significant to me. Mary was a little embarrassed by his vivacity, but the sound of carriage-wheels came as a distraction, and we all three went to the window. The young medico blushed at her silence, and looked a trifle guilty, as if he felt that it reproved him.

We drove back to Worborough Court without delay, leaving the instructions for our luggage to be sent on afterward, and the doctor and the groom tore on ahead to carry the news of our return.

"Come with me to her ladyship's room when we arrive," said Mary, as we were driven along. "I am afraid of a scene, and your presence may help to keep her quiet."

The servants who were present at our arrival received us with an alacrity which seemed to indicate to my mind that they knew something of the story. I supposed then, and actually learned afterward, that Goldsmith had been talking. Mary had spent but a day within the house, but her sweet face and gentle ways had begun to tell even in that short time, as they did everywhere and always.

It is not an easy thing to analyze and proportion one's affections. I have been fortunate enough, on my way to middle age, to have known and cared for a round half dozen of lovable people, which I take to be a rather unusual allowance for one man. One's affections differ, of course, in kind, although they may be almost equal in intensity. My wife is absolutely aware of my opinion and sentiment, and shares it with me thoroughly and without a sign of jealousy—a rare and pleasing characteristic in a woman. So far as my experience carried me, I believed Mary Delamere to have been the best woman in the world. She never had need to search for affection, but found it offering itself everywhere spontaneously. I took—at this period especially—a tender pride in her, such as I suppose a brother feels for a sister. The pleased willingness of the servants was, I believe, more agreeable to me than to her. It rejoiced me to know that people loved her; and when any phlegmatic creature, as sometimes happened, appeared insensible to her charm and goodness, I was angered. In plain fact, love me and love my Mary Delamere was a prime article in my creed, which I could hardly have sacrificed to please anybody.

The housekeeper, among others, awaited our arrival, and

came forth with something of a kindly bustle, saying that her ladyship was especially anxious to see Sister Constance at once. We found the invalid lying where we had left her, and her face showed evident signs of recent tears. Her eyes were red and swollen, and her magnificent black hair all wildly disarranged. At the moment of our entrance she stretched out her arms imploringly toward Mary, with a strange moaning noise which I thought eloquent at once of joy and of repentance. Mary took the outstretched hands in her own and stooped a little over her, but the poor thing dragged her hysterically to her knees, and threw both arms about her, kissing her and crying over her in an almost frantic way. This went on for a minute or two, and at first Mary made a gentle effort to disengage herself. Finding it useless, she submitted to these wild caresses, and putting her own arms about the patient, drew her to her breast. At this Lady Worborough cried at first more violently than ever; but in awhile the gentle embrace soothed her, and she lay there, heaping all manner of apology and protestation upon her recovered companion.

"You are an angel," she said over and over again. "An angel! an angel! an angel! How could you come back to me? If anybody had treated me in such a way I should have killed her. I should have hated her for ever and ever and ever. Oh, my wicked heart! my wicked heart! What makes me hate people so? I have always hated people. I have always hated myself for doing it. Why does God make us to be so unhappy?"

She grew quieter by degrees, and Mary had a way with her which nobody else seemed to know the secret of.

"I shall never forget it," said the unhappy woman. "I shall nver forgive myself. I shall carry the memory of it to my grave. I knew, when I said it, it was a wicked lie. I had to say it. I have no power over my tongue when I am angry."

I was slipping silently from the room, seeing that there was not the slightest necessity for my presence there, and thinking that she might be calmer in my absence, when she called me by name, and begged me not to go away. I was going, she said, because I hated her. Everybody hated her, except the one creature in the world who had most reason.

"And you don't hate me, dear?" she said, addressing Mary. "I know you don't, although you have a right to."

I besought her not to think that I bore her any hatred; and, indeed, making all possible allowances for her explosive and capricious nature, her penitence and her affection for the

woman she had wronged were so sincere that she touched me nearly. That slow-burning, passionate heart of hers had not been subdued to penitence and apology without an awful inward struggle, and I knew it. She held out her hand to me very feebly, and I took it in my own.

"You don't hate me?" she asked. "You love my husband, and you don't wish me dead?"

I could only answer that I was glad to know she cared; that I was extremely sorry for her, and that I thanked her with all my heart for what she had just said to Miss Delamere.

"But you hate me," she insisted. "You hate me. You must hate me."

"My poor dear Lady Worborough," I answered, "why should anybody hate you now?"

"Ah!" she answered, with a great sigh, "I suppose you can all afford to forgive me. I sha'n't trouble you long, I know. I've lied about that as well. I won't see Walter, mind you. I'm not going to make things up with him. I'm not so weak as that yet, and never shall be. It was all his own fault. If he had beaten me, as I deserved, when I first broke out, we might have been happy always."

There was no reply possible to this astonishing statement, though it might have been true enough to an exceptional sort of feminine human nature.

"You will overexcite yourself again," Mary said, gently, "if you talk too much. Let us stay here together quite quietly, and say nothing. It will be better to go away, John, because Lady Worborough is really in need of quiet."

"My name is Adelaide," said her ladyship, with a touch of her habitual willfulness and irony in the tone of her voice. Then, with a sudden change, "Call me by it. Please do call me by it. *You* hate me, Mr. Denham, all the same. You wish me dead."

"Go away, John," said Mary, decisively. "I am sending him away," she added, "because you must not excite yourself —Adelaide."

Her ladyship gave a little gasping sob in answer to the name, a suppressed cry of pleasure and of affection. The daylight was fading by this time, and the fire was already beginning to cast a reddish tinge upon objects prominent in the room, making the shadows deeper by contrast. A great expanse of quiet country lay visible beyond the pale oblong of the single window of the room, and the red glow of the fire made the landscape dim and ghostly. I stole out of the room on

tiptoe, and as I turned to draw the door behind me, I saw the two clinging to each other.

CHAPTER XL.

POLE'S lawyer was beginning to be impatient, and I had not left Mary and Lady Worborough more than ten minutes at the outside when one of the servants came to me with a message from him. He was afraid of missing the up train, and was angered at the unnecessary delay. I told him as much as I cared to tell of what had happened, and of the momentary condition of affairs, and he consented to wait another twenty minutes before sending in a message. This, I thought, would give her ladyship time to collect herself, and in her softened humor it was quite possible that she might be willing to give less trouble than usual. It was plain enough that she had already kept the lawyers waiting simply to assure them and herself of her own importance. Goldsmith had no other affairs likely to be as profitable as this, but the other man was differently situated, and had reasons for desiring to get away quickly.

At the end of the twenty minutes a servant was dispatched with a respectfully worded message. Mary herself returned with the answer. Lady Worborough, after the excitement of the day, had grown alarmingly faint and weak, and had just fallen asleep. She did not think it advisable to awake her. It was certain that most healthy people would have found the wild excitement into which she had been plunged more than a little trying, and to an invalid as she was the day was certain to have been really dangerous. The lawyer hummed and hawed, but finally resigned himself, and sat down to write a lengthy letter of instruction to his staff. Mary went back quietly to her patient, and the hours went by in great dullness. I myself should have returned to town by the late train, and was indeed prepared to do so, but for an encounter with the doctor, who came with a face of great gravity to consult me.

"I have just been to see her ladyship," he said. "She had slept for an hour when she awoke, and frightened Sister Constance by her extreme languor and feebleness. I don't like the look of things at all, and I can't accept the responsibility of the case alone. I shall send a telegram to Doctor Mason detailing the symptoms, and leaving it to him to come down if he thinks them sufficiently grave, and I shall wire to Exeter." He mentioned the name of a well-known physician there, and added: "He is almost as good as anybody, and he can get down here by the local train by midnight."

"You think things really serious enough for this?" I asked him.

"I think things very serious indeed," he answered. "We have had two or three hours of almost uninterrupted raving, and she is not in a state to stand it."

I decided at least to await the arrival of the physician from Exeter, and by the messenger who carried the doctor's telegram I sent a dispatch to Clara, apprising her of my resolve and the reasons which inspired it.

The doctor, the two men of law, and I dined together, and made a grave party. Goldsmith had heard the news, and showed more feeling than I had expected.

"I'll tell you what it is, gedtlemen," said Goldsmith, looking from one to the other of us, "this is neither more nor less thad a judgment. That's what it is—a judgment. You may think it's only a coidcidence, but that ain't my way of looking at it." The doctor asked him what he meant. "You don't know the story?" said Goldsmith. "Well, it ain't ady business of mine to tell it to you. Bister Dedham knows the story, and he understads what I'm talking about."

I understood more than that. I comprehended perfectly Mr. Goldsmith's unwillingness to make anything but a veiled allusion to that history in the presence of a respectable member of his own profession. Pole's lawyer would certainly have refused to sit at the same table with him, had he been aware of the facts of that strange episode. I was not proud of Mr. Goldsmith's society myself, but I could not very well evade it at the time. I occupied myself for awhile by thinking what that eminently respectable practitioner would say and do if I should unveil Goldsmith's secret to him then and there. When, after dinner, Goldsmith button-holed me apart, and started anew his theory that Lady Worborough's disaster was a judgment, I had been thinking so warmly of his scoundrelly participation in her terrible plot that I felt constrained to ask him to address me as rarely as possible.

"It's pretty bitter on a cove," said Goldsmith; "you'd have done it yourself if you'd had that womad standig over you."

He went away, however, and even seemed a little depressed by my disapproval.

The doctor spent most of his time in her ladyship's apartments. She had been got to bed, and was now lying there in a state of marked prostration. I saw him only once before midnight, and then his looks were so somber, and his words so few that I was certain he thought the aspect of the case to be growing graver. Mary, during these hours, I did not see at

all, for she remained constantly in attendance upon her patient. It was half an hour after midnight when the physician from Exeter arrived. I think he was the most reserved and guarded person I had ever met. He refused to commit himself to any opinion, hopeful or despairing. He did not even say that her ladyship's position was critical, but simply decided to wait and watch. On this unsatisfactory no-verdict I went to bed, but I found myself unable to sleep, and after tossing to and fro for a couple of hours I got up again and partly dressed myself. The materials for a fire lay ready in the grate. I set a light to them, and wrapping myself snugly in a dressing-gown, sat staring at the blaze, and allowed my thoughts to wander where they would. They never wandered far from Lady Worborough and those who were most intimately about her. I thought a good deal of that striking coincidence which Goldsmith regarded as evidence of a judgment. The woman whose body had been passed off as her own, and whom she had pretended to identify as herself, had been injured in the same manner, and had been carried to the same hospital. But I am not a believer in miraculous interpositions of that kind.

I had brought no books with me, and time crawled so slowly, and my own thoughts grew so dreary, that at last I decided to steal into the library, which was at the far end of the corridor in which my bedroom was situated. Lady Worborough's apartments were about midway. I lighted a candle, and looking out, saw the doctor in the act of leaving his patient's room. The light I carried attracted his attention, and he moved toward me. We met half-way, and he looked graver and more anxious than ever.

"The pulse is feebler," he said; "the temperature is lower. I don't like things at all."

"What does your colleague say?" I asked.

"He is reserved, but he doesn't look confident. I am inclined to think he will wire for Mason."

I told him of my inability to sleep, and asked him to let me know if the change became more marked. He promised this, and I went on to the library. Having secured a book or two there, I returned to my chamber, and sat down to read, with such excellent effect that when I had gone steadily through a dozen pages I had not the remotest idea of the meaning of a single phrase. I knew that I had been reading diligently, but my mind was busy with other things, and refused to take cognizance of the message the eyes brought it. Having tried again, and having, by dint of resolution, fastened my mind to the first paragraph, I found myself at the end of the third page

in the same position as before; so I gave up the effort, and my mind went wandering again in the mazes of fantastic waking dreams. I came out of them once to replenish the fire, and again when my candles flickered in the sockets and went out. The room I sat in was cozy and home-like enough, and the fire gave a light which would have been clear enough to read by if I had been so minded. But I felt eerie and alone, and the sense of the likelihood of approaching death laid a chill upon my heart. The shadow feared of men seemed in the house already, and touched me where I sat.

Suddenly I heard a cautious footstep in the corridor and a light tap upon my door. It was the doctor.

"There is no doubt now," he whispered. "She is sinking."

"Is she conscious?" I asked.

"She is conscious," he answered, "but she is suffering from what we call aphasia. She has tried several times to speak, but she can not use the words she wants. Her phrases are unintelligible."

I told him that Lord Worborough ought, with as little delay as possible, to be informed of her condition. The local physician would know the country, and could tell us how best to dispatch a telegram to town. The young doctor went back to consult him on this theme, and returned with the message that a man was all night on duty at the railway station, and would probably be able to dispatch a message. I had assuredly nothing better to do, and I decided on going there myself. I completed my toilet and set out. One of the servants offered to provide me with a lantern, and I went round to the stables with him to secure it. The night was pitch-dark, and so absolutely without a sound, that more than once between the house and the lodge I felt impelled to pause and listen. The silence hummed in my ears, and I was glad to break it by the noise of my own footsteps. The gates were closed, and I had to awake the lodge-keeper, who came down in a state of great alarm. When I had told him my errand he was eager to take it upon himself, but I knew the road as well as he, and declined his services. It was better to be walking on, even in that monotonous, unchanging little circle of light with the dense black of the night about me, than to be doing nothing, and sitting in the house with that grim presence growing tangible.

The man at the railway station had nothing to do but to signal the coming and going of luggage trains, and to adjust a point or two. He had his telegraphic signal, of course, in the

box with him, but that was of no avail. The instrument used for the transmission of messages was locked up in the station. So far as the man knew, the station-master was the only person who knew how to work it. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to awaken that functionary, and to trust his respect for the great house to secure his good-will and assistance. I got his address from the pointsman and went out in search of him. I lost my way for awhile, and went stumbling about the village without finding a creature of whom I could inquire, until at last I lighted upon a man with a cart, who gave me the necessary information.

When I had found the station-master, he was extremely civil and obliging and eager to be of service. We went down to the station together, and he signaled for a long time without securing an answer. At last, when we were almost on the point of despair, the gong set up a great clanging, and we knew that we had secured communication. Five minutes later I was back in the dark again, walking toward the court. The station-master had informed me that if his lordship got the telegram within an hour, he could secure a train as far as Bristol, could there take up another after an hour and a half's waiting, and could so reach the village three hours earlier than by the express. I had tacked this information to my message, and was certain that Pole would act upon it if he received it in time. I felt very strongly that if it were possible he ought to see his wife before she took leave of the world. Death clears all scores, and on his side there had, all things considered, been but little rancor. What there might be, I knew him well enough to know, would be buried now forever. I was more than two hours away, and it was still pitch-dark when I returned. There was no marked further change in Lady Worborough's condition, but her attendants thought her just a little feebler, and had no hope at all that she would rally. Mary, so the young doctor told me, was sitting at her bedside, and for hours past the dying woman had been holding her by the hand.

"That's a curious little bit of heroism and endurance, in its way," he said. "Did you ever try to sit for hours in one position? It's a great task. At times it's something of a torture. It's one of those things that women will do. She may have to put up with hours more of it."

The night crawled on wearily, with its silent, stealthy comings and goings, its brief whispered colloquies, its monotonous questions and replies.

"Anything as yet?"

"Nothing."

Sometimes the mere lifting of the eyebrows gave the question, and a grave negative sign of the head the answer. It seemed as if the dawn would never break, but after interminable waiting the windows began to show a ghastly gray and lightened slowly, until at last the world was awake again. The dull, windless dawn was in keeping with the thoughts which filled me. The sky and the landscape that brooded under it looked alike cold and desolate, and there was a gloom upon the day. There is a mysterious tie between men and nature at such times, which makes her seem to deride or sympathize with our moods as a sentient thing might. All the while poor Lady Worborough lay slowly dying, and the woman she had plotted to shame and agonize sat by her like some pitying angel, nursing her hand, and soothing her last moments by forgiveness.

Somewhere between eight and nine o'clock a telegram came from Pole announcing that he had started by the train indicated in my message, and was bringing Dr. Mason with him. I communicated this to the doctors, and asked if there would be time, in their judgment, for him to reach us before the end came. They thought so, but had no certainty in their opinion. The elderly lawyer was either an early riser by habit, or was out at an unusual hour that morning. I told him the news, and he received it with a grave tranquillity.

"It is better so," he said.

An hour or two later the housekeeper informed me that Goldsmith had shed tears on learning that the end was now regarded as inevitable. He did not appear at breakfsat, and I met him in the shrubbery, red-eyed and miserable. He came to me with no attempt to conceal his emotion, and without an atom of resentment, or even of memory, for our interview of last night. He was not sensitive to the opinion of others, and, except by actual violence, it did not seem easy to incense him.

"I was very fond of her," he said, brokenly. "She was hard to get along with, and she had her faults, like the rest of us. But she was kind to me, very kind once, when I wanted it badly."

And so even she had her mourner, and had enlisted the affection of one heart at least, and kept it, though she might have won and kept others better worth the having.

I lingered as long as I dared before going down to meet Pole at the station, in order that I might be able to carry to him the latest intelligence. Outside the railway station I found quite a crowd of people. I suspect that the station-master had divulged the contents of Pole's telegram, which was not a very

serious offense in the circumstances. The people were all quiet and expectant, and parted on either side to make a lane for the carriage. One or two of the villagers, whom I had known on earlier visits, came forward and made inquiries. By and by came the signal for the train, then the train itself. Then Pole, followed by Mason.

"What is the news?" he asked me.

"I think," I answered, "that you will be in time to see her."

"Has she expressed a wish to see me?" he demanded.

I had to answer in the negative, but I could tell him that she was strangely softened, and that there was some hope of a reconciliation even at this late hour. We entered the carriage and drove away amid the silent salutations on the village road, and I told the story of Lady Worborough's outbreak. There was no need for silence in Mason's presence, for he knew the whole history already, and I had made Pole aware of his knowledge of it. The narrative shocked one of my listeners painfully, though I slid past the indignity of the search without a word, and did my best to emphasize the completeness of the retraction and apology.

"Ah, well!" said Mason, with an aspect of relief, "I am glad that the thing was not of my doing. I allowed Lady Worborough to come down here, and I was afraid that I might have acted like a fool. I understand it now, and it takes a great weight from my mind."

I knew so well what happened afterward from Pole himself and from Mary's account of it to Clara, that I can tell the story of the scene almost as if I had witnessed it. Mason told me something of it too, though he was very brusque and brief, not caring, I think, to trust himself to too prolonged a narrative. The dying woman was told of her husband's presence in the house, and was asked if she would see him. At first she made no sign at all, but by looking straight before her. Mary said that the hand she held trembled piteously at the question. It was repeated to her with much gentleness, and turning her eyes round upon the doctor, she signaled "Yes." The gesture of the head was faint, but its meaning was obvious. Pole was shown into the room, and his wife looked toward him with what was construed into a glance of appeal and supplication. She was partly propped up with pillows, and her left hand lay upon the coverlet. Mary still held the other.

Lady Worborough looked from Pole's face to her own disengaged hand once or twice, and made a feeble motion of the hand itself. Pole read this sign, and took it in both his own.

Mary rose and tried gently to disengage herself from the grasp which held her, but it tightened so decisively, and with a force which was so considerably greater than she could have expected, that she resumed her place.

The dying woman tried to speak, and did utter one or two words indistinctly, but they had no meaning to her hearers. She lay with closed eyes for awhile after this failure, and both her husband and Mary felt a change in her hands, a tenseness which at first they thought indicated some spasm of great pain, though they knew only a second or two later that she was but making one final effort of that indomitable will. She quivered in her passionate desire to find the word. She found it and she spoke it, the worthiest she ever spoke, and the last:

"Forgive."

Pole told her that he forgave her everything, fully and freely, as he hoped that his own misdeeds might be forgiven. He begged her that if he had wronged her in any way she would pardon him as truly. The effort it had cost her to find the word had almost exhausted her, and they feared that every breath she drew would be her last. But she heard and understood, and for a moment a smile flickered faintly upon her face. Then a most strange and pathetic thing happened. The feeble hands drew the hands they held nearer to each other across the coverlet, and when they touched released them, and lay lax in death above them.

So I may say of her truly that nothing in her life became her like the leaving of it.

CHAPTER XLI.

A ROYAL master of fiction laid it down as an axiom that when everybody can tell how a story will end, the story is ended. Here, for the rounding of this history, there remain but two or three things to tell. Mary and I returned to town together that same day, and Clara nursed her for a day or two with great assiduity, for now that the strain was over she proved quite overwrought. She was soon herself again, however, and we fell into our own ways of life at home, with some few differences. Pole had never once crossed my threshold since my marriage, and his reason for absence had been understood all along. He came for the first time about six weeks after Lady Worborough's funeral. He was serious at first, but he had always been a man to whom affectation of any sort was intolerable and hateful, and when in the course of our talk we happened to strike a comic fancy, he had one of his old

bright and charming smiles in readiness for it. His troubles had aged him, and, young as he was, there was a touch of gray about his hair. The attitude of his mind had grown habitually serious, but he was not at all the man to cling to a departing shadow.

"I don't know," he said, "whether I have acted properly in coming here so soon. I have been guided by you so often that if you will allow me I will take your advice once more. Mary is still staying with you?"

"Still," I answered, "and will stay, until the only person who has a right to take her away shall come to do it. I have been looking for you for days past."

"That sounds," he said, "like approval."

"It ought to sound," I answered him, "like complete approval. The fact is that if you liked to think so, your position for a time might be embarrassing and delicate. If you do not choose to trouble yourself at all about it, it may grow natural in a day."

Clara, who was of course aware of his presence in the house, came in at this juncture to welcome him. She stayed but for a moment or two, and on retiring said:

"Tea will be ready in five minutes. You will come up and join us, John, and bring Lord Worborough with you."

This indicated clearly enough another opinion on our side, and we followed Clara upstairs. Pole glanced about the room, but Mary was not there. He looked disappointed, and even a little nervous, but almost immediately she entered. They shook hands and we all sat down together, Clara talking at first with a rather forced vivacity. She soon conquered this, however, and the ice once being broken, we got on without further trouble. When we had taken tea, Clara moved into the adjoining room and sat down to the piano. I also sauntered through the folding-doors and stood to listen to her playing. It was by no means as firm as usual, and I was not long in discovering that she was crying softly to herself. But I knew that her tears were very far from being unhappy, and feigned to take no notice. In about an hour Pole said his good-byes and went away. He came again, and continued to come, not half as often as I should have been glad to see him, or I suppose a twentieth part as often as he would really have cared to call.

I remember that while these visits were going on, and while indeed they were comparatively new, Clara and Mary and I dined together with that genial old Dr. Fish, of whom I have once or twice found it necessary to make mention in the course

of my story. I met at his table the lady of the poor, dear Hottentots. It appeared that they had changed their allegiance, and the poor, dear Cypriotes were now in charge, after a fashion as mysterious as that of their predecessors. She hinted to me after dinner that Lord Worborough's visits were just a little—now didn't I think so? Were they quite? Didn't I fancy, now, that they were rather premature? Did I think that they were absolutely and entirely—well, she might say delicate?

"Dear madame," I responded, "Lord Worborough and Miss Delamere suffered horribly as the result of a wicked and shameful plot. They behaved throughout like persons of delicacy and honor, and they are acting now like people of common sense. It was I who took upon myself to advise Lord Worborough, and his visits to my house are at my invitation."

Whether the general Mrs. Grundy had more to say upon the question I never learned, and certainly never took the trouble to inquire. This particular lady was more abashed than I had meant her to be. She abdicated from her proprietorship of the poor, dear Cypriotes for the rest of that evening, and went away early, with effusive "my dearings" and hand-shakings for Miss Delamere.

When we had quite settled down to the new order of things, and when that sorrowful past had at last sunk from the surface of our lives, we made a very happy quartet. From my dignified height of married man I looked upon the two dearest friends I had in the world with a profound satisfaction and thanksgiving. Clara, from her extra elevation of dignity as married woman, surveyed them with a pleasure as genuine as my own. The ghastly dead past must have floated up sometimes in their remembrance, as it did in ours, but the great equal stream of time went on and drowned it deeper hour by hour and day by day.

The haunted man, in his bargain with the ghost, lost all his memories of sorrow with the natural result we know of. It would be as sad to lose our memories of trouble as to lose our memories of joy. But we may all thank God that joy grows brighter in the retrospection, and that sorrow fades.

It was about this time that I received an unexpected visit in my official room. Mr. Delamere turned up there, as distinguished, as well bred, as condescending, and urbane as ever.

"My dear Denham," he said, "I have called upon you with regard to an affair of the utmost delicacy. I have never been able to refrain from a certain feeling of contempt for those people who make a lavish display of the emotions. I have, in

fact, now in preparation for the press a lecture delivered some years ago on the Control of the Emotions as a Sign of the Perfected Man."

I thought within myself that the control of the emotions was no doubt an admirable thing, but that the aspect of power in that direction might be less estimable where there were no emotions to control. But I held my tongue, and Mr. Delamere streamed on, calm, urbane, forgiving.

"I have never," he pursued, "closed my eyes to the fact that your charming wife and yourself have of late considerably influenced the career, the character, and the resolutions of my child. I do not inquire whether her resolutions to divide her life from mine were, or were not, arrived at as a result of that undoubted influence. I even applaud that fineness of sentiment, that high sense of honor in my daughter, which led her to sacrifice the instincts and the cherished associations of a life-time. I presume that the instincts were inherited, and I can not, and I do not, blame Mary for acting upon a sentiment which I have found only too considerably active in my own career. She has an erroneous conception of the circumstances of the case. But I authorize you to inform her—I should rather say perhaps that I beg you to inform her—that I applaud her feeling, but that I consider that she has by this time more than sufficiently justified her own position. I come to you because I can not again endure to be encountered with coldness by my daughter. I appeal to you as a man of honor to present my case as I have stated it. It is possible," he added, with a touch of dignified pathos which would have imposed upon me completely in the early days of my acquaintance with him, "it is possible that my very whereabouts may be unknown to her. You will find it indicated here."

With this he produced a card and laid it delicately upon the table, like an artist and a gentleman. He took up his hat like an artist and a gentleman—he really had the most perfect and finished manner I have ever known—and rose to go. I promised that I would do my best, and told him I was certain that Mary would be the happier for the reconciliation. He thanked me and went away.

I took the message home that evening, and to be brief, Mary consented very willingly to call upon him, and next morning paid him a visit. As a result of this I wrote to him saying that she would continue her residence with Clara for some little time to come, and asking him to visit her and us as often as he pleased. I expressed my joy at the reconciliation, and

made myself a great deal more agreeable on paper than I felt internally toward him.

Sebastian had been upon our household list almost from the beginning, and it was like old times to hear him and Delamere, when they met together, orating one at another with all their original solemnity. Sebastian had turned to architecture, and had a theory that the reformation of the world from the great doctrine of ugliness was more easily to be effected in that direction than any other.

"The very streets of London strangle and suffocate the wayfarer," he would say. "The dull, eternal, unbroken straight line wearies the soul with its infinite monotony of repetition. The poisonous fallacy of utility has been the death of beauty."

I suspect that he wrote these things down and committed them to memory, unless when they came freshly from the paternal pump-spout and he repoured them.

"I speak of the fallacy of utility, and I protest that I find no exaggeration in the phrase. The first essential in a thing is that it shall not be hideous. The second essential in given cases is that it shall be useful. Because we can pack more squares or oblongs than circles or ovals into a given space we sit in these soul-freezing rooms of ours, among flat walls and ceilings."

Pole was there, and asked him if he wouldn't keep the floors level, if only as a concession. Not to speak it unkindly, Sebastian had grown more tolerant of Pole's form of humor since the latter had come in for a great fortune and a peerage. I dare say that was true of many people, and I am not disposed to be severe on Jones. He smiled allowingly, and proceeded with the development of his theory.

"It is very heart-breaking," he said at last, "but nobody appears to care much. I dined last night with a contractor. One meets such people now and then. He jeered at my contention in a way which I felt to be quite tasteless and almost personally injurious. He positively told me that I need only exceed my average allowance of wine at dinner, and 'top up' —that was the contractor's expression—with a dose of old Tom and hot water, in order to see the lines of any street arranged in as varied a pattern as I could desire. Of course that closed the conversation. One can't talk with such people. They veil themselves in their own coarse contempt against the light of thoughts beyond their understanding."

But Sebastian was even more enjoyable on one occasion when only Pole and I were present. It appeared that Delamere and

he had clubbed together, and had resolved, for the sake of society, to dine in common when not otherwise engaged.

"And do you know," said Jones, "I begin to suspect Delamere of being a trifle selfish in an almost unbelievable direction. We have dined together, I should suppose, since this compact was entered upon, not fewer than a score of times. Now, it happens that the man who caters for us at the Albany, though otherwise excellent, is possessed of but little resource or variety with respect to dessert. He has always served up a mere half dozen of a kind of macaroon of which I am—one confesses to this kind of trifle with no shame—particularly fond. I appropriated them, of course, with Delamere's express consent, on the first evening. They became, so to speak, my property, and I looked forward to them naturally as the close of my repast. Now, last night, and positively also the night before, Delamere deliberately, and with obvious intention, appropriated them all."

Pole said that this was simply brutal, and Sebastian thought the term too strong. Really, he thought it unwarrantably strong. Pole was sorry, but regretted that he could not modify it, and Sebastian expressed his regret at having told the story. He valued Delamere, and had no wish to give his friends a poor opinion of him. For his own part, he was contented to describe the act as an unexpected idiosyncrasy.

I delighted in all this, not merely because it was so charming in itself, but because it showed that Pole still had a laugh left in him, and because he had had a more relishing perception by nature of the fun than I had.

Nothing was said of the one event which we all regarded as inevitable. Clara was full of wonder as to when the news was coming. It came out at length that Pole and Mary had decided between themselves to wait a year, and that they had resolved upon a very quiet wedding. To me, the time seemed to pass swiftly, and I look back to it now, or at least to all but the earliest months of it, as the happiest of my life. There are few men who can boast of nine months so free from care, so tranquilly, uneventfully hopeful and content. To see the patient look of settled resignation fade from Mary's face, and to see the dawn of positive happiness in it, was in itself a joy which any man might envy. To see the same change in Pole, to watch the quiet, hearty humor of the man growing more supple and more at home again within him day by day was another and an equal pleasure. I thought Pole the best fellow in the world. Almost everybody has that opinion about somebody, but I am prepared to this hour to back my man; and if

anybody should prove so fortunate as to win against me, I shall never know it, and the winner will have a friend who is indeed worthy of his best affection.

I am getting very near the end now, and have little more to tell. But when I sat, revolving this old history in my mind a year ago, and determining to write it, I fixed upon a title for the story, as if it had been a novel. I decided to call it "The Weaker Vessel;" and that, if ever it should see the light of publicity, is the name it ought to bear. The episode the remembrance of which decided me upon that title has still to be told. The title itself has passed into a sort of by-word between my wife and me, and we have grown familiar with the name.

It was only a week before the wedding when Clara the younger had been conducted, on a chill but sunshiny day, upon a walk by her nurse. This same Clara the younger has filled but a little place in these pages, though she was known to all hands aboard the family craft as commanderess-in-chief. We were all standing at the drawing-room windows at home, chatting and looking out on the fine bright weather—Clara, Mary, Pole, myself, and Delamere. Clara, Delamere, and myself were at one window, Pole and Mary at the other. The little Clara was suddenly discerned in the street, toddling forward with outstretched hands and somewhat uncertain footsteps, treating the ridges of frozen mud as if they were half her own height. She had evidently escaped for the moment from her nurse, who was scudding forward in a stooping posture, either to pick her up or to sustain her footsteps, when a wildly driven hansom came tearing round the corner, and dashed in between them. The child was absolutely touched by the wheel, and thrown forward. The nurse-girl, recoiling with a shriek, tripped and sat down upon the road-way. By a happy wonder, neither child nor nurse received a hurt worth mentioning, but for the moment my heart was in my mouth, and by the time that Pole and I had torn down-stairs together, got the hall door open, and discovered the pair to be undamaged, I was sick and faint.

I carried the little creature, who was not at all alarmed by her tumble, into the drawing-room, and there was Mary in an arm-chair in a state of perfect collapse. She had fainted clean away. There was a mighty hubbub for a moment, but we all calmed down, and in half an hour's time Mary herself, with a rather white face and tremulous manner, apologized for her weakness. She had imagined that both the girl and the child had been run over.

Delamere was very gorgeous to behold and listen to as he

expatiated upon this incident, and turning to Pole, with his courtly and condescending grace, he said:

"You must have pity on the weaker vessel."

An hour later, when Mary had quite recovered and Pole and I were alone together, he delivered his mind of the thoughts which this utterance awoke in him.

"Jack, you heard Delamere speak just now about the weaker vessel?"

I remarked that I had noticed the phrase, and that I had had some fancies about it.

"It set me thinking," said Pole. "The weaker vessel! In all things worth while to be strong in, much the stronger vessel, to my mind. How dares that hollow sham to condescend to a creature so infinitely his superior? Did *she* stoop to touch money dishonorably borrowed? And what did I do? Is it any vanity to say to you who know her as well almost as I do that she loves me? Is it vanity to suppose that she felt the separation as bitterly as I did? I know she did, Jack. I know the shame of being public talk in such a business made that sensitive heart bleed many and many a time. And while I was away in Paris, gambling and racketing and hating my kind and eating the husks the swine do eat, she was tending her sick and her poor, and strengthening her soul with holy thought and pious living. Jack, my lad, they're better than we are. They're purer and stronger, and more patient to endure."

He was not talkative for a long time after this outburst, but several times in the course of the afternoon I heard him muttering to himself: "The Weaker Vessel!" in a tone of wrathful incredulity.

In the old tales the hero and the heroine always married and lived happily ever afterward, and this strange episode in my own career shall end as so many other stories have ended—to the sound of wedding-bells. Their happy riot has long since sunk into silence; but I know that so far peace and honored usefulness and deep content follow their music. The wedding was a very quiet affair, indeed, as it was long since arranged it should be. There were not more than half a dozen people present at it as spectators. Delamere gave away the bride, and Sebastian was there in his character of friend of the family. Sebastian, by the way, brought the only strange lady present. He had so far relented from his theory of beauty and utility as to sacrifice himself at the shrine of a conspicuously plain and outrageously dollared young woman who came from Oleoville, Pa. She was related to the Dodges there, and,

as everybody knows, the Dodges are financially big fish even among the biggest.

I was particularly pleased to get a visit from MacIlray on the very morning of the wedding, as I was in the act of dressing for the ceremony. I saw him in my dressing-room for an instant, and he was pleasantly excited by the news I had to give him.

"Ah'm glad," said McIlray, "that the good lad is going to be happy. I'll tell ye! Ef I may be permitted, I'll just get away to the church, and have a look at the ceremony from the gallery."

He made his way thither, and when the wedding was over, and the hand-shakings and congratulations were all over likewise, and the wedded pair had been driven away, I found him waiting at the church door for me. There was no wedding-breakfast, for Pole had too active a horror of the possibilities of Delamere's eloquence on such an occasion to endure more than the bare prospect of it. I know this to have been the working factor in his mind, and in all seriousness I am not disposed to be surprised at his decision.

I should have been glad to meet McIlray at any time, for I had learned to have a genuine regard for him. But with Pole and Mary gone I felt lonely and a little dispirited, and he came doubly welcome. We sat and talked about the chase in Paris, and I told him something of what had happened since.

Then the conversation languished for a time, until his old unconscious watch-cry broke the silence. It sounded to me, in an odd way, as if there were a philosophy in it, as if it even reconciled discrepancies, and expressed a sort of wisdom of generality in little.

"Ay, ay, Denham," said McIlray. "Ay, ay, lad! Ay, ay!"

THE END.

We Use Soap.

DISTORTED HANDS

will surely come to those who clean house and wash clothes in the old-fashioned way—with soap. How can it be otherwise? You rub—rub—rub, and you ache—ache—ache. You spend hours inhaling the hot steam and odors which rise from the tub, impregnated with the filth of soiled clothing, and with all this you have not obtained the best results.

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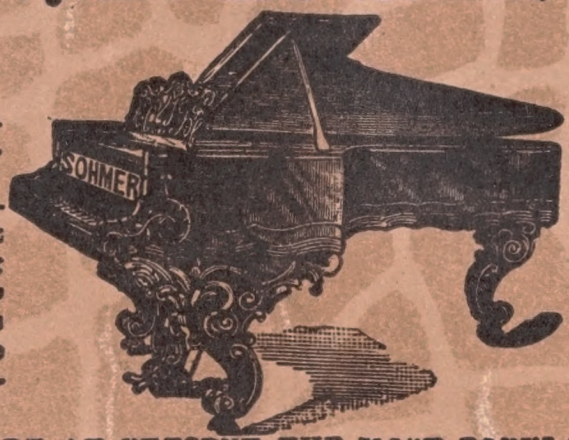

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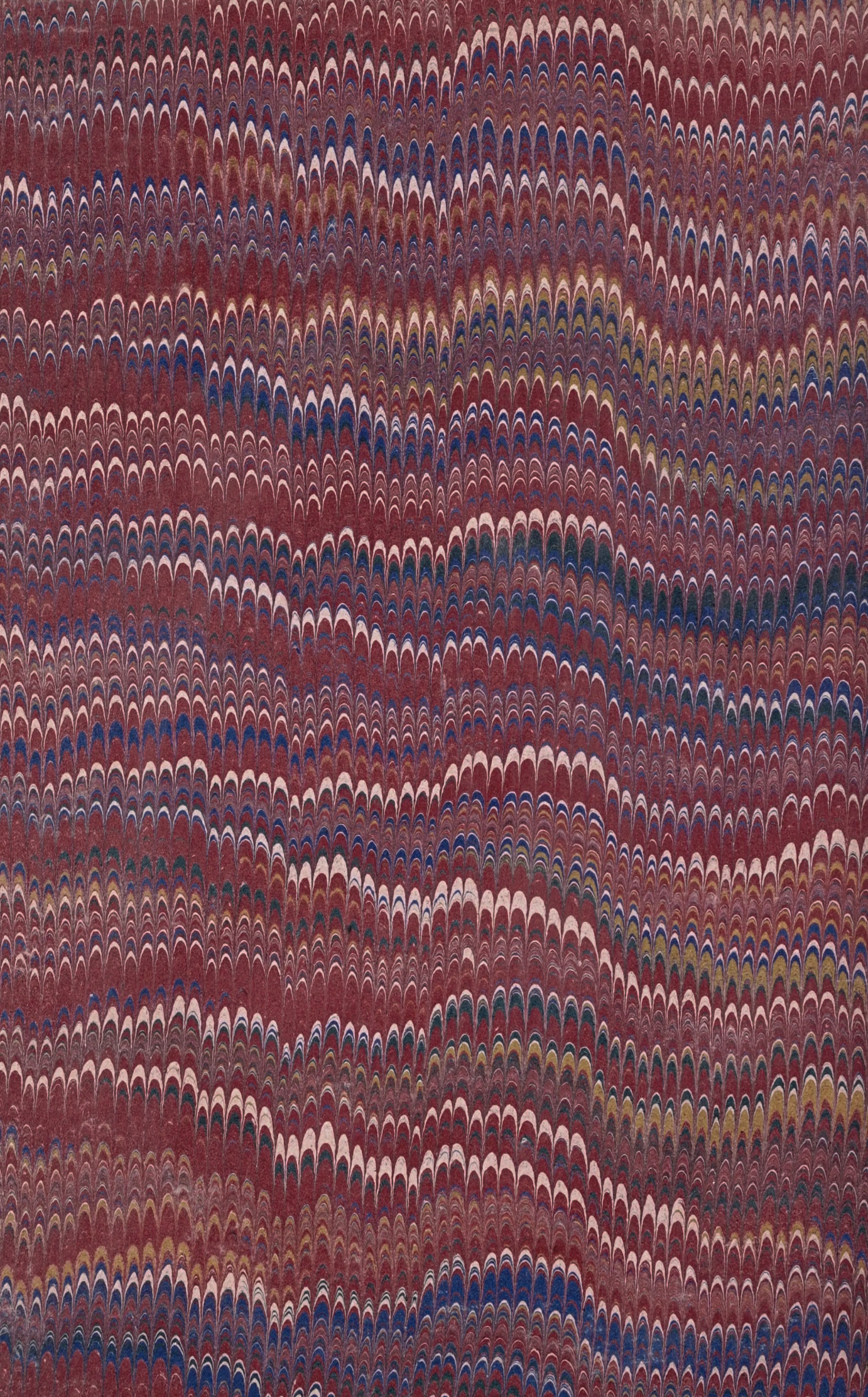

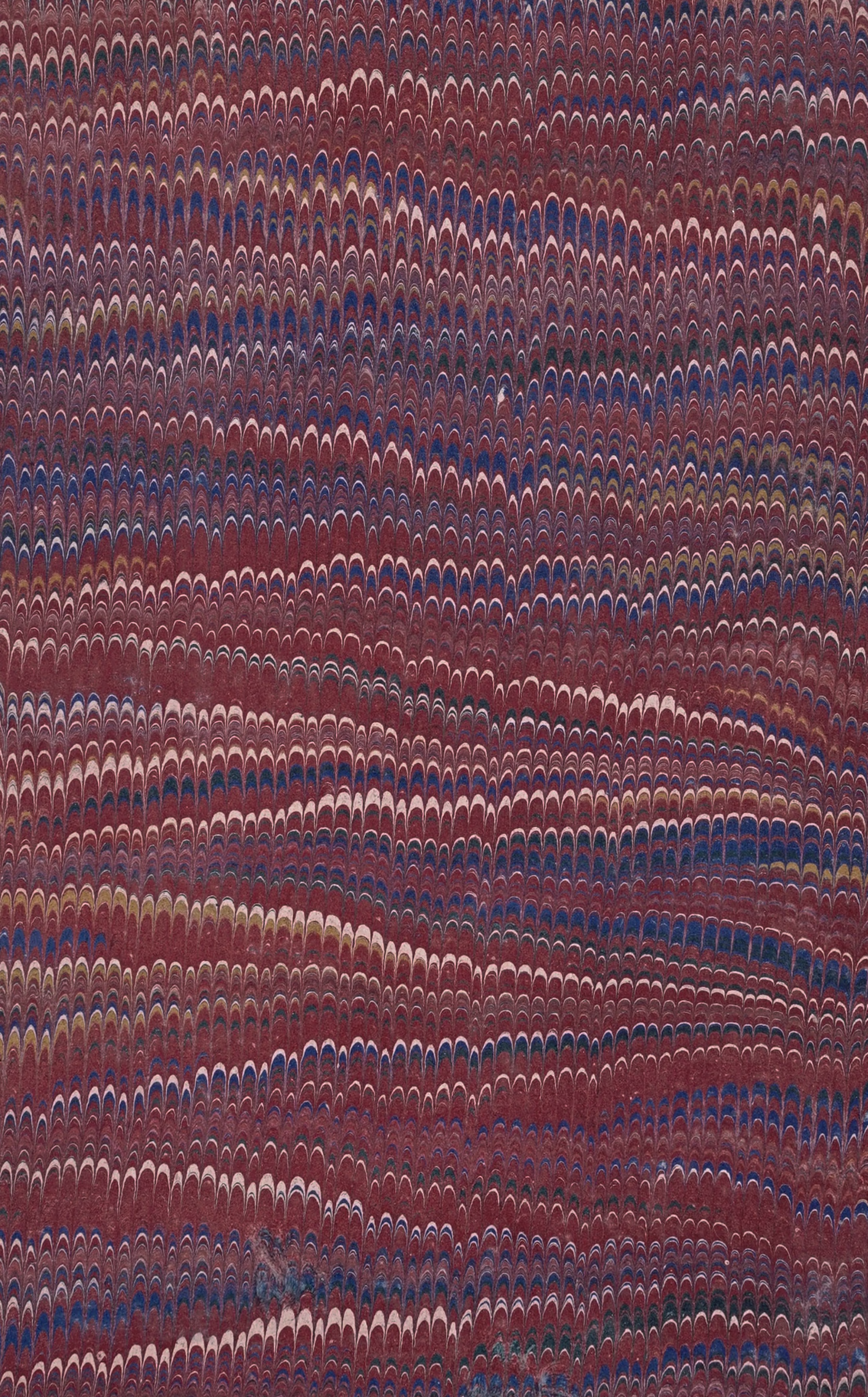

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