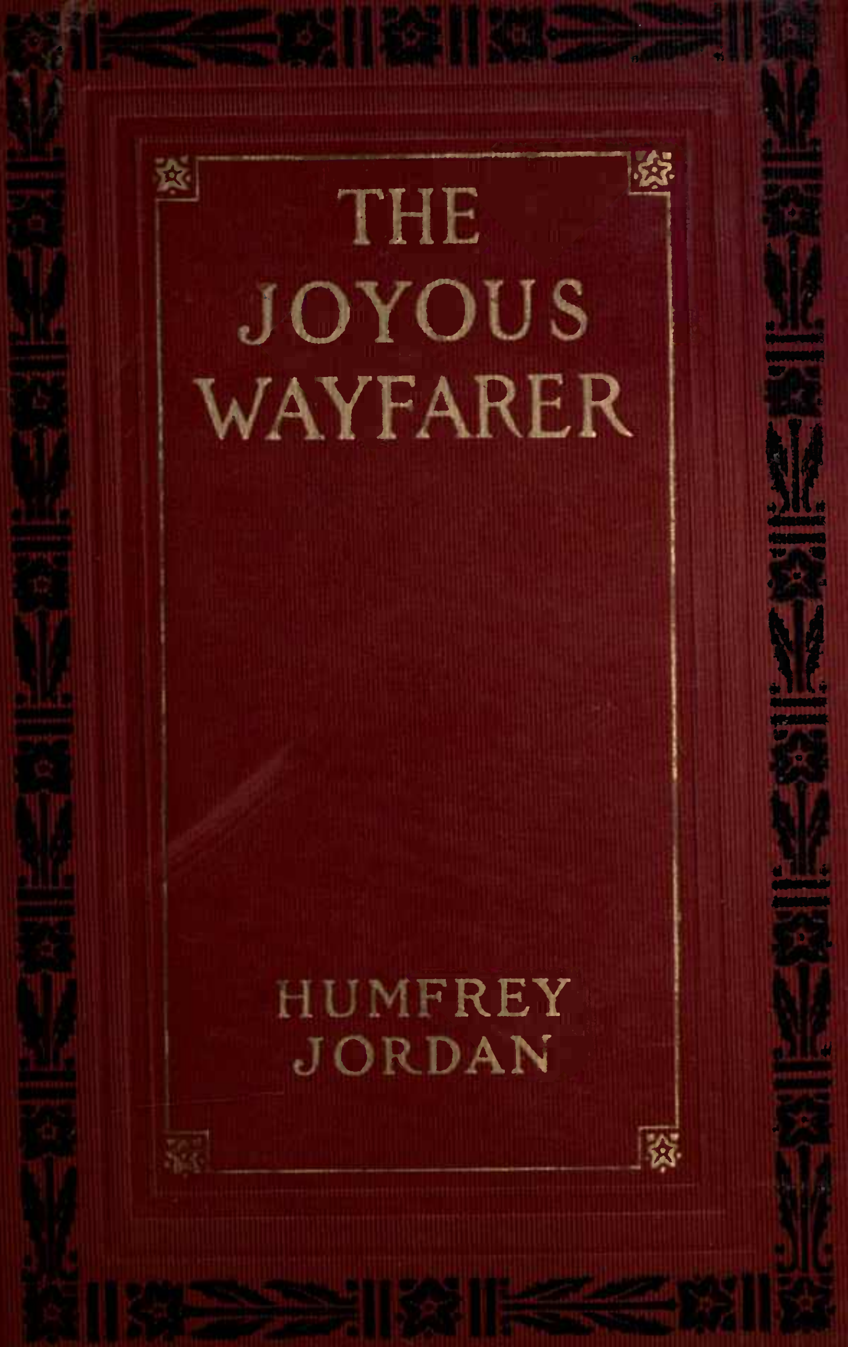

THE JOYOUS WAYFARER

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The Joyous Wayfarer

By

Humfrey Jordan

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1912

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The Knickerbocker Press, New York

To

A. R. J.

THAT IT MAY HELP

TO KEEP GREEN THE MEMORY OF PLEASANT WEEKS

OF WANDERING IN BURGUNDIAN VALLEYS

THIS TALE IS DEDICATED

BY HIS BROTHER

THE AUTHOR

2136394

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The Joyous Wayfarer

The Joyous Wayfarer

CHAPTER I

A FOOL AND SOME OF HIS FOLLY

I FIRST met Kenneth Louis St. Cyprien Massingdale—"a name," its owner will tell you, "that bespeaks the most unseemly irresponsibility on the part of the godparents"—at Cambridge, where he was a year my junior. He was then, as he is now, very far removed from the conventional type; he did not pose at all; was moved to much mirth at the talk and manners of the body of self-proclaimed æsthetes, at the time fairly numerous; and said little or nothing about painting, neither announcing nor suggesting that he could paint or had ever wished to do so. He was very popular—indeed, I can scarcely imagine him otherwise—but he was not the man with whom the average undergraduate could arrive at any real intimacy. Outside of rowing, which is the only athletic performance I have ever seen him take part in, he had little in common with most of us. His ways had not been ours, and most men, I am inclined to think, saw that his interest in the affairs of the place was carefully assumed, which discovery is likely to arouse suspicion in any community. I do not fancy that, except to myself and to a man named Denton, who died in Egypt two years after we went down, he ever, during this time, communicated his real thoughts to any one. To the most of his Cambridge acquaintance he is probably remembered as a brilliant talker, who was seldom if ever serious, who, but only very rarely, would explode with unexplained outbursts of praise or denunciation.

I need scarcely describe his appearance; it is well known. When he came up to Cambridge he was very little different from what he is to-day. He was perhaps half an inch shorter, though now he is scarcely over the middle height; his face was just as thin as it is to-day; he was very neatly made on fine lines; his hair light brown and very wiry, the years have done little to it except to add some grey; his eyes just the same as now, wide-set, deep-sunk, blue, with many changing expressions to be read in them, the most expressive feature of a face that has always failed to hide its moods.

His manner is, without a doubt, much altered, and that along lines that are not frequently traversed in the journey to middle age; he has taken the opposite direction to that of most of us. His whole behaviour is, even now, much less restrained than it was at Cambridge; he is not less responsible, for since he has never been anything but irresponsible, that could not be, but his speech is less guarded, his whole attitude more free and natural. I do not think that this repression which marked his undergraduate years was due to self-consciousness, I believe it to have been engendered of the place. The three years which he spent at the university were, I am convinced, although he has spoken little to me on the subject, far from being loved by him; he extracted from them, as he has extracted from all the phases of his life, much interest and no mean amount of pleasure, but the existence was not one that appealed to him, the bonds, official, social, and scholastic, galled him very much indeed.

His childhood had been more lonely than is common: Captain Massingdale, his father, had spent most of his son's boyhood at sea; Mrs. Massingdale had died in giving him birth; he was the only child. Most of his holidays had been passed under the care of relations of whom he was not fond. He left school very young, when he was just sixteen, and went to live with his mother's family in France; after a year of French domestic life he went to Paris, his father having a fixed determination that the boy should be taught independence as soon as might be; there for a matter of two years he lived the life of a Sorbonne student, nominally studying the humanities, in reality working with a great enthusiasm at painting. In the middle of his nineteenth year Captain Massingdale came to visit him; he was entertained by his son with every circumstance of care. I have it from both of them that the first fortnight of the visit was exceedingly pleasantly spent. Captain Massingdale found Kenneth already very well informed on many subjects, a surprisingly agreeable companion for his years, and very well capable of looking after himself; being a man of much discretion and no Puritan, he did not inquire too strictly into his son's habits, but was content to inform himself, without ostentatious questioning, that the boy came to no real harm. So the pair of them set about taking a fair toll of the spring's enjoyment in the good city on the Seine.

I know of few men more open to finding enjoyment in things which are strange to them than Captain Massingdale; I know of no other man more capable of leading any one to the pleasant passage of most delightful hours than Kenneth Louis St. Cyprien; therefore, on no other evidence, I would assume that holiday to have been well spent. Both of them knew Paris, which is essential if it is to be properly enjoyed; both of them spoke French with much facility, Captain Massingdale because he had married a French wife, and had been much in France and French-speaking countries, Kenneth because he has French blood, and good blood, in his veins, and also because he has the gift of tongues. So, in their quest of pleasure—"a diurnal scattering of much gold," Massingdale once named it —they attended one night a *soirée* given by Jean Sébastien Loissel to his pupils, of whom, unofficially, Massingdale was one. The evening began with promise; there were many distinguished persons present; the whole company was set upon enjoyment; Monsieur Loissel, a model of gentle courtesy, saw to it that his guests found something to their taste, cards, music, what they would. About midnight Yvonne Carrel came from the Opéra Comique and sang "*Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix*," and Massingdale, much to the amusement of his father, forced his way through the crowd and spoke to her, letting formal introductions go by the board. What he said I do not know, but Captain Massingdale informs me that she sat with the boy for an hour on a sofa in a corner, and that afterwards she spoke of him as an "*enfant dont on parlera plus tard.*" Of the lady Massingdale himself says little, except that she could have brought laughter or tears from the rocks of a desert, had she sung to them. She was, then, not less fair to look at, I understand, was Yvonne, than she is now, and she made smaller use of paint and powder.

In the small hours of the morning, when his duties as host gave him for the moment some quiet, Loissel fell into confidential talk with Captain Massingdale. The good man has affirmed that his intentions were of the best, that what he said was meant to help a pupil of whom he had hopes. He began, it seems, with a little flattery. I can picture him as he talked, standing in his favourite attitude, his legs wide apart, his head somewhat on one side as if he surveyed an easel, plucking at his beard—then not quite white—with his left hand, tapping, every now and again, his listener on the waistcoat with his right. Having inquired about the length of his guest's stay in Paris, and having got rid of other polite preliminaries of the same nature, he turned the talk to painting; he would have Captain Massingdale's advice. Could Monsieur le Capitaine inform him what was the dominant shade of colour when the fog was heavy in La Manche—for his part the true shade had always escaped him? Loissel asking for instruction in the painting of the sea! It may seem that the flattery would be at once detected, but Captain Massingdale has since informed me that, though he realised the complete impossibility of his teaching the master anything that he did not already know about the changing face of waters, he was none the less flattered on that account. After the conversation had settled somewhat on the subject of painting, Loissel made his point.

"Tell me, monsieur," he asked, "when will your son let alone these other subjects which cut into his time, and set to work seriously? Oh, believe me, monsieur, I am not of those who can tolerate a man who is ignorant of every subject but his own. I would have him well informed. But, *le petit* Louis, he will instruct himself. Not a doubt, monsieur. And, now, he is not altogether ignorant. But the life's work, it is never too early to commence that. It is not long, monsieur, our life, and for the painter there is very much to learn. Surely he should begin, seriously, at once?"

Captain Massingdale knew that his son had a fondness for what, in the family, was termed drawing; proofs of this inclination to the arts had, during ten years and more, reached him in all quarters of the globe, and many of those childish drawings are still preserved. He knew, moreover, that the boy was in many ways different to his contemporaries in England; that here was a painter in the making, had, however, never occurred to him. Like many laymen, Captain Massingdale had always imagined that talent in the artist must strike the public from the outset, that in his first sketch, his first poem, or his first story, the beginner, who should afterwards succeed, would make plain the stuff of which he was made; whereas, I have noticed for myself, and have taken pride at my perspicacity therein, and I have also been assured by the initiated, that the gold is most commonly more than half concealed beneath the dross of want of training, and that in the first stages the public is more than likely to miss the good and praise the bad. Such easy mastery of technicalities as leads to the immature production of pretentious work is, they tell me, the worst danger in the path of the apprentice.

Captain Massingdale having a considerable fondness for the arts, and, also, priding himself somewhat on his taste in such matters, not seeing, as he thought, a chance of his son becoming a great painter, was duly astonished at the talk of his becoming a painter at all. Being, however, capable of facing an unexpected situation without obvious hesitation, he endeavoured to gain some further information from Loissel, without letting him know that he now heard of the project for the first time. So he questioned the old man about his son's chances of success. Loissel, whose reputation for generosity and for kindness to the struggling artist is surely not unearned—how many men owe all they have to his timely help and praise, is his secret, which we shall never know—has learned the lesson of the frequent fall of hopes; he has seen many tall ships, which left the stocks amid congratulations, and afterwards set sail with every circumstance of promise, flags flying, all taut and trim, founder before ever they came to port; and having seen these things, he will speak little of the future. Therefore, Captain Massingdale got small assurance out of him except that there was promise, that, beyond a doubt, one had the right to found hopes.

"Monsieur," he concluded, when he was forced to end the conversation and bid good-bye to guests who left, "it is impossible to say; you must see that, you who follow the sea. Yet you would not hesitate to risk your life—and to give it, monsieur—in the hope that you might serve your Queen; would you deny that your son should risk his life, for failure is surely the loss of all that makes life good, in the service that he has chosen?"

And with that he moved away.

Which was the end of the pleasant holiday in Paris. For when Captain Massingdale has once come to a decision he takes a deal of shifting; and he had decided that no son of his should risk his life on such a slender chance. Next morning, I understand, there was much facing of the situation. Captain Massingdale would have no talk of the profession of painting, and argued that he had been treated unfairly in hearing of it, in the first instance, from a stranger; Kenneth answered with the plea that he waited to see what he could do before speaking, and that he had paid a decent attention to the humanities. Then followed a long, and, I am inclined to think, rather bitter dispute. Captain Massingdale offered his son the choice of any other profession, and, the selection going by default, chose the Bar; Kenneth meeting the decision with a fine array of arguments. After his usual method, Massingdale left the chief point in his case untouched, assuming that his father already realised that the first aim of his existence was to become a painter; he assailed with much vehemence every imaginable weakness of every other calling, made out, apparently, that life was a sort of desert where dwelt all mortals except those happy few who adorned canvases in the one oasis, yet said never a word of the artist-fever which consumed him. Consequently, Captain Massingdale not unnaturally assumed that the glamour of the life called to him, and that the life's work was little heeded.

At the end of two or three days, when neither of them could say a word that they had not already said about the matter, a settlement was come to—of necessity on Massingdale's part. He was left in Paris for six weeks until—the irony of the thing seems to have appealed to his sense of humour—after an examination for which he was entered at the Sorbonne; that finished he was to return to England, and, the following October, to go up to Cambridge and read for the Bar.

When his father had left Paris, he returned to his room on the fifth floor of a small hotel in the Rue de Monsieur le Prince; previously the father and son had been together at the Continental. There for ten days he nursed his trouble in solitude, shunning old Loissel and the studio, and working, spasmodically, at the examination subjects to give himself occupation and a change of thought; finally he could stand the thing no longer, and rushed off to find sympathy and advice. He found

Loissel alone, smoking and reading, for the old man had a peculiar fancy for remaining, sometimes two hours or more, after the pupils had gone; on the days when he came to the studio he seemed loth to leave it. Loissel has never spoken to me of the interview; Massingdale, not more than once or twice, and then vaguely. He tells me that he was very hysterical, but that Loissel let him rave until he was tired; that they then both sat silent, he somewhat embarrassed after the recent display; finally, in his quiet, kindly voice the old man gave his advice. It was simple.

"Obey your father," he advised. "Go to this English university, and take your degree there. Become a barrister—we will call that worldly wisdom, my child—attempt to make your living as they wish. If then, when you are no longer a boy, you cannot desert the mistress, come back and I will help you. If you come back, you may make an artist, if not—then you have escaped being a failure. You should thank these tears, they will help you."

And since Loissel would not go back on his decision, Massingdale, thinking himself deserted by all men, left the studio and wandered the streets, miserable, for some hours. Then, hunger overcoming his restlessness, he went and dined at his favourite restaurant, a little place of, it seems to me, no particular merit, where since then he has often taken me; got maudlin over his wine; and was finally put to bed, very drunk, by kindly disposed friends. He was then nineteen.

Under the circumstances it is not very surprising that he failed to discover the best of that which Cambridge has to offer; to appreciate the place one must go there straight from school; to wander, although it be only a very little way, and then to come back, is to miss the chance of much. It is a point which we seldom discuss, he and I, for I love the old town, and hate to hear it badly spoken of; he does not. He was, as I have said, popular; though never intimate with the other men, it was with the fellows that he had a quarrel that could not be hid. I knew, as every man in the college knew, that for some reason which did not seem apparent, he had a peculiar dislike to these harmless, and, sometimes, hard-working gentry. He never fell foul of them, his relations with them were invariably polite, yet, as far as I can recollect, he had not a good word to say to them as a body, though he admitted that their number included certain passable individuals. He said very little, at that time, directly on the subject, but he made no attempt to disguise his feelings, and it was not until the end of the Lent Term of his last year that I really gathered some idea of the state of his feelings.

The cause of the outburst which gave me some understanding of Massingdale's state of mind was his cousin, the Rev. Arthur Sidney Magram-Coke, fit cause for any outburst, however violent. This gentleman, who was dean of the college at the time, had a very beautiful appearance, of which he was disgustingly proud; he might have sat, supposing the artist had not been too critical of detail, for the portrait of an effeminate medieval saint. His hands and feet were small; his figure was slim, and he dressed very carefully; his hair was grey, and waved with the utmost care; his expression was pious and bland, and bore traces of a permanent sorrow, nobly borne—induced, I suppose, by the manifold sins of the world; he had a vile trick of turning up his eyes—another manifestation of his saintly character; affected a stoop, sacerdotal I fancy he would call it; and should have grown a moustache to hide—here I shall be given the lie by many women—an abominably sensual mouth. A truly estimable character, with, which seems extraordinary, great prospects in his profession.

One Sunday night after hall Massingdale came into my rooms. He had been to chapel, since he was going to town the next day and did not wish to be gated. He had been walking the streets for the last hour or so, and had not dined. Previously I had never seen him so excited; for he burst into his subject without a word of preface, and paced up and down the room kicking anything that got in his way.

"You were n't in chapel," he began, stuttering with excitement; "you did n't hear my beautiful cousin give forth some of his most cherished beliefs. 'What a privilege it must be to know him, and how proud you must be of his relationship!' Do you know, Dick, a good woman told me that the other day. I said that I could not claim to know him, and that I tried not to think of the relationship. She probably thought me an impertinent and stupid boy. Good God! how does the man impose on them? Why, in the name of decency, do they allow him to open his mouth in public? A community that had any glimmerings of good sense would sign him up, and lock him in an asylum as a dangerous lunatic. An——"

"What," I asked, shouting to make myself heard, "is his latest iniquity?"

Massingdale stopped in the middle of the room, and stared at me; I believe that he had certainly forgotten my presence, for he was silent a moment before answering.

"Of course, you were n't there," he answered, beginning to walk again, but speaking very quietly. "I will tell you what he said. I can remember the words, and the air which accompanied their delivery. He was vomiting I don't know what foolishness; I was thinking of other things, when he paused. That attracted my attention. Then he uttered this remarkable sentiment: 'I am convinced that a child, no matter how tender its years, is capable of committing a mortal sin; although its action may be unconscious it may still transgress the laws of God, and, but for the sacrifice of Christ, would be damned through all eternity.' He said that, Dick, he said it clearly and distinctly; and I am sure that for some inconceivable reason he wished us to think that he believed it. Whether he does believe it or not is all one; that he says it is the crime. They punish people for theft and murder, but surely theft and murder are small things compared with the preaching of such a thing as that. Supposing he lives some time, and during his evil lifetime gives tongue to such doctrines, it is quite possible that he will meet with two or three half-witted people who will believe the things he says. Don't you think, that to make a mother believe such things as that is worse than murder? Don't you think, that to make any one believe that senseless little babies are on the same moral level as the most refined and callous criminals, as the Rev. Arthur Sidney Magram-Coke, is an action for which any punishment is too small?"

I did not answer him; he would not have heard my reply, for he sat on the table, staring at the fire, and was concerned with nothing but his own thoughts. I was quite well occupied with watching him. It occurred to me as extraordinary that any man should get so excited about the opinions expressed in a sermon; I had not come into any close relationship, at that time, with people whose feelings ran as strongly as his did, who, moreover, did not attempt to hide them.

He sat on the table with his legs swinging, and his eyes were extraordinarily bright and animated; it must have been some minutes before he spoke again, when, it seemed to me, he had run off on to a new subject.

"There is something wrong with the whole lot of them," he announced suddenly. "Their view is so narrow that they never see anything at all in proper perspective; not even their own work, for they each think that the most important thing on earth. They are flattered and pampered, and each man has his little title and his own particular position in the pretty ceremonies, and all they ever want to do is to take the place of the man above them, or to gain more attention in the miserable world in which they move."

"Are 'they' the fellows and dignitaries of this ancient institution?" I asked. "Because, if so, are n't you making the case a bit steep? They are a very decent crowd on the whole."

This remark of mine seemed to arouse him instead of bringing him to quieter views. He sprang up with a positive shout, and put the thing far more strongly than before.

"They are not. Thunder of heaven, man, they are awful. They will discuss anything on earth—from the academic standpoint. They will discuss war, and art, and morality, as if they were in a lecture room. They assume the most impossible airs of being broad-minded men of the world, and they talk as if men's lives were ordered on some plan which was never forsaken, as if under the storm of passion all their pet ideas did n't get whirled away. If a man speaks in an educated fashion,—what they call educated,—gives some sort of logical reason for the things he does, assumes that everything he has never seen or heard of is unworthy of attention, and acts with a strict regard to academic etiquette, they call him an able man and a credit to the university; if, being sane, some poor devil, whom they know, departs from their traditions, grabs at living with both hands, not with one soft and clammy paw, and with the blood stirring in him blunders on as he best can, they look upon him as a scandal and a failure. They will probably praise Coke's infernal sermon, saying that he argued his point in scholarly fashion. Even if they are professed agnostics, and do not admit the proofs which he used, even if they are decent, kindly sort of men in their home life, they will say that he justified himself by the Book of Hezekiah, or something, and that it was admirably worked out. They won't even notice the damned immorality of the muck he talked."

"You don't seem to like them," I suggested, for he appeared to have finished. "You 'll have a bit of a job reforming them."

"We are not taking it on," he announced, with one of the sudden changes of manner which belonged to him. "We are leaving them all alone in about three months. Now turn out what food you have got; I 'm fearful hungry."

While we dined off bottled beer and potted meat and marmalade, he entertained me with the account of an evening he had spent at an inn in the fens. "I was very generous," he insisted, "with beer. I spent all my money filling the natives up—a hopeless task—in order that they should be in a condition to hear me sing. I then asked the fattest man in the room if he could sing 'Excelsior'; he said he could. I bargained for the 'lifeless yet beautiful he lay' part; he said we had to sing it together; so we began. The company was transported with joy, though, such is the ingratitude of these human barrels, the fat man said I came in too soon each turn and spoilt his chances. How could I know, Dick, never having sung 'Excelsior' before? It 's a devilish tricky thing, although it 's so funny."

He talked in his usual inconsequent and voluble manner for the rest of the evening, yet I am certain that Magram-Coke's sermon was constantly annoying him, and I fancy that, if any one were to mention the subject to him now, there would be another outburst.

When, the following June, he went down for good, he insisted upon celebrating the occasion by a dinner at which Denton and I were the only guests. He said little on the topic, inevitable on such an occasion, of the past three years, but when the port was put on the table, proposed an appropriate toast: "The ending of a stage." He was a lover of phrases. I think, however, that he viewed the ending of this stage with very different feelings to either Denton or myself.

Here, then, at the outset, is a man richly equipped with qualities that cause other men to read him wrongly, or, often, not to read him at all, qualities that have very commonly earned him the title of fool. A charming fool, a lovable fool, a good fool, a weird sort of ass, an unprincipled idiot, according to the style and sex of those who named him, but, until the public was given to understand that *La Femme* is a masterpiece, a picture with not many peers, he was most frequently termed fool; now he is called genius. But they have not altered their opinion, the people who talk of him but do not know him, they have only followed a fashion in the matter of a title, and, in fairness, one can scarcely blame them; the man who lives his life in a different world to his neighbours, must not put in a claim to be called their compatriot, and fool and genius are often applied with much the same significance when they refer to character.

CHAPTER II

OF A LAWYER'S MANY OCCUPATIONS

FOR a couple of months after we went down I saw nothing of Massingdale; he spent most of the summer wandering about France. I had one letter, written, it seemed to me, in excellent spirits, from Cluny, but I have never ascertained where he was during the most part of the holiday. Just before coming back to London he paid a flying visit to Malta to see his father, and arrived home a day or two before the Courts opened after the vacation. We had, very luckily, managed to get chambers in the Temple, two sets of attics on the top floor of the same staircase in Brick Court; the quarters might have been more convenient, but as far as the situation is concerned I maintain that we could scarcely have done better. The fashionable man about town may view the locality as altogether outside consideration, but for men who are not fashionable and, happily, never will be, the place has many things to recommend it. Work can be done there amid pleasanter, and most certainly quieter, surroundings than are to be found in any other place in London of equal handiness. Personally, I have no fancy for a journey either by train or any other conveyance before I get to my work in the morning; the farthest that I wish to go, if the thing can possibly be so arranged, is down a staircase and across a court.

So Massingdale and I settled down to our apprenticeship at the Bar with all the fitting hopes that attend persons in that condition. I speak for myself in this: my hopes, I will maintain, were probably identical with those of any other man who has taken up the Bar as a profession; as far as Massingdale was concerned, I can only say that he had the appearance of being interested in the business, which means very little since he could, and did, simulate interest in anything on which he was engaged. He did his work in chambers, and later he awaited fortune and the goodwill of the solicitors with the outward signs of enthusiasm in his profession; he gained, I am inclined to think, some knowledge of the workings of the law; but that he ever really considered the business as a serious occupation I am not, in the light of after happenings, ready to allow. However, of Massingdale as barrister-at-law no one would wish to hear; certainly I am not disposed to supply information on the subject.

His life during the time that he was my neighbour in Brick Court was, apart from his professional occupations, altogether different from that of the rest of us. As a first point, his rooms were furnished unlike any others with which I am acquainted in the Temple; this may, possibly, seem a small matter; to me it appears as very important. When a man takes over an empty apartment and furnishes it, being the possessor of sufficient money to obey the chief commands of his taste in the matter of its equipment, he exhibits in the result a very reliable guide to his character. Massingdale's sitting-room—he used only one—was certainly very representative of its tenant's personality. It was a decent-sized room and panelled; the panelling had been painted cream colour as the place was dark, and at this choice on the part of a former occupant Massingdale was wont to rave; I had great difficulty in persuading him not to have it scraped. Round three sides of the room, except where the door and the fireplace cut into it, there was fixed to the wall a broad and very comfortable sofa —a divan, Massingdale called it, and begged others, in the name of accuracy, to do the same. Above this divan there were shelves, containing a curious collection of volumes, some of them being of value, others, so far as I could ever make out, of no conceivable use or interest, which, since it was one of the principles of the owner never to sell a book, and since his purchases were many and varied, is not surprising. The particular virtue of this arrangement of shelves and sofa was pointed out to every one who frequented the apartment at all constantly. "You don't have to bring the book you want to a chair, or a chair to the shelf," Massingdale would explain, "which is a great thing; besides the fact that it does away with chairs, which in most rooms are an abominable nuisance." The floor was waxed and polished and had some very handsome rugs spread on it; there was placed, at right angles to the window so that any one wishing to write at it had to sit on the divan at the side of the fireplace, a heavy oak table of the Jacobean period; later, owing to the serious complaint of friends, two huge grandfather arm-chairs were introduced, and a small grand piano also appeared. With that you have the main furnishings of the room; into this strange apartment no other piece of any considerable size was admitted. Above the book-shelves there stood or hung many odds and ends that he had picked up, or that his father had sent to him; and a single picture hung over the chimney-piece—a sketch by Loissel of wet sands at ebb-tide, with the sea beyond wind-swept and foam-flecked. On ordinary occasions the room was lighted by electric lamps, well shaded; on festive occasions, which was often, by candles in silver sticks.

So much, therefore, for the house. It may be that this lengthy description of it will be considered out of place; I, who knew it well, think differently: it is a setting which should not be ignored when the tenant is remembered.

Almost immediately on his return from Malta I noticed a change in Massingdale's manner; he seemed much less cramped than before, and far less careful about following the traditions of the neighbourhood, which I am prepared to grant were not so rigid as those of Cambridge. He wandered much in the out-of-the-way parts of London, and would often appear in my rooms some time after midnight for the ostensible reason of smoking a last pipe before bed; on such occasions he frequently prolonged the sitting for an hour or more, discussing some chance encounter that he had experienced in his walk, or talking eagerly of any other matter that was uppermost in his mind at the moment. Although I sometimes went to bed, and left him smoking in front of my fire, I cannot say that I resented the way in which he made my rooms the last house of call in his evening's entertainment, or that I did not look forward to these hours of his excited, exaggerated talk. I always had the refuge of bed, but I did not often avail myself of it.

One night about Christmas-time he disturbed me shortly after midnight, just as I was about to turn in. He came in suddenly without knocking, after his usual habit, not quietly, for I never knew him to enter a room without noise; he stood with the door open, and his hand on the door-knob.

"God rest you, Richard Crutchley," says he solemnly.

I told him to shut the door.

"I have hopes," he went on, doing what I asked, "that the high gods will vouchsafe us a real Christmas. Look here." He held up his overcoat, which was covered with snow, then threw it on to a chair. "That is one of the advantages of those abominable things," he announced, referring to the chair; "they get in the way, but you can put things on them. Dick, I met a philosopher this evening. Oh! but a tattered philosopher."

"From what I can judge, you seem to be making a habit of it," I answered, pouring him out some whisky. "Say when."

"Enough!" he told me, and launched into his tale. "A transcendental philosopher, *mon vieux*. A rogue who, in one simple phrase, epitomised the great problems of life. I met him on the Embankment; he made the usual request in a beautiful Scots voice. It was so beautiful that I gave him sixpence. 'I suppose,' says I, 'that you will spend that on whisky.' 'Ay, mon, but you 're mistaken,' says he. 'Not a' the saxpence. I 'll just be spending tuppence on bread. Whusky is nigh wasted on an empty stomach.' *Ciel*, what wisdom! I have found a creed by which to guide my erring life. No more shall I be tempted to spend all my sixpence on whisky, tuppence shall go first to fill my belly. Deny yourself something of the things you want that the remainder may be the better enjoyed. Be a Spartan this minute that you may be a better Sybarite the next. O excellent Scotsman! O wise knave! Dick, I asked him up to my rooms, but he was suspicious and would not come. Do you think he suspected me, his humble follower, of the impertinence of offering him a sermon?"

"He probably suspected you of being drunk," I answered. "But you did n't seriously propose bringing him up here?"

"Not here," he assured me, stretching himself out in an arm-chair. "I respected your peculiar prejudice. But why not to my own rooms? He would have amused me; he had the cut of a man who would have given me a good half-hour. But he refused to come; yet I promised him both bread and whisky."

"Good Lord," I murmured, "there seems no limit to your madness."

At that he sat up like a man who has a pin sticking into him.

"Madness!" he shouted, waving his glass of whisky so that I thought he would empty the contents into the fire. "Go to bed, you lump of convention; lay yourself down and fill the night with placid snores; pillow your head on a treatise on the law of torts; and refrain from speaking to your betters. Madness! Thousand devils, he calls me mad because I exhibit some slight courtesy to an old, drunken, Scots philosopher, clad like a mechanic, who has given me the best advice that I have had for years. Creature of no perception, my spirit is at rest—to-night. I will spend tuppence of my life upon the law, that presently I may the better enjoy the whisky of my desire. Crude worldling, go to bed."

We did not pursue the subject further, although I did not go to bed, for he suddenly turned to some other matter and discussed it with enthusiasm. However extravagant it may seem, I honestly believe that the chance words of the out-of-work mechanic had given him some comfort; yet I am equally certain that he had not intended to express himself so clearly. It was the first time that I had ever heard him, even indirectly, refer to the chance of his going back to painting. Whether these words of his caused me to attach significance to things that might otherwise have escaped my attention, I do not know, but I certainly noticed that he began to be careless of leaving artist material knocking about his room, and that he no longer concealed the fact that he knew something of the business of the painter. Sometimes I would disturb him making rough charcoal sketches of street scenes which had stuck in his memory; and on these occasions he would no longer throw the work down, and begin a conversation on some other topic, but would, as often as not, ask my opinion of the drawing, and then, before I could express my views, condemn the thing himself. "The mark of the beast is plain, Dick," he once told me. "I 'm a damned amateur—perhaps I always shall be."

Yet he did what he could to make something of his profession, and used to their full extent whatever chances came his way. When he got his first brief, the usual unimportant thing, he worked it up as if it had been of the utmost seriousness, and got himself into such a state of nervousness over the business that I was afraid that he would make a fool of himself. His manner in court, however, was perfectly self-possessed, and he won a doubtful case rather neatly. That night he insisted that I should dine with him at the Savoy, where he spent three times what the brief was marked, and talked an incredible amount of nonsense into the bargain. "It is a pity," he informed me as we left the table, "that no Lord Chancellor has, so far as I know, ever been an artist. I hate setting fashions." Yet, before we got back to the Temple he bet me five pounds that he would never succeed in earning a hundred a year at the Bar. I did not take him.

Soon after our first New Year's Day in Brick Court, he began the habit of entertaining an extraordinary assortment of odd characters on Saturday evenings. The circumstance brought him some local fame, and many men went to his rooms on these occasions to see the latest curiosity that he had collected. Any one, provided that he was polite to the rest of the company and did not give himself airs, was admitted; yet had Massingdale imagined that many of his guests viewed the others as a manner of show, there would have been the very devil to pay, and the rupture of several acquaintanceships. But he regarded it as so very natural a thing for a man to entertain any one, of any condition, who happened to appeal to him as an amusing companion, that he could not imagine that others would take a different view. Therefore, he offered his hospitality to a quaint mixture of classes and conditions, and played the host to a heterogeneous collection of guests without noticing the peculiar quality of the gathering.

When, or how, he managed to scrape acquaintance with many of the persons who came to his rooms, I do not know; it has, however, always seemed to me that the fact of his getting them together, and of setting them at their ease, is no small tribute to his character. Personally, I might follow in his footsteps all my days, and at the end signally fail to instil an appearance of comfort into myself, or my guests; I shall not, however, make the attempt.

Some of his disreputable companions I could not stand; some I admired; others bored me. I imagine that to all of them I appeared what I was, self-conscious and unnatural. There was, for instance, Ponterac, the *maître d'armes*, five foot six of rolling *r's* and bombast, a Gascon of the stage. I could not stand the man, and had much difficulty in maintaining any hold on politeness when he talked with me; his fantastic accounts of his father's wealth and position left me cold, and his inane manner, accompanied by much twirling of the moustache, of explaining his own importance, made me angry. Yet when I explained this to Massingdale he would only laugh at me. "If," he informed me, "you knew how to hold a foil, you would think better of friend Ponterac. He fences like a god, Dick. Much can be forgiven to genius; and with a sword he is a master. Besides, he is really a very good fellow." I am prepared to admit his swordsmanship; when he fences I admire him; my complaint is that any one should ever want to know him outside the Salle d'Armes. When he finished his visit to London and went back to Paris, I felt that my good name with Massingdale was in less danger.

But there were others with whom I was on different terms, whose acquaintance I was very glad to have: Mrs. George Brown, widow, who appeared very infrequently, and who taught singing under the style of Madame Bombadier, she looked on life with so much amusement, despite the deadly nature of her occupation, that a conversation with her put one in the best of tempers; Josef Armande Letiche, *ancien professeur de lycée*, now giving lessons in French and Latin at clients' houses, a fierce Royalist with an excellent taste in literature, and one of the mildest old gentlemen who ever earned a pittance; James Hopkins, commercial traveller, who, once he got over the desire to do business with chance acquaintances, was an amusing specimen of his tribe, and was admitted to Massingdale's rooms because he had once knocked down a carter who was ill-treating his horse. He must have been singularly bored with the nature of the entertainment, yet he came regularly. There were struggling artists and musicians, who came and went and brought their friends, whose business was often of the most sordid kind, though their hopes might have been high, who designed small advertisements and played in the lesser orchestras. Last, yet in his own estimation first, there was Hendick, a gentleman and a well-informed man, who was in the most violent stage of newly adopted socialistic proselytism. Hendick had a fine voice, and could sing good songs well; at times, moreover, he could be induced to forget his ideas of social reform; but a chance word would recall him to what, I imagine, he thought his duty, and the room would be filled with clamour, for his opponents, led by Massingdale, never shirked the battle. In the immediate vicinity of Massingdale's rooms, Hendick was not popular; his voice was very loud and harsh, except in singing, and carried after the fashion of a steam siren, so that in the small hours of morning our neighbours were often able to satisfy themselves as to his exact opinions. I have frequently done so from my own bed, with no satisfaction.

These peculiar gatherings once established, Massingdale seemed to find extraordinary pleasure in them, and every Saturday night, when he was in London, some of the mixed company might be found drinking and smoking and engaging in every possible variety of talk, in his rooms; as a concession to the "absurd habits" of the other residents in the inn, the host discouraged musical performances after one in the morning. On the whole, I would prefer to have sacrificed many things, besides an occasional hour of sleep, rather than to have missed many of those gatherings; although I am altogether incapable of organising, or of desiring to organise such meetings on my own account, they pleased me when I was a guest. More, they showed me Massingdale in a new light, which, I fancied, was worth the seeing. As he performed his duties, providing his guests with what they wanted in the matter of refreshment and, which is a very different thing, of talk, he showed as another person from the man I knew at Cambridge, or from the man who worked at the law; it was impossible to suppose that he would continue the absurd business much longer, and I grew interested to discover when the change would come, when he would go back to old Loissel and an easel.

Yet the months passed and no upheaval in his life occurred; he became more wrapped up in the strange society which he frequented, but he said nothing of giving up his profession of barrister. As I was very busy myself, doing all I could to make good the chances that had come my way, I did not see very much of him at this time, and accompanied him not more than once or twice into the queer places where he spent his evenings. His constitution must have been of iron, for he often returned at one or two in the morning, after spending many hours in Soho or some similar locality, and then sat down to work that had to be ready in a few hours; yet he rose early, and was usually smoking an after-breakfast pipe at eight-thirty. I told him that his habits were a disgrace, and that he would have to reform, whereat he laughed at me, and asked what was wrong with his health; but I fancy he was not sorry when the Long Vacation came round again. As soon as the Courts closed he was off to France, where he spent the whole vacation, "painting," he wrote to me, "with some approach to seriousness." I spent a fortnight with him at Avignon, and together we tramped much of the surrounding country. Whether it was the sun of the Midi, or whether it was the influence of the foregoing weeks upon him, I have no means of telling, but on this occasion he told me definitely that he would give up the Bar and try his fortune at the business that he loved, yet that when that would be he did not know.

"I spent a week with the governor at Toulon," he told me one day, as we took a midday siesta in the garden of a country inn. "The old man is dead against the business; refuses all supplies, if I give up the Bar. A most obdurate parent, Dick."

Since I did not reply to this, we sat silent, staring at the valley in front of us, and at the white, winding riband of the road. He suddenly returned to the subject again, but without his usual accompaniment of laughter, so that his tone disturbed me from a well-fed reverie, and fixed my attention on the man beside me. He sat with his arms on the wooden table, his pipe unlighted at his side, and there was something in his voice, and in his eyes which saw nothing of the scene before them, that brought me the sudden consciousness that here was no spoilt favourite of fortune, baulked of one of his pleasures, but a man distressed on a subject that went deeper than I could see.

"It is simple cowardice," said he, speaking, it seemed, half to himself. "I have n't the courage to face it. I 've always had money, and I 've never known want. I am not so ignorant of what the life means as to imagine that I can enter into the precious heritage at once; there would be years of poverty, where doubt of the end would make the burden heavier, before I could hope for calm water; there is the certainty that I should be a poor man all my life. It could never be a sort of golden vagabondage; there would be no coming back to the glass and silver, when the coloured table-cloth and the horn-handled knives seemed mean and ugly. Yet to be true to the faith one holds, to go the way of the instincts, to tread the road, however rough it be, that shows itself in dreams! Would n't any sane man do that? Would n't anything that had the effrontery to hold up its head among decent beings make the choice at once? Dick, I 'm a damned coward."

To such words there is no reply; a man feeling as Massingdale did must act alone, and, failing to act, suffer what I think he suffered. Others, as far as I see things, cannot serve him. So I murmured what I could, and he, being the last person to afflict others with his own troubles, resumed his normal manner, and on the tramp back to Avignon never left his hold of laughing talk.

But the thing stuck in my mind, and when he came back to Brick Court in the autumn, I had to check myself for fear of greeting him with a request for his decision. However, I forwent the temptation to interfere in matters which did not concern me, and we resumed the same existence that we had commenced a year before. I confess that I was somewhat irritated by the want of movement in the affair, and was, for a time, inclined to style Massingdale's wish to become a painter as a passing fancy, a thing that had no firm root. I, seeing half his trouble, fancied that I saw the whole, and was ready to agree with his own definition of the thing as cowardly; since, I have somewhat altered my opinion, and have come to the conclusion that the step he hesitated so long in making was one which no man, viewing the thing as seriously as he did, could take without proper consideration. To his artist-mind the chance that he should one day falter in the business, having embarked upon the enterprise, was a risk that he dared not undergo. Had he set out upon the road he saw in dreams, and then turned back because the way was too difficult, I imagine, knowing him as I do, that he would have lost the worth from life. He waited so long because he wished to make certain that there should be no breakdown farther on.

One important addition was made to the Saturday evening company that autumn: Yvonne Carrel joined the band. I had seen that she was advertised to sing at one of the music halls, and I had read something of a quarrel that she had had with the directors of the Opéra in Paris, but I did not expect to meet her in Brick Court. Massingdale had occasionally spoken about her, but I had no idea that the acquaintance which he had begun in Loissel's studio had ripened into such intimate friendship. I met her first in his rooms one Saturday night in early November; I had looked in about midnight and found the usual crowd assembled, Hendick being in particularly aggressive mood. The place was so thick with smoke that, coming from out-of-doors, I could hardly see; I sat down on the divan near the door, and, following the etiquette which ruled strictly, prepared to converse with my neighbour, whoever it might be. It was Yvonne Carrel, and Massingdale was sprawling on the other side of her.

"I did n't think we should see you to-night," said he; "I heard you were dining in polite society. Make yourself agreeable to Yvonne, while I go and get drinks."

I believe the name of Yvonne is not the most uncommon in France, so that the introduction left something to be desired, but I had seen Mademoiselle Carrel's photograph, and so was able to recognise her. Although she was thirty, perhaps older, she looked much younger; was not in any way made up, and conveyed, at the first glance, that impression of childhood which, through everything, she has maintained. She was very dark and slight and beautiful after a wild gipsy fashion, yet her face was too empty of everything but mere beauty of form to impress her attractions on the mind. When she spoke, more especially when she sang, she seemed another woman.

"You are Monsieur Crutchley?" she asked, beginning the conversation, as soon as Massingdale left us. "Ah, yes. Louis has told me much of you. You will some day do much at the profession of *avocat.*"

I murmured something appropriate, but she did not seem to require me to answer, for she asked a question without listening to what I said.

"Have you ever heard me sing?" she inquired, with a peculiar directness.

"Unfortunately, I have not," I answered.

"Then," she said with a smile, "I will sing to you, when the ardour of Monsieur—Hendick, is it not?—is less strong. People should hear me sing before they meet me, then they would like me better. I cannot talk."

So, as Massingdale came up with the drinks, she informed him that she was going to sing, and he, without a word, planted them on the floor, and went over to Hendick.

"Silence, madman!" he cried, seizing the socialist prophet by the shoulder. "Mademoiselle Carrel is going to sing, and you, unworthy tub-thumper, must play for her."

Upon which she sang to us; Hendick, who would assault the cherished traditions of mankind without a tremor, sweating with nervousness as he played. I do not know, and I care less, what the song she sang was called; it was some French ballad of which Massingdale had the music. A small thing of no particular merit, yet she gave it to us as I imagine the composer dreamed that it might be rendered, as, I am very certain, I shall not hear it sung again. Her voice was not large, considering her place in her profession, it had no amazing compass, yet it could express any emotion which she had ever felt, and she was not without emotions. I realised that what she had said was true; when people had heard her sing it would take much to make them think little of her. Hendick spoke no more of socialism that evening.

After that I saw a certain amount of Mademoiselle Carrel. She came occasionally, but not regularly, to the Saturday evenings, and fairly frequently to Massingdale's rooms at other times, to lunch or tea; also, on more than one occasion, I ran across her having supper with Massingdale at one of the quieter restaurants. Considering the amount of gossip of which she was the centre during her autumn season in London, I was interested to know Massingdale's opinion of her, and one day tackled him on the subject.

"I gather," I suggested, as we sat alone in my rooms one evening, "that you could correct certain of the accounts, and supply others."

"I have known her intimately for years," he told me quietly, "and even in face of the cross-examination of a rising lawyer I shall maintain the habit of those years."

I took the hint, and we discussed her no more. He had an admirable reserve in such matters, and, as he stated, he had known her some years, yet, until she came to London, had done no more than make an occasional and casual allusion to their acquaintanceship.

About this time Massingdale exhibited a painting in an autumn exhibition in Paris, a picture of a rock-strewn path near the Bas Bréau in the forest of Fontainebleau, and it entered into the critics' heads to say complimentary things of it, things perfectly justified, yet liable to do him much harm. He knew that the picture had some merit, and he was, not unnaturally, glad that its good points were recognised; at the same time he was somewhat taken with the impossible idea of combining the two professions of painting and of law. I urged that the Bar would go by the board; that solicitors did not want artists to represent their clients; that he would inevitably fail in both endeavours. Loissel, writing from Paris, put the matter more strongly; he had heard nothing of the possible compromise, but being a shrewd old fellow, and knowing the difficulties that faced Massingdale, he anticipated the evil. Massingdale showed me the letter; its meaning could not be mistaken. Loissel called him *insensé, fou, un drôle de petit idiot;* he denounced his picture in the exhibition as the work of an amateur who had not yet learned how to paint; he foretold ignominious failure, a pitiful prostitution of talent, if Massingdale did more work without finishing his apprenticeship; and at the end of the letter he undid all the good of the beginning. "Come to me, come back to me," he wrote, "and I will make you a painter. A little, a very little, and you will pass the Rubicon; a little hard work, and then I can teach you no more."

Perhaps one cannot blame the poor devil for reading the thing wrongly; he was ready to clutch at any straw that passed him. He knew himself and his own affairs as well as an outsider, and only wished to avoid a total shipwreck. If a man is going to fly in the face of prudent advice, gamble his life upon a slender chance, and embrace poverty where he has hitherto been the companion of moderate wealth, he cannot be blamed because he seeks, however foolishly, to find some safer way before he takes his plunge.

In any case, Loissel's letter did what the writer intended it should not, and helped Massingdale to play with his compromise more fondly.

"If I am so near the Rubicon," he told me, when he had shown me the letter, "I can pass it by myself. I can work each summer in Paris. It only means moving more slowly. Thunder of heaven, man, I have no wish to turn out pictures by the dozens; I wish to learn to paint so that before I die I can set down on canvas some of the things I see and feel."

"And the Bar?" I asked him. "Do you think it 's going to make your fortune while you spend your spare time at something else? Or is it to be used only as security for your allowance?"

I had expected an outburst of anger, and for a moment I made sure that I was going to get it; but after a short silence, during which he seemed to struggle with his feelings, Massingdale began to laugh with what appeared to be genuine amusement.

"The devil 's in the wise old counsellor," he announced, "the devil, or the spirit of wisdom, or both. Yet it 's truth that you speak, you brutal castigator of youth's blindness. I seem to be becoming knave as well as fool. Oh! it 's a sorry world for a poor young gentleman. I 'll have to go all over the thing again."

And with that he left me.

We did not speak of the business again for some days; and I am of the opinion that he would have made up his mind and said good-bye to the law before Christmas, had not a woman come into the affair, thrown him, poor hot-headed fool, clean off his balance, and sent him wandering down an even rougher path.

CHAPTER III

A MAIDEN AND THE FOOL

ONE Saturday night in December I came back to my rooms after dinner and found a note from my cousin, Tom Onnington, saying that he had been round that afternoon, but had not been able to wait, and suggesting that I should come round to lunch next morning at the Berkeley, where he was stopping with his people; he also suggested that he might look in again that evening, but that I was not to stop in on that account. I had not seen the man for a couple of years; when he had been in England I had missed him, and I was very glad to hear that he was home. Except on his first voyage as a midshipman, he had not served in home waters, and so we had seen very little of each other, although he generally made a point of looking me up when he was on leave. I liked the man very much, and was delighted to hear that he was in town; I also looked forward to the next day's lunch, my uncle, Vice-Admiral Onnington, and his wife being excellent company. The house near Cambridge had been shut for six months, as the family had been abroad all the summer, and I had missed going down to them for week-ends; Elsingham Hall is a very pleasant place to stop at. There was also Joan to be considered, a maiden whom I had last seen with her hair down, and who had just finished a year on the Continent; she had been an excellent little person before the metamorphosis, and I was much interested to find out how much it would alter her. On the whole count I promised myself a pleasant Sunday.

As I had not been in Massingdale's rooms on a Saturday evening for a matter of some weeks, I went across to him that night, leaving a note for Tom, telling him where I might be found, in case he should call. The place was already thick with smoke when I arrived, and the smell of many strange drinks was heavy, for Massingdale did what he could to satisfy the tastes of his guests, and kept all manner of odd fluids for their benefit; yet the talk was comparatively quiet as the company had not yet warmed to their work, and as Hendick was fortunately engaged in the discussion of art, not of politics, with old Monsieur Letiche and a second-rate, black-and-white artist, whose name I did not know. Mr. James Hopkins, the traveller in drapery, had just made his appearance; he was, somewhat, I fancy, to Massingdale's embarrassment, a most faithful attendant. He was, according to his own account, opening his mind and enlarging his horizon, a business which sometimes entailed an hour or two of sleep. On this occasion he had not eaten since midday, and was, when I came in, engaged on a search for plates and knives, while his host fried eggs for his meal; I narrowly missed sitting on a loaf of bread and a pot of jam, which he had already got out on the divan near the fire. When the eggs were ready, and Hopkins settled to his food, Massingdale joined with full enthusiasm in the discussion that was afoot.

"The only justification of art," announced Hendick, planting himself before the fire, a glass of beer in one hand and a long clay pipe in the other, "is that it should have a definite ethical purpose; if it teaches nothing, it becomes useless."

"Sacred Goddess of Beauty!" shouted Massingdale, waving the frying-pan which he was engaged in scraping; "the thing 's a blasphemy. The artist is not a moral preacher, he is solely concerned with turning out work that conforms to his standard of beauty."

"The art for art's sake business," retorted Hendick, scenting battle. "I thought that idea was definitely exploded. The good of humanity——"

"Surely," interrupted Letiche, in his polite, rather weary voice, "the good of humanity is served, Monsieur Hendick, if the standard of beauty is faithfully in view?"

"No, certainly not," asserted Hendick, enjoying himself hugely. "What right has any one to maintain that the ideal of some emotional individual must be of service to mankind?"

"Yet," argued Massingdale, beginning to pace the room, as he would when roused, the frying-pan still firmly grasped, "it is, despite your fool theories, through individual effort that we move on. One man is stronger, more enthusiastic, less muddled, perhaps more cruel, than his neighbours; he succeeds, and after his success the herd come rushing to copy his acts. In art, in all things, this holds good; there is no fixed standard; the artist must follow where his fancy takes him."

Before Hendick could get out his reply, the black-and-white artist had taken up the tale.

"You 're right, Massingdale," he proclaimed eagerly. "It is absurd to expect a man, no matter what branch of art he works at, to be a sort of confounded mirror of the morals of the moment. He is only concerned with expressing his own ideas."

"If he tried to teach some obvious lesson, he would likely make a beautiful thing ugly to half the world," I hazarded, sitting forward on the divan as the discussion promised some interest.

Hopkins, who was usually silent on these occasions, seemed to be suddenly inspired; he crammed half an egg into his mouth, followed it with a large piece of bread, and began speaking in a muffled voice.

"I don't rightly follow," said he, "all that you gentlemen 'ave been saying. I ain't no artist myself, could n't draw nor yet play the piano for old boots, but what I do maintain, an' always 'ave done, is that this art should be something that a feller can git 'old of. What 's 'e for if it ain't to amuse the public? If 'e don't write music with a tune that a man can remember, an' if 'e don't paint pictures that 'ave some interest in 'em, a story or something, 'e ain't no artist. That 's my view."

Hopkins, at least, had the satisfaction of attracting attention by the expression of his views; there was a perfect shout of derision at the nature of his ideal. Hendick, bellowing above the others, maintained that there was a truth at the bottom of it; Monsieur Letiche groaned at the heresy; and Massingdale paced the room furiously, waiting a chance to make himself heard.

In the middle of all the noise, which must have been alarming to any stranger, the door opened and a man and a girl appeared, halting in evident surprise at the sight the room offered them. I decided that Tom and Joan, who were the visitors, could scarcely have hit upon a more characteristic scene in which to make Massingdale's acquaintance, but I did not know why the girl should have put in an appearance. And I went across and greeted them, being extremely thankful that it was not the habit of the company to pay attention to new arrivals.

"Good Lord, man," said Tom, shaking me by the hand, "what on earth is this?" Then turning to Joan: "It seems we 've struck a secret meeting or something. The man on the hearth-rug is an anarchist for a certainty; he 's got good lungs, however. It 's no place for you, my child."

"Dick," exclaimed Joan, ignoring her brother's advice, "you must be leading an awful life. But may I come in? It looks awfully amusing."

"Certainly not," answered Tom; and in a lower voice: "Here is the pedestrian with the frying-pan coming to speak to us."

Massingdale, who at first had taken as little notice of the newcomers as the others had done, seeing me in conversation by the door, came up. At sight of my two cousins' fashionable apparel he seemed somewhat astonished, but, without the least show of embarrassment, put down the frying-pan, and asked me to introduce him.

"I am afraid you must be rather astonished at our volubility," said he, shaking hands with Joan, "but there is a point under discussion which interests us. The atmosphere is bad, I grant you, but we can open the windows; and if you would care to come in you might be rather amused."

"I should love to, Mr. Massingdale," answered Joan, taking no notice of the signs which Tom and I made to induce her to refuse. "I hope we shall not interrupt the discussion."

And without more parley she moved into the room, Massingdale at her side. Tom and I followed, shutting the door behind us.

"Is it all right?" he whispered to me, seeming amused. "They won't get blind drunk before we can get out? The place looks like a confounded drinking shop."

I assured him that every one would be on his best behaviour, and we joined the group by the fire.

The entrance of a pair of strangers in full evening dress had the effect of settling the discussion on the justification of art with some abruptness, but the company, with the exception of Hopkins, showed no signs of discomfort. He, poor man, was mightily upset; he swept together the remnants of his meal, and with a beer bottle protruding from one pocket, and his hands full with a couple of plates, a loaf, and the jam-pot, he retired to the opposite side of the room, where he stealthily concluded his repast when he imagined that Joan was not looking at him. I was sorry for him, but I like to think that he satisfied his hunger all the same.

Joan seemed taken with the idea of making a good impression; she was gracious to Hendick, and friendly with Monsieur Letiche, and she smiled at the "black-and-white" man, who with a "first violin," then out of employment, hovered in the background. Poor Hopkins gave her no chance of including him in her greeting. Tom, since he found himself there, took the thing as he found it, and got the violinist to help him to find a drink. I rather fancy that I was more ill at ease than any of the others; I had a perfectly reasonless fear that some one would do something, or more probably say it, which would make things difficult. I made the mistake of thinking that I knew the company. Yet I had not realised that their sense of fitting conversation was as good, or better, than mine, that there was not a man present, Hopkins being silent, who had any reason to be embarrassed, or to keep a guard upon his tongue.

Massingdale himself was certainly the figure that would attract the most of a stranger's attention; there was something in the man that made people take notice of him in the middle of a crowd. His clothes might have aroused attention, but they would not have held it; being at his ease, he wore a flowing dressing-gown of flowery pattern, he had on a soft collar, and a tie fastened in a bow, and his slippers might have been cut from the parlour carpet of a workman's villa. Yet the man himself made one think little of his apparel; in whatever garments he chose to appear he created the same impression; he had a manner of being completely absorbed in the business of the moment and of seeming mighty interested at any turn of events. Had a duke and his duchess suddenly arrived to pay him a visit, he would, I am convinced, have expressed his pleasure at seeing them, and would have treated their inclusion in the gathering as an event which called for no possible comment; moreover, he would have been much annoyed if the other guests had interrupted their enjoyment on account of the new arrivals.

So, when Tom and Joan had settled themselves, he began to work up the talk again to some show of animation, and—such a thing, I believe, he could always do when he wished it—set everybody at their ease. Seeing Tom somewhat interested in the personality of Hendick, he involved the couple in a fiery discussion on increasing armaments; launched Monsieur Letiche, the violinist, and the "black-and-white" man on the resumed discussion of the purpose of the artist; failed to make Hopkins do anything but listen; and finally came and sat with Joan and me upon the divan by the fire.

Since he did not dance, and only went to the entertainments of polite society when he could not avoid it without offence, and since he was a very loquacious person, Massingdale had not any tricks of small talk, and carried on any conversation in which he was engaged with far more eagerness than is usual. To any one not afraid of original talk he brought much diversion; I imagined, and I was not wrong, that he would succeed in amusing Joan.

"Don't you think, Miss Onnington," he asked, as he sat down, "that this is a very excellent arrangement for a room?"

"It is rather original," she answered; "but you have cleared the chairs out, have n't you?"

At that he broke out in the best Massingdale manner.

"This to me!" he cried, with an air of bitterness. "Chairs! What need have I of chairs? Things that always stand out and get in a man's way when he wants to walk about. You laugh. You have probably been born and bred among chairs, and know no better. If they stand round the walls, which is the only place for them, my arrangement is far better; if they are placed without cause or reason about the room, a man must be for always thinking of them or he damages his shins in a moment of deeper thought."

"But don't you ever want to sit in front of the fire, Mr. Massingdale?" Joan asked him.

"I do," said he, solemnly; "but sitting in front of the fire in an arm-chair involves having a table, a small table, at your side, to hold a light and books; and a small table is worse than a chair; a man is become a slave to his furniture when he has such things. I sacrifice a little comfort to gain a greater freedom."

"Oh," answered Joan; she was clearly delighted with Massingdale's drivel. "But I see you have two arm-chairs, though I can't see any little tables."

"Those," he informed her, assuming the air of a man who is unjustly suspected, "are the evidences of true hospitality. I was faced with a choice: to encumber my promenade with heavy pieces of furniture, or to forego the chance of entertaining my friends. You have my decision before you."

As my assistance in the conversation did not seem required, I sat back on the divan and employed myself in reckoning up the recent changes in Miss Joan Onnington. She was, I decided, very much improved in appearance, and had a style of good looks which promised to weather the years well. She was slight, and had an excellent figure; she carried her head as if she were proud of it; and she knew how to move. Her manners were more assured than when I had last seen her, yet she appeared to have lost nothing of her naturalness; she disguised, even if she attempted, any obvious effort to hold fast a man's attention. Her hair was certainly without reproach, of a dark brown colour with many rich, warm tints in it, and very fine, hair that an artist would wish to paint; since she had done it up, it showed to a greater advantage, setting a broader crown upon her face. Her eyes were of the colour of her hair, long-lashed and wide; her features were fine cut and well modelled; her mouth was small, and her lips very red. She had an air of freshness and of health about her, and her skin was very smooth and fair. I imagine that when she looked in her glass, which, I suppose, she did as often as most women, she was well content; if she were not, she set herself a standard very much above the average of good-looking women. As she sat beside Massingdale in that rather dim and very smoky atmosphere, I was inclined to foretell that she would come to real beauty, a thing much spoken of, yet so rare that one does not meet it more than once or twice in a decade; she had, before she was nineteen, the makings of it, but the real quality was not yet there. She had, already, the signs of character; her face was neither weak nor wanting in expression, but she flew the flag of life's apprenticeship, and the marks of deeper feelings, of high passions, of a warm and kindly sympathy, without which no real beauty can ever be, were not yet come. She was a child with little knowledge and less experience; but the years ahead would bring a plenitude of both, and I had a fancy that she would use what came to hand to some advantage.

My estimation of her character was, for the time, checked by her asking me a question.

"Mr. Massingdale is a barrister, is n't he, Dick?"

"A barrister? Yes, certainly," I answered, somewhat startled at the inquiry. "Why do you ask?"

"Because he keeps on talking about 'these lawyer men' as if he were an outsider studying a strange people; and if I asked him myself he would probably evade the question."

"This," said Massingdale, "is the reward of lucid conversation. I am suspected of evading the truth, a truth so patent that it cannot be hid. Surely, Miss Onnington, you can perceive the stamp of the counsel on me?"

"I don't know many barristers," pleaded Joan; "but you are not very much like Dick, are you?"

"I am not," he affirmed. "I am very unlike him; and therein lies a compliment for one of us. But a barrister I am, and one, moreover, who has pleaded at the Bar, sometimes with inconspicuous success; that is my titular occupation, but I am many other things besides, chief amongst them, I think, being a fool."

Before Joan could reply to this, Tom came up and interrupted us.

"Young woman," he asked her, "are you aware of the time? It will probably strike midnight before I have finished this sentence."

Joan sprang up with a gasp.

"Not really, Tom!" she cried, but a neighbouring clock began to prove the statement true. "What will mother say? We promised to be back in an hour, at the most."

"The police are probably aware of the fact by now," Tom declared; "and the governor is very likely shinning round London. We 'll get in by a back way, go up to our rooms with stealth, and announce that we have been in bed for hours."

As Massingdale and I saw them down the stairs, which take some knowing, Joan asked him to tea the next day.

"You will have to assure my mother that it was your fault that we stayed so long," she declared.

"I will swear that I stood with my back to the door and threatened you with a frying-pan," he promised her.

When we were half-way up the stairs on our way back, he halted, and addressed me with reproach.

"I take it as unneighbourly of you, Gossip Crutchley," he announced, "that you are so secretive in the matter of your relations. I wonder how the sailor hit it off with Citizen Hendick."

Personally, I was tempted to suggest that the couple probably had an equal contempt for each other, but I did not go back to enquire of Hendick. Judging by the fact that I was twice disturbed in my sleep by bursts of applause coming from Massingdale's rooms, and that I heard the company depart, not quietly, some time after three o'clock, I gathered that the evening had been pleasantly passed.

The following afternoon Massingdale established himself in the good graces of my aunt and uncle. Captain Massingdale and the latter had served together on more than one commission, and were, it appeared, on the best of terms. In fact, the Admiral proclaimed that he had a score against me because I had not brought young Massingdale to see him before; which, I maintained, was most unjust, since I had not had the opportunity of doing so for the past year. Meanwhile Massingdale kept faithfully and exactly to his promise.

"Brandishing a frying-pan," I heard him explain to Mrs. Onnington, "I was an object that would strike terror into the heart of any maiden; and your son, although displaying desperate bravery, was unable to drive me from a superior strategic position. When exhausted by his heroic efforts, he was forced to capitulate and grant my terms."

"You don't say what was happening to Dick during this terrible encounter, Mr. Massingdale?" asked my aunt.

"He had started," replied Massingdale promptly, "by imploring me in the sacred name of hospitality to desist from my brutal attack, but I knocked him senseless with one swift blow of my murderous implement. And that 's a fact, ladies and gentlemen."

"I can see, my boy," my uncle interposed, patting Massingdale on the shoulder, "that we must n't let Joan visit such dangerous places in future. You will have to come and see us. But you 're very like your father. A bit more talkative, however!"

"Don't!" laughed Massingdale. "You take away one of my cherished beliefs, Admiral Onnington. I had always blamed it to heredity."

"It is really very odd," my uncle continued. "I have heard a lot about you from your father, but I had not the faintest notion that you knew Dick. Let me see, you ran wild in Paris for a bit, did n't you, and wanted to become an artist?"

Massingdale looked across at me with an expression of much amusement; he wished, I fancy, to call my attention to the suggestion that his ambitions as a painter were things of the past.

"The indiscretion of my parent," said he, in reply to Admiral Onnington, "has stopped at that, I hope. It is true that I have thought a good deal about painting."

"Is that why you talk about the 'lawyer men' as if you were not one of them?" asked Joan, eagerly.

But he was saved the difficulty of a reply by Tom presenting him with a piece of the hotel notepaper.

"Show us your paces, Massingdale," he asked. "Draw me a caricature of your socialist pal. I dare n't meet the man again for fear of hitting him, but I want to remember his face."

I would have given fairly long odds on Massingdale politely refusing; I had never previously seen him attempt to exhibit his talent, or even to refer to it, before strangers. But he did not seem to hesitate; he only refused the notepaper.

"I don't like your material," said he, producing a small sketching book from his breast-pocket. And he got to work.

As he drew, there came a complete change on the man. I do not know whether the others noticed it; I fancy Joan did, for her eyes did not leave him, but to me it was very apparent. He was absolutely absorbed in his occupation, so that some one might have had a fit alongside of him and he would not have noticed it; he gave an impression of capability, as of a man engaged with something that he understood; he held his pencil as if he were sure of its obedience. I do not remember to have been so impressed by the working Massingdale before, and I had a sudden fancy to tell him to pack up and go off to Paris by the night express. He worked with great quickness, and at the end of four or five minutes sat back and looked at what he had done.

"There," said he, throwing the book to Tom, "that is the best that I can do."

Tom stared at the drawing for a moment with an air of considerable surprise.

"This is not a caricature," he cried, still holding the thing in front of him, "this is a portrait. My lord, man, that is the fellow himself. I would n't have asked you if I had thought you were a professional at the thing."

So the portrait was handed round, and we duly admired it, and said what occurred to us to say, except Joan. Beyond a doubt the thing, which now hangs in the library at Elsingham Hall, is good; it is Hendick as he then was, Hendick in an aggressive mood arguing on politics. It is a rough sketch in outline, an affair of a few lines, but you can almost hear the subject shouting his preposterous theories of state control; the head is thrust forward, the eyes are fierce, as Hendick's are in argument, a lock of hair is displaced across the forehead, and the tie is awry. The man who could so animate a drawing, making it the counterfeit of the live being, has no business to be a pleader at the Bar; his business is with brushes and an easel.

Beyond stating that the thing was a mass of technical crudities, Massingdale said nothing about his work. Having done the drawing, he seemed to me to repent of it, and to be endeavouring to hide a mood of some bitterness. He had acted on a moment's inspiration, and it had brought to his mind questions which he had for the time forgotten.

While Tom and I were explaining to my uncle and aunt the merits of the portrait, I heard Massingdale ask Joan for her opinion.

"You have not," said he, in his ordinary manner, "expressed an opinion of the greatness of my genius."

"I think, Mr. Massingdale," she answered, and she seemed mighty serious about the matter, "that you are very foolish, and that you are wasting your time."

"And I," he replied, "am absolutely certain of it." And changed the conversation. After which he took his departure with all the speed that politeness allowed.

"Mr. Massingdale seems very funny about his drawing," said my aunt, when he had gone. "He seemed quite upset at something."

"I fancy he takes it rather seriously," I answered.

"He would be a fool, if he did n't," Tom assured us.

"He probably knows a great deal better than you or I," suggested the Admiral, "the difference between what talent he has got and what is required of a professional artist." Whereat we let the subject drop.

I looked in at Massingdale's rooms that night after dinner, but he was not in. The following morning I had to catch an early train in order to get down to Portsmouth for a case on circuit; as I hurried down the staircase at about half-past eight, I met Massingdale coming up, showing complete evidence of not having been to bed.

"Been on the tiles, I see," I called to him, without stopping.

"Tiles be damned!" he shouted, cheerfully. "I never got up so far; I could n't get away from the prosaic pavement."

It was abominably cold, and as I sat in a badly heated railway carriage I speculated on the advantages of possessing a temperament such as Massingdale's; its chief value seemed to be that it obviated, on occasions, the horrible process of getting up in the cold and dark. The alternative of walking about all night did not, however, attract me, and I turned to my papers wondering what on earth had gone wrong with the man the afternoon before.

CHAPTER IV

THE SETTLEMENT OF A QUESTION, AND THE AMENITIES OF THE DINNER TABLE

MASSINGDALE spent that Christmas at Elsingham Hall; his father was still on the Mediterranean station, and their house in Dorsetshire was shut up, so that he accepted my aunt's invitation very gladly. "Having been faced with the choice of a dinner in some London restaurant, which promises little," he explained to me, when the letter came, "or of accepting the decorous hospitality of my reverend cousin Coke, which promises a very great deal, I should have denied myself the greater promise."

He and I arrived at Elsingham on Christmas Eve with the weather looking like snow, and as we drove from the station he promised to go to church next day, a thing I had never known him to do of his own will before, and to put a sovereign in the plate, "if the gods send that the country is white to-morrow." The gods did send snow; and as we sat in church listening to the vicar's appropriate treatment of the occasion, Massingdale, who had been ill at ease during most of the service, informed me that after lunch he intended to build a snow-man, "the devil of a fine chap, with a real top-hat on his head," and thereafter sat smiling to himself until the good parson had finished. The snow-man, as constructed by the party under Massingdale's direction, was a most imposing figure, and remained crowned with his fashionable hat until we had taken our departure.

The country of this part of Cambridgeshire has a pleasant quality of its own; it is as different from the valley of the Cam as it is from the fens themselves, which form its other boundary; it is a place of rolling hills, not high or of any bold outline, but often topped with clumps of trees, and giving much character to the view. The district, considering its nearness to Cambridge, is deep in the country, having neither good roads nor a convenient railway to serve it; the villagers, lacking the opportunity, do not spend Saturday in the town, and preserve some character of their own; the grass-grown Roman road sets a boundary to the locality, bringing a comfortable assurance of tradition to those who are its neighbours. I make no plea for the place, I would claim for it neither great beauty nor compelling interest, but I would uphold its charm. There is, that I know of, no other spot that so nicely conveys the impression of upland country with so little cause; a man standing upon some summit of these little hills, being no more than two hundred feet above the sea, could fancy himself abroad upon a moorland. Whether it is the wide sky which helps in the delusion, or whether the many copses, some of beech and some of fir, exaggerate the bareness where once a forest stood, I have never yet decided; but I know very well that a man can walk here gratefully, in summer when the land is baked with the sun's heat, in wind and rain, in snow and frost, or, which is best, when the mists rise and the autumn sunset is wrapped in gathering dark, and can feel that good sense of open freshness that rightly comes from hilltops, or from the cliffs beside the sea.

This fondness for the corner of Cambridgeshire where Elsingham is situated Massingdale shared with me, and since, during the Christmas week that we spent with the Onningtons, it did little else but snow, he spent much of the time in walking, a business of which he was extraordinary fond. He would start out after breakfast, for the guests were always free to do what they wished, and often not return until dark; and on one occasion he took Joan with him. The morning was heavy and threatening, and the snow began to fall steadily about one o'clock, but the couple did not return until an hour or more after it was dark, by which time Mrs. Onnington had worked herself into a fine condition of agitation. When they did make their appearance they came in a farm cart, and Joan looked, although she stoutly denied it, extremely tired. While she was upstairs changing, Massingdale gave us some account of the day, standing in front of the hall fire and consuming toasted buns.

"I am a fool," he told us, "a slow-witted, blind idiot. I walked your daughter off her legs, Mrs. Onnington, though my life is not worth a moment's purchase if she knew that I had said it. We were about six miles the other side of Balsham, and the going pretty heavy in this snow, when I realised that she was tired; then it took some time to find a farm and a cart to bring us back."

"I don't think you are capable of looking after a woman, or yourself for that matter," said Mrs. Onnington severely.

"I am very far from being capable," he apologised, and his absurd manner, I believe, extinguished half of her just maternal wrath. "I will do penance. I 'll go up to bed and have no dinner." And he went up and changed his sodden clothes.

That same night Joan showed me some of the fruits of the walk. She and I were sitting in the billiard room after dinner, and the talk ran upon art and artists. I, wishing to see how the land lay, cited Massingdale as an able dilettante, and she was up in arms at the word.

"I thought you had more perception, Dick," said she, with an air of much superiority. "I imagined that, since you have seen a good deal of him, you would have understood that Mr. Massingdale is a real artist, and that he is only making a living out of this law work."

I did not pursue the subject, and I did not point out that most certainly the law did not provide him with a living, but I was mightily amused; I imagined that there had been some fine Massingdale oratory as they ploughed together through the snow.

Two days afterwards, when we left, even my aunt showed that she bore Massingdale no grudge for keeping her daughter out in a snowstorm, and he was made to promise that he would repeat the visit; which thing he did very cheerfully.

For the next two months matters followed a not very original course. I lay claim to no extraordinary perception, but little observation was required to make sure of the state of affairs between Massingdale and Joan. That the man, with customary impetuosity, rushed on his fate was very apparent; that there was an equal eagerness on the other side, I am not in a position to state, although I fancy that there was. In any case, the inevitable result was viewed with satisfaction by everybody concerned. Captain Massingdale had come home on leave, had passed a week at Elsingham, and had probably discussed the matter with my uncle; he certainly welcomed the turn of events as putting an effectual stop to any talk of the career of an artist. Everything pointed to the one result; there seemed no chance of any hitch; and, had I thought of it, I imagine that I could have obtained pretty long odds from Tom, Captain Massingdale, or my uncle, on the engagement being declared before May Day. Yet I saw more of Massingdale himself than they did, and there were times when I made tolerably sure that he would fly the whole business and get him off to Paris and Loissel's studio by the next train.

The state of the lover is proverbially agitated and conducive to the exhibition of varying moods, wherefore I was inclined to style Massingdale a model for all men in this condition, since he was one moment in a state of absolute content, and the next displayed such restlessness that he became an impossible companion; but I take it that there was more than the one cause working to disturb him, and that the claims of two imperious mistresses gave him small peace. He was no fool, and he did not shut his eyes to the truth, involving himself in a proposal of marriage because a girl had seized his fancy; yet he was a man whose passions ran high and strong, and no one could call him other than impetuous. There was a choice which faced him, and which he endeavoured to settle in the way that he thought best, asking advice from nobody, relying, as he always did, on his own judgment. If he married Joan he would remain at the Bar, and chance its favour, settling himself for life among the numbers of the "damned amateurs" as far as painting was concerned; if he did not ask her to marry him—he was, I imagine, pretty sure of her answer—he would likely go on as he had done, dreaming of his artist's life, hesitating some long while before he made the plunge; that, I fancy, was the way he saw the business, and the balance seemed down upon the marriage side. That he should compromise, avoid the issue, either by taking a prolonged holiday, or simply by lack of action, was, I am certain, a thing that never occurred to him; he was, in nearly all things, a man of quick decision. How much the success of his picture in the autumn exhibition weighed with him, helping him to a decision, I do not know. He was so different to the ordinary man, so much more the victim of strong emotion, and he cared so little for the obvious questions in the case, that what he really thought about the matter is much of a speculation.

That he had much difficulty in his choice was altogether apparent. During the early part of that year his habits became more curious than they had been before; he walked the City of London nightly, and came, as near as was possible with a man of his temperament, to avoiding other people's society. I had, moreover, constantly before me the strange spectacle of a Massingdale who was often silent, and whose gaiety was forced and unnatural, who seemed chiefly engaged in keeping me from the discussion of topics that I had no intention of broaching. The company that still gathered weekly in his rooms, though the day had been changed from Saturday to Friday to allow him to get away for the week-end, noticed a change in their host, and, knowing nothing of its cause, set it down to ill-health, which conclusion his appearance certainly justified; he was, in consequence, the recipient of much original advice, and a bottle of quack medicine, a remedy that had secured the printed support of Mr. James Hopkins. Matters, indeed, became so difficult, he showing every sign of doing something foolish if he did not settle them before long, that I was on the point of interfering in affairs which did not concern me, and of urging the necessity of settling the business, whether he cared for my meddling or not, when he took a definite step himself.

He had been down to Elsingham for a short week-end, and came into my rooms late on Sunday night.

"Dick," said he, without any preamble, yet looking at me with some expectancy, "I have burnt my boats. I have made my choice. Joan has promised to marry me."

"My dear man," I cried, shaking his hand, "I wish both of you the best of luck."

"Anything more?" he asked, with the same air of expectancy.

"Long life to enjoy it in," I told him, somewhat puzzled by his attitude. "Riches, prosperity, fame. I meant luck to include the lot. What more do you want?"

"Thank God!" he replied in a tone of relief. "Dick, I name you the model of true friendship, a prince among friends. I will have your head copied in marble, and place it, laurel-crowned, among the chiefest of my household gods; your name shall be honoured by my descendants; and my eldest son shall be called Richard. Loyal and devoted companion, I hold you blessed beyond all other males!"

"Which means?"

"That you said nothing, but that you wished me happiness," he answered quietly, staring at the fire. "If you live to be a hundred you will never do a kinder act than that. I misjudged you, and I apologise; I thought you like the others. Even my father, whom I have just told, had to improve the occasion. He is doubly glad to hear of the event, Dick; because he is sure that I shall be happy with her, and because marriage will put an end to the foolish talk about becoming a painter. Why cannot people think a little before they speak? Don't they see that words can do harm? When a man is as near to perfect happiness as he is ever likely to get, they have no business to cloud the brightness of his hour. They must realise that there are shadows, however high the sun is. Yet is there need to point them out? No one can come to the Elysian fields without some suffering, which should be held as payment to silence the detractors in the moment of arrival."

He stopped speaking, and the room was very silent for some minutes; then he got up to go. At the door he turned, and thanked me again.

"I am not in the least concerned," he informed me, using the same quiet tone, "whether you think that I have been, or am, the greater fool. I can only thank you that you did not mention the subject of folly." And he went out.

After he had gone I made up my fire and settled comfortably in my arm-chair with a pipe; I had matter for thought before me, and I sat late over it. The attitude has been, I am inclined to fancy, typical of my whole life; I have often held a watching brief in the interest of my friends, but I have seldom engaged an issue on my own account. I fancy that I have seen as much as most men of my years, yet chiefly from the standpoint of the observer who, although he may occasionally take a part in the playing, is not personally concerned at the result. The attitude has its disadvantages, but it certainly makes for no lack of interest in the play.

As I sat thinking over the probable chances of Massingdale's future, it seemed to me that there was the promise of much trouble ahead. The more I saw of the man, and I saw as much as I could, the more I became convinced that he must sooner or later turn to painting; there is a type of man, and he is usually called artist, whose chief concern is to express, on paper, on canvas, or on a music score, those ideas about the life around him which appeal to him as beautiful, and of this type was Massingdale. To reproduce the expression of some face that had moved him, to set down the beauty of some landscape as he saw it, was of more importance to him than to attain the woolsack or the cabinet; in view of which, his continued appearance at the Bar was so much folly. When such desires have taken possession of any man or woman, they will out; they may be stifled for a time, but they cannot be subjected; and they have a habit, when unduly repressed, of breaking out when the chance of their satisfaction is gone by, when the only fruit of their indulgence can be regret. Therefore, I saw Massingdale newly embarked on an enterprise, the conclusion of which could scarcely be untroubled. I was convinced, and after-events confirmed the conviction, that he loved Joan as it is the happiness of few women to be loved; he was an idealist, and he had framed his dreams about her. But a man cannot live on his love for a woman; there must enter other interests to his life, if his living is to be in any way advantageous to himself or others; he must play his part in the world on a larger stage than his own hearth. When the lover himself is well aware of this, and when, unhappily for them both, the stage that he would play upon is one that, under the circumstances, he may not mount, there is no outcome of the thing but trouble, and the shipwreck of one or other fond desire.

I viewed the problem from every aspect that I could arrive at, and from every new sight of it I came back to the old position; I was not able to imagine that, whatever might be his delusions at the moment, and I was very free with my blame to him for having those delusions, he could stifle a passion that was at least as strong, if not stronger than love. I blamed him for expecting too much, and I blamed him for not seeing the obvious, and very rightly, since, if we are to settle the affairs of others any better than our own, we must leave out all matter that makes for confusion. I forgot that, at times, a man is so blinded by his eagerness that he cannot see at all. Finally, having found him culpable on every charge, I remembered that he had thanked me for not talking of folly, and was grateful to the chance that had caused him to do so, and went to bed, seeing the pity of the thing, yet not quite so ready with my condemnation.

It was shortly after Easter, which came late that year, that Joan and Massingdale settled matters between them, and for some weeks they enjoyed themselves after the manner of people in their condition; they must have grown somewhat tired of being informed that they were ridiculously young to think of marriage, but they doubtless accepted such remarks as inevitable, and gave no attention to them; in any case, they seemed to find little fault with life. Joan, in particular, provided me with a deal of amusement; she was so very patently delighted at the turn of events, and would sometimes, being entirely unconscious of her lack of originality, grow confidential with me on the subject of the pitiful condition of the bachelor. She was in love with Massingdale, but she was a long cry from understanding him. It is very easy to suggest the attitude of the parties concerned, after the events in which they moved have taken place, in spite of which thing I still maintain that I saw the weak point of Joan's position before circumstances had discovered it. She treated the man whom she proposed to marry as a brilliant and fascinating toy, clearly designed for her delight; she was proud of him, and she was fond of him, but she did not understand, I fancy, that the qualities which so attracted her were not mere tricks of speech and manner, but the expression of the nature of the man. She imagined, I believe, that Massingdale, in face of his obvious peculiarities, would act in all important things in the same way as the other men she knew; and when he did not, she was much upset. Being very young, and without any experience, she had made sure that the things which she called right and fitting he would so name also; when she found that he did something that at the first appearance seemed to her altogether wrong, she made no allowance for a different standpoint, and acted, without hesitation, in the heat of her surprise.

Towards the end of May, Massingdale disturbed me one morning while I breakfasted, coming into my room with a note in his hand, and seating himself at the open window.

"For a man who has legal ambitions you breakfast at an ungodly hour," said he. "All judges, I am informed, sit down to their morning meal at eight o'clock precisely. Think of the future, and weep."

"I am providing against possible contingencies," I assured him.

At that he bowed, deeply contrite.

"Wretched being that I am," he cried, "I have wronged a man whose wisdom exceeds mine as the owl's that of the louse. I had always imagined that you breakfasted at ten on account of natural sloth. But I came to ask you a favour."

"About that letter you are waving about?"

"Yes, mountain of perspicacity," he replied, "it is. Will you gird yourself with your best boiled shirt this evening, and betake you, in my company, to Berkeley Square, the residence of Henry Wrant, knight, there to dine?"

"Why is my presence desired?" I asked. "I do not know Sir Henry Wrant."

"To fill up the table, presumably. Lady Wrant has written asking me to come, and to bring another man, frankly confessing that two have failed her. The food is good, gourmet; the wine is excellent, bibber; the company is often entertaining, butterfly. Will you come?"

"Right! What time?"

"Eight," said he. "You promise that?"

"I have done so," I told him. "Why ask?"

"Because," he replied solemnly, "I want your pledge. Call me evil names, Dick; I am no true friend. The newly aproned bishop is to be there!"

"What bishop?"

"My holy cousin, the Right Reverend Magram-Coke!"

"Well, I 'm damned! The man is a bishop?"

"His gaiters, which he won't be wearing, are disgustingly new," answered Massingdale, in the manner of a man much afflicted. "He is a bishop of one week's standing, and a miserable suffragan at that. I hope the man above him, a real bishop I imagine, comes it pretty heavy in the superior officer line of business. Can you forgive me this betrayal?"

"Possibly, in time," I answered, "and if the dinner is good."

"I must go," he announced, getting up. "Know, my friend, that *la petite* Yvonne is again in town. I must go and tell her of my engagement."

"I should," I laughed; "she will be pleased to hear it."

"At times, Richard," said he, as he went out, "you remind me of a fool."

Dinner at the Wrants', I had been given to understand by those who had dined there, was a pleasant function as well as a good meal. The host was a man who could set the talk going on lines of interest, keeping his considerable knowledge of the East to flavour his conversation rather than to instruct his guests; and the men and women who sat at his table did not usually lack character. In spite of the presence of Magram-Coke—and why the man should ever have been asked to the Wrants' house I could not conceive—I looked forward to an evening's entertainment, although scarcely one of the quality of that which we obtained.

When we arrived at Berkeley Square we found Coke already installed, and filling the drawing-room with his suave, consciously gentle talk. As I spoke with my host and hostess, I heard the episcopal greeting to Massingdale, and could form some idea of the feelings of the recipient.

"Ah, Kenneth, I have a pleasant duty to perform," Coke remarked archly. "I have not seen you since your engagement. Allow me to congratulate you, and to express my heartfelt wishes for your true happiness. You are about to undertake a very solemn responsibility, but I am sure that, with God's help, you will perform your duty."

"I hope so," answered Massingdale, smiling.

"I have," went on the bishop in his best manner, "a very sincere regard for your welfare. I was, until this happy event, somewhat anxious about your future." Here his attitude expressed a broad-minded condonation of past faults, and his voice became increasingly bland. "There was talk of all manner of foolishness, Kenneth, on which we need not lay stress. Marriage, I am confident, will drive all those youthful fancies about art, fancies that we have all experienced at one time, out of your head. You have a very pretty picture of your own to think about?" And the right reverend gentleman indulged in decorous laughter at his own jest.

"I think," said Lady Wrant to me, "that I had better go and rescue poor Mr. Massingdale."

"If you don't want that clerical suavity sorely tried by some extravagant remark, I think, my dear, that you had better do so," answered Sir Henry.

From which remarks it was not hard to deduce that Magram-Coke dined that night as the guest of politeness rather than esteem, which, I take it, was a common position of his.

There were ten of us at dinner, the other man being an Egyptian civilian home on leave, and a very decent fellow, who seemed highly amused at the course of events. The first part of the meal passed in very ordinary fashion; Massingdale, in whose expression I read signs of battle, was at the other end of the table to the bishop, and was, therefore, spared further conversation with him. When we were alone with our wine, the trouble began almost immediately, and it was certainly of Coke's seeking. He pushed his chair back, crossed his legs, and gave us his opinions with the air of a man bestowing something of value.

"I was in Paris recently," he began, for the benefit of the four of us, "and I visited the Salon. Half a glass—no more, Sir Henry. I confirmed the opinion, which I have always held, that art runs sadly away from her true course."

"Surely that is rather a sweeping statement?"

answered our host, with an amused glance at Massingdale, who had sat forward with his arms on the table, and his whole figure expressing disgust.

"I am afraid," pursued Magram-Coke, "that it is, unhappily, only too true. I wish it were not."

"What should you define as the true course of art?" Massingdale demanded abruptly.

"The function of art is to help us to a truer and nobler life," the bishop announced.

"Do you deny that it sometimes succeeds in that?" I inquired.

"Sometimes! There you have the evil," was his answer. "Sometimes it fulfils its high mission, often it does incalculable harm. Until it is purged of its fondness for arousing the base passions of man, it must be more of a danger to us than a help."

"What, in the name of sanity, do you mean?" asked Massingdale; I could see that the man was becoming worked up to a high pitch of excitement.

"It is, surely, only too obvious," continued Magram-Coke, intent on making an impression, "that even those men, whose place is the most honoured in the world of artists, have often given birth to work that is an offence to any one of pure mind, and that they have thereby done more harm than can be corrected by the influence of their better creative moments."

"Would you mind explaining what you wish to say, by naming examples?" Massingdale asked, speaking very quietly.

Now, I hold that Sir Henry was in part responsible for what happened afterwards, because at this moment a servant entered with coffee and cigars, and it would have been no difficult matter to set the talk going on some other topic after the slight interruption; he did not, however, attempt any such diversion, although he must have realised, knowing something of Massingdale, that a very heated outburst threatened. If he did anything it was to encourage the discussion; and he confessed afterwards that he would not have interfered for a hundred pounds.

"Certainly," continued Magram-Coke, having helped himself to coffee, "I will give you instances, Kenneth; that is, if Sir Henry does not mind our continuing this discussion."

"By all means, please go on," said our host. And the bishop pursued the matter farther with increasing contentment.

"I saw in the Salon a very large number of what, I believe, are termed 'studies of the nude.'"

"I can believe it," gasped Massingdale. "But you don't base your assertions on that?"

"It reminded me, as I have said, of this unhappy tendency in art," Magram-Coke replied.

"Do you think that a picture of a man's body, or a woman's, naked, often does incalculable harm?" Massingdale inquired, in a strained voice.

"Really, Kenneth," the bishop continued, and his face expressed a sorrowful pain at the mere discussion of such matters, "I fail to see what good such pictures can accomplish."

"Do you see nothing beautiful in the naked body of a man or woman?"

"That is a subject which I do not care to discuss," Magram-Coke replied.

"It is a subject which you yourself started," retorted Massingdale, making no attempt to disguise his anger.

I confess that I was beginning to feel uncomfortable; I did not know my host, and I was not sure how he would take the outburst which was threatening. But Sir Henry Wrant sat watching Massingdale with much interest, and contented himself with urging on the discussion.

"Won't you explain to us," said he, addressing Magram-Coke, "the reason that you object to the painting, and, I presume, the sculpture, of the nude?"

"Certainly, Sir Henry, certainly," the bishop answered. "I am afraid that Kenneth may still preserve some of the fancies that he once professed, and that he will disagree with me, but I must not shirk my duty on that account."

"God help us!" muttered Massingdale; but the bishop was too occupied with the sound of his own voice to pay attention to the interruption.

"I hold," he continued piously, "that these studies, no matter what may have been the intention of their creator, are liable to do very serious harm. It has been wisely ordained that man should cover his nakedness with garments, and I cannot see that anything but evil can come from the portrayal, in public galleries, of the undraped bodies of men and women. This form of picture is, to my mind, to be classed with certain songs, and certain books, which suggest indecency under a thin cloak of artistic disguise."

Here Massingdale put a sudden end to the discussion; he had for some time past been fidgeting on his seat like a man in pain, now he burst forth in anger. Leaning forward with an abrupt movement, he upset his coffee cup, but did not seem to notice what he had done. His eyes shone with passion, and his right hand, which was stretched out on the table, shook; yet his voice was low when he first began to speak.

"And I hold," he cried, "that a man who thinks the things that you have just said, is not a fit person to mix with ordinary men and women. If you really see anything indecent in the simple picture of a naked woman, I advise you to be very careful or your filthy mind will bring you to a criminal dock on some disgraceful charge. Meanwhile, whether you have just been giving us your true thoughts, or whether, as I imagine, you have mouthed a stupid lie to suit your damned hypocritical pose, I would ask you to spare ordinary men your peculiarly obscene talk."

For a moment I thought that Coke would be startled from his habitual pose of saintly humilitude; I imagined that there trembled on his lips some natural phrase of angry retort, but he was well schooled in his hypocrisy, and he managed to maintain his part; yet, if his eyes were any guide, the man had come very near to conquering the attitude.

"Kenneth, my dear boy," he reproved, his voice more unctuous than usual, and his manner that of great suffering, "you cannot think what you are saying. To-morrow, I am sure, you will be ready to ask the pardon that I shall be only too glad to give."

Massingdale had shrugged his shoulders, and had sat back as Coke began speaking, and when the latest example of true forbearance had been delivered, he took no notice of the speaker; instead, he replaced the coffee cup which he had upset, apologising to his host for his clumsiness.

"It is of no consequence at all," Sir Henry informed him, his manner giving no hint of his appreciation of the late interchange of opinions. "But we have been sitting talking a long while, suppose we join the womenfolk in the drawing-room."

After Magram-Coke had taken his departure, which he did at an early hour, the matter of Massingdale's outburst was discussed. The Egyptian civilian was outspoken in his pleasure, the "incredible bishop person" had not pleased him; Sir Henry Wrant explained, in answer to Massingdale's apologies, that he did not in the least object to the business.

"It was inevitable from the start," he insisted, smiling. "I could have stopped it, if I had wished. But I am afraid the truth that you told him, Massingdale, will have no effect on our right reverend acquaintance; he is far beyond being improved."

"I never thought about him," Massingdale answered. "I spoke because his idiotic drivel forced me to it. His canonisation or his damnation is a matter which does not interest me."

"Yet you have made a nasty enemy," suggested Lady Wrant. "He won't forget what you said to him, and he will do you all the harm he can. But sit down and talk to me about something more amusing."

Massingdale shook his head and laughed.

"I can't," he explained. "My dear cousin has ensured that I shall think about him all the evening. I will call on you, Lady Wrant, the day after to-morrow, and then I will talk at your bidding. To-night I must go; what is more, I must take the unhappy Richard Crutchley with me. We will walk the streets together, and he will listen patiently to much foolish talk, until the vision of the Magram-Coke creature is driven from our heads."

Which thing we did, subject to a slight modification of the programme; for when we had been aimlessly tramping about for half an hour or more, I struck, and we spent the rest of the evening drinking lager beer in a German beer-hall. Owing to the fortunate circumstance that Massingdale sat next to a citizen of Leipzig, who waxed exceedingly communicative on the subject of English feeding, I escaped further discussion of the new suffragan bishop.

CHAPTER V

OF AN ACT OF FRIENDSHIP

ONE afternoon about a week later I was walking down the Borough High Street, in which neighbourhood I had had business. I do not share Massingdale's fondness for wandering in unsavoury quarters, and I found little to interest me, or to cause me to saunter. The afternoon was, however, very hot, and I was thirsty, so that I looked out for a decent place in which to drink. I passed a cheap eating-house, where the chief dish for the day was announced on a slate that hung on the door-post; a warm smell of stale food and sawdust was about the place, and the interior, seen through the open door, looked ugly and uninteresting; but I saw that the room was not too full, and it occurred to me that I had never been in such surroundings before, and that I might get tea there as well as anywhere else in the district. So I went in. As I walked to an empty table, intent on trying to appear not altogether out of place, some one touched me on the arm. I turned quickly, and saw Massingdale smiling at me in amusement.

"'Streuth,' Dick," said he, "I did not expect to find you in such places. Don't stare, Mr. Crutchley; it is rude. This is Master William Egger, my guest at a composite, and I hope full, meal. Won't you join us?"

I sat down next to Massingdale and, in defiance of his reproof, eyed his guest in some astonishment. I had become accustomed to peculiar conduct on his part, but the promiscuous finding of stray slum children was a proceeding that I had never anticipated; yet I had the entertaining spectacle before me of Massingdale, apparently well content, supplying an embryo criminal of forbidding aspect with a strange assortment of food. Master William Egger was exceedingly small; could not have been more than thirteen or fourteen years of age; had close-cropped red hair, a white face, very dirty, and no external evidence of any attractive or desirable qualities. He did not look a pleasant child, I must suppose, under favourable circumstances, but in the midst of enthusiastic and noisy feeding he put an animal greed to his former disadvantages, which added nothing to his beauty.

He sat opposite to Massingdale, leaning forward to the table, and, when he could spare a moment from his absorbing occupation, eyed his host furtively and with some enquiry. I imagine that he was much confused, since Massingdale's manner was scarcely that of the ordinary philanthropist. Whatever may have been his curiosity it did not interfere with his appetite. I ordered some tea, which was peculiarly nasty, and sat watching the urchin. When he had finished off his meal with a couple of meat pies, he sat back with a grunt.

"Won't you have something more?" asked Massingdale.

"Bloomin' well full, I am, guv'ner," answered the child hoarsely, in a voice as ugly as his appearance. "I cawn't do no more, s'elp me, thenking yer."

"Then take a couple of the pies for future occasions," suggested Massingdale, pushing the plate towards him.

William Egger did not reply, but pocketed four of the pies in, really, very smart fashion. Massingdale winked at me, but did not otherwise draw attention to the number concealed.

"I do not think," said he, addressing the boy, "that you need hang about any longer, young man. I hope you have enjoyed the afternoon as much as I have."

"Garn," replied William Egger briefly, sliding from his chair; he hesitated a moment, as if wondering what he should do; looked at the other tables aggressively, where, I noticed, we were creating much interest; and then added in his hoarse, Cockney voice: "Fair knocked some on 'em, we did. So long, guv'ner."

After which statement, and without condescending to notice my presence, he went out into the street.

"Suppose we get to some fresher air than this," said Massingdale, paying the bill. "That is, if you have finished your tea."

"I have not," I answered, "and I 'm not going to finish it. Come on."

When we were outside, walking towards London Bridge, I endeavoured to satisfy my curiosity, which was great.

"Why the devil have you taken to entertaining infant criminals in their own haunts?" I inquired.

"Why, O Richard," he answered, twirling his stick to the great danger of the other pedestrians, "have you taken to drinking a dish of tea in a squalid eating-house? Yours is the more surprising action."

"I was passing," I assured him, "and I thought that I would try to see what attracts you in such places. I did not discover anything."

"A good defence," he allowed, lunging at a lamp-post. "I entertained my friend William, who will certainly develop into a very decent criminal, because he is an astute critic of human nature."

"Explain, you lunatic," I implored.

"You interrupt my explanation," he protested, stopping to look at the river as we got on to the bridge. "After lunch I went out to take the air on the Embankment, and to watch the gulls being fed with fish. As I approached a group of the great people engaged in this amusing occupation, I saw my friend William seated on a bench; I had not, then, the pleasure of William's acquaintance. He was, as I came up, about to transfer a silk handkerchief from the bench to his own pocket. William is, as yet, only an apprentice in thieving; he caught my eye, as the expression goes, and became embarrassed.

" 'I see,' says I, 'that you have found a handkerchief. Do you know who dropped it?'

"'I was jist agoin' to give it to 'im, guv'ner,' replied William, in his agreeable tones.

" 'Who is him?' says I.

" 'Why 'im,' answers William, pointing; 'that there bloomin' snuffler in the gaiters.'

"The 'bloomin' snuffler,' O *mon* Richard, was our sainted cousin, that most holy divine the Lord Bishop of Tooting Bec, or wherever it is. When William had returned the handkerchief, which he did with evident reluctance, he and I went off together; a child who could so accurately describe our dear relative was, you will surely agree, worthy of some attention. Who am I that I should not hail genius when I meet it? A 'bloomin' snuffler'! A God-given phrase which shall comfort me on many sad occasions."

Here Massingdale ceased his explanation and walked beside me in silence, his eyes laughing and his whole carriage expressing his delight.

"That does not explain how you got to the Borough High Street," I told him, after a pause.

"Oh," said he, smiling, "that was William's choice; I could scarcely do less than consult my guest. After a visit to the Whispering Gallery of St. Paul's, where William whispered very hoarsely, we took a cab to the eating-house, which is William's favourite resort when he is in funds. As he very properly put it, his presence there with, apparently, unlimited gold at his disposition would make 'the other coves wot I know so bloomin' wild.' He seemed pleased with the result, when he left us."

"It is possible to conceive better moral guides for the young man than yourself," I suggested. "Did you tell Master William Egger the cause of your hospitality?"

"I did," replied Massingdale; "but he seemed to think me a fool for not having heard the phrase before. William is an enlightened, though scarcely a polite, child."

Massingdale was silent as we passed St. Paul's Station, coming from Upper Thames Street, but when we got on to the Embankment he suddenly dashed into another subject.

"Exit William," he announced solemnly. "William was an episode, and he is passed; in mortal fashion he has vanished into the unknown. We will talk of other things. Have you observed, my friend, that, at the inexorable bidding of Time, we move towards the Long Vacation?"

"Curiously enough, I have," I answered.

"You are observant," he assured me, with much gravity. "The occasion has its significance. After the Long Vacation I shall no longer inhabit Brick Court; I shall have become a model, for the benefit of all my friends, of domestic respectability; I shall be married. I decline to hang on much longer in this futile fashion; I shall bring eloquence, prayers, and tears to my assistance; I shall assail the parties most concerned with a ceaseless clamour; and I shall gain my way. To be engaged and to continue in that state contentedly, is, to a man of spirit, intolerable; no one, whose mind is not that of a fish, can endure for long a condition so amorphous. Therefore I will get married speedily, my Richard, and I will make my bow to many of my old delights. For we pay for the joys of to-morrow by the loss of those of to-day—which remark has, possibly, been made by others. Kind sir, I hear the chime of distant bells."

And being, as he always was, perfectly oblivious to what others might think of his behaviour, he stoppd in the middle of the pavement, and requested me to listen to their pleasant melody.

"I sincerely hope," said I, "that marriage may give you some little appearance of sense. But for heaven's sake come on; there is a knave behind you with fish for sale, and he obviously thinks you want to buy some."

Massingdale turned round without replying, and purchased six penny bags of fish; two of which, to my considerable disgust, he handed to me.

"Have you ever played this game?" he asked, throwing small pieces of fish over the river, where they were caught by the gulls before they reached the water.

"No," I replied shortly, "and I 'll be damned if I begin now."

"Richard," he answered, apparently very much amused, "a top-hat and a tail-coat will be the ruin of you. Observe. Although I wear the same form of clothing, I throw fish with skill and accuracy."

Seeing, however, that I would not be persuaded to join him in fish throwing, he presented the remaining bags to some children, and we continued our walk.

"Since," he remarked, continuing the conversation, as if it had not been interrupted, "my days as a bachelor are numbered, we will make use of them. Will you dine with me to-night in Soho, and afterwards find such amusement as may offer itself to us?"

"I will," I agreed, not sorry to get the chance, as I had been very busy for some time past. "By the way, you were telling me the other day that Yvonne Carrel was in town. Have you seen anything of her?"

At the mention of her name Massingdale let all his laughing mood slip from him, and took on a manner that had a deal of sadness in it. He hesitated a minute or two before answering, as if he were not certain of what he should say, a thing very unusual with him.

"I have," he answered at last. "I have seen her twice. There is the shadow of tragedy hanging about her, Dick, a miserable, sordid tragedy of failure, from which I cannot see any escape."

"What on earth is wrong?" I questioned in surprise, for from what I had seen of her I judged that nothing of the depth of tragedy would ever touch her. The woman I imagined her to be, laughed much, often mixed tears and laughter, touched the world lightly, asking nothing serious from it; she would be kind to others because it was her nature, she would obey her simple instincts, and be called, by the short-sighted, a bad woman on that account; but that she should ever journey to the wild land of tragedy, leaving the smooth valleys of carelessness, was a chance that I had not foreseen.

Massingdale stopped walking, and leaned his elbow on the stone balustrade guarding the river; I did the same thing, seeing that he wished to talk.

"I think," he answered, speaking slowly, "that you have seen enough of her to know that her voice is very much to her, that however shallow and foolish she may seem in other things, in music, in her art, she touches something deep-rooted and secure."

I nodded; and he continued in the same voice.

"Well, unless something happens, she will lose it all; for if she loses her power of singing she will lose all hold she ever had on the beautiful in life. When she has lost that, she will realise what it was, and the life that will be left to her will not be good. She maintains that she is badly treated, that the opera people in Paris have behaved disgracefully, that even the managers in England are beginning to conspire against her. It is, of course, untrue. You have seen, perhaps, that she is sometimes, lately more often, indisposed and cannot sing?"

"Yes," I answered, beginning to see the thing as serious.

"You know that sort of indisposition, Dick," Massingdale continued. "You know what it means. The thing has been going on for some time, and, in a singer, the end will come quickly. When I saw her a week ago, and when I saw her yesterday, in the afternoon, before she had to sing, she was not sober. No human voice can stand it."

I kept silence, trying to find something, not altogether banal, that I might say. Meanwhile Massingdale stared out over the river, seeing nothing, I fancy, of the

Thames. Quite suddenly he stood up straight, and began speaking very fast, his words tumbling from him as they do when he is excited, his hands making many expressive gestures; yet he did not raise his voice.

"Any man who knows her as I know her," he cried, "would be a blackguard to let the thing happen without some attempt to stop it. Yet what can I do? She knows me as a sort of child to whom she has taught the most of that which he knows of women—or knew until a little while ago. She knows that I do not see as she does, that many of my ideas she cannot understand, therefore she laughs at me when I presume to give advice. Yet she wanders on to her ruin, and a schoolboy could see the danger which she ignores. Some years ago in Paris, just before I came to Cambridge, she did much for me, and in her foolish, laughing way taught me things that it is good to know; since then she has encouraged me when she thought I needed it; has borne with me when I have been at war with all things; has often shown me where I was a fool. Beneath the actress, who plays a fool part for the smiles of men, there is a woman, no wiser, no better than the rest of us, but surely just as good. Sooner or later there will be a public scene, a breakdown that cannot be hushed up, and even her name will fail to secure her more engagements. Then? She has no money; she spends all that she earns. No one will pay much attention to Yvonne Carrel when her voice no longer lures the listener to a golden land. And, through the future, through the years that may still be for her, she will never forget what she has been, she will not lose sight of the thing which she has lost. To kill her before the end comes, to make her die while her voice still holds its magic, would be a kindness."

I had rarely seen him so much in earnest, so captured by sadness and perplexity; he had much of the same appearance that he had shown, at times, before his engagement to Joan, with something more of sorrow added.

"Are you sure that you don't make the case more gloomy than it is?" I asked, having not much hope that he did. "Surely it can be stopped before it makes for ruin."

"Many things might happen," he answered me, "that amongst them; but how it is to come about the high gods have not informed me. Am I to go to Yvonne and tell her that she is drinking disaster, and that she must reform her ways? If you were my age, if you were in my place that is to say, would you do it? And, if you did it, would you achieve any result?"

"But," I argued, evading the question, "she surely has older friends who could do something?"

"Older friends!" cried Massingdale, with a sudden show of bitterness. "She has such friends as a woman who leads her life can make—men who, some of them grey-haired, take her as she is, and who, if she ceases to amuse them, will leave her for some one else. Loissel would help her, if she would let him, but she will not. She finishes her engagement on Saturday, and will probably return to Paris." He finished his sentence abruptly, and stood staring in front of him, his hands clasped on the balustrade; when he spoke again, his tone indicated that the subject was closed. "If," said he, "we could only see one clear patch of road ahead, we might make something more out of this journey of our lives. Shall we come on?"

I knew Massingdale sufficiently well not to attempt to reopen the discussion, so I walked by his side in silence until we got to Westminster Bridge. When we arrived there, he suggested that we should go on to Chelsea, and so fill up the time until dinner, to which thing I agreed. We had scarcely got past the Houses of Parliament before he began talking at random, but with his usual vivacity, on any subject that came into his head, and for the rest of the evening he kept up an almost ceaseless flow of talk. Such, I had discovered long before, was his habit when something had upset him; he would endeavour, generally, I will admit, with much success, to cover his thoughts, or to stop them, by great volubility. By the time that we had finished dinner, he was to all appearance in his ordinary temper of impressionable carelessness, and when we had spent an hour or more in a music-hall, and had found the entertainment dull, it would have been a hard matter to persuade a stranger that Massingdale was other than an amused and sympathetic spectator of the antics of his fellows, one who had performed little on his own account.

Somewhere around midnight we found ourselves in Piccadilly Circus, making for one of the substitutes for the Continental *café* which London has to offer, the particular place to which we walked having an entrance in Regent Street, and being nearby to an expensive and highly respectable restaurant. As we came up to the door of our *café*, we had to stand aside to let a fashionably dressed woman pass out. I am extremely unobservant in such matters, and often fail to recognise my acquaintances, so that until Massingdale took off his hat I did not notice that the woman who stood by us was Yvonne Carrel. She was standing facing Massingdale, and smiling, and it was perfectly obvious that she had no great control of herself; she provided an undeniable confirmation of Massingdale's talk of the afternoon.

"Ah! *le petit* Louis!" she cried, raising her voice more than is usual in a public thoroughfare. "*Viens, mon chéri.* You come to supper with me?"

I saw that one or two of the people passing turned to look at us, and I noticed that a party leaving the adjoining restaurant had noticed the greeting, and paid us some attention as they waited for their carriage. I began to be exceedingly uncomfortable.

Massingdale spoke to her in his easy, laughing fashion, but I fancied him somewhat anxious about her behaviour.

"Certainly, if you wish me, Yvonne," said he. "Shall I call a cab?" And he signalled to a passing hansom.

What miserable fancy entered into her muddled brain, I do not know, but Mademoiselle Carrel seized the occasion to make an unwonted claim upon his affection.

"It is good," she went on, in the same high voice, so that there were now two or three loiterers, besides the party at the door of the restaurant, staring at us. "You do not altogether forget your old friends." Then suddenly, though in a lower voice: "Kiss me, Louis."

Massingdale was curiously white, but he did not seem to hesitate, he allowed no chance of the scene becoming more noticeable than it already was. He stooped and kissed her on the cheek, leading her to the cab that waited. He then gave her address to the cabman, and, getting in beside her, was driven off.

I turned away up Regent Street, the amusement of the witnesses of this episode causing me to think gratefully of physical violence. To them the affair was a not uncommon occurrence, and, doubtless, they could not be expected to see any unusual feature, yet I was persuaded that, had any of the spectators found themselves in Massingdale's place, they would have hesitated, as I should have, to do what he had done, they would have allowed Mademoiselle Carrel to make a greater exhibition of herself rather than put themselves in a foolish position.

As I passed the restaurant, hoping that no one had recognised the players in this comedy, I discovered that Magram-Coke was of the party who waited for their carriage. He had assumed an expression of pious indignation in which there was a nice admixture of sadness, and his eyes met mine as I passed. I did not, however, think the occasion was one on which recognition would be advisable, and he made no attempt to greet me, so I hurried on.

Massingdale would return to the Temple, I imagined, after getting Mademoiselle Carrel to her rooms; therefore, when I had allowed sufficient time for Magram-Coke to drive off with his companions, I went back to the *café*, and, after half an hour or so, to Brick Court.

Shortly before two o'clock Massingdale came in; he looked tired and upset, but he avoided any discussion of the evening's happenings, beyond a single reference to the matter.

"Some attractive example of chivalry had met her at the theatre," he stated, helping himself to whisky, "and had been drinking with her; doubtless, this pleasant gentleman wished to spare her, and himself, the hurt of scandal, and so avoided seeing her home."

"Magram-Coke witnessed the episode," I announced, watching Massingdale.

"The devil he did," he replied showing no particular interest; and he sat down on my sofa. "I hope the righteous person benefited by what he saw, which is unlikely. May I be permitted to suggest that my host, should he be so disposed, retires to bed? I will smoke a pipe and meditate, whilst reclining on the sofa, upon the complexity of human affairs."

Having said this, Massingdale had delivered an ultimatum. I had the choice of going to bed, and the hour was not unreasonable for such a proceeding, or of sitting in talk with him until I fell asleep in my chair, when all subjects under heaven might be discussed except the affairs of Mademoiselle Yvonne Carrel. Being remarkably tired, I chose the former alternative, and left him in a meditative condition upon his back.

I was very busy the following morning, and, when I got back to my rooms after lunch, found that Massingdale had gone down to Elsingham for the week-end, which, it being Saturday, was his usual custom. On Sunday evening I had to dine with some relatives in Kensington, and for the space of two hours and a half was compelled to assume an air of entertainment amongst people with whom I neither had, nor wished to have, any common interests; when I had listened for as short a time as decency permitted to the talk in the drawing-room, which was mainly concerned with dances and the latest musical comedy, I made my escape, and got back to the Temple. There I found Massingdale pacing up and down my sitting-room.

In the light of a single candle—for of his own wish he would always pass the evening in partial darkness—his appearance startled me; his hair was in its wildest condition, he seemed incapable of remaining still, and his face showed signs of some strong emotion. I imagine that I betrayed some indication of my astonishment at his appearance, for he greeted me as I entered with a very feeble imitation of his ordinary manner; it was quite plain that he wished to steer the conversation by himself.

"The reveller returns," said he, stopping in the middle of the room.

"And the lover leaves his mistress," I returned, and was surprised to see him start. "What makes you turn up to-night? I did not expect you until to-morrow evening."

He started pacing the room again, but did not reply at once. It was clear beyond a doubt that something had gone badly wrong, and I waited impatiently to hear what it was.

"I thought it advisable to return at once," he answered after a pause, making use of a precise, expressionless tone that was new to me. "I leave for Paris to-morrow afternoon by the two-twenty."

"What the devil are you going to Paris for?" I asked, putting down my coat and hat, and standing in front of the hearth.

Massingdale turned at the window, and faced me; and his voice was very distinct as he answered.

"To paint."

"To paint?" I gasped; but he took no notice of me, and began his restless walking again.

"Yes," he continued, speaking fast, but letting his words come from him in jerks, as if he dared not emphasise them. "I am going back to Loissel like a damned prodigal who has failed in other things. I have failed in other things. I have played my stake and lost it. I thought that I knew what the risks were, I thought that I saw my way. I was mistaken. Fate laughs at fools, Dick, especially when they are self-satisfied fools. I made the great mistake of thinking that others, who knew me, would have realised the way that I see things. They do not. You said that the lover leaves his mistress. He does not. He is sent away."

"You don't mean that—" I began; but he interrupted me.

"I do," he stated. "I mean that I am no longer engaged to Joan Onnington. She tells me that she has been mistaken, and I agree with her, though not in the way she means. Poor child, she thinks me a polished blackguard, a laughing scoundrel who deceives her with a smile. I tried to alter her view, to make her see the truth—I failed." He paused, and then attempted his usual manner with no success. "So, Richard, I 'll take me off to Paris, and to painting. Fortune and fame shall come to me; my pictures shall rejoice a world unborn; and—many other things that I can't think of for the moment."

Under the circumstances, I decided that it was better to keep him to his new manner; it was easier to meet.

"Feel inclined to give me any details?" I asked abruptly, occupying myself with the filling of a pipe.

"If you want them," he agreed, going back to his former tone, but sitting down on the seat by the open window. "The trouble came through Magram-Coke: it was a product of his pure mind. Don't grunt, Dick; he is a very interesting person in his way, which, thank God, is not ours. He counts the unhappiness of others a thing of no moment, a small matter to be induced instantly, if it helps to advertise his pose; to secure an effectual setting for his chosen attitude of righteousness, he will forget many things, or will not heed them; a man of single purpose. He called at Elsingham Hall yesterday afternoon; he came with a friend of the Onningtons'. He eyed me sadly, as if my existence pained him. After tea he expressed a desire to see the grounds, and asked whether Joan and I would show them to him. We began to do so. When we had got down to the river, he stopped and sat down on the seat in the bay of the yew hedge, saying that he wanted to talk. It did not occur to me that I should form the subject of that talk. You know the man's manner. You know the gentle, humble voice, that grows sad at the thought of sin. Helped by his gaiters and his profession, he can impose on a young girl, can make her think him a good man. 'Kenneth,' said he, 'I want to know whether you have told Miss Onnington of what happened on Friday night?'

"'Friday night?' I asked. I had been thinking of other things, Dick, and did not, for a moment, remember what had happened.

"'I see that you have not,' he went on, and the man assumed something of a judicial manner. 'As that is so—and it is as I thought it would be—I conceive it my duty, both as an honourable man and an humble worker against evil, to tell her that she has something very painful to learn.'

"'Will you, please, tell me what you are talking about?' Joan asked him, and her face was flushed with indignation. 'I ——'"

Here Massingdale was silent, sitting without a movement, staring out at the Court. When he spoke again there was no difference in the quiet, expressionless tone of his voice.

"I am not used to such scenes," he went on; "and I am not a very self-controlled person. I showed that I was getting angry, and I made a movement to silence Magram-Coke. Joan, I suppose, thought that I wished to hide something; she turned suddenly very white, and said nothing more. Coke had the air of a man performing a painful duty, but I think that he enjoyed it. He spoke to Joan. 'Miss Onnington,' he stated, 'since Kenneth will not, I am forced to inform you that I saw him, last Friday evening, embrace a woman of obviously low character, and that he did this thing about midnight in the middle of Regent Street; that he then returned with her to her lodging. I thought it better to inform you, rather than Admiral Onnington, of this disgraceful occurrence, because it is you—I will not dwell on his own sin—whom he has chiefly wronged.' Then I lost control of myself; I do not remember what I said, but I was very near to assaulting the animal. When I had finished, Joan asked him to go, and, contrary to his usual custom, he went without saying anything more. As he disappeared round the corner of the yew hedge, I turned to Joan; she stood very straight, with her hands clenched at her sides; she did not look at me."

Massingdale again fell silent; and before going on with his tale got up from the window-seat to resume his walk up and down the room.

"It is not necessary to repeat what we said," he continued presently; "the result is all that you will want to know. She asked me—and I have a fancy, Dick, that she had condemned me before I began to reply—to what Magram-Coke had referred. I told her; I explained that I had been afraid that there might have been a worse scene, and that Yvonne's condition would have been mentioned in the papers. She asked me, without any comment, how long I had known Yvonne. I explained that she was an old friend of mine. Then, quite suddenly, Joan turned on me with a manner of suppressed passion, demanding that I should tell her what I meant by an 'old friend.' She stood quite close to me, looking me in the eyes, and she repeated her question with more insistence. I knew that was the end; I knew that she could not understand that things had changed, that I would not sink to what she thought. I informed her, in the best way that I could, of what our relations had been." He took a turn of the room without speaking, and then continued, his voice strained and low. "She is very young; she did not mean what she said; she was blinded by the suggestion that Coke had given. Surely—she knows me—I have not the air of a man of that sort. The past is past. She would know that there are few men who can bring up a clean record—yet, because of the past, to condemn the present without hesitation, I— Forgive me, Dick, I am forgetting you. She told me to go—that is all."

He sat down again by the window, wearily, resting his elbow on the sill and staring into the night. I left the hearth-rug, and took a turn up and down the room before replying; yet when I spoke I had little enough to say.

"You are quite certain that you don't exaggerate things?" I asked with diffidence. "You are not mistaking a passing storm for something more serious?"

He answered me without turning his head.

"Absolutely certain."

Since he said nothing more, I tried to argue the matter, more for my own satisfaction than for the help that it might give him.

"But, confound it all," I cried, "Joan is not an absolute fool. She must be willing to listen to reason; she can't turn you off as if the matter were of small importance. It 's damned ridiculous."

Massingdale got up from his seat and came over to where I stood; putting his hands on my shoulders, he pushed me into an arm-chair. Something seemed to have given him more command upon himself than he had had throughout the evening.

"Peace, you old fool," he ordered, making something more of a success of his usual manner. "It is not an affair of reason. You cannot alter the decision of the gods—I wish you could. If a man cannot make himself understood, he should not complain that others mistake his actions. When Joan asked me for an explanation of my friendship with Yvonne, I should have given her something that would have helped her to my seeing; instead, beyond certain statements, I was mightily occupied with assuring her that I could not have done anything but the thing I did. Sometimes, doubtless, it is advisable to adopt another's outlook. However, the thing is finished."

"Did you talk to Admiral Onnington?" I asked.

"I told him that Joan had altered her mind, as she considered that I had not acted honourably; that I would, therefore, go away. That was the right thing to do, was n't it?"

I told him that I imagined so; and he sat on the edge of the table, filling a pipe. His face, in the light of the match, showed haggard and tired, but he seemed to have himself under good control.

We both smoked in silence for some time, and I was not able to discover from his expression anything of the thoughts which held him. For my own part, I indulged in the futile business of condemning the happenings of the past, endeavouring, without success, to discover how they might be robbed of their result.

Massingdale broke the silence with a remark that I had not in the least expected.

"I have," he announced, "about one hundred and eighty pounds in the bank, the balance of the coming half-year's allowance, and some odd cash about me. I shall not return that to my father; however he may take this business, I do not imagine that he would wish to take back what he has already given. I shall want it badly enough."

"You are not serious about going to Paris?" I asked, prepared for argument. "You have a very decent chance at the Bar, why throw it up?"

For the first time that evening he showed some of his old energy and excitement.

"Thunder of heaven!" he shouted, beating the table with his fist, "what have I to do with the Bar? Was it ever anything but cowardice that induced me to wear a wig and gown? Fate has surely told me with sufficient clearness where my destiny may be."

I did not attempt to dissuade him; I should have gained nothing by it, except the conviction that I had indulged in useless interference. Instead, I began to discuss the practical details of his leaving the Temple; and, although I had much to say on my side, I failed to move him from his intention of going the next day. When we had decided on the arrangements required for storing his furniture, selling some of it, and other matters of a like nature, he made mention of what I have always regarded as a piece of the purest folly.

"I shall go and see Yvonne later on this morning," said he, sitting back from the table at which he had been writing, "and I shall try to persuade her to come to Paris with me. I think she will agree to it."

"Good Lord, man," I cried in astonishment, "you can't be such a fool!"

"Why a fool?" he asked, taking no notice of my tone. "If she should come with me, I shall be able to get Loissel on her tracks, and the old man may work some magic."

"You are not a child, Massingdale," I urged; "you must see that, if you go off with her to-morrow, few people will believe she is not still your mistress."

"Not more than one or two, certainly," he allowed, quite unmoved.

"And there will be strong evidence to force people into the belief that you have behaved like a scoundrel to Joan."

"Since she believes that now, without the evidence, I do not concern myself with what others may think later," he answered, with something of finality in his tone.

But I was not willing to let him embark on this absurd folly without further protest, so I attacked him again.

"No man can afford to throw away his reputation for a whim," I insisted. "It is not a little matter to be held a blackguard by decent men. When it comes to acting in this fashion for no real purpose, it is nothing else than idiotic folly."

He tilted his chair back, and looked at me in very kindly fashion, yet there was no sign about him that my words had had any effect.

"*Mon* Richard," said he, and there was much determination in his voice, "we waste our breath. Yet I owe you some explanation. Take it, and be content. Do not imagine me the type of fool who will indulge in quixotic action because he thinks the pose becoming. If I thought that there was the slightest, the very smallest, chance that Joan would alter her view, I should not do this, I should be afraid of the consequence; but I have heard her speak to me, and I do not think that she will see the other side. When she is grown up, when she sees things more as they really are, she will have forgotten the charm that I once had for her. Therefore, I have nothing to fear on her account. On the other hand, Yvonne is so far gone that something must be done immediately, if anything is to come of it; and she will do nothing of her own will. Having, I believe, some influence with her, I can get her back to Paris; there I put the matter into other hands. About my reputation you are somewhat misinformed; it is gone, or will be shortly, without this. All my acquaintances will accept the scandal with avidity; the thing will be so pleasing to them that, whether I go off with my supposed mistress or not, they will not refuse belief in it. My departure with Yvonne may turn from me a few waverers, they do not count; you and my other friends, Loissel and, I fancy, Tom Onnington, will not be affected. Therefore a prudence that hesitated, in such a case, at an action which might turn out of some use, would surely be misplaced."

"I suppose," I told him, when he had finished speaking, "that you will go off with Yvonne Carrel, but you have not convinced me that you are not a fool for doing so."

He gave a curious laugh, and walked to the window.

"Ah!" he called, looking out, "this is a nice return for much forbearance. I have robbed you of your night's sleep, Dick. Here is the dawn."

I went and stood beside him at the window, and looked out into the Court. A pale light had come after the darkness, and the old buildings looked grey, and cold, and cheerless, although the summer night was warm; I shivered in sympathy with the hour, and realised that I was very tired. Massingdale stood beside me without movement, his face showing a weariness that matched the lingering shadow out of doors.

"Wherein lies the sadness of this hour before the sunrise?" he murmured, forgetting, I fancy, that I stood by him. "It is not the half-light, for the evening misses it. A man should have his dreams before the sun comes, to help him in the day, he should not be awake; at sunset he has had some hours of action to give him courage for his thoughts, and that means much."

I moved, and he turned with a start.

"Go to bed, Dick," said he. "I 'll sit here a bit, and you shall provide me with breakfast."

So I turned in, and slept, leaving him at the window.

The following afternoon I saw him depart, in company with Yvonne Carrel, by the two-twenty train for Paris; and he seemed particularly careful that I should not speak to her alone. Except for his appearance, which suggested illness or debauchery, he offered a very praiseworthy imitation of his ordinary self, and poured forth a steady stream of talk until the train steamed out of the station.

As I left Charing Cross and walked back along the Strand, I began to realise the difference that his absence would make to me; and before I reached the Temple I was cursing Magram-Coke and Joan with an impartial vigour.

CHAPTER VI

SHOWING DIFFERENT SIDES TO THE SAME QUESTION

THAT same evening Admiral Onnington paid me a visit, as I sat smoking after dinner; he seemed moved from his usual hearty cheeriness; affected a serious manner that became him very ill; and plunged into the affairs of Joan and Massingdale at once.

"What 's this last thing I hear?" he asked, letting himself drop into an arm-chair with a sigh, for he was a man of heavy build. "Just pass the brandy to me, my boy; you have n't learned how to mix a drink yet. But what is this about Kenneth Massingdale going off to Paris with this singing woman? I heard it from Wrant this afternoon at the club, and he is a man I trust. Is it true?"

"Massingdale went by the same train, and in the same carriage as Mademoiselle Carrel, if that is what you mean," I answered, making the best that I could of it.

"It is, thank you," replied my uncle, with decision. "It is a good bit more than I want." He puffed at his cigar in silence, frowning fiercely; then went on speaking with a deal more of confidence. "I 'll be shot, if I can make it out," he announced. "I thought that, after knocking about the world for sixty years, I had learned to judge something of a man's character; enough, at any rate, to go by. I would have sworn that young Massingdale was as honourable a man as his father, and here he turns out an absolute blackguard, and plays the devil with my daughter's feelings. What have you to say to it yourself, Dick?"

"I think," I suggested, "that you seem too ready to condemn the man unheard. Why jump to the conclusion that he must be guilty?"

"That 's not fair, my boy, that 's not fair," the Admiral answered impatiently. "I have done nothing of the sort; I have done the opposite. Last night when he knocked the breath out of me by saying that Joan had done with him, I neither condemned him nor thought of doing so. I only let him rush off in that fashion because I thought that, being a queer, excitable fellow, it would do him good to be alone. I listened to what Joan had to say—which was damned little—and could not make head or tail of it, except that he had behaved disgracefully with some singing woman. I distrusted the whole business, because that insufferable hypocrite of a parson had been in it, and I said as little as I could. This morning I went into Cambridge and interviewed this precious bishop. I had the whole story from him, chapter and verse, with a lot of pious nonsense thrown in as well; and he swore to the whole lot of it. I told him, pretty plainly, what I thought of him for not coming to me first; and then I came up to town to try and find young Massingdale himself. I thought the disgraceful business must have some explanation; I have never yet condemned any man without full evidence of his guilt, and I hope I never shall. However, I came here and found no one in, and so went down to the club. There Wrant told me, and he did it very nicely too, what he had seen at Charing Cross. I am not a fool, my boy, and I can put facts together, when they are thrust under my nose. There can be no doubt that young Massingdale has behaved like an infernal scoundrel."

"There can be, and there is," I urged, "very considerable doubt. The whole thing is a mistake. Massingdale has done nothing that is dishonourable. The tale that Magram-Coke concocted about the affair in Regent Street the other night is sheer misrepresentation; Massingdale did what he did in order to prevent a scene."

"I know all about that," Admiral Onnington interrupted. "Your aunt has told me all that; it was, it seems, the excuse which the fellow offered to Joan. But, frankly, Dick, do you expect me to believe that an ordinary man is in the habit of kissing a well-known actress in a public thoroughfare, unless he is on pretty intimate terms with her?"

I saw the case going against Massingdale, as I had expected that it would, so I put my defence with all the heat I could muster.

"Massingdale is not an ordinary man," I retorted, with some anger. "And I am not aware that he has attempted to hide what his relations have been in the past with Mademoiselle Carrel. I fail to see why the devil, because he acts decently towards the woman, and helps her out of a hole, you should assume that she is still his mistress. Would you call it the conduct of an honourable man to disown her acquaintance because she happened to be intoxicated?"

Admiral Onnington got up from the arm-chair, and gripped hold of my left arm above the elbow; he had abandoned his attempt to appear magisterial, and seemed to feel relief at the change.

"Look here, Dick, my boy," said he, pinching my arm tightly, "I 'm not going to quarrel with you because you stick to a friend. Defend young Massingdale as warmly as you will; it will please me to hear you. But I must recognise the truth about this matter. Joan is my daughter, and I do not feel inclined to think kindly of a man who has played the very deuce with her affections. Besides, drop your prejudice, and tell me whether you can regard these two occurrences, the business in the street and the going off to Paris, as anything but conclusive proof."

To state, baldly, that Massingdale had taken Mademoiselle Carrel with him to Paris in order to affect her reform, seemed to me useless; offered as an explanation to any one who did not know him well, it had the appearance of a most ineffectual lie. Therefore, I tried to turn the matter aside, which was a mistake.

"Mademoiselle Carrel's engagement in London was finished," I replied, as confidently as I could. "She would have been going back to Paris in any case. I cannot see that you can make anything out of that coincidence."

"Steady, Dick," Admiral Onnington warned me, giving my arm another nip; "you are beginning to talk like a lawyer. Don't hide the facts, my boy. Can you give me your word—I don't ask you this because I want to hear you give a friend away, but because I must have the truth. Remember I am Joan's father—can you give me your word that it was nothing more than a coincidence that these two went away together this afternoon?"

I had the mighty poor satisfaction of knowing that I had predicted the harm that the departure referred to would bring about, which satisfaction I would have thrown in, in company with a good many things besides, to have had the question withdrawn.

"No," I answered, "I cannot; but——"

He stopped me, before I could finish the sentence; and his manner was so kindly that I could not take offence at his words.

"That is all I want," said he sadly. "That settles the matter. I decline to argue any more. I should only make you quarrel, Dick, and I won't have that. You take your view; I must, in duty, act on mine. I wish young Massingdale every success in life; I suppose that he will follow his taste, and go in for painting. I know that an outsider cannot reckon up all the temptations that go to a man's undoing; and I believe there is a lot of good in the boy; but I think that it will be better that he and I do not meet again. There are some things that a father should not forgive."

"You make an incredible mistake," I pleaded; but he stopped me again.

"Don't," he asked, picking up his hat. "Let us call the subject ended, there 's a good fellow. We 'll agree to be silent about it. Come down to Elsingham next week-end; we are a bit gloomy, and we want visitors. Besides, I want to talk to you about a yachting cruise next month."

Upon that he left me. He was, I have reason to suppose, a very good sailor, but he was a poor hand at hiding his feelings; and it was no difficult matter to see that the thing which, perhaps, struck him hardest in the whole business was the loss of the regard which he had had for Massingdale, a feeling that had been very strong in him. For it was characteristic of Massingdale to inspire very warm feelings, either of like or dislike, in those with whom he came in contact; and, however he might be judged, the memory of him was not easily forgotten.

At the end of the week I went down to Elsingham, and it would be an abominable misrepresentation to say that I enjoyed the visit. The manner adopted by the Onnington family was so carefully assumed, their strict avoiding of any discussion of recent events was so apparent, that the house seemed peopled by conscientious actors, somewhat fearful lest they should forget their parts. Joan showed the clearest signs that her attitude was difficult to support, and I was in continual fear that she would abandon the pose and invite me to an exchange of confidence. I recognised that where there was so little to be said, this refusal to introduce the subject of Massingdale or his behaviour was certainly wise, but I found the prevailing cheerfulness full of embarrassment, and a most effective barrier against careless conversation. I was mightily relieved to find that the vicar and a friend stopping with him had been asked in to dinner on the night of my arrival, for we played bridge until after the women had gone to bed, and so escaped the chance of any review of the situation. The following afternoon, it being Sunday, Joan suggested that I should go out for a walk with her, and having no possible excuse to offer, I was forced to consent, although I did not fancy the prospect.

We made for the Roman Road, which passes within a half-mile of the Hall, a broad, green cart-track, little used, running straight across the landscape, avoiding in the present day the neighbourhood of any village; a place much overgrown, and very lonely, serving, it would seem, no useful purpose of a road, but resting quietly in a slow decay. Here, even on Sunday afternoons, in summer, when complacent and unheeding couples cover the countryside, you will scarcely encounter a single pair in the course of an hour's walk. But it is a dangerous path to follow if you are minded to shut out the past, for the air is filled with memories, and the call of forgotten days may well serve a double purpose, leading a man from the long-closed chapters of history to the more troubled memory of his own yesterday.

Therefore, I was in no doubt that Joan and I would touch on what had happened, but was inclined to question whether we should have any profit of our talk. After we had walked a mile or more along the road, outwardly engaged in a discussion of the yachting cruise of which I was to be a member, Joan made the suggestion that we should sit down and rest, for the day was clear and hot, and there was no wind stirring. We sat in the shade of a hedge, facing across the road, cornfields rising to a copse-crowned hill; and I filled a pipe in silence, waiting for Joan to open the talk.

"Don't you think," she began, not looking at me, but keeping her eyes on a small pile of grass to which she added handfuls, "that it is rather foolish avoiding things in this way? I want you to answer me a question, Dick."

"Ask it," I replied, leaning back against the bank behind me, "and I will do my best, when I hear what it is."

"Did you—" she began, and then hesitated. "Oh, I don't know that it will do any good to speak about it at all."

"It will probably do no harm," I suggested.

Since the discussion seemed inevitable, I was inclined to urge it on and be done with it; and I fancy that Joan looked at the matter in the same way. She ceased to tear up grass, but she did not look at me, and her voice, when she spoke, was little above a whisper.

"How long have you known," she asked, "that

Kenneth was—very intimate," she seemed to stumble at the phrase, "with this Mademoiselle Carrel?"

"Some years at least," I answered. "She is one of his oldest friends. It is a great pity that you did not meet her."

She flushed, and replied to me with a sudden coldness.

"I am thankful that he spared me that."

"I fail to see why," I told her.

"Because I am not accustomed to meet that sort of woman," she retorted with a blaze of anger, turning to me with a fine display of indignation; "because I like to think that even he had more respect for me than that."

"You make a great mistake," I replied, sitting up. "If you had met Mademoiselle Carrel, if you had seen Massingdale with her, you would not have jumped to the absurd conclusions that you have adopted."

Although she was a girl not yet come to more than the borderland of womanhood, she already had much of a woman's way with her; and she turned from the point at issue with a perfect calmness.

"I prefer not to discuss that," said she, with an air of reproof. "I only wished to know how long the thing had been going on."

Doubtless, I should have realised the futility of further discussion, but when a man has had as little to do with women as I had at that time, he is often led on to argument when he should, more profitably, keep silence. Being, therefore, inexperienced in such encounters, I set about Massingdale's defence.

"If that is all you wish to know," I protested, "the subject is done with; but I had hoped that you would be willing to hear some other opinion than your own."

She seemed to have made away with her indignation, and she turned to me with an expression so near to tears that I regarded my coming attack upon her want of insight with something less of favour.

"You can't imagine, Dick," she answered, in a low voice, "that I am unwilling to hear of anything that might make a difference?"

I assured her that I did not imagine that she was unwilling; and I began to see that, perhaps, she saw the case as black as I saw it mistaken and unfortunate: but I called up a vision of Massingdale pacing my room in the candle-light, and I attempted my explanation.

"When you promised to marry Massingdale," I began, shifting my position so that I could watch her face, "you must have understood that he was a man who would do unusual things."

She raised her eyes, which for the most part she kept lowered, and stared at me in surprise.

"Of course I did," she murmured.

"You surely knew," I continued, "that there must have been actions in his life, before he met you, which you would not like, which he, under the circumstances, would not dwell upon with any pleasure."

She nodded her head in silence, without looking up, and she played nervously with the grass beside her.

"Yet you must have seen," I urged, "that he was a man of honour. You, of all people, Joan, must have learned that there were certain things, this thing of which you believe him guilty amongst them, that under no circumstances at all would he ever do. In spite of this, simply because appearances are against him, you condemn him; because Magram-Coke comes to you with a tale, you will not hear another word about the matter."

"That is not true, Dick," cried Joan in a choking voice. "I did listen to him."

"And did he hide," I asked, "what his relations with Mademoiselle Carrel had been in the past? Did he lie to you, Joan? Did he attempt any explanation but the true one? "

There was no answer to my questions. Joan sat with her head bent, and she had stopped playing with the grass. Therefore, I went on with my plea.

"Think what sort of a man you have to deal with," I insisted. "Remember him as he is, not as the ordinary interpretation of his actions would make him. Surely you can see him only as a loyal friend, a man who would not desert an old acquaintance because in befriending her he might be hurt himself? Surely you, of all people, have sufficient trust in him to believe that he did what he did because he would not let Mademoiselle Carrel ruin herself, when he might help her?"

I stopped. Joan was silent a moment, then she raised her head and looked at me; and her face was very white, though she spoke quietly, and with a certain finality.

"No, Dick," she answered me, "I can't believe what you ask me. I can't believe that, if he was only true and loyal as you say, he would have waited until the bishop forced him before he spoke about it. He ought to have told me first, then I should have believed him." She paused, and when she continued it almost seemed as if she nursed a grievance. "I am not a child," she stated; "I should have understood. You talk as if you knew him better than I do; yet I know what he is. He is never really serious. He plays with everything. Anything that comes along amuses him. He plays with his painting."

"Massingdale plays with his art?" I cried, interrupting her.

"Yes," she replied, with a manner of experienced conviction that might, under other circumstances, have amused me. "He does nothing more than play with it; he would not make it his profession. But it is the same in all things, Dick, he is not really serious about them. He works himself into an excited condition over all sorts of things, but he does not really care. He—he only lives for the moment. I thought he really cared about— O Dick, go away, please."

Here her judgment on Massingdale's character ceased with some suddenness; she covered her face with her hands, and began to sob in an uneasy, choking fashion.

I got up and walked off some little distance down the road. When I pulled up, and leaned on a gate to review the situation, I found that I had left my pipe on the bank and that I had not got another in my pocket, so that my embarrassment went without the solace of tobacco. A rabbit, seated just within the shelter of a crop of oats, about twenty yards from the gate, stared at me in a foolish, frightened fashion, evidently undecided whether it should bolt or hold its ground; the animal kept my attention to the exclusion of other thoughts, until, glancing at the hedge in front of it in genuine panic, it hopped out of sight. Looking up the road, I saw that Joan had left the bank, and that she came towards me with her sunshade hiding the most of her face. As she came near the gate, on which I leaned, she held out my pipe.

"You 're a very careless person, Dick," she told me, in a voice that was quite steady and composed. "You left this priceless possession lying on the bank, which means that you must have been quite ten minutes without smoking."

"I might have had another in my pocket," I argued, uncommon glad that we had passed the occasion for a further show of feelings.

"But you have not got another," she announced, as if my objection to her false reasoning had been beside the point; and she handed me the pipe.

On our way back to tea we maintained a steady conversation on subjects of no importance, being, I fancy, both very anxious to prove that we did not intend to reopen the more serious discussion. I admired the way in which she played her part, and, in spite of the evidence of tears which her face still bore, talked with a manner of cheerfulness excellently assumed. As we left the road and struck across the fields towards the Hall, my distaste for Fate's behaviour increased with every sentence that Joan spoke; to have separated a couple who had as many excellent good points as had she and Massingdale, seemed to me a jest with singularly little point.

We approached the front of the house by a stile and a footpath across the park, and Joan entertained me with a description of certain workings of the village mind on the subject of current politics; but as I opened the iron gate that leads into the gardens, she stopped, and put her hand upon my arm.

"You must not think, Dick," she pleaded, her voice low and firm, and her eyes on mine, "that I do not try to see the truth about this—this thing. But I don't think that it will really do any good talking about it—at any rate, just yet."

Two things seemed very plain to me as she stood touching my arm: the one, that a man who had fallen into love of this girl would find some difficulty in finding any cure for his condition, and I thought of Massingdale in Paris and the misery of so much misunderstanding;

the other, and this second thing seemed even plainer than the first, that this business had set her life a quicker pace, and was bringing Joan to womanhood with a disquieting suddenness. She was already a long journey from the child that she had been a week before.

"I think," I answered her, and I tried to give to my voice all the expression that I could, "that you are right. Talking will do no good. Being trained as a lawyer, I could not resist the temptation to argue the case, although I was half convinced that I should only do more harm. Time may right things, Joan. Meanwhile, the whole infernal business had better be left alone."

She smiled, sadly enough, at me when I spoke of time righting things, and turned away; and we walked up to the house in silence. Yet at tea, when she had to entertain some visitors, the most careful attention that I could give to her discovered no flaw in her self-possession, and only the faintest traces of the recent presence of tears.

However, before I left next morning, I was soundly rated by my aunt for having added to Joan's unhappiness, and—the strict justice of the censure caused me no little amusement—for having made her cry. Knowing my aunt to be an excellent woman, though not at all amenable to argument, and still less to contradiction, I suffered her charge in silence, and promised that I would not repeat the offence in the future, which promise, when I spoke it, was no less than the sober truth.

I found life at the Temple without Massingdale very much less amusing than I had imagined that it could be, and I looked forward to the rising of the Courts, and the chance of getting away from town, with considerable impatience. I also looked for a letter from him, being anxious to hear where he had settled, and what he did; but when the communication came it left, as I think I had expected, a vast deal unsaid, and although it gave me a good deal of information of one sort and another, it made no statement at all upon the recent happenings. I quote it here in full; it is very typical of the writer, and may well serve in shaping the picture of the man. It ran:

10 RUE ANTOINETTE (sixth floor),
20 ARRONDT.,
PARIS, *Thursday.*

"MOST BELOVED RICHARD,—To you dwelling in exile and outer darkness, greeting! How any man, unless he be possessed of the soul of a rabbit, can dwell for any long period of time away from this divine city passes my understanding. Why the place is not grossly overcrowded, the inhabitants being packed together like chickens in a coop, since all the world of sane men should hurry hither as the flowers turn to the sun, is of the deeper mysteries. Seriously, my prosaic and sober-minded friend, there is something in the very smell of Paris which acts upon me as some rare and precious wine; I step from the train, fill my lungs and ears with that which is about me, and open my eyes upon the future and much hope.

"You knew, in long past ages, a struggling, ineffectual, and very foolish barrister. He is dead. We will not mourn him, but wish his ashes a quiet, unremembered sleep. He meant well (O unutterable condemnation!) and achieved —a thousand follies. We will call him to mind, but only very rarely, with a kindly, indulgent sigh. You shall meet—but not just yet—the writer, who is the offspring of this same dead failure. An artist, my son—*mais un vrai type, je vous assure*—a man wholly set upon one business, and mightily enamoured of success. You shall visit him where he dwells in Montmartre (an outlying portion of Olympus); and you shall admire his studio, and the cupboard of a bedroom which opens from it. If you stay with him, as haply you will, you will sleep upon a divan (kindly note the word, sir!) impregnated with the smell of paints and stale tobacco. And to do all of this you will have to climb six flights of ill-lighted and not too cleanly stairs. Climb stairs! What in the devil's name is come to me that I dwell on such a trifle? A man, I take it, must climb if he wish to reach the stars, and 'I, *mein werther*, sit above it all; I am alone with the stars.' No, I am in better case than even the esteemed Professor Teufelsdröckh; I am above the stars! Surely the gods are kind to me, *mon* Richard, for from my windows I command a dual prospect: a gap left between the buildings to Parisward lets me look out over the city; and when the dark is come and the night clear, I have the earthly stars of Paris underneath me, a hundred thousand changing points of light set in a velvet cushion of more than mortal richness, and above, overhead, *mon ami*, a thousand worlds look down, smiling, yet somewhat pitifully I fancy, in their cold pride and aloofness, watching in their high state the world and men's poor play. Can you wonder, poor dweller in a wild barbaric country, that I lean from my window, blowing tobacco to these stars, and hold that, beyond any question, my destiny has brought me to a pleasant resting-place. Here, somehow, sometime, I shall learn to ply my trade, and gain a sight (surely not less than that!) of the fair land to which I wish to go.

"That dead fool of a barrister, Dick (God forgive me for so speaking of the man to whom I owe my being; but he was a fool!), used to think that a man could combine two trades, one of them being painting; he used to assure himself that the painting would not suffer, and that it did not matter if the law went by the board; he actually turned out some pictures with a certain degree of satisfaction in the result. I—and for this I owe him my best thanks—profit by his mistakes, and realise that not yet, nor for many months to come, shall I be in a position to fill a canvas with other decoration than the studies of the student. Another year (six months perhaps had been enough) of such fooling and my hand had been spoiled for life, and the polite tricks of a genteel accomplishment had killed, for ever, the seeds of any real work. Suppose that that last thing had come about, that I had let the time go by when the painter in me might be trained, I do not think that anything—anything, my friend—would have repaid me for the loss. 'Dear Lord!' says you, sitting at your ease all surrounded by fat tomes anent the law of England, 'the young man thinks that he is in a fair way to become a famous painter. What humorous conceit!' 'All youth that is ambitious,' I reply to you from my dwelling among the stars, 'nourishes a wise conceit. Yet I call you to order on the one word "famous"; for it I would have you substitute some other expression which shall convey a greater idea of merit and less of notoriety.' After which reply I leave you to your laughter undisturbed. *Mon très cher ami*, I am embarking on this business with a full cargo of high hopes, and, as any sane man would, the vision of success, not failure, before me.

"The journey from London was scarcely an unmixed delight. It was most infernal hot; the carriages were like ovens, and the train was very crowded. Yvonne, failing to justify her character, was much out of temper with the world, and, why I do not know, with the poor scribe as well. She attempted, and again the reason for her action escapes me, to smuggle many matches, which she could scarcely need, through the customs in her hand-bag. The attempt was discovered, and cost us, despite the utmost eloquence, one hundred francs. I—O wondrous woman's nature!—was blamed for this; and we dined aboard the train in a manner scarcely amicable. But, before we got to Paris, the air had cleared again, and behold me in an even greater embarrassment than before. As we smoked and drank our coffee (our railway coffee), she leaned across the table to me, her petulance a thing of the past, and her manner more serious than her wont. 'When, *mon petit* Louis,' says she, 'do you get married?' You can conceive my joy, the subject being one that I delight to linger over. I told her that I did not contemplate marriage, and that I journeyed to Paris to settle down as a student of painting; that there had come a considerable change into my way of living. She was silent some length of time, but renewed the attack with a question even less to my liking than the first. 'Am I,' she asked me, 'in any way responsible for this sudden change of all your plans?' In the name of good sense, my wise Richard, what was I to say? If I had lied to her she would, later, have learned the truth; yet to name the bald facts was a thing beyond me. I, unsuccessfully, grabbing at the flying coat-tails of composure, informed her that through a misunderstanding, on account of a mistake, due to a misrepresentation, she was the cause. The figure I cut was of the very sorriest; yet she did not seem to pay me any attention. 'You were a fool, *mon cher*,' said she; 'I am not worth it. Yet you asked me to come to Paris with you, which would confirm the misunderstanding!' It was, I assure you, the merest chance that I did not bolt from the dining-car, fearing that she would read a construction on my actions which I was not able to face—with her. But she let the matter go at that; looked at me in a fashion that I could not interpret; and suggested that we should go back to our compartment. And for the rest of the journey never another word about the business, but something of a return to the old manner that I knew when I first met her. Even at the door of her flat, where we drove from the station, even as I said good-night to her, there was no indication, which might have been given in a hundred ways, that she knew anything of the change in my affairs. Yet I have been fool enough to think that I knew something about them—these women!

"When I had left Yvonne, I made my way to the new flat which Loissel has taken in the Boulevard Haussmann. There I had the good fortune to find the old man alone, a snuff-stained velvet jacket (when I am white-haired, Dick, I shall always wear one), and a huge cherrywood pipe proclaiming him at his ease. He gave a cry of astonishment at my entrance, but I was first in the field in the matter of speech. 'I have come back, monsieur,' I told him. 'I have come back to learn to paint.' 'Ah!' said he, and nothing more. But he came and took me by the shoulders, and moved me into the light of a hanging lamp, looking down very searchingly at me, for he is a man of great height. 'Ah!' said he again, when he had finished his scrutiny, 'you travel by the *via dolorosa*, *mon enfant*. It is a road which leads us, not infrequently, to much achievement. But you will stop the night with me —believe me, we shall sit late to-night—and you will tell me all there is to tell, slowly, in your own way. But you know me, is it not, *mon petit*, and that I shall ask no questions that you do not wish to answer.' So I sat the night with him, Dick, and, as he had said I would, I told him all there was to tell. He asked no questions; he scarcely spoke until the tale was done, but —you shall meet him some day—he is a man to whom one tells much, perhaps all. Once, when I spoke of recent events, he made some sort of answer, yet it was no more than '*pauvres enfants*,' and seemed the whispered voicing of his thoughts. Again, when I told him—and why I was moved to such unburdening I do not know—of the confusion that I have been in this year and more, he interrupted me a second time muttering, 'So the way has been a long time difficult,' and then signing me to go on. After I had finished we sat a long while silent, and then at last he answered me; and as he did so he leaned forward in his chair and tapped me on the chest, after the habit that he has. 'So much for the past,' says he. 'It is to the future that we must turn. Of these affairs of which you tell me I can say nothing. Perhaps—I concern myself very little with the opinion of the world—you were in some things foolish, yet surely these others were blind. There should be faith in such matters—oh, but a faith that is stronger than appearances. In life it is at least permitted to hope, and we will do that in silence until the way ahead is clearer. And now we will speak very seriously of the future which, *mon enfant*, will not be easy, but which is full of promise.' So, Richard, we talked of the making of a painter.

"It was Loissel, an old man who has better things to do than run about with restless students, who found me this studio, this super-astral home; it was Loissel who secured for me many bargains in my furnishing, who insisted upon accompanying me to prevent my wasting money; it is Loissel who is killing the amateur in me, and encouraging the growing artist; it is Loissel, a man besieged by countless requests, the greatest teacher and the greatest painter in all Paris, who stamped the ground in fury, calling me an impertinent boy, a well-meaning but grossly foolish baby, when I asked to be allowed to pay his fees. 'Ah,' cried he in great anger, 'to the devil with your money, *petit enfant insensé!* I want your work, not your sous.' Yet he is patient and untiring with me, and sometimes, which thing causes much jealousy in the quarter, will come in to help me in my studio. I should be the worst sort of hound, Dick, if I did not forthwith acknowledge such help, both in my work and in my life, as I can never even hope to realise. If, either as a man or as a painter, I ever come to any decent standing, old Loissel will have done far more than I to put me there.

"You must understand, Richard, that here occurs an interruption. I have been out to get my dinner, and I have found on my return a letter from my father, in answer to one that I wrote at dawn in your rooms, and dealing very much with one that Admiral Onnington has written to him. Poor man! It seems that this damn-fool business has hit him hard. I wonder why —for so his letter suggests—he thinks that the thing is any the less serious for me. I, it appears, am to become a mere acquaintance, who will be treated, should he meet me, with common courtesy, yet I gather that he will not seek to meet me. It could not have been a pleasant letter to write; it was not pleasant to receive. I am his son, Dick, damn it, I am his son. I cannot see that he is right in thus holding me a blackguard, with no further attempt to establish my guilt or innocence. And if I were a blackguard, yet, being my father, he might come and inform me of the fact in person. To be cast off like an unclean rag is, I fancy, greater punishment than the fancied crime demands. It is a lonely business losing the whole of them at once.

"But this is no sort of topic for the polite letter-writer. I 'll go and take the air of Paris, leaving my stars unwatched to-night. Heaven and yourself, Dick, forgive me for writing a letter of such immoral length. Tell me in your reply, which may be of equal length, anything that there is to tell. We will suppose you, my dear sir, to be a man of intelligence, and to understand that I still take interest in those things which pleased me yesterday. But what in the name of truth is there to say? What you will, Dick, but for the love of friendship, something.

"Don't come here until the autumn. I want to settle down alone.

"Yours eternally, *mon* Richard, but at the
moment very confusedly,
"KENNETH MASSINGDALE."

This letter should serve to give a very good picture of Massingdale as he then was; and even at the present time he is little changed. He would supply you with much information that was of interest, and he would so put things that you might deduce his state of mind, at the moment of writing, with some approach to accuracy, but I have only very rarely known him to write, or for that matter to speak, of his more intimate feelings. He was the last man to attempt to hide his real attitude, but he showed no fondness for announcing loudly what that attitude might be.

I was glad to receive his letter, but it did not make me see the business in any better light, although I was forced to acknowledge that in painting he worked at the one business which was likely to lead him anywhere. The information about his father's temper caused me a good deal of anger; and I was ready to swear that Massingdale, in his usual hot-headed fashion, had seen the parental wrath as more serious than it really was. I knew Captain Massingdale to be a man who would look at an affair of this sort with no kind of leniency, but I did not fancy that he would be ready to consign his son to the devil in quite such summary fashion. As for the rest of the letter, in spite of the high hopes and the promise of his work, I did not fancy that the prospect of the stars from the sixth floor of a Montmartre dwelling would induce the philosophic calm that, hitherto, Massingdale had always failed to capture.

CHAPTER VII

THE POINT OF VIEW OF A PARENT

JUST before I left London to join the Onningtons and their yacht at Marseilles, I met Hendick. I had not seen him for some time, not since a week or more before Massingdale's departure for Paris, and I foresaw that we should discuss that departure. The time of our meeting being something after eleven in the evening, and the place Leicester Square, Hendick took me off to a beer-hall in Rupert Street, openly confessing that he intended to gossip. I knew very little of him, beyond the fact that he was a well-educated man with very aggressive opinions, and I was a good deal astonished to find him a far more clear-sighted and sympathetic friend than I had ever imagined.

"So," said he, when we were settled at a table in the corner of an underground *café*, "Massingdale has settled down in Montmartre. I had a letter from him the other day, saying that he had fled from the Temple."

"You know why he fled," I suggested, since the thing was public knowledge.

"Certainly," answered Hendick. "He did quite the best thing possible. I 'll bet you don't think so, however."

"I don't," I assured him. "Why you should call doing a bolt of that sort, and thereby playing into the hands of the people who call him guilty, the best possible thing, I cannot conceive."

"My dear man," replied Hendick, obviously glad of the chance of airing his views, "what else could he have done? We need not enumerate the facts, we both know 'em, but here you have him faced with the accusation of playing a damned low game on the girl he was going to marry. She, apparently, believes the accusation. Massingdale, I suppose, still wants to marry her. Had he been an absolute fool, he might have thrown himself on her pity, admitted many indiscretions, pleaded that the vital implication was unjust, and implored her pardon. She might—it is only a possibility and not very probable—still she might have overlooked the incident, married him, and let the pair of them in for another spoiled marriage. Do you suppose, man, that any couple, tied together for life, can make a decent journey of it when the wife believes, as she would have done, that her husband was unfaithful at the start? I don't. Their life would have been hopeless from the start, even supposing the woman was a sort of gilded saint instead of an inexperienced girl."

"Go on," said I, for he paused.

"If," he continued, putting his pipe on the table, and speaking very earnestly, "she had refused to pardon him, as I fancy she would, where would he have been? In the devil of a hole, my friend. By his own confession a sort of weak-minded idiot. Instead of that he sticks to his guns; denies the imputation, or so I imagine; is not believed; and so goes off. Any fool could have seen that if he had not fallen in love with Miss Onnington at a critical moment, he would have settled down to painting before this. He simply acted as a sensible man would: saw that things were wrong beyond the point of setting them right, and so did the sanest and most honest thing open to him. He did not whine about his wrongs, which are big enough; he did not waste time and dignity in explanations, which would not have been believed; he simply made the best use of what was before him. But, being Massingdale, he made up his mind at once, where a smaller man would have hesitated."

"I 'll grant you," I allowed, for Hendick had sat back in his chair in the manner of a man who has conclusively proved his point, "that, on the whole, he did best in going to Paris and throwing up the law. I agree with you it must have come sooner or later. If it had come after his marriage there would have been the devil to pay; but that is another matter. The point is, that he made an unnecessary fool of himself, in going off with Yvonne Carrel. The world could not forego dwelling on that episode, coming after the other."

"The world is a collection of damn fools," announced Hendick, much as I had expected that he would. "What does it matter what the fools may say? Sooner or later those who really care for him, of whom, possibly, Miss Onnington may be one, will realise that what he has done has proved his honesty. Why, the very fact that he went off with the woman who caused all the fuss helps to prove his case. No one can go on indefinitely believing Massingdale to be a cynical and careless blackguard; whatever he may be, and I know he is no saint, he is so very patently not that. Well, his conduct only admits of one other interpretation, it shows him impulsive and unconventional. Eventually they will all come round to that view, that is the people who have sufficient intelligence to know him; but meanwhile they are all going to be honourably and virtuously scandalised, and are going to avoid any communication with so choice a scoundrel."

I had not expected him to show such warmth of championship; I had looked for a tirade against conventionality, and a rather obvious sermon on Massingdale's luck at being quit of the chains which had bound him; but for once Hendick had forgotten to indict Society, and was solely concerned with a personal matter. I liked him better in this mood than in any other that he had showed me.

"Of course," he resumed, after an interval in which we had both ordered more beer, "the business is not pleasant for Massingdale. It would have a bad effect on any one, to be cast off by his people in that fashion; but it gives him a chance that he might otherwise have missed. I think he will take it, Crutchley. I fancy he will do something bigger than any of us expect. But he will have an unholy time before he does it; he has more pride than the whole crowd of his virtuous detractors, and he will not take this casting-off lightly."

"It won't spoil him," I protested; "he is far too good a sort to drop into cynicism or bitterness. He will feel it, I know, but he will show precious little of his feelings."

"I was n't thinking of that," answered Hendick; "I was thinking of the future, when the patrons of virtue find out their mistake, when they see that his whole conduct has been consistent, and not in the way they think. Then the fun begins. If they meet him openly, and own that they have made considerable and foolish mistakes, he will reply to them with a laugh and open arms; if they run on the stupid-misguided-youth tack, and suggest that they are magnanimous in overlooking so much folly, they 'll have to whistle till the crack of doom before they get him. Damn! It 's chucking-out time. We shall have to go."

We walked, since our ways lay for some distance together, slowly and in silence. As we turned into Henrietta Street towards the market, Hendick started the subject again, with a laughing apology, which I did not expect, for his garrulity.

"It is the one point where I resemble Massingdale," he declared, "I love the sound of my own voice." He paused, exhibiting unwonted signs of nervousness, then plunged into his subject with an obvious effort. "I am afraid," he apologised, "that since I don't know you very well, you may think this rather an impertinence, especially as I am sure to bungle it—the thing 's not in my line. But—do you think that your cousin, Miss Onnington, is really fond of Massingdale, that the feeling which she called love is the real thing, is, in fact, at all likely to last?"

I stared at him; his question annoyed me as well as causing me surprise. It is not the sort of thing I usually discuss with slight acquaintances. But something in the man's attitude, which drove away any idea that he was merely gossiping, led me to answer him, as far as I could answer the question.

"I did not think so until the other day, in fact I was certain of the contrary; now, however, I have turned round, and believe that the feeling, as you call it, is the real thing. Very possibly I may be wrong; Miss Onnington is very young."

I imagine that he gathered from my tone that I did not much fancy the topic, for he again apologised for introducing it.

"I hope you are right," he replied, coming to a halt as we emerged into Kingsway. "I did n't ask out of idle curiosity. I wanted to find out if there was any chance of her realising her mistake. He wants some one to look after him; he is the sort of man who has a genius for helping other people at his own expense, if he has n't some sort of anchor in life. And a wife, they tell me, is an anchor that pretty often holds."

"I fancy," I laughed, for he seemed to be clearing obstacles in the most careless fashion, "that Massingdale is not likely to find himself riding at the particular anchor in question."

"He may yet," Hendick maintained, "if what you say is true. Sooner or later, as I said before, they will realise the folly of dubbing Massingdale blackguard any longer; and at the first mouthful of humble pie he 'll stop them eating any more. But they 'll have to take the first mouthful."

"He himself might change," I suggested, certainly not because I thought it probable, but to hear what he would say.

"It 's damned unlikely," said Hendick. "Good-night. I hope I see you again."

And he walked off towards Bloomsbury, where he had his dwelling.

As I made my way home, I realised that I had been in talk with him for something over an hour, and that no hint of any desire for social reform had escaped him; and I marvelled at the circumstance, and the power which Massingdale seemed to possess of occupying the thoughts of his friends to the exclusion of their own most cherished hobby-horses.

Three days later I joined *La Cygale* at Marseilles, and cruised the Mediterranean in her for two very pleasant months. She was a hundred-ton schooner, and her lines, for all that she had petrol auxiliary engines, were such as to delight the heart of the most exacting; add to this that she behaved herself very admirably in both light and heavy weather, and you will perceive that we had at hand the foundations of a very pleasant holiday. For my part, I should be stating something very much less than the truth, were I to deny that I enjoyed myself immensely during the months that I was of her company; and, if I may judge by appearances, which in this case I am inclined to do, I will wager that the others enjoyed the cruise in no way less than I did. My aunt and uncle, Joan and myself, lived aboard *La Cygale* until the beginning of September, but for no more than an occasional night or two were we without other company aboard; and although I had not previously met many of the guests whom the Onningtons entertained, they all, with one or two exceptions, proved themselves excellent good company, both for cruising and for a day's excursion ashore. The Mediterranean had been, hitherto, unknown to me, and during those weeks that we sailed it, I came precious near to complete forgetfulness of less pleasant affairs in the pleasure of the moment.

I am not prepared to say that Joan took the same pleasure from the cruise that I did, but I am certainly prepared to maintain that she enjoyed herself. There were days on which she inclined to silence, and sought the company of books rather than people; there were times at which she showed restlessness and seemed sad; throughout the cruise, and after it, she could be seen changed from the girl of some months before; but she did not make a luxury of grief, if she felt it, and it would be a gross libel to say that she, in any way at all, failed to contribute her share to the gaiety of the ship's company. She did not, I fancy, dwell more than she could help upon the past, and she made no deliberate allusion to it, yet it was plain, though not obtrusive, that she remembered it, and that she was scarcely likely to forget it for some time to come.

Once, for three days, we were forced into somewhat closer company with the events of the early summer; and I am inclined to include the lot of us in the same congratulation that we got through that period with so little outward discomfort. Captain Massingdale came aboard at Malta, about the middle of August, and spent three days' leave cruising with us. He had not seen us since the breaking off of the engagement, and the way for everybody was fairly lined with pitfalls; I think that, broadly speaking, we escaped the lot of them. Perhaps his manner was a shade more kindly to Joan than the occasion demanded, but—confound it all—I should have made ten times a worse hash of it, had I been in his place; and, in any case, he never bordered on the sentimental.

After my aunt and Joan had turned in on the first night that he was aboard us—we had no other guests at the time—he broached the subject of Kenneth's behaviour; and that was the only occasion during the whole cruise that I remember it to have been discussed directly. We sat on deck, the night being hot, and the wind light and almost astern of us, yet sufficient to keep her steady on the starboard tack. I was feeling lazy and content, and very far away from the sifting of serious matters, much more inclined, as far as I remember, to smoke and dream into the night. We all three sat silent after the women had left us, engaged for some little time with our own thoughts; then Captain Massingdale sat forward on his deck-chair with an air of purpose, and put an end to our meditation.

"We will discuss this business of Kenneth," he said quietly; "that is, if you don't mind, Onnington. I have not had the chance of talking it over before, and, God knows, I want to."

"I 'll leave you to it," I suggested, thinking that they would not want me; but they insisted that I should remain.

"Why, Dick," replied Captain Massingdale, "you are his greatest friend, and we shall want you for the defence; you must stand as the prisoner's friend, if there is anything to be said for him."

So we went through the whole affair again, and finished much where we had started, gathering no more understanding by our talk, and precious little satisfaction. The only thing which I got from the conversation was a certain amount of information about the relations of Massingdale and his father, and that, when I had it, did nothing to throw any light on the general misunderstanding. I tried advancing the arguments which Hendick had used in the matter, but, although I got a hearing for them, they were not accepted, and I am inclined to doubt whether I did any good by putting them forward.

"I did not fancy," Captain Massingdale declared at last, when we had, all three of us, failed to find anything to say about the business that we had not said before, "that we should arrive at any new conclusion. In fact, Onnington, I ought to apologise for forcing the conversation, which is a very unpleasant one for you; but I could not manage to let slip the chance of talking the matter out. And if a man has something to talk about, he had better get going as soon as he can."

"Far and away the best thing to do," replied my uncle. "I 'm glad you did it, and infernally sorry we could n't get to some other conclusion. Of course, Dick, here, thinks we are narrow-minded and conventional. I am rather glad he does. And look here, Massingdale, I 'll be shot if I can get rid of my liking for that boy of yours, but, under the circumstances—

he 's a different build to you and me, and I hope he will do something with his life."

My uncle, whenever he attempted to express a feeling which moved him, made use of a manner that was exceedingly gruff, and he finished his sentence in this case in much the same voice that he employed when dismissing a servant or sending a beggar about his business. He and Captain Massingdale had, however, served together for many odd years, and knew each other's moods with some thoroughness; so that there was no danger that they would fail to understand each other.

"I hope to God he will," his father answered, speaking quietly, and getting up from his chair to throw a cigar end overboard, so that I could not see his face. "It is more important, however, that he may have done a very serious harm to some other life."

He did not continue the discussion, but stood looking out to sea with his head thrown back, in a fashion that Kenneth had inherited from him. Although he was taller and of a heavier build than his son, he was very clearly of the same breed, and showed, as he stood with his back to us in the half-darkness, a resemblance that I had not noticed before. It was in their movements and their speech that the pair showed the great difference that there was between them.

After some minutes of silence Admiral Onnington stood up and yawned.

"I 'm going to turn in," he announced, making a move for the companion way. "Don't let me hurry you fellows, but I feel sleepy. Tell one of the watch to put those chairs away when you go. 'Night, Massingdale. Look after him, and see that he has all he wants, Dick. Good-night."

And, with a last look at the weather, he went below.

Captain Massingdale, who had turned round to say good-night, came and sat down beside me, and filled a pipe.

"In any hurry to turn in?" he asked.

"None at all," I answered, settling more comfortably in my chair. "It seems an abominable misuse of time to sleep on a night like this at sea."

"I 'm the other way about," he laughed; "but then I should be, naturally. A fine night ashore, in the country, will keep me out of bed until all hours. At the moment I am wondering how any man can enjoy being a passenger on board ship. I can't stand it."

"Do you distrust the skipper?" I asked, having heard other sailors complain of the same thing yet fail to give an explanation.

"Lord, no," he replied at once. "He is probably as good a man as I am. Besides, I had the feeling before I ever held a command. It 's being altogether out of it, and having nothing to do, I fancy."

Conversation between us stopped at that, and I suddenly became conscious that he had something of more importance to say to me, that he was beating about for a suitable opening. I imagined that Kenneth would form the subject of our talk, and was about to refer to him when I was forestalled.

"I am inclined to envy you," Captain Massingdale stated, and although his tone was little different from when he had last spoken, I thought that his expression, as far as I could read it in the darkness, had become sad and somewhat bitter.

"Why?" I asked, not seeing his meaning.

"Because you are a friend and I am a father," he continued in the same voice. "And because, between the two, there is a greater difference than you imagine. I am no philosopher, and I cannot express what I want to say, but a friend is in an easier position; he is more detached, his affection is, in some ways, a purer thing than a father's. A father is bound by all sorts of obligations; his son is, so to speak, the continued expression of himself, and when he condemns his son's behaviour he is, very largely, defending his own honour. Then, again, there is his family, the name which they both bear; if that suffers, it is bound to put the father against the action that hurt it. It is a much harder business for a father to look unbiassed at an affair of this sort, than for a friend. You must make allowances for that, Dick."

"I know," I replied, in some confusion. "Of course I realise that this thing hits you much harder than it does me. I sincerely apologise, if I have seemed aggressive in defending Kenneth. But I am so certain of your mistake; and if, as you say yourself, a father is necessarily biassed——"

But he interrupted me with a laugh that had mighty little mirth in it, yet was kindly for all that.

"Why, man," said he, "there you go again. It 's no good, Dick, really. However you may put it, I have formed my opinion. This woman had been Kenneth's mistress, and, under what temptation I do not know or care, while he was engaged to Joan Onnington, she was in the same position again; of that I am convinced. But that is not what I wanted to talk to you about. I want to speak to you of the relations between the two of us, Kenneth and me, I mean. The boy is young, and I hoped he was going to do something. He has got brains. When I heard about this business, and its sequel of his throwing over his profession, I lost my head a bit; I wrote a very bitter letter. I am not, perhaps, the level-headed, conventional officer that you think me; Kenneth is not the only Massingdale who is inclined to get excited. What I said in that letter I do not quite remember; nothing, I am convinced, more than I felt, and feel. But I expressed it, I fancy, with too much bitterness. The point of the whole thing was that, in future, our attitude towards each other would be changed; he had dishonoured our name, he had gone against all my wishes into the bargain; I could not, and would not if I could, disinherit him, but in the future he must do without my help, and—I am afraid I added—without my company. His reply to that letter was quite short—very polished and polite. He regretted, he wrote, that my hopes had met with such a check; children are proverbially unsatisfactory creatures. At the same time, he informed me, he could find no fault with my decision; that I should continue to appear on cordial terms with a son whom I believed to be a dishonourable scoundrel, would be little short of foolish; that he should continue to be on cordial terms with me while I believed such a thing of him, would be equally absurd. Therefore my decision was completely satisfactory to both of us. He finished by expressing the wish that we should both attain some distinction in our careers; assured me that he would always look out for his father's name with eagerness in any list of honours; and concluded by informing me that a letter addressed '*chez* M. Loissel' would always find him, although he hoped that the necessity for sending a letter might not arise for many years to come."

I had not any idea of what I should reply to this confidence; the matter seemed too serious to allow of any conventional expression of pity, and I had not the wit to think of some phrase that would express my feelings. The quarrel was gone to such lengths that there seemed no immediate way of settling it. Meanwhile Captain Massingdale puffed at his pipe in silence, blowing out great clouds of smoke in quick succession, until the bowl began to crackle and must have been as hot as a furnace. In a minute or so he began speaking again, quietly, and as much to himself, I fancy, as to me.

"We 've made a hash of it between us," he murmured; "and I can't see any way out of it. Of course I should have got a few days' leave, and visited him in Paris; we might have come to some understanding then. The thing is largely my fault, I know that; you could n't expect the boy to do anything but meet my mood more than half-way, after that infernal letter got to him. The trouble is that my mood is very much changed. I cannot exactly face the idea of going on without seeing him; you know what an extraordinary companion he was, Dick. But what is there to do?"

He paused, obviously expecting me to answer something, which thing I had very little fancy for doing.

"If you saw him now," I suggested lamely, "could n't you patch the business up somehow?"

"Somehow?" he repeated. "How, is the point. If I were to go to him, what do you think would be the first thing that he would ask me? Let me have the truth, Dick, I don't want any optimism out of place." For I had hesitated at his question.

"I imagine he would want to know whether you still thought him a blackguard," I answered.

"Yes. He would. I still think him one. What then?"

"You would n't get much forrarder."

"We should be worse off than before," he announced, his voice very bitter. "He would be exceedingly polite;

he would laugh and joke in the pleasantest manner possible; and would gently convey the understanding that I was a companion in whose society he found little entertainment. If I pressed him, and asked for the establishment of our old relations, and a forgetting of the past, he would laugh and refuse me. 'What! Friendship with a dishonourable blackguard? Surely you forget your position as a gentleman.' He would give me some such phrase as that, and I should lose my temper. No. It 's impossible. Can he earn his living by this painting?"

"Yes. I think so. Only it will take some time. No matter how good the man is, and Kenneth is much above the ruck, he must learn his trade."

I was purely thankful that we had got to firmer ground, and gave him my answer with eagerness; but he checked me, seeming a different man, with most of the sympathy gone out of him.

"I 'm glad to hear that," he replied, a hint of offence in his tone. "Since he has made a choice of the thing, I hope he will do well at it."

His manner did not encourage a discussion of the point, and he gave another indication of the finish of the talk by pocketing his pipe, and making ready to turn in. It seemed to me that these Massingdales cultivated a trick of politely wishing each other prosperity, whenever they happened to quarrel; I remembered the last phrases of Kenneth's letter, but for a variety of reasons refrained from quoting them. However, Captain Massingdale's show of temper did not last long, although it was sufficient to prove that any reconciliation between him and his son would, at present, be unlikely. He stood up, and addressed me with a laugh of apology.

"The older generation is not coming out well to-night, Dick," he assured me. "You 're probably right in thinking me a strange-tempered fool; but I can't get over the fact that, in addition to the other things, this affair has turned Kenneth into a painter. We need not discuss it, but you know I have always been against that. However, he manages his own affairs without me now."

He took a turn along the deck up to the foremast and back; came and slipped his arm through mine, for I had got up from my chair as he walked off; and led me just forward of the main-shrouds, where we stood and looked out over the sea.

The wind was very light, no more than sufficient to keep the sails drawing; yet *La Cygale* seemed content with the weather, and made on her way steadily, rising and falling gently to the swell, as if she rocked herself to sleep. The water gurgled softly at her bows, and the wake she left behind her showed smooth and far-stretching on the quiet, untroubled sea. The night was very clear and the stars shone pale overhead, faded and tired at the coming of the day. A greyness covered the whole expanse of sea about us, light and shade were deadened to one dull colour, and eastwards, beneath a thin bank of cloud, the broken line of the horizon began to show sharp-cut against the sky; the air struck chill, and even the summer night could not hide the sadness of the dawn on waters.

I shivered, and buttoned up my coat. Captain Massingdale turned his head at the movement.

"Getting chilly," he remarked. "We had better go below, unless you want to wait for the sunrise, and I don't suppose you do."

I shook my head; but he did not move.

"Look here, Dick," he continued, looking out to sea. "I want you to promise me something. It 's the outcome of all this talk I 've had with you this evening. Will you promise me—I want you to give me your word, remember—that, if Kenneth gets on his beam-ends, if things go wrong with him, and you find out that he can't manage to keep his head above water, you 'll let me know. I can 't let the fellow starve."

"Yes," I answered readily enough, although I had such faith in Massingdale's ability that I did not imagine that I should be called upon to carry out my promise. "If it comes to that, and if I hear of it, I 'll let you know. I 'll better the bargain, if you like, I 'll write you now and again of what he is doing."

"Will you?" he asked, and his face in the gathering light showed extraordinarily eager. "Thanks. We 'll call that settled. I trust to you. And now I 'll give you a chance of sleep."

So we turned in, and forgot about giving orders for the chairs to be put away; and, whether Captain Massingdale was in the same case or not, I do not know, I slept like a log almost from the moment that I lay down in my bunk.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RECREATIONS OF AN ARTIST IN PARIS

TOWARDS the end of September we left *La Cygale* at Toulon, and came straight through to Paris. The Onningtons were going back to England after one night's rest, but I had arranged to spend a week with Massingdale. Thinking that a meeting between the two was a thing to be carefully avoided, I had not said anything of my plans except that I stopped in Paris; that they probably guessed with whom I should stay was their affair, not mine. I had also given Massingdale no more information about my arrival than that I should come and look him up when I arrived, which would be, I wrote to him, one or other of two days named.

We arrived about six o'clock at the Gare de Lyon, and I put up for the night at the same hotel as the Onningtons, imagining that we should spend a quiet evening after eighteen hours of railway travelling. My aunt, as I had suspected, declined to move from the hotel after dinner, but Joan announced her intention of going out alone, if we refused to go with her. I had not the least objection to a walk, an evening in the lounge of a fashionable hotel being a penance I would do much to avoid, and I imagined that if we kept to the boulevards and the Opera quarter we ran no risk of coming across Massingdale, so she and I left the others to the prospect of an early bed.

For some unknown reason Joan took it into her head that she would like to visit one of the Montmartre *cafés*. "Not the places where the foreign tourists go," she informed me, "but interesting places where we shall see bohemians and apaches, and that sort of people." I am no bohemian, but a respectable lawyer, yet I resented the way she classed these harmless persons with apaches; and I was very much set against a visit to Montmartre. In the first place, respectably dressed young women, of polite upbringing are out of place there, and in the second, it increased, in an altogether unnecessary fashion, the odds on an encounter I much wished to avoid. Therefore, I hardened my heart against Joan's entreaties; listened stolidly to her plea that the last time she had stopped in Paris was in the capacity of a schoolgirl; and declined with much firmness to be lured into any distant district of the town. I believe that I then established a reputation in her mind, which my subsequent behaviour has not entirely abolished, for extreme conventionality and an almost fanatical distaste for any other haunts than those sanctioned by polite society; yet I was aware that Massingdale dwelt in Montmartre, and might very well be found in a *café*, such as she described, if we could happen on such a place, while she did not know for certain that he was still in Paris, and had no idea of his address. Besides, the acquisition of such a reputation, although it be something of a libel on my character, has done me no harm that I can discover.

As a concession to Joan's desire to leave the boulevards and to visit some less popular thoroughfare, we strolled round by the Bibliothèque Nationale and the

General Post Office down to Les Halles, and then back to the lights, and the noise, and the flaring sky signs again. We had been late over dinner, and we had not hurried on our walk, but had idled along, trying to picture the streets as they used to be whenever we came upon a block of older houses, discovering as we went along the vast proportions of our ignorance of Paris history; so that when we turned from the Rue Richelieu to the corner of the Boulevard des Italians the earlier theatres were already empty, and the *cafés* were commencing the business of the night. We made for the Café Riche, which is less tourist-infected than many of its neighbours, which, besides, is very far removed from being a spot much patronised by the impecunious brethren of Montmartre, and, finding the terrace full, had to go inside, where we got a table by the windows. Joan was obviously pleased with her surroundings, and declared that she had almost forgiven me for my refusal to take her to some less ordinary place of entertainment. We sat for some time watching the crowd pass before the *café*, occasionally exchanging a remark when a figure, whose originality called for comment, came into view, but for the most part silent. The great merit of the boulevards, as I see it, lies in the circumstance that you may sit at your ease and watch all classes and conditions of mankind troop by before you, in the manner of a picture show. The pageant, when seen from behind the protection of a little table, becomes unreal, the sordid quality of much of it escapes the observer, and the whole procession takes on the habit of an entertainment to be regarded, in seriousness or in jest, as the fancy moves one. Clerks and shop-girls, the half-world and the great world, the respectably clad and minded man of affairs with his wife, in all things similarly equipped, upon his arm, the thief and the person of unquestioned rectitude, Frenchmen and foreigners of all races and colours, all hurrying along with, for the most part, the restraint of their work gone from them. You may hear them laughing, quarrelling, whining, bullying, as the mood has them, yet whether they be going to seek food and drink, or be taking the air in the process of digestion, whether they be out furtively, with an eye for the unwelcome policemen, to get the wherewithal to satisfy, later and in a less pretentious place, the demands of their very obvious hunger, or whether they show themselves to the night well clad, well nourished, and seeking nothing but amusement, they observe the laughing manners of the boulevard, and are intent to see that the night shall bring some minor profit to themselves. To a throng playing their hands with such light-hearted enthusiasm it would be an unseemly liberty to introduce a serious analysis; whatever their businesses, and they cover a wide field from the foolish to the vicious and the criminal, while they walk the boulevards they absolve themselves from serious consideration, abandon both their tragedy and their claim upon the admiration of their neighbours, and shelter themselves under the cloak of laughter, of light, and of noise.

Joan and I were, I have said, well content to watch the crowd, and to let it furnish us with the matter for an occasional remark. We had become, I remember, interested in the repeated passage of a couple more lively than the rest: a youth, a student I imagined him, with a girl upon his arm, both extravagantly dressed in exaggeration of the moment's fashion, and both joyfully exhibiting the fact that they had dined; the man inclined to song, the girl delighting in his prowess. They had already passed the *café* three or four times, and on each appearance seemed to challenge the interference of the police with more insistence. Joan had therefore laid me a bet, a rash thing to do for they might well have sought some other promenade without compulsion, that they would be sent about their business if they appeared again; and I, knowing something of the Parisian police, had taken her. I was engaged in keeping a lookout up the boulevard, in which direction they had disappeared, when I heard Joan give an exclamation, quickly stifled. I turned, and seeing her with her colour somewhat mounted, and her expression carefully set against the exhibition of any feeling, followed the line of her gaze with considerable misgiving. Just come into the sphere of the *café* lights I saw Massingdale, and with him Yvonne Carrel. His face seemed thinner than it used to be, and I could have sworn the man had aged since last I saw him, but the light made any comparison worthless, and he was laughing and talking with all his usual animation. He was walking quickly, however, and I had little time in which to look at him; Yvonne Carrel's appearance I did not notice. When they had disappeared, I looked at Joan and found her eyes on me.

"That was Mademoiselle Carrel with Mr. Massingdale, was n't it, Dick?" she asked, without any sign of embarrassment.

"It was," I answered, cursing Fate very heartily for the circumstance.

"I think she is rather good-looking," Joan replied, casually; and turned to the window again.

We sat for some minutes as we had been before, and then Joan began putting on her gloves.

"I believe that couple have been run in somewhere else," she declared. "I think you ought to call the bet off, or pay me the money."

"I certainly won't pay you," I assured her. "Do you want to go?"

On the way back to the hotel Joan was very talkative, and I could not find any fault with her manner, except that she was more voluble than her wont. From which thing I was forced to the deduction that she had recently learned much about the control of her feelings; for I was not willing to admit that the sight of Massingdale had left her unmoved—the exclamation that she had checked spoke against that—or that his being in the company of Yvonne Carrel had given her any pleasure. The affair was very little to my fancy, especially as my efforts to avoid the encounter had brought the thing about, and I was inclined to take it as a personal grievance that artists, more especially unknown artists, should so far forget themselves as to haunt the boulevards at night. It is, when one comes to think of it, a most improper proceeding.

However, what were her feelings about this chance meeting Joan did not offer to inform me, and as I was not at all inclined to question her on the subject, she left Paris the following day with no more said about the matter.

When I had seen the Onningtons off, I walked up to the Rue Antoinette, climbed the six flights of stairs, which were certainly very dark and unclean, and discovered Massingdale in his studio, a great bare place, uncommon cold, I should imagine, in winter, littered with the odds and ends of the artist and the bachelor. The owner was engaged in copying the plaster cast of a very muscular leg, when I made my appearance, and he hailed me with a shout.

"Welcome, old thing," he cried, shaking me by the hand. "I imagine you arrived last night—you look too fresh to have come off the train this morning—you should have let me know. You 'll stop here. I 'll curse you with bell, book, and candle, if you put up at any gilded hostelry."

"Have you a room?" I asked him.

He replied as he often does, when an ordinary, practical question is put to him.

"A room!" he shouted. "This, this is the present generation, born in splendour, nourished in luxury, demanding silk hangings to their beds and the finest damask sheets. Take shame to yourself for a witless fellow, Dick. Should I ask a guest to share the shelter of my roof and not offer him a bed? There is your room, sceptic, the smallest you ever slept in, yet free from vermin—I can say no more."

He pointed, with a magnificent gesture of reproof, to a door opposite the stove; and I, going into the room behind it, found the place no larger than he had said. It was, I should judge, not more than six feet by nine, and was mainly occupied by the bed; yet it seemed clean.

"And where will you sleep?" I enquired, after my inspection, for it was obviously Massingdale's room.

"There," he answered, pointing to a divan which ran round three sides of the room. "There is accommodation for at least six stout persons, and I am thin and daily growing more attenuated. You shall have clean sheets. We can offer you, sir, the fullest luxuries of the pampered rich."

So I accepted his hospitality, since I saw that he really wished to have me with him; but for eight nights out of the ten I chose the studio, and slept on the divan, the weather being warm and the bedroom, under such conditions, sufficient to choke a man.

At first I was too pleased at being in Massingdale's company again to reckon up the changes that the last two months had made in him; for the first few hours that I was with him I forgot the whole wretched business of the past, and concerned myself only with his descriptions of his present life, and the picture of his acquaintances which he conjured up for me. I am almost prepared to say that I laughed more that first day that I spent in the Rue Antoinette than in any similar period of my life, before or since; and I should be paying a devilish poor compliment to his powers of conversation if I suggested that, during that time, I thought of anything but the subjects he discussed. However, before I went back to England, I had discovered a considerable change in the man, although his manner was not, in the slightest, altered. He had come, I think, to face life with a greater purpose, and was entirely serious in his art. It surprised me to find him become a regular worker, and, except on the Sunday, to hear him refuse to desert his painting while the best of the daylight lasted. In many things I thought him more tolerant, and on some, chiefly matters of ethics, inclined to refuse an opinion. It would be misleading to say that he had grown up, I do not think that even at the present time he can be said to have left childhood behind him, but he had come to realise that the most of the men about him had done with that happy state, and he had ceased to be angry with them on that account. But above all the other changes, there was one salient point that took my notice: he seemed to have come into some heritance of power, and to have acquired the means of impressing on those who met him the fact that he was engaged on work that he did well. I do not know what this quality is; I imagine it nameless; but it is observable in all men who gain success, and in many to whom success, in the world's sense, shall never come, and it has nothing to do with position or recognition, for it is to be noticed in strangers whose name and calling are facts unknown. In London, Massingdale had attracted notice in almost any gathering as a man of promise: apart from his personal charm he had conveyed the impression that he would some day do things; now—I cannot get nearer to the explanation than this—he gave the suggestion that he was doing them, and that, when completed, they would have some worth.

When we had finished *déjeuner*, which meal we took at a small and undistinguished place where Massingdale seemed well known, we went for a walk in the Bois, and, later, fetched my luggage from the hotel. Upon our return to the studio, we found the stairs blocked by four perspiring men and a piano; at the moment of our arrival the instrument reposed in the middle of the last flight, and the men sat below it on the stairs, smoking cigarettes. The presence of Massingdale seemed to relieve them.

"*Tiens*," cried one of them, a little fat fellow with a black beard, who gasped and panted in his speech. "You have arrived; and not too soon, my friend. I expire. Another five minutes and the world had lost Auguste Vanne." He snapped his fingers to express the suddenness of Auguste's ending; then, seeing me, got up from the step where he sat, and bowed. "M'sieur," he murmured, and the other three followed his lead.

"This," said Massingdale, presenting me, "is my friend, Monsieur Crutchley." Whereat we all bowed again. "But," he added, addressing the little man who called himself Vanne, "what, in the name of reason, are you doing with your piano?"

"We take it to your studio," Vanne informed him, and he had now passed from gasping to a sort of whistling wheeze, which was, I learned, his ordinary voice. "You give a reception to-night, don't you?"

"Certainly," answered Massingdale; "and you lend me your piano. Thanks."

"I take pity on your forgetfulness," corrected Vanne, waving his hand in a large circle. "Five o'clock comes. I go up to your studio; you are not there. There is no piano. I take counsel with myself: a reception without a piano is a thing unthinkable. 'He has forgotten,' I say; 'he forgets all things. I will make sure.' I go to the concierge. 'Has Monsieur Massingdale spoken of the arrival of a piano?' I ask. 'No,' answers the animal who keeps the door. 'But, Monsieur Vanne, you owe me the rent of a month.' I fly. I seek out these good friends; and behold the piano is already half way to your door. To work, *mes chers*."

The stairs were narrow, the piano very heavy, and the labour unskilled; so that the removal, when we had accomplished it, left us, all six, breathed and hot, while Auguste Vanne appeared upon the point of death. He sat upon the divan, leaning forward, and gasped and gurgled, panted and blew, until I grew uneasy; yet whenever he showed any signs of getting back his breath, he would start laughing, his small eyes changing from distress to merriment, and his laughter would set him coughing, and his coughing robbed him again of all his breath. The paroxysm, which had seemed bound to end in his death, passed after a while, and he was able to laugh without danger, which seemed his chief desire.

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu,*" he chuckled, "I grow fatter every day. Listen, my friends. I met Richelin to-day

—the *chef-d'orchestre* of the opera, Monsieur Crutchley—he seized me by the arm. He eyed me with amazement. '*Ça va, gros tonneau*,' he cried. '*Tu vas crever bientôt. Pas de doute.*' He was very agreeable."

I was less struck by the humour of Monsieur Richelin than Vanne himself appeared to be; but I much admired the fashion in which the little man faced a physical infirmity that put him to great discomfort, and I noticed a peculiar charm about his chuckling, wheezy voice.

When we were recovered from our exertions with the piano, the other three departed, and Massingdale and Vanne and I set about clearing the studio, and making it ready for the evening. Massingdale had already told me that he was entertaining the full circle of his acquaintance that night, and that the affair was a sort of inauguration ceremony of his establishment as an inhabitant of the quarter.

"I hoped that you would be here for it, Dick," he had said. "You used to take a sort of serious interest in these shows. Besides, Loissel has promised to come, and I want you to meet him as soon as possible."

Personally, I was very glad of the chance of being present, and I joined in the preparations with considerable amusement. The studio was a large, bare room, the walls washed terra cotta, and much discoloured and knocked about. The divan ran along three of the walls, on one of which was the door from the stairs, the bedroom opening out of the end wall at right angles to it; opposite the entrance from the stairs there were two windows looking over Paris; and on the same side as the stairs, to the left of the door, as you faced it, the great north window, running up to the roof. The place seemed to me bare and ugly, but it had a rough and essential comfort about it, and was certainly airy and light.

We cleared the easels and canvases into the corner by the stove; put the two tables, which the room boasted, in front of them; stowed the odd things lying about on the shelf which ran round the walls about six feet from the ground; and so had the place prepared for whatever the guests might take it into their heads to do. When we had set out the food and drink, which had arrived while we worked, Massingdale announced his intention of dining without more delay; and we accordingly went out.

We went to a different place to that in which we had lunched.

"It is a good rule to remember," Massingdale informed me, "that where you are satisfied with the lunch, you will probably be disappointed in the dinner."

And Vanne, who came with us, agreed to this wisdom.

"We will go," he announced, "to the Chasseur d'Afrique. It is an occasion for expenditure. *Potage à la bonne femme, salmi de gibier* (made of rabbit), cheese, dessert, and a bottle of good wine—that, *mes enfants*, should give us satisfaction."

Although we faithfully carried out the programme, except that we drank three bottles of wine in place of one, I failed to understand why the Chasseur d'Afrique was more suitable to dine at than our restaurant of the morning; it seemed to me very much the same.

During the meal Auguste Vanne gave me some information about himself. The little man interested me, and I listened to him gladly.

"I am from Picardy," he told me. "You know the country, monsieur? No. No more do I; I left it when I was ten years old. I am of Paris, all that is most

Parisian. I am a musician, monsieur, a pianist. But look at my hands." He stretched them out, and they were very small and fat, with stumpy fingers not too clean. "It is a tragedy. I have the soul of an artist, yet, if you will believe me, I have difficulty in stretching the octave."

His expression changed to one of such sorrow, that I feared that he would weep; but Massingdale interrupted to avert his woe.

"Yet, *mon gros*," said he, "you let the soul come, somehow, through those fat fingers to the notes."

The little man gave him a glance of thanks, and resumed his ordinary smiling demeanour.

"*Ciel*," he cried, and waved his hand to a girl who passed our table, "I forget myself. Life is not the place to weep in; laughter and the sound of music should fill our days. And, understand, messieurs, I am more fortunate than most men. I compose little waltzes that are light and pretty, but far, ah! so far, from being real music; I play accompaniments at cheap concerts for inferior singers, that is true and unfortunate; but I begin to be known: men speak well of my playing. Richelin calls me a barrel, and says that I shall soon burst. It is good; some day, perhaps, I shall play, at a concert of my own, one of the divine sonatas of the great Beethoven. And beyond that, I shall never reach old age and poverty; I shall die suddenly; perhaps at a concert, after the last notes of the great master have died away—one spasm of pain, pouf! zut! Auguste Vanne will be dead; the heart of the barrel will have burst!"

"But to-night," said Massingdale, smiling at Vanne's excited and glistening countenance, "you will play to us, and you will not die. I should be very angry with you, *mon cher*, if you died in my studio."

"I will play Beethoven," the fat man promised, and suddenly fell to smiling with an air of mystery. "But I have a surprise for you," he continued proudly. "I bring a friend who will also play to you."

"Good," answered Massingdale. "Yet I much doubt if he will give us more pleasure than yourself. Who is he?"

Auguste Vanne began to chuckle; he seemed to have discovered another joke.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he puffed, "not better than myself. Oh, *ma foi*, no. A little boy, a little good-for-nothing, who shall one day stand where Paganini stood. Not better than myself! Oh, no! It is my cousin whom I bring, the little Marellac!"

"Good Lord!" murmured Massingdale in English, the name, which I had never heard, seeming to mean so much to him.

"One promise," pleaded Vanne, as we settled the bill, which the others would not let me pay myself. "You give him no praise. You say nothing of his playing. He must not lose his head, and think that, already, he has learned enough about the violin."

On the way back to the studio I heard who "the little Marellac" was; he had taken the first prize at the Conservatoire, and was being looked after by a rich patron. Vanne's geese were often swans, I learned from Massingdale, but it would seem that his young cousin was really a fine player, and that, as he was not to play in any concert for another two years, there was much hope that he would develop to his full powers.

Very soon after we had lighted up the studio Massingdale's guests began to arrive; and shortly after nine the place was crowded. There was a fair sprinkling of Englishmen, which pleased me, as my French would not stand the strain of excited colloquial talk. Yvonne Carrel arrived early, but I had only a few minutes' conversation with her, and she said nothing, naturally, of what had happened when she was last in London. Marellac was among the last comers, and seemed a shy, nervous boy of sixteen, very far removed from having a swollen head. Auguste Vanne brought him up to me and the boy seemed very ill-at-ease, and would only talk in the most formal fashion; he was relieved, I fancy, when he found some one else with whom to talk.

I could not see any one who might be Loissel; and, about half an hour after the last arrival had put in an appearance, I was seated on the divan, for the moment alone, trying to discover him in the crowd, when the man next to me, whom I had not particularly noticed, started talking. He was an Englishman of middle age, grey-haired, clean-shaven, inclining to stoutness, with a blotched countenance and a watery blue eye in which, when it was not glazed, there showed much humour. He spoke in a peculiar jerky fashion, and his voice was slightly hoarse, yet obviously that of a gentleman, and of a man of education as well.

"You are Mr. Crutchley, I take it," he began. "Pleased to meet you. Heard Massingdale speak of you. At Cambridge together, then in chambers, eh? Damn fool thing of Massingdale's attempting the law. The man 's no lawyer."

While he rattled on I had a look at him, and was astonished that I had not noticed him before; he was a most extraordinary figure. His clothes fitted him very badly, but had the appearance of having come from a decent tailor: he wore shepherd's plaid trousers and a frock-coat, with an enormous black cravat in the manner of a stage Frenchman; he carried a gold-rimmed eye-glass in his right eye, and never seemed to remove it or to drop it.

"You are wondering who the devil I am," he continued, giving me no chance of answering him. "I 'll tell you. My name is Athanasius Roderick Blinkson. You may laugh, if you wish to, Mr. Crutchley; I am used to it. My father was a fool, like his son, that is why he allowed me to be called Athanasius when fate had saddled me with Blinkson. I was once a Fellow of Balliol; I think the other fellows rejoiced when I resigned—anyhow I did. Only sensible thing I ever did. I live in Paris. Teach English, Greek, and Latin to poor students; have done for twenty-five years. Just keeps me going. For the rest I am entirely disreputable, and a confirmed drunkard—but you can see, hear, and smell that. Quite superfluous information. I have no shame. Now you know something about me. Talk if you feel inclined; if not, please don't be polite. I never take offence, and am aware that I am a most undesirable person—I shall be worse before the finish of the evening."

The style of this introduction was certainly original, but it had its uses, although, at the offset, it induced embarrassment; moreover, as far as I could judge at the moment, Mr. Blinkson had given me an entirely accurate description of himself. He was clearly a drunkard, and probably very undesirable. Although the whole aspect and demeanour of the man set me against him, there was something, whether it was the kindly humour that showed itself, now and again, in his bloodshot eyes, or whether it was a certain shattered remnant of dignity that still clung to him, I do not know, but there was something about him which compelled courtesy though it could not induce any liking.

"I have every intention of talking," I replied, as easily as I could. "I am even inclined, if you 'll submit to it, to put you through a cross-examination. I want to know who all these people are."

"Good," says he, sucking at an old and very foul pipe. "I 'll be your guide."

He faithfully fulfilled his word; but it was without the aid of any questions from me. For during the next ten minutes he unburdened himself, spasmodically, of a vast amount of promiscuous information about the company assembled, odds and ends of gossip and biography, given in his peculiar style, mixed up with very little praise, but without a trace of malice. I saw no means of stopping him, although I was hopelessly lost before he was half-way through; finally he came to a finish of his own accord.

"See the big man—old fellow with a magnificent head, just come in?" he asked at last. "That is Loissel. The only genius present, except Massingdale himself—I mean that—and, perhaps, this boy Marellac. Finest man I ever met. Go and talk to him. I want a drink after all this speaking."

I followed his advice, and made my way to where Massingdale and two other men stood talking to Loissel. The room was full of smoke, and the noise of talk was such that a man must shout to make himself heard; there were faces of all types and of several different races to be seen; yet the old painter stood above them all, in stature—for he was a man of over six feet—and in power. He was cast in a generous mould, very strong, I should imagine, in his prime, with limbs so well proportioned that he might have posed as a sculptor's model. He had a mass of shaggy white hair; his beard was cut round his chin in a fashion that called to mind the sea; his face was tanned and weather-beaten; and his hands were thin, very finely shaped, and kept with the extreme of care. In the whole cast of his face, which was large-featured and strong, but more especially in the eyes, there was a suggestion of calm and power, the equal to which I have never yet discovered. It is hard to judge a man when you know him to be a person of great achievement, the mind being set upon the finding of his greatness, but I am very willing to wager that, had I met Jean Sébastien Loissel for the first time not knowing who he was or what he did, I should have fallen under the same spell that held me that night in Massingdale's studio. I did not then question whether he was a great man, I was fully occupied with the desire to make his acquaintance, which desire became strong only when I had seen him.

I joined the group, and Massingdale introduced me.

"I hoped that I should meet you to-night, Monsieur Crutchley," said Loissel in his deep, quiet voice, and speaking English. "I have the ill-fortune to be leaving Paris to-morrow, and I shall be away a week. I shall talk very much to-night, monsieur. We will sit in a corner, and you shall fight with sleep while '*le père* Loissel' confides in you. I want you to tell me many things—things that you must not hear, *petit* Louis."

Here he struck Massingdale in the chest; laughed a great, rolling laugh; slipped his arm through mine; and led me off round the studio, stopping to talk to every group in the room.

We installed ourselves, Loissel and I, after he had made the tour of the studio, in the corner between the bedroom door and the two windows which looked on Paris. Having crammed a great cherrywood pipe from the contents of a paper packet of the cheapest caporal, he forgot to light it in the eagerness of his speech.

"Now," said he, "we will talk—in French. I cannot express myself in your language; I am forced to say what I can, not what I wish. This foolish friend of ours, Monsieur Crutchley, he has made many false steps, is it not? No. You must not protest, my friend. I do not think him guilty of any dishonour—I know him; but of foolishness—that is another matter! But the affair is finished, done with, for the moment. I cannot understand you English; I cease to make the effort after many failures. *Mon Dieu*, but you are droll! You say—not you, monsieur, but the others—this young man had a mistress, therefore he is bad. He speaks to this horrible woman, he is seen with her again, therefore he has gone back to his old ways. The thing is settled; you ask no questions; your mind is made up. Yet the English come to Paris and amuse themselves; they amuse themselves in London; they do what all men do. They are not different from us; and I think that they have ceased to make a profession of the virtue which they have not got. But to act with openness, to make no secret of their life—oh, no, they will not do that. This young man, this little Louis, he made no secret of it; he had a mistress, and he treated her as he would treat a friend. It is plain, monsieur, is it not, that he is a very vicious boy, without shame and without proper feeling. No man with wise instincts, no gentleman, monsieur, would take any interest in a woman so debased, when he had done with her; if he did—ah, we are not children to be deceived by protests—it would mean that he had gone back to her again. The thing is clear. So say these others, monsieur; and they are wrong. It cannot be avoided, their mistake; it is made. There is no going back, you agree with me?"

He leaned towards me, gripping the lapel of my coat, eyeing me very earnestly, and tapping my waistcoat with the mouthpiece of his pipe.

"You mean," I replied, "that there is no good in Massingdale attempting to make Miss Onnington change her opinion?"

"So," he answered, giving me a shake in his eagerness. "So, monsieur. And you agree?"

"Yes," I hesitated somewhat at my answer. "I don't think that it would do any good at present."

"It would do harm," he announced; and although throughout the conversation he had kept his voice low, so that we should not be overheard, it rang with an assurance that compelled me to agreement. "It is the *grande passion* with him, my friend; I know, I read him like a book. He will not forget. So much the worse. He would perhaps find more happiness in a heartless seriousness. And this girl, monsieur, this English girl whom I do not know! Perhaps she is good, beautiful, also faithful, and perhaps some day she will be wise, will get sympathy and a little understanding. Then she will come to him, my friend, if she ever cared for him. A woman has many resources, even now in this dull age of money. If she does not come, if she never grows wise, if she never cared for him—and she is very young, I think, a child, and perhaps does not know her mind—then, *mon Dieu*, the affair arranges itself well; he is better without her. Love is much, my friend—I, who had a wife to love me, tell you so—yet it is not all. The life's work comes before it. Only for those without ambition is this great comfort and happiness the all, the end. But he has something else. What should a man count happiness, the soft pleasures of the fireside, when he puts it against a great work that he alone can do? Nothing, monsieur; if there were less, then less."

He let go of my coat, and placed his hand on my shoulder. His voice was little more than a whisper, and shook with the sincerity of his pleading.

"Monsieur Crutchley," he implored, "he is your friend. You will work with me and help him. We will make a great artist of him. He shall do work that is good, work that has inspiration. I am old, I approach the end—not yet, I hope, but before many years; I have passed through my hands many students, yet not one like this one. I am too fond of the art that I have worked at to lose this chance. There must be no waste of his time; he must not forget to paint, in hoping that this girl will come to him. You will see to this; you will not write to him of her; you will let the matter quite alone; perhaps it will arrange itself, perhaps not; but you will not interfere?"

His words were more of command than question, yet I felt no resentment at them. I hesitated, however, to grant his request, why, I do not know, for his manner had already convinced me.

"You think, then," I asked, "that he will do these things? You think that he will become a great painter? It is not merely a case of aptitude that may not develop?"

"Monsieur," he answered on a sudden note of dignity, and sitting back from me, "I am Loissel. I do not exaggerate on a matter of a student's ability."

"I beg your pardon," I apologised, and for the life of me I could not avoid the feeling that I was gravely at fault. "If that is so, I will do as you wish."

"Ah," he cried, smiling, and his pipe again tapped my chest, "you are a true friend, monsieur. I thank you from my heart. The affair is arranged—*le père* Loissel shall worry you no more. There will be music presently, good music, and we shall have no other thoughts, you and I, to spoil the pleasure of it."

I am no musician, a musical score is a thing of no meaning for me; on the other hand, I am not a lump of wood, and I am of opinion that music is the most compelling of all the arts, perhaps the only one that can force a man from the mood in which it finds him, carrying him, whether he will it or not, into a kingdom where his own thoughts do not rule. Therefore, I prepared to listen to what we should be given, with much pleasant anticipation.

Auguste Vanne sat down to the piano very soon after Loissel and I had finished our discussion, and as he began sounding idle chords the talk stopped in the room. How the company managed to seat itself is something of a mystery, but in a minute the room was quiet and clear, with a fringe of listening men and women on the divan and the floor. Massingdale had been thrust into the one arm-chair in his possession, placed in front of the stove and a little out into the room, so that he faced the rest of us in the manner of a potentate with his court about him.

"*Bien!*" cried little Vanne. "We commence."

He struck a crashing chord, looked over his shoulder to Yvonne Carrel, as if giving a signal, and began to play the music of the entrance of Carmen.

I had only heard Yvonne sing on one occasion, and then no more than a ballad song; I had no idea of her power, or that the woman as I knew her could so hide herself in the player.

The spirit of Carmen seemed entered into her; she danced and laughed, and the notes came from her with no apparent effort or consciousness; she sang, I could have sworn it, because the mood took her to sing, and because singing properly expressed the nature of her thoughts. And Massingdale was her Don José. She wooed him, laughing; she mocked him, and her eyes were wide and soft; she caressed him, and there was only coquetry in her caress; she threatened him, and there was a wealth of Southern passion in her clear, beautiful voice. At first Massingdale seemed astonished, for a moment, I fancy, not too pleased; then, like the rest of us, the spell of her amazing performance held him, and he sat still in his chair with his eyes fixed on her. "*Prends garde, prends garde à toi!*" she sang, her arms wide, her body bent towards him, her dark eye bold and threatening; then, almost before her last note had died away, she was in the middle of the room, laughing and bowing, asking us whether her voice had not improved.

The applause was without stint, the compliments given to her sounded to me sincere; but she paid little attention to them and came almost at once to where we sat, taking a place beside Loissel.

"*Et le père*?" she asked. "What does he say?"

He answered her gravely, with his large, gentle smile.

"You will yet sing at the Opera—perhaps, *ma belle*."

But the sound of Marellac tuning his fiddle brought another silence on the room, and with it a sort of rustling stir of expectation. The artistic circles of Paris were talking much, it appeared, about this boy; and Auguste Vanne, his cousin, sat at the piano puffing in his pride. Of the boy's playing I will attempt no criticism; it might have been a mass of faults, I am no judge of technique. Yet to me it went beyond pleasure; it forced me to wish that I was alone that others might not see my emotion; for the music which he gave us, the name or composer of which I do not know, was sad and slow, played for the most part on the low strings, and the violin sobbed in deep, uneasy pain. There was a silence when he had finished, and he received no more than murmured thanks; but that the conversation did not grow loud again for a full five minutes was an appreciation that, I imagine, he could understand.

An interval in which many healths were drunk, and during which the noise became greater and the talk more excited than it had been before, occurred after Marellac had played. I discovered Blinkson in a corner solemnly consuming brandy, and explaining, or endeavouring to explain, the stylistic value of Horace's Odes to an uncomprehending and tolerant maiden, who earned a hard living as a model, and had likely never heard the name of a single Latin author. He was far gone in liquor, and had some difficulty in standing upright.

Presently Auguste Vanne sat down to the piano again, and as before the noise ceased and the room became clear and attentive. I went back to my former place next to Loissel, who had not moved, and watched the little man at the piano with much interest. He had promised that he would play Beethoven, and he kept his word, giving us the Adagio from the *Sonate Pathétique*. I have seldom seen a man so change himself as Vanne did when he touched a piano; he lost all his absurdity; he seemed to disguise even his fatness; he became dignified, and a man of purpose. Fame as a pianist was a thing that he could never have, yet he played well and with great sympathy and feeling. As the sad melody, that air haunting and soft, grew from his touch, and lost itself, and came again to die away in quiet, you could see him answer to the call of the music, his eyes growing dreamy, then purposeful, and back again to sadness. When he had finished, he sat silent without any movement, staring at some vision that he had created for himself; and I imagined that here was a life to which there was no ending but in disappointment, since the man was wholly concerned with the making of the music which he loved, yet was faced with the knowledge that he could never make it as he knew it should be made. A common state, yet thereby not the less bitter, I imagine, for those who suffer in it.

Without getting up, Vanne called to Yvonne Carrel and to Marellac, and, when they had come to him, spoke to them in low tones. Then, without any warning of what they would perform, he and Marellac began playing the *Ave Maria* of Gounod, the violin giving the air. The thing struck me as incongruous, out of place, a beautiful thing in a wrong setting; but I soon forgot to criticise, or to think of other things than the wonderful notes of pleading; and as Yvonne began to sing, with Marellac playing the obligato, I abandoned myself to such music as had not come my way before. Together they played on our emotions as Marellac upon the strings which he endowed with such perfect utterance; and when the woman's voice was silent and the violin spoke no more, there was quiet in the studio. We who had listened to them sat still, each, I think, hoping to put off the moment when talk should begin again, every man absorbed in his own vision: Loissel with his great head sunk forward on his chest; Blinkson with the tears rolling down his cheeks, a pitiable object of half-awakened drunkenness.

But Auguste Vanne did not leave us long; he was not in the mind, I fancy, to let the effects of the music wear themselves away. Before a word had been spoken he jumped up from the music stool, an absurd, fat little man again, and hailed the company in his thick, chuckling voice.

"It is finished, my friends," he cried. "We play no more to-night."

Thereupon the company behaved as before, the talk began afresh, and the drinks went round again; but, and the circumstance impressed me, I heard no comment, no mention even of the music that had just been played.

Loissel left soon after this, and with him went Yvonne Carrel and the boy Marellac. Before he went he told me that he would probably be in London after Christmas, and would call on me; so, in bidding him good-night, I gave him my address. After this departure the character of the entertainment became more ordinary, the noise not less. Auguste Vanne shut and locked the piano, declining firmly to allow another note to be played; and his wish met with little objection. Somewhere, as far as I remember, in the neighbourhood of four-thirty of the morning, what there were left of us adjourned to a neighbouring *café*, where we drank beer, in my case with infinite relish; then, each using what strength the night had left to him, we got us home to bed.

CHAPTER IX

THE EXIT OF A BISHOP AND THE ADVENT OF AN ARTIST

WHEN I got back to London after my visit to Massingdale in Paris, I, at least, had the satisfaction of knowing him to be settled in a profession that promised to hold his attention and his endeavours; beyond that I was not tempted to make any prophecy on his account. Before I left the Rue Antoinette I tackled him on the subject of finance and the business prospect of his career, and encountered, as I had anticipated, a good-tempered toleration of what he probably thought was a peculiar whim of mine, a perfectly careless optimism about his future income, and beyond that—no sign of common-sense. He had in hand, it appeared, something under one hundred pounds, and with that imposing capital was quite content to face the world; that the prospect of his being able to earn any more money before that was exhausted appeared extremely doubtful, did not seem to trouble him. I failed, signally and completely, to make the man realise that in a few months he might find himself without a penny; I aroused in him no more than surprise that any one should look so far ahead. As a concession, I fancy, to what he termed my "indecently practical mind," he explained at some length his idea of economy, and asked my approval of it; in so far as I could gather anything from what he told me, I came to the conclusion that his economical principles consisted in living with extreme care and at very small expense for five days in every week, but, upon the remaining two, spending very much more money than seven days of quite decent comfort would have cost him. I did not admire his system, and I told him so; whereat he called me an old fool, and suggested that we should go and get a really good dinner to remove the taste of so much dry talk.

"*Maître* Richard," said he, as we neared the finish of the dinner in question, which I had not had the strength of mind to refuse to take in company with him, "you have been talking in a mighty solemn fashion. What 's the point, my friend? If I am to starve—devil take the thing—the gods have ordered it, and I shall starve; but I am their true and faithful servant, I trust these stern Olympians with a faith you cannot equal, I rest in their arms content. Besides—we will imitate, good sir, your own abundant common-sense—very few people with my education and ability—I would have you lay stress, sir, on the ability—actually die of starvation; I cannot imagine that I am to be singled out as one of the exceptions. And, if I do not die, without doubt I shall live—the reasoning is perfect—and if I live, I shall paint, and if I paint, I shall be happy, which is the chief end in life, and to hell with the moralists that deny it. Friend of my abandoned youth, counsellor and sage, honoured and esteemed companion, I drink your excellent good health in this pleasant wine, which—God be thanked—has not passed through the chemical factory on its way to this table. And, my Richard, no more of business!"

I did not attempt to open the discussion again; and I left Paris a few days afterwards, knowing, I fancy, as much about the chances of his future as Massingdale did himself, which is to say that I knew practically nothing at all.

My practice at the Bar was beginning to fill my time, and during the autumn I became very busy, so that I had little time to think of Massingdale or his affairs. In addition to this, he was a bad correspondent, would maintain silence during many months, and then send a budget that told very little about himself; so that until after Christmas, I had only the scantiest news of him. However, he wrote that he flourished and that he led a calm untroubled life, and I had no evidence to prove that he garbled the truth.

I imagined that with Massingdale in Paris I should be altogether quit of the Right Reverend Arthur Sidney Magram-Coke; I was, happily, no relation of his, and I saw no possible reason why I should do more than encounter him on chance occasions; yet, why I could not for some time discover, he began to thrust himself into my existence with suave determination. Shortly after I had settled down for the autumn, I was annoyed by receiving a letter from him; it was disgustingly polite. He wrote that he imagined that I should be in London for the winter, and that he hoped to see something of me, since it was his great desire to keep in touch with old college friends; and he urged me to come and lunch with him, or, if lunch was not convenient for a busy man, such as he assumed I had become, to dine, naming my own day. To offend, without cause or without tangible cause, prominent men, however objectionable, is not the best way to success in life, so that, since I had my own living to earn, I refrained from replying to the man with a curt refusal, accompanied by the suggestion that he should not misuse the word friend; instead I pleaded a press of work and named a Saturday for dinner, as the only date in the near future on which I could accept his invitation, having an idea that all parsons were always busy on that particular night preparing for the Sunday. He replied immediately that he counted on me for the evening I had named, and that he anticipated a long chat about old days. I kept the engagement, and was very singularly bored. He was then a bachelor and he had asked, possibly commanded, I do not know the etiquette, a couple of ordinary clergymen to meet me; one of these two men toadied his spiritual overlord in the most shameless manner, apparently rejoicing in the snubs which he received; the other, an excellent sort of fellow, I fancied him, with a layman's wit, did not in the least abase himself before my lord, the Bishop, and was, I imagine, without the hospitality of the episcopal table for the future. Both these gentlemen were dismissed in unmistakable fashion soon after dinner was over, and I, despite my best efforts at escape, had something over an hour of his lordship's edifying monologue. He harped on the Massingdale business; deplored the fact that his duty had compelled him to act in it; and let me have a full quarter of an hour of unctuous drivel about young lives ruined, stray sheep, and hopes of future repentance, until he drove me out of the house in a mood of violent anger against a man whose food I had eaten.

After that Magram-Coke became a perfect nightmare to me; I could not escape from the man's smooth, saintly face; I imagine that I saw him, on an average, once a fortnight. He procured me a brief, which did me a lot of good, besides bringing me in the fee at which it was marked; I did not realise at the time that I owed it to him, I fancied that it was brought to me in a perfectly ordinary fashion, but I discovered afterwards that he had given the solicitors a hint—he was interested in the case—on which they acted. Had I known all about it I think that I should have refused the thing, good as it was, in order to be quit of any appearance of being indebted to him. He never pestered me with any of his professional charities or good works, and he always treated me with a rather obvious deference, which, coming from a man so much my senior and in such a far more prominent position, caused me a good deal of speculation. One afternoon in the following January he came to me in my chambers, with a request that I should get him, and a young niece of his, a seat at the Central Criminal Courts, in order to hear a case tried. I was exceedingly rude to the man, being both busy and altogether sick of him. I began by asking him whether he preferred a murder trial, or whether he had not mistaken the court and really wished to hear an amusing divorce suit; then without giving him the time to answer, I told him that I did not like helping to make the administration of justice a public spectacle, that I was sorry but I could not help him. Although I am quite aware that my attitude must have appeared both bombastic and ridiculous, besides being gratuitously rude to a man much older than myself, he showed no sign of offence; apologised for having encountered one of my principles; and assured me that I had opened his eyes to the true aspect of something that he had hitherto condoned. I felt, and I am quite willing to suppose that I looked, a fool; I learned later that he attended a trial for murder and, I give a junior counsel's gossip, appeared highly interested in the whole proceeding. I also discovered, some five days afterwards, the reason of his goodwill on my account: he imagined that I was on terms of intimacy with a member of the Cabinet, who had been a close friend of my father. I had, it is true, dined with the gentleman in question perhaps once a year since my father's death; beyond that I could not be said to know him, and had about as much influence with him as with the Grand Mogul. Yet, I understand, Cabinets make Suffragan Bishops into Prelates of greater dignity, and without doubt the poor man was not willing to miss a single chance; therefore, I avoided him with greater care than before; I gave my clerk orders to say that I was out, if he should happen to call at my chambers; and I did not enlighten him as to my relations with the politician. It was just as well, in my opinion, that he should waste his time on a wild goose chase; I have no liking for gratuitous interference, and it stuck in my mind that he was responsible for the fact that I no longer had Massingdale as my neighbour in Brick Court.

Early in February I had a letter from Loissel announcing his arrival in London in the course of the next week. I had taken a great fancy to the old man, and I wrote urging him to be my guest; I also wrote to Massingdale asking him to try to induce the old artist to come to me. Our joint efforts were successful, and Loissel promised to make my rooms his headquarters for a week. He was fully occupied, and I did not see very much of him except in the early morning and late at night, but I made the most of such occasions, and was delighted to discover in him a man who styled one of the morning an early hour at which to go to bed. He had travelled a great deal, had sailed, I fancy, every navigable sea, and he spoke many languages; in addition, he was an excellent talker, and looked out upon the world with a kindly, laughing toleration. Therefore, I hold the hours that he and I spent together in my rooms, comfortably settled before the fire, with London growing quiet about us, occasions which I am not likely to forget.

Although he said very little about Massingdale, and I did not press the subject, I gathered that he was anxious to meet Joan Onnington; so I got my aunt to send him an invitation for the week-end, which he accepted. From the moment of his entry into Elsingham Hall he established himself as a friend of the Onnington family; and during dinner on Saturday evening, and afterwards into the small hours, my uncle held him in talk about the sea, of which Loissel always spoke as of a thing he loved beyond praise. "My countrymen do not understand it," he told us, "they have mistaken what it is. When I read Hugo, I am inclined to weep at his mistakes. *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*—but it is all wrong! With him, with Hugo, it is the cruelty of the sea, its remorselessness that fills his mind. And with the others the same thing; all, yes, all of them, speak chiefly of this cruelty, this great force without pity. But the sea is not cruel, only unrelenting, calm, and very strong. It is that strength, so quiet, so resistless, which even in its anger is never impotent with rage, that should attract the mind. *Mon Dieu*, it is not cruel, the sea, only stern, and no lover of any weakness."

He had spent many years as a young man shipping as purser or as steward, voyaging in cargo tramps of all classes and of all nations, in order that he might come to some real understanding of the thing he loved so much, yet not wishing, he informed us, to spoil his hands with the work of an able seaman. What hardships and what poverty he had undergone I do not know; he seldom spoke about himself, but that he had seen plenty of both there could be no kind of doubt.

He was of peasant origin, a fact which he neither hid nor advertised; and from a small farm to a first place among French artists, from obscurity to fame, from the peasant's blouse to a coat glittering with orders, is a long road, and for much of the way rough going.

As Admiral Onnington and I stood in the hall that night, lighting our candles, I obtained some idea of the impression that Loissel had made.

"Confound it," said my uncle, "if I had not taken such a fancy to your great artist friend, I should be furious with the fellow. He has knocked all the conceit out of me, and I thought I was fairly secure at my time of life. I 've sailed the sea for a good many years, and—damme—I believe I 've had my eyes shut the whole time."

With that he went off to bed, apparently very well pleased in spite of the loss of his self-conceit.

The next day Joan, Loissel, and I set out in the morning for a long walk, to have a look at the country in the daylight. The day was clear and bright, with a touch of frost in the air, but the sun so warm that we seemed already arrived at spring. Loissel had never seen our eastern counties, had heard them much decried as flat, misty, and without charm, and had expected little better; so that as we tramped on our way, touching the real fenlands, and working back again into the undulating country of south-east Cambridgeshire, he condemned his informants as purblind fools. Beyond that, he made few comments on the scene, spoke very little of his art, and was as far from boring us with any polite rhapsodies as any man could be. Occasionally, as he swung along with the free stride of a man half his years, his hat in one hand, and his pipe, as likely as not, waving to his remarks in the other, he would pull up and look about him. "They are good," he would tell us, "your fens. They are wide—wide. There is space here; one is not crowded." Then we would go on tramping again, discussing many subjects with much freedom. He hailed every child that he met; and at the inn where we lunched he collected a swarm of them about him, and his broken English neither made them laugh nor stopped their tongues. Upon Joan, I am certain, he made a very deep impression, and that he, on his part, had formed no small liking for the girl seemed equally apparent, so that the three of us found ourselves very well content, and our talk flowed without restraint.

About four o'clock we got to Balsham, and took the Hildersham road until we came to the Roman way; there we turned off to the right, where the track leads sharply to the top of a knoll. Loissel halted as we got to the summit.

"You treat my age with small respect, mademoiselle," he laughed. "You take me up these local mountains as if I had your youth. You forget that I am old, and very fat."

"I certainly had forgotten that," said Joan, with the appearance of much contrition. "I am so sorry; but I can hardly remember it even now."

"You only flatter me in this way," he told her, "because you think that I am so old that I shall no longer attempt to give you back your compliments. Beware, mademoiselle; I shall begin to pester you with attentions. I am not blind; and I shall argue that you have led me on."

Joan promised that she would deal gently with him and we stood a moment silent, looking at the view before us. The sun had gone down behind the hills ahead, leaving them outlined against the glowing red, the trees upon the crest black and delicate like fine and ragged lace. The sky was without a cloud, and wide above us; the night had turned cold, and a wind, that left the mists in the hollows undisturbed, blew quietly. The whole countryside was still, heavy and sleeping, resting gladly, it would seem, after its short day of talk about the summer, without any stir of birds or insects, moved to no bustle of retiring as the sun went down.

When we had watched this scene some moments, we moved on down the track, picking our way as the light began to fade. Joan was the first to speak, after we had walked a quarter of a mile or more, and her thoughts still wandered, I fancy, round the sight that we had left.

"I think," she announced, "that it is quite right that men who can make beautiful things, sights, or sounds, or ideas, live again for others, should be admired and respected. Artists of any kind are wonderful people."

Loissel looked at her in enquiry, and seemed to hesitate at his reply. Then:

"Surely you jest, mademoiselle?" he asked.

"I am quite serious," Joan assured him. "Don't you agree with me?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders, spreading out his hands, and his words came with unexpected vehemence.

"*Mon Dieu*, no! Honour the works if they are worth it, guard them with care, read them often, delight in the sound of them. But the men—that is a different affair. Why should you admire and respect them?"

"Because men who do great things ought to be admired and honoured. They deserve thanks, and respect is the best expression of the ordinary man's thanks."

Joan's voice sounded astonished, and, I thought, touching on indignation.

"They get paid for their work like other men," Loissel answered, with a scorn that I had not heard him use before. "Believe me, mademoiselle, the world is very much inclined to praise the artist beyond his merit, to call him a fine fellow when it knows that he is not. We have already far too much conceit. Instead of a just criticism of our work, we find a great deal of indifference, politely concealed, for the art, and foolish petting and spoiling for the man. We grow worse and worse."

"Why do you say this?" cried Joan, and there was no longer any doubt of her indignation.

"I only say the truth," Loissel assured her. "Your artist, what is he? A man who has some work to do in life. If he does his work well, that is good; but he is not different from other men who also perform with success in the business of their lives. What does he do, your artist? He is not content with his work to do it quietly, he proclaims to the world that he has a temperament, and the world gapes at him and says that a temperament is surely a very fine thing, and the man who has it a wonderful fellow. Perhaps he believes in his temperament—I think he does—but the world should not help him to make a god of it. He comes to despise these others—these men without this wonderful quality; he will imagine that they are different to himself and much inferior. When he does something that they do not like he styles them fools, and he goes on doing the thing because he is certain that these others must be wrong.

Oh, this temperament of the artist, it is a wonderful thing, a fine excuse for all manner of foolishness and wrong!"

"I don't believe a word of it," Joan interposed, staring ahead of her with angry eyes. "Why should you blame them because they are different to other men? You would scorn them if they were conventional."

The painter took no notice of her anger; his voice was quiet and thoughtful, and he seemed to be convinced of his point.

"I do not blame them," he continued, "I pity them. I pity myself, mademoiselle. I ask that the world, you others who admire our work, should treat us as you would if we did other things. To go against the conventions of society, when your place is among men, is no virtue in itself. When an ordinary man offends these laws of society, he is punished by loss of standing among his neighbours; when an artist does the same thing he does not suffer. It is his temperament, you say—he cannot help it, he is different from other men, and he gains credit for his unconventionality, because it is expected from him. Then, mademoiselle, one fine day your artist does something that is not expected from him, something, perhaps, that may seem to you to go too far, and at once you forget that he has a temperament, and you blame him for what he has done. But the poor man has only followed his usual course, he has acted on his own advice, as he has done before, and he cannot understand why you blame him. His fault is probably not grave—to him it is, very likely, a little thing—but he has found the one convention that he must not override, and he is punished."

Loissel was silent, but Joan did not answer him. She gave no sign of her feelings, and it was too dark to see her face. Seeing that she did not answer, the old man continued in his steady, kindly voice:

"It is not just, mademoiselle, it is not wise, the way you treat us. There should be less mention of this temperament, or, if it must be mentioned, then more understanding. A butcher has a temperament, though possibly of a less interesting nature than that of the artist, but I have never yet heard it suggested that a butcher should be encouraged to walk among his fellows with pounds of good beef hanging about his neck. Why, then, do you encourage us, artists, to exhibit our wares? Why do you allow us to bring our moods with us when we come amongst you? You urge us on to dance before you, possibly because we are puppets that amuse you, but when our dance becomes natural, when we no longer pose before you but show our real selves in the excitement of the moment then—how do you say it?—we have overstayed our welcome, you are no longer pleased with us. That is why so often we make fools of ourselves, why, very frequently, the artist appears in the light of a conceited mountebank. It would be better, I am sure of it, mademoiselle, better for you, and much, much better for us, if you would treat us just like other men. Forget these moods which we show, do not remember that we have this temperament, and treat us as those others whose work in the world is not less valuable than ours. The artist has many temptations. He lives so much in a world that is not real that often, without any encouragement, he is tempted to forget that the things about him are more alive than those which he creates; yet when, through his own foolishness and through that of the men about him, he is shut out from the real things to dwell in his own world, then, very often, he suffers much unhappiness.

I would ask you, mademoiselle, for the sake of myself and these other foolish men, my fellows, to think more of the work, less of the man. It is a good work which we do—for me it is the only work—but to do it well is no more wonderful, no more to be admired than the doing well of any other thing that demands skill and thought and loving care."

I had listened to him with interest, and when he had finished I walked in silence, thinking of what he had said and seeing many meanings in it. Joan said nothing, but walked beside him in the dark, keeping her own counsel. As we turned into the park, he spoke again, in a voice that was full of laughter and apology.

"I am an old fool," he told us. "I begin to lecture; I am surely come to old age. You must forgive me, my friends; I forget myself when I speak of this subject. And now we are certainly late for tea, your nice English tea with the hot cakes. I am desolate."

His great rolling laugh sounded gently, but Joan seemed to take him at his word, and was urgent with protests.

"No, no!" she cried, and I could imagine her very serious, "you must not think we were not interested. I should have answered you; it was very rude. But you showed me so many new things that I had no reply ready. Please don't imagine that I was not interested."

Loissel chuckled to himself.

"You do not know me, mademoiselle," he assured her. "I am a very conceited old man. I did not think you were offended."

We were, as Loissel had foreseen, late for tea, but we got the hot cakes before they had grown cold.

The following afternoon, as we journeyed back to

London, I asked a question that had been puzzling me.

"I thought," I suggested, "that you were anxious to leave matters alone. Surely your talk yesterday afternoon about temperament and its reception was intended to refer to such cases as Massingdale?"

The old man sat back in his corner, smiling at me in content.

"So you can add up little figures and make the total right," he answered. "But yes, my friend, I had that intention. I gave a suggestion. *Hein!* But she will not know my meaning; she will be puzzled, your little cousin. And when a woman is puzzled, she tries to find the answer to the puzzle. She will think of our friend Louis; she is not sure whether I think him wrong or not, but she will think of him. That is what I want."

"But is this leaving the matter alone?" I asked, not seeing his object.

"I like your cousin," he replied, ignoring my question. "I think that she would make a good wife, when she is grown up. *Eh, bien!* I could not resist the chance of making her think a little more of this boy who loves her. Perhaps, I do not know, she might come to understand him; if she remains persuaded that she has ever done so, that becomes impossible. But, no word of anything to him; for him the thing is past, hopeless. We are agreed?"

"Yes," I assented. "But is it fair to bring the matter up again; ought not she, also, to be left alone?"

"Oh! as for that," he told me, "I have no scruple. He is worth a little suffering, that boy."

He broke the silence again, a little later, saying his last word on the matter.

"*Si la jeunesse savait!*" he sighed. "If in this love of youth there was a little understanding, a small idea of what life means, would it be better?"

The question being one which I could not answer, we talked of other things.

Loissel went back to Paris two days afterwards, and I was for some time without any news from that pleasant city. At Easter I had intended going over for a week, but circumstances preventing me, I saw nothing more of Massingdale for some time to come.

CHAPTER X

WHICH SHOWS SOME ASPECTS OF A WANDERING LIFE, TOGETHER WITH OTHER MATTERS

SOMETIME in June of that year I induced Massingdale to break a silence that had lasted more than a couple of months; but when his letter came it brought me no good news. He wrote from the Hôtel Dieu, in a perfectly cheerful vein, which meant, in his case, nothing, and in a handwriting more illegible than usual.

"You behold," he informed me, "or you might do so if you stood in this somewhat cheerless barrack, an interesting invalid, a convalescent about to quit the couch of sickness, the victim, sir, of one of those deplorable motor accidents that are daily becoming more frequent. One fine day, about three weeks ago, the fat Auguste and I should be imagined taking the air upon the Place du Parvis-Notre-Dame, engaged in the engrossing occupation of determining the aspect of the old Parvis. We walked, entirely lost to our surroundings, about the middle of the square, and we reconstructed the old buildings with many expressive gestures of the arms. As you are aware, no man can suitably conduct such a business without becoming erratic in his progress, without forgetting, if there be a soul within him, that vehicles exist. For us, at the moment, the whole development of vehicular traffic, the long centuries of evolution, had been in vain. There was a hoot—we had been walking and had stopped short with some suddenness—a shout, the noise of levers and other mechanical devices being violently applied. '*Sauve toi*,' cries Auguste, making an attempt to catch me by the arm; and I was caught amidships by an elegant and expensive automobile. Here, *mon cher*, the lights go down, the incidental music becomes mournful, and the faces of the crowd are seen to whiten. Behold! the poor gentleman is upon the ground, obviously no longer at his ease, and his faithful companion heartbroken and filled with rage. A car is a bad thing to hit, tough and insensible; I had the worst of the encounter, a broken leg, some ribs stove in, and many bruises, but nothing either interesting or serious. Auguste! Auguste was superb. I remember that he spoke with scant politeness to the driver. '*Sacré cochon!*' he screamed, his face transported to the higher realms of woe, '*espèce d'animal!* You have killed him, you have killed my friend. He dies.' With that he went down on his knees beside me, the tears streaming down his face, and began to loosen my collar, talking incoherently the while. I will not disguise the horrid truth from you. I felt damn bad; but the sight of Auguste had moved a corpse to laughter, so I laughed, and it hurt my ribs like hell. Up gets our little fat man; the *rôle* is changed, action and resignation hold the boards; he is a broken man, but capable. 'Messieurs,' says he to the crowd about us, and very solemnly he removes his hat, 'we will take him, my poor friend, across to the hospital that he may die in comfort on a bed.' Since then I have been a fixture in the Hôtel Dieu, but hope to leave the place in a few days.

"I am inclined to think that the authorities of the hospital are divided between mirth and resentment at the behaviour of the good Auguste. When he had been informed that the case would not come up to his expectations, that death had no part in it, and that a few weeks would see me about again, he flew, I am informed, to the opposite extreme of emotion; congratulated every one about him; praised the skill of the resident surgeon in no measured fashion; referred incoherently to the Cross of the Legion of Honour, for whom it is not known; was told that he could not see me until later; and departed in a great state of excitement. Within a couple of hours he had Loissel and Yvonne Carrel at my bedside, and I should judge from their manner that they had expected to see the battered remnants of a man, living but robbed of all future hope of activity or even movement. Loissel would have had me brought to his flat, but I was against it and so was the surgeon fellow; Yvonne said little, but I am embowered amid the flowers that she has sent me; and Auguste sat patting my hand, a very picture of foolishness, and announced his intention of bringing Marellac to play to me, a thing he has not been allowed to do.

"For the last three weeks I have daily held a levée: Auguste is always here; not seldom Loissel or Yvonne; and from time to time others whipped up by the indefatigable fat man. Blinkson comes regularly twice a week, and is always sober when he comes; each time he brings me a book, chosen in a fashion beyond praise, so that I think that when I am about again I shall allow him to guide me in my reading. He is a fine wreck of a man, Dick, come upon the rocks and going fast to pieces; you do not like him, but you would if you saw more of him.

"I laugh at all these good people, a sick man is a selfish, careless animal, and I am afraid that, sometimes, I show that their solicitude amuses me. Yet it is that or tears, my friend; for if I don't laugh at the way they stick by me, I shall most certainly disgrace myself by maudlin sentiment. They do not grow on the hedges, the fat man, Loissel, Yvonne, and the rest.

"I did not write before because I knew that you would go one better than the rest of them, and that I should probably receive a call from you as well. If the thing had been a really serious matter, I would have asked you to be in at the finish. I, moreover, extracted a solemn and universal promise that you should not be told of anything.

"When I come out, I go to Loissel for a few days. I have let the studio—an economy after your own heart. Then—Loissel arranged this—I go to some villa near Como, to paint a fresco for the owner. Fame, fortune, riches!!

"Having so many famous and influential friends, I am allowed many privileges here. I already hobble about. If you were fool enough to come here to visit me, I should be very rude and altogether unsociable. Write instead—a better proceeding for all parties."

I was fool enough to go and see him, and I was somewhat annoyed that he had not sent for me before. I went over to Paris for a week-end, informing him of my intention by wire, and asking him to let me know, by the same means of communication, addressing his answer to Boulogne to meet the boat, whether he was still in hospital. His reply was, possibly, a source of amusement to some jaded telegraph clerk possessing a knowledge of English. It ran:

"Inimitable idiot. Wasteful and extravagant fool. 217 bis Boulevard Haussmann. You put up there."

A clear waste of six words which he could no more help than I could avoid going to visit him.

He had all the appearance of convalescence, and was the temporary possessor of a pair of crutches, which he used with no skill at all, yet he proclaimed himself perfectly well, announced that he thought of nothing at all but the next occasion on which he could eat, and was in excellent spirits. I discovered that he had had a very narrow escape, and had, in reality, been rather badly knocked about; but that the accident was unquestionably his own fault; Auguste Vanne gave me an account of it which did not lack fire, which, moreover, was a miracle of effective gesture.

I could not stop with Loissel more than a couple of days, although he tried to keep me longer, and during that time I came to the conclusion that, whatever Massingdale had lost in leaving England, he had certainly gained some friends in Paris to whom the name was not misapplied. We had no serious talk, he and I, but I learned that he was full of hopes, partly justified, and that his worldly goods amounted to little more than twenty pounds, his artist materials, and a wardrobe that was neither well equipped nor fashionable. After I had left him, standing upon his crutches at the door of Loissel's flat and enlarging upon my folly in coming to see him, which thing he had forgotten, so he told me, until that moment, I saw no more of him for something over a year.

He went, as he had intended, to the villa near Como; was there some two months or more, living in the neighbouring village; and adorned the villa to the satisfaction, I believe, of both the owner and himself.

Then, until Christmas, he was in Rome, doing, as far as I could gather from his letters, the work of a student, and it has always been a mystery to me how he managed to live during those months; that he was often hungry I afterwards had proof. Finally, a few days before Christmas, he was back again in Paris, in a much smaller studio, in the Rue Cortot, with no fair view of Paris from his windows. In this studio, where I have reason to believe he dwelt in great poverty, he remained until the late spring, but as I never saw the place, something always occurring to prevent my paying him a visit, I cannot give any description of it.

I cannot imagine that this is the place to quote his letters at any length, they were often of a description that seems to me better kept to the sole knowledge of the man to whom they were written, and by that I mean that they were full of casual gossip about himself and his surroundings, which I am determined to guard as intimate talk between friends; yet this, at least, I will say of them, they always, with one single exception, maintained the same note of cheerfulness, and they dealt very much with his hopes of artistic achievement.

At the villa near Como I gathered that he was without friends and somewhat lonely, although much pleased at the fulfilment of his first commission. Soon after his arrival in Rome I had amusing news from him, some of which I shall quote.

"My excellent friend," he wrote, in the course of a long letter, "I stand upon the summit of achievement, no more is left for me to do in life; I have fought a duel! I still ache with laughter that I had thought inextinguishable. Here is the absurd tale. I was seated the other night in a small drinking-shop which I frequent, enjoying the company of several worthy persons of a like persuasion to myself, one of whom was a tall, sallow-faced, cadaverous Belgian of an absurdly pompous turn of mind. We discussed international politics—a not less loathsome subject than the affairs of any particular nation. The discussion grew warm and loud, and the Belgian—Renier is his name—louder and warmer than the rest of us. 'It is well known,' cried he, at last, 'that the English have no political faith or honour, that they will face about if they can gain two sous' worth of advantage.' Possibly, Dick, I do not know, we have earned some such reputation among the ignorant; with the justification of this indictment I do not concern myself a damn,—I will not have people say it. 'Monsieur,' I answered, 'you lie, moreover, you lie like an ignorant fool.' He sprang from his chair at that. 'You intend to insult me?' he stuttered. 'Not a doubt of it,' said I. 'I do.' Thereupon he grows quite polite, says that I shall hear from him, and goes out of the *café*. We fought next day, *mon cher*, and the affair was comic opera from start to finish. We hired the swords, borrowed 'em from a pawnshop, and they were infernal heavy, an extra weight of cavalry sabre, I should imagine. Every one was prodigious solemn over the encounter, the formalities caused me eternal delight; there was only one thing clear from the start, we must on no account do any serious harm to one another. In the second bout I was scratched upon the wrist, honour was satisfied, and we shook hands. You may laugh, but I 'll be shot if you laugh as much as I did. God help us all, it 's a funny world, and duelling—as I know it—better than a roaring farce! I don't expect for a moment that you will believe me, yet the thing is true, you have my oath to it, from the time that I got up that morning until I was on the ground, when the farce of the whole thing was established, I felt in a blue funk. The kind gods grant I did not show it—I think that I did not! The heroic mould was, doubtless, not at hand when I was fashioned."

Some years after the event, I met one of the men who had performed the duties of second for Massingdale on the occasion of his first, and, I believe, his only duel. The description of the encounter which I, then, was given certainly supported Massingdale's tale, that the affair was comic opera; the narrator, moreover, showed that the gods had been kind, and that the true state of mind of one of the combatants went undiscovered. He assured me that he had come near to being nervous, since Massingdale's amusement appeared such that there seemed some chance that he would get hurt out of sheer carelessness.

But Massingdale's life was not, I have reason to suppose, altogether a matter for laughter, and there were many occasions during those months when a man situated as he was had been excused in seeing nothing but blackness about him; it is, indeed, a strong testimony to his courage that there is only one letter, out of many that he then wrote to me, written in other than good spirits and in hope. To face poverty and want, when for twenty-five years such things have not been experienced, is a test before which cheerfulness is apt to be defeated. I learned afterwards something, I do not think that I shall ever learn all, of what he underwent during that autumn in Rome. I gathered from chance conversations some idea of the straits to which he was put, of the difficulty that he often had in finding money to buy food and to hire a lodging, and I am much inclined to wonder that among his letters, which I have by me now, there is only the one in which he seems to have lost hope, in which there sounds a note of bitterness or of despair. I know that any man who sets out to make his living as an artist must be prepared for many failures, for years of unremunerative and unnoticed work, but that he should continue to hold to his ideals, and that he should meet, with little outcry, whatever evil fortune chance may bring him, seems to me, although little more than his obvious duty, still a circumstance on which those who wish him well may look with satisfaction.

I shall, therefore, give in this connection some portion of the letter to which I have already referred; and by quoting it I shall hope to point the contrast between that and his ordinary correspondence. Perhaps, if I look at the matter justly, I have another reason: this letter shows, or so I think, something of the strength of the friendship which existed between us, and I am sufficiently proud of that friendship to be unwilling to let slip this chance of exposing it.

I received the letter at the beginning of October, and it had the address of a *poste restante* in Rome.

"Can you manage to send me," it began, "as soon as possible, a money order for eight pounds? God knows when you will get it back—as soon as I can earn it, which may be not at all. I know that you would rather have me forego any lame explanation; that, if necessary, you would give the money and be offended at any hesitation on my part to ask for it; but I must explain, and it is only right that you should know to what sort of a fool you send it.

"During the last six weeks or so—I 'll make the tale as short as I can—I have altogether failed to earn a single sou. For a time after I arrived here I was employed in a studio to give what help I could to aspiring beginners; by this I earned enough to feed me, and was also allowed the use of the room for my own work. I quarrelled with my employer, largely on account of my own foolishness, and he fired me out. Since then I have been living on my capital, which was not large, which is now exhausted. Four days ago I was sitting to a meal in the place which I frequent, the place where Renier challenged me, when my father came in, recognised me, and sat down at my table. Why, when the world is wide, when Rome in any case is full of drinking-shops, the fates should send him to this particular one, I do not know; possibly it has some reputation as the haunt of poor artists. However, being in Rome, the last place in which I had thought to meet him, he came, on a miserable, cold, rainy evening, and encountered his illustrious son.

"My father is, I think, one of the best bred men that I have ever met; his manner never loses its ease; and on that particular evening he was a model for those who aim at unembarrassed conversation. I did not show myself worthy of such parentage; I seem to have dropped into a damnable habit of seriousness, and to have forgotten the trick of laughter. Besides, I was not in a strong position; as I see the matter, I could not possibly make any advance, nor meet any that he might begin. He thinks me one thing, I know myself, at least, not that; he was much against my becoming a painter, and I, not knowing my own mind, at one time gave him some hopes that I had forgotten that career. I sat in front of him ragged, unshaven—my razors are in pawn—obviously far from prosperous, so that any attempted good-fellowship on my part had seemed damnably like a case of begging. I had the fear of God in me of that.

So we sat talking, not of ourselves but of other things; and all the time I could notice his eyes on me, studying, with an expression I did not try to read, his most successful, independent offspring. After a while he excused himself for a moment, and left the *café*, coming back after a short while for another ten minutes of dull talk; finally, as he got up to go, he handed me a sealed envelope without address. 'This came to me for you,' says he, and his tone was so natural that I did not suspect him, 'or rather the enclosure did. I was going to ask Dick Crutchley to forward it; I have not your address.' And with that he gave me good-night and went out.

"The envelope contained two hundred-franc notes. I spent them, or much of them, in the next twenty-four hours. The temptation of money to the very poor is greater than I thought, or I am weaker. Then, when through high living I had regained a conscience, I saw the fine honourable quality of the proceeding: to style my father blind and disloyal, as I do in my own mind, to fancy him wanting in trust and friendship and myself the pattern of virtue, who must break with him because he does not believe in me, but to accept and spend his money because I was hungry and cold! The thing needs no comment. I went to the only man I know here who could lend me the sum; borrowed it, and returned the sum to my father, with a letter thanking him, but stating that he was mistaken and that I had no need of it. That was the only thing that it occurred to me to do—I am not proud of it, now that it is done. Please send the money, if you can, I must repay the other man at once. It seems that I am engaged in an endeavour to find out whose debtor I may become with least discomfort to myself.

"Whether or not I shall ever reap the harvest of my dreams, I do not know. I have not lost hope, but at the moment I cut so poor a figure that I have little conceit left in me, and it seems a long, rough stretch to any turning. I cannot paint pictures that the small dealers want; I am not yet able to paint those that I dream of painting. If I stand still where I am now, I am damned and lost, a failure in all things. I am too good a workman to paint the cheap things that the suburban *bourgeois* wants; I am yet a whole world away from being a great artist. There are times when things seem so very wrong that I despair. So far, I have never once succeeded in getting my thoughts on to the canvas; what right, in God's name, have I to hope that I shall ever come to better things?"

The letter ended with a statement that he would leave Rome as soon as he could manage it, and that he would get back to Paris.

Much of the scorn which he felt for himself was, I think, justified; he had acted in many things like a fool, and had no right to sympathy in the attitude he chose to adopt towards Captain Massingdale; but the giving of the two hundred francs was a false move, and the cause of a difficulty to the recipient that he could very well have done without.

In answer to the reply that I wrote him, I had a short note, written in much more cheerful fashion, yet, or so I fancied it, somewhat forced in its gaiety.

"Would you," he wrote to me, "enchain me in a very mesh of debt? Crœsus, you are unduly kind to me, but I will only be a beggar in so far as it suits my honourable and punctilious soul to demand alms. I return the fare to Paris; and will cause a bust of Richard Crutchley to be carved, that I may daily worship it in humble gratitude. I am rich again; I am in excellent spirits ('Poor thing of moods!' says you); I am a burning mass of shame for all my past follies, but more especially for the maudlin letter which I sent you. I am in no confusion about my moral worth: I have no delusions about my being anything but foolish; but once again I am a hopeful fool. Paris shines ahead of me, a star, a hope, the haven whose pier-head lights shine out to me across the waters. I have a commission to conduct a statue of Diana—blessed goddess!—to some rich man's dwelling near Marseilles. When I have seen it safely installed, I shall be half-way on my road, and with money in my pocket! I shall walk to Paris; I shall be many weeks upon the road; and I shall gather inspiration as the children blackberries in autumn; finally, looking down the river at sunset, footsore and content, I shall stand on the Pont Neuf, breathe a prayer of thankfulness, and cast my young life on the altar steps of art. *En cette foi je veux vivre et mourir.*

"Don't expect to hear from me till Christmas, and then from Paris."

Of the two months during which he tramped the roads of Eastern France, making his way along the Rhone, through Burgundy, past the vineyards where names that are like household words for familiarity distinguish pleasant, quiet villages, and at last by the valley of the Seine to Paris, Massingdale has told me very little; yet I am inclined to fancy it a period of the utmost importance in his career, a time that helped him to a much clearer sight of the way ahead.

I had three communications from him: two postcards with bits of Burgundian country sketched upon them, and, towards the end of November, two hundred-franc notes, enclosed with one line of writing on a half-sheet of notepaper. How he arrived at saving this amount of money I have not been able to discover; when I ask him he shouts, and accuses me of thinking that he stole it. Otherwise I have no details of his journey, and nothing to go upon beyond his assurance that he enjoyed himself prodigiously.

I had a few days in Paris at the beginning of December, and was present at Yvonne Carrel's first appearance at the Opera, when she took the part of Delilah, and sang with much the same genius that she had shown to us in the studio of the Rue Antoinette. She had shortened the life of her voice, I was told, but she would, for some few years more, have power to hold an audience obedient to her mood; Massingdale in the first case, and Loissel after, with his kindly guarding of her, had held her off from ruin in a fashion which she did not forget. After the performance I had supper at the Café Anglais with Yvonne, Loissel, and the fat Auguste; we had a private room, and the party was a merry one. For the most part of the time we were content to discuss Yvonne's singing, and to pay her compliments, but just before we broke up the gathering, Loissel, whose guests we were, gave us a toast.

"To the return of our Ulysses," he cried, "and to the strength that he has gained in wandering!"

We drank the toast in silence; and then, almost before we had swallowed the wine, Yvonne was upon her feet, her glass recharged, her eyes shining with more of passion and intensity than was their wont, except in singing.

"You must drink again, my friends," she told us, waiting for our glasses to be filled. "You must drink my toast without reserve. Messieurs! May the dreams that we have dreamt of him, our Ulysses, all come true!"

When she had emptied her glass, she threw it on the table; looked at the fragments with a smile; asked us whether that was not the proper thing to do; and immediately announced that she was tired, and would go off to bed.

Later, as Loissel and I walked home down the Rue Auber, for I stopped with the old man, he touched on Yvonne's toast.

"It is strange," he murmured, staring ahead with eyes which did not see the street about him, "this muddle in which we live. Always, always, my friend, there are complications. You will laugh at me, perhaps, but I have a fancy the little Yvonne's mistake, the journey which she started and only ended at the last moment left to her, was due to this same cause, the cause of her toast to-night." He paused, and walked some yards in silence, then resumed his talk on the same note of speculation. "She is weak, very weak, and the danger is in her blood; she gave way to it when life became difficult. She wants him, she has wanted him since he was a little boy in Paris—how much, we do not know, you and I. He knows it; she told him, and he has ceased to be to her what he had been before. Then she gave way. Now she hopes again. Hope is seldom reasonable. It is impossible, we know that, you and I; he does not care. I do not think he ever would have cared, in other circumstances. She is kind and has a hundred good qualities; she could be faithful, but she could never be the mate for him. So, my friend, I say that the world is full of complications and of sadness: for it is not a little thing the wasting of the love of any woman, even though she be such that her purer sisters shrink away from her. Purity—*mon Dieu!* I think I would exchange it for kindness."

"You think, then," I asked, and his words had brought me to a greater sympathy than I had thought to have in such a case, "that this is serious with her, that it will last?"

He stopped and faced me, his hand gripping the lapel of my overcoat, his voice harder than I had expected.

"It is one of those cases," he told me, "which certain persons associate with justice, calling it retribution. You and I, being perhaps less stupid, might call it tragedy—or comedy, the comedy that the gods have played for their amusement, when the long Olympian peace is irksome to them."

We did not continue the discussion of the matter, there seemed to us both, I fancy, little more to be said; but I remembered Loissel's final pronouncement, and when the matter came to my mind during the next few months, I wondered what the end would be, and what finish the weary Olympians would order to be written to this play. A happy ending was clearly not to be, or so I most devoutly believed, although I have no liking for any tragedy.

During Christmas time, however, I had other things to think about. As usual, I passed that season at Elsingham Hall, and that year Tom Onnington was home, and had with him a brother officer, a man named Gatton, who was quite plainly making a good bid for Joan's affections. He was an amusing fellow, physically very perfect, and not less intelligent than the rest of us; comfortably rich, interested in his profession, and a simple and honourable gentleman; such a man, I should imagine, as might be considered a very excellent prospective husband. In his case it was reasonable to proclaim that you knew him when he had been in your company for a week. I should be prepared to wager that Joan liked him, as I am certain most people did: I am equally convinced that her feelings were not deeply stirred on his account. But, being an exceedingly good-looking girl, she was not against being pleasant to him, and very probably she gave him more than a passing thought as a possible husband, submitting, without any sign of resentment or acceptance, to the delicate driving of my aunt, who thought that here was the final solution of the Massingdale affair. For his part, Gatton seemed to find the situation to his liking; but was, I took it, not the sort of man to add much zest to the gods' comedy, if the game went against him in the end.

Tom Onnington did not fancy the way in which matters stood, and gave me his opinions one misty afternoon, as he and I rode back from a day's hunting.

"I don't like the way Joan is letting Gatton make love to her," he told me, breaking a silence with some suddenness.

"Lord, man," said I, laughing, "don't play the heavy brother. She 's doing no more than a girl with her looks is compelled to do, to keep herself in good conceit."

"I don't see it," he answered, and the man was plainly in earnest. "If she had the slightest idea of marrying him, I 'd back her up with the best of them—Gatton 's an excellent sort; but she can't have forgotten that poor devil Massingdale—he is not the sort of man any girl forgets."

"What do you mean?" I asked, pulling up to light a pipe; for I can always make a better show with a ticklish conversation when I have the help of tobacco.

"Massingdale is more your friend than mine," said he, "you ought to know; but it has always struck me that he is a cut above our humble selves. Personality or something. I imagine a girl feels that as we do. Also, I 'll be damned if Joan did not really care for him."

"You seem to forget the circumstances of the quarrel."

"I do not," he cut me short. "I remember it as one of the most silly, fool businesses I ever heard of. It 's quite impossible that Massingdale did what they suggest. Why, good Lord! ten minutes in the man's company, and you could take your dying oath on that. Joan must be blind, or stupidly proud, or offended, or some equally inane thing or other. Anyhow, it 's devilish hard on Massingdale, and about the worst day's business she ever did."

"Well," said I, "supposing that is so, what 's the remedy?"

"There is n't one," he answered. "I never suggested there was. I 'm only on the cursing tack to relieve my feelings. How does he take it?"

"Massingdale? I 've never spoken to him about it. Pretty hardly, I should judge, though you know he is not the man to shout out because it hurts him."

"Yes, I know that," Tom replied. "Damn it all, Dick, it 's a fool world. Let 's liven up the pace a bit. I 'm cold."

At odd times in the course of the next week I had a good deal of talk with Tom about Massingdale, and although we came to no conclusion about his affairs, I was uncommon pleased to discover that one of my relations, in any case, would back the opinions he had formed against the force of suspicious circumstances.

A few days after Tom and I had reopened the matter, Gatton brought up the subject of Massingdale at the dinner table, and that in perfect innocence of the fact that we had ever heard of such a man. The cloth had just been removed, and the wine and fruit put on the table—for my uncle would never have the wine set while the linen still covered the board—when Gatton indulged in reminiscence.

"The other day," said he, addressing himself to Joan across the table, but he had found a pause in the conversation and we all listened to him, "as I was coming home overland, I tumbled on a most amusing artist fellow; should n't have guessed his trade if he had not told me. He was driving cows when I met him. It 's a rather funny yarn, if you care to hear it."

Having discovered that we did want to hear it, he settled to his work with relish, being a man who liked telling a story, which is a common weakness, who also could tell one without spoiling it, which is rare.

"I broke my journey at Macon," he told us, "and went, for a couple of days, to Cluny. When I 'm not in a hurry, I like messing about these old places, though I know nothing about them; still I had read something of the history of Cluny and wanted to see the remains of the monastery place. It 's not bad country round about, and the second afternoon I went for a walk. I did n't know my way at all; just wandered on through a forest and over some hills. I was looking out for some one to tell me the way back when a man turned up driving four cows; one of the most incongruous-looking birds I ever set eyes on—dressed like a peasant, except for his coat, which was of rough tweed and English for a certainty, but a gentleman without a doubt by the cut and the carriage of him. He started the conversation before I had a chance to open my mouth, shouting out to me in English almost as soon as he came in sight. 'Good-day,' he yelled, and I liked the sound of him at the first go-off. 'You might stand aside, or you 'll head my cows down that bridle road. I 'm no sort of hand at the driving game.' I got out of the way as he asked, and waited for him to come abreast of me; if it had not been for a mongrel pointer that he had with him, I 'll bet that even in that short distance the cows would have gone off all over the countryside. When he came up to me I asked him how he knew that I was English; thereupon he roared aloud with laughter. 'Your clothes, your walk, your face, your build, your pipe! Heaven be kind to the man!' he shouted; 'does he think that he looks like a native of any other country?'

"I liked this cowherd fellow, he seemed a jovial kind of knave although he was as thin as a lath and had the eyes of a fanatic, so I fell in alongside of him and went the way that he did. He told me of a vast number of things that a man should be careful to avoid in driving cows, and I howled with delight at his account of his morning's misadventures; then, quite suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, he asked for a fill of baccy. I gave him one. 'Sir,' said he, with an absurd bow, stopping short in the middle of the road and letting the cows wander off where they would, 'for this I hold myself your debtor for all time. Fate will separate us—probably in a few minutes—but not the grave itself shall dim for me the memory of your charity. For many weeks nothing but the vilest caporal has been through my pipe. That is France's greatest shame, that she has no decent tobacco. Damnation!' With no other warning he fled from me down the road, like a man with a swarm of bees astern of him. There ahead of us was a fat man in a trap, walking his horse past the cows and flicking at them with his whip as he went by; the mongrel dog evidently was n't taking any of this, and went for the trap with a snarl; thereupon the fat beast inside cut at him, and caught the poor brute in the eye, sending him away yelling. By that time the cowherd chap had got up to the horse's head; he held on to it and addressed the man in the cart in a voice that must have carried most of the way to Cluny. He started off by calling t' other man a fat swine, and then became so fluent that my French would n't stand it; but I saw there was going to be war, so I hurried up to see the fun. It was a glorious scrap. The fat man, to do him justice, seemed quite willing, perhaps he was backing his weight. The fighting lacked style and finish, but they went at it in proper fashion; the cowherd was all over the fat man, who made sort of windmill rushes and used everything he had got, feet, hands, head—everything, and the fight was finished, I should think, in under three minutes. The heavy-weight got a punch in the eye that was all he wanted, and he sat down in the road and cursed. I handed him the reins of his horse, who seemed a quiet sort of beast—probably dragging the sportsman with the damaged eye had sobered him—and the flushed victor enlisted my aid in rounding up the cows again.

"We drove them—I was a long sight better hand at the game than he was; he seemed the most extraordinarily erratic person I ever met—to a farm about a mile away. I looked upon the whole business as a lunatic performance that I would not have missed for a fiver, but the cowherd fellow—Massingdale, that was his name, I thought I should remember it—seemed mighty serious about it; he talked with amazing excitement about the fat fellow's cruelty to the dog, until we delivered up the kine to their owner. Massingdale was just about to be paid for his herding—the man grew more and more of a mystery to me as things went on—when the defeated champion drove into the yard. 'Streuth! there was some talk then. I could n't follow all of it, but the three of them went at it at once; and I 'd have taken odds on there being another battle—in fact I was standing by to give my own side some assistance when they settled the thing without blows. The former was an excellent man of business: he suggested not giving Massingdale his money by way of punishment for his violence; he stopped some of the fat man's protest by hinting that the dog was seriously damaged and that there might be compensation to pay on that count; and in the end he got his way.

"Massingdale offered to see me on to the road for Cluny, and we set out together; as far as I could make out, his business in that part of the world seemed ended with the safe return of the cows. I bubbled with curiosity worse than any spinster; I started pumping him; and he put me to eternal shame by offering me a version of his life's history. 'Charitable dispenser of deifying tobacco, amused spectator of my pugilistic efforts, you shall hear how you walk with a great man unawares,' said he; and I should have started an apology for my beastly inquisitiveness, if it had not been perfectly obvious that he did not care a tinker's curse whether I happened to be inquisitive or not. He told me that he was a painter 'of quite uncommon merit,' but that unfortunately the public and the critics were, so far, unaware of his existence; that he walked from Marseilles to Paris in order to gain inspiration by the road; and that his periodic employment as a farm labourer was an experiment to prove that an unskilled man could always earn his living in the country. He fired this weird yarn at me with an air of perfect frankness, and I kept my mouth shut at the end of it, because I was fairly up a tree, and had nothing to say. I tried to get him to come to

Cluny and dine with me, but he would not, and left me when we came in sight of the place.

"Hope I have not bored you with the tale, but this man Massingdale made an awful impression on me; he was, in some ways, what I should call the type of a genius. Gave you an idea that he could do things if he tried to, and made you cotton to him and listen to what he had to say for himself, you did n't quite know why. Gad, I never saw such eyes!"

Gatton stopped talking and stared at his plate, playing with an almond; then he looked up, found us all, I fancy, trying to hit upon some happy comment, and realised that there was something in the air.

"I say," he began rather nervously, "have I stuck my hoof into it somehow?—O Lord! Don't say that you know this man Massingdale!"

He seemed to find the idea an excellent jest, and laughed heartily.

"We used to know him very well," Joan answered, without any sign of embarrassment; "but he has not been in England for nearly two years. What you say of him is very characteristic; he does those original sorts of things."

"Does he paint well?" enquired Gatton; he was evidently interested in Massingdale.

"He used to be a barrister," my uncle joined in quietly. "I have not seen any of his work since he left England."

"I hope he gets on," Gatton persisted. "I wish him a popular reception at the Salon or somewhere of that sort; because it struck me afterwards that he was pretty well at the end of his tether. I believe the money that that farmer fellow would n't pay him was fairly badly needed, and that he was too proud to dine at my expense.

I supppose a man does get like that when he can't possibly return the hospitality; it 's rotten silly, because your friend Massingdale probably slept under a haystack, and was beastly hungry when he might have been well fed, besides depriving me of a most amusing evening."

We did not go on with the subject, though Gatton was evidently loth to let it drop; he probably wondered why we were so little interested in a man whom we professed to know. Yet, had he known the true state of affairs, he would have wished himself, I take it, not quite so ready with a story; for he had given Joan a picture which, it may be supposed, she dwelt upon. To one who had once had a liking for him, the vision of Massingdale, out at elbows and cheerful, doing quixotic and excitable actions on the public roads of France, exercising his peculiar influence, although in literal fact a tramp, sleeping hungry under the autumn stars, was something that would stick in the mind, keeping green disquieting memories, wakening sleeping hopes.

CHAPTER XI

AN ODD COMPANY ASSEMBLES

MASSINGDALE had arrived in Paris a few days before Christmas; had, I believe, been received as a returning prodigal by his friends; and had settled down to paint pictures, and, if possible, to sell them. Loissel had persuaded him to accept a position in his studio; the work allowed him plenty of time to do his own painting, and the salary enabled him to live, otherwise he had most certainly failed to find sufficient money either to carry on his trade or to support existence. Yet if the job offered him had been an absolute sinecure, he would have snorted at it, proclaiming it charity, would have refused to touch it, and would, likely, have foregone many chances of success in consequence. As it was, Loissel gained his own way, and Massingdale had enough money to feed himself and to buy materials, and the time to do the serious work that he had not yet attempted.

During the next few months, he turned his walk across France to some profit, and finished, from the sketches that he had made on the road, the first two pictures that show the real development of his power; in both, *A Valley of Auvergne*, and *La Pluie d' Automne*, there is something more than fine workmanship and a wonderful skill in colouring—there is a strength, and a suggestion of wide places and the clean air, which is not easily come upon. Both pictures brought to their creator some attention, both were exhibited in the Salon, and both sold for small sums —something under fifty pounds for the two of them, if I remember right. The advocates of the latest fashion of the moment denounced the work as being superficial, technically well executed but insincere. Massingdale, these astute gentlemen urged, with great delight in their meaningless jargon, had been content to reproduce a scene that had some claim on beauty; he did not, as a true artist should, express the idea which the scene had conveyed to him, obliterating in his expression all details that were not essential to his meaning. The wiser critics held out many hopes for his future, but complained that his pictures were indefinite, since they conjured to the mind a hundred different aspects of the painted scenes, since in them there were many suggestions, but no clear explanation of the artist's vision.

Although the world of picture-lovers had not risen with open arms held out to him, his first exhibits had led men to speak of him, and even the more pessimistic of the Parisian judges were inclined to grant that a man of more than common merit had made his first bow to the public. Massingdale himself seemed to care very little what they said of him, announcing that a kindly fate had blinded them to the worst faults in his two pictures, and, for the rest, that they might say what things they would.

"There is a deal of truth," he wrote to me, "in what the critics, some of them, have said about my painting, but may I rot in the depths of hell if I understand what they mean by not making clear the artist's vision. Have

I, have you, has any one of all the human tribe, a clear vision of autumn rain? At one moment it is one thing, at the next, when a squall strikes you on the other cheek and the wind finds out the weakness of your clothing, the whole thing is changed, the scene before you not at all the same. It is as we are, saints yesterday and devils to-morrow, and the reason of the change not comprehended. A clear vision, forsooth! Let them take their clear visions to a seminary, they are fit meat for pedagogues or fools. For me, I have never yet seen clearly, being human, and, still being human, I do not think I ever shall."

So the spring and the summer passed, and I saw nothing of Massingdale, and only heard from him occasionally, of how he slowly grew to be a painter. The Onningtons left England directly after the season was finished to wander about the Continent until the autumn; they had, much to my uncle's disgust, rented a house in town during May and June, and Joan had passed what, I suppose, may be called a successful season. She was uncommon popular with men, not disliked by her own kind, and had developed something of a real beauty; yet, so far as I was concerned, she had lost far more than she had gained, and in occupying herself solely with the ordinary affairs of a girl in her position, without, as far as I could judge, any particular interest, she showed signs of losing all the individual character that nature had given to her. When we met, which I contrived should be less frequently than hitherto, she talked, for the most part, of the common topics of the moment, and she showed some signs of exhibiting a trick of being bored with her surroundings, which had not been her habit a year before.

I did not like the change, and I came near to congratulating Massingdale on a merciful escape. Admiral Onnington, also was not blind to the alteration of her manner, giving me his views upon it one evening, when, to escape some function or other, he had taken refuge with me in Brick Court.

"There is something wrong with Joan, Dick," he told me, sitting at his ease in a new arm-chair that I had purchased. "Too much of this stupid gadding about. What any one wants to miss the best month of the summer rushing about this town for, I can't imagine. However, your aunt would have it, my boy, and a wise man knows when to give way to his wife. What do you think of the girl yourself?"

"I don't quite know," I answered. "She seems getting bored with the show, and yet she hardly talks of anything else, as she used to do."

"I 'm hoping," he suggested, chuckling, "that she 'll get such a sickener of the business that I shan't be dragged up here next June. Still, I can't quite make her out; she does n't seem to care, nowadays, about a man who can say something interesting. I can only hope that she will wait a bit, give herself time to change again, before she picks a husband. There was a time, Dick, when I would have told a man to go to the devil if he had suggested that my daughter would turn out good-looking and nothing else; now, sometimes, I 'm rather afraid that that may come to be the case. I don't like it; I always hoped that she might make a good wife for a man who wanted something more than a pretty face."

He sighed, and sat silent, staring in front of him; then, as if he had detected himself gossiping, he changed the subject.

On the whole I was not sorry when the Onningtons left town, and I was distinctly relieved that they had not suggested my being with them on their holiday.

Having no particular plans for the spending of my Long Vacation, and being of those men who do not like to wander about alone, I had written to Massingdale suggesting that he should leave Paris for a few weeks and should look after me somewhere in the country; in due course, which in this instance was a matter of several weeks, he sent me an answer, and I learned that he had already fled the town, and was settled in some obscure Burgundian village, in the department of Saône-et-Loire. Beyond the facts that he wished to sketch the peasantry, and that he held many pleasant memories of this district—perhaps his fight with the fat man, which Gatton had witnessed, was high amongst them—I can suggest no reason why he should have chosen this spot rather than one of a hundred others, neither can I show any cause at all why he should have settled as the tenant of a house; however, there are very few of Massingdale's actions which may be seen as carefully thought out and duly weighed, and therein, since he has come to no very great harm, and is, I fancy, not less well thought of than his neighbours, lies evidence for the defence of irresponsibility, and for an attack upon the useless habit of setting about the discovery of other people's motives.

His overdue answer to my letter was headed by a curious announcement, which the rest of the epistle did not fully explain; the address was given, in the usual place, as La Fontaine des Bois, St. Gengoux, Saône-et-Loire, and below it was inscribed the following information:

"AU GRAND ESPOIR

(AUBERGE ORIGINALE)

CUISINE SOIGNÉE. BAINS (TUBS). GRAND CONFORT.

PRIX MODÉRÉS.

Propriétaire: LOUIS MASSINGDALE."

After this promising advertisement, there was the written assurance that, should I decide to visit the hostelry, the landlord would make it his business to ensure my comfort, and that he would be pleased to offer me the ridiculously low terms of four francs a day, inclusive.

Then—and, having read so far, I was still in ignorance of the meaning of the communication—Massingdale condescended to some explanation, which, however, left me scarcely wiser than before. He informed me that he had become an innkeeper; that after a long life of misspent effort, he had found the one occupation becoming to a man of parts; that it was his only wish, all other earthly vanities being purged from his nature, that he might die in harness, an apron about his waist, a dish in one hand, a bottle of wine in the other, and that above his grave, in place of any tombstone, an inn sign should creak in the wind. Moving slowly, and at the cost of much inferior note-paper and a most prodigious outpouring of words, he came at length to facts, touched on them lightly, and was away again to many lines of nonsense. As far as I could make anything of what he wrote to me, I gathered that he had gone to Cluny, or near it, to paint; that he had there met a man —who the gentleman might be he did not say—and that this good person had a house to let in the hamlet of La Fontaine des Bois; that the name of the hamlet was beautiful beyond expression; that the situation was God-given; that the house was fit to live in and very picturesque; that the whole circumstance was certainly an almost incredible example of Olympian kindness; that, in short, Kenneth Louis St. Cyprien Massingdale was now the tenant of a cottage property in Burgundy. Having signed the agreement—which document I afterwards studied, and it was a thing to compel tears of pity in the hearts of the tenant's friends—it seemed that Massingdale began to think of what he should next do. The house was furnished, and the tenancy was for no more than five months, otherwise one of the parties to the transaction had shortly found himself in a debtor's prison; but even in view of this mitigation of his folly, there was no chance that he could support existence as a solvent householder. Therefore, and even he saw the necessity for some action, he set about augmenting his income in the best way that was open to him; he wrote to Paris, to such of his friends as were there, suggesting that they should stop with him, paying their way; and, it being the season when any man who may gets him out of the town, he managed to collect a house-party. Such, I imagined, was the cause of his announcement that he had become an innkeeper; a statement not more exaggerated than many that he was in the habit of making.

He furnished me with a list of the guests, promising that, should I hesitate to come to his house, he would provide me with a sheaf of the most enthusiastic testimonials.

"Auguste Vanne is here," he wrote, "a creature as happy as the summer air, though heavier. He is engaged upon the composition of a sonata which is to dower him with immortality. In his company came the boy Marellac, who wanders the hills all day and only returns to my roof at night, when he makes for us the divine music that the gods have sent him with the sun. Athanasius Roderick Blinkson, M.A., serves as my head gardener, also as wine-taster. In both things he is highly successful, and beyond, in a rôle more difficult, he earns our gratitude as the kindly critic of our many follies. Loissel will be here shortly, so that you perceive, honoured sir, that the house is above reproach. Yesterday, towards sundown, Hendick—you remember the reformer—comes swinging down the road, a pack upon his back. He stops. Being a person of impossible vanity, he has sent for his luggage—we had imagined that he had it with him, but have been informed of our mistake—and, upon its arrival, will be expected to take his dinner in the garments ordered by society. We are, therefore, fashionable. When you arrive the board will be as representative as a public lecture at the Sorbonne. We shall point to you, proclaiming, 'There sits a man of common-sense!' We have no women with us; *mais nous sommes bien sages, mon cher*. Yvonne had added to our gaiety, but the thing was impossible; no good would have come of it. I speak neither in a conventional fashion nor as the champion of *bourgeois* morals. We are, however, better without women here. Therefore, come! A few old clothes thrown into a bag, a book or two, the next train to Paris caught with no time to spare, a telegram announcing the hour of your arrival at Cluny (remember the station), and the thing is done. You shall live as you have not dreamed of living; you shall become a person of amazing health and appetite, and nightly you shall go blessedly weary to your bed; you shall spend long hours in the company of pleasant companions, and with them you shall discuss the world and its affairs. You will not refuse? As you love me, Richard, you will come and see my inn, you will fill your chair that has been too long vacant? Heavens, man! you cannot possibly conceive my satisfaction. I am a householder—the circumstance pleases me like a draught of wine on a hot day. I look from my windows upon a garden from which I can exclude the world, if the mood takes me. The garden is not large, nor beautiful as our English gardens are, yet, *nom d'un nom*, it is mine! And the place where lies this corner which I control! You shall see it—it cannot be described. The mountains of the Charollais, the Forêt de Goulène; hills, rolling and bold, and trees—not woods of them, but forests; streams, noisy and self-occupied; vines, and oxen at the plough—white oxen, soft-eyed and slow. Here in this quiet valley we live apart from noise, and dust, and business; railways are far from us, and the hills shut them out; no main road passes us, and the world's news is not brought to our door. Upon a little hill, an islet in a wooded sea, there stands an unpretentious château—a hunting lodge, no more, yet this holds us to the past and keeps us pledged to old tradition; for the lord who rules here is of ancient stock, and neither revolutions nor new creeds, enfranchisements nor popular instruction, have robbed him altogether of his father's sway, neither emperors nor republics have killed the memory of his feudal power. Surely this is only fitting, for the valley of to-day shows no great change from that of yesterday; the seasons come and go, and nature changes her dress like a maiden proud of her beauty. Every morning you may waken to a new scene, some slight altered expression of the old friend who veiled himself last night;

every day, whether in sun or rain, calm or wind, triumphant music played by swaying trees or the deep silence of small noises, you shall gather new inspiration and new hope; every day you shall grow more thankful that, for a little time at least, you are done with towns and their confusion, that you breathe quietly under the wide sky. But you shall come and make your memories for yourself. You shall see how we work and enjoy ourselves, and, with us, you shall forget the barriers, and dream your dreams are realised, the work you want to do is done."

The thing suited me very well. I had sufficient trust in Massingdale's good taste to be assured that this valley of his was worth the seeing. I liked the sound of the promised entertainment, and I looked forward to watching Massingdale direct a household with a deal of amusement. At worst, I decided, I might be of some use in extricating him from proceedings in bankruptcy, so I left London two days after receiving his letter, and wired him to meet me at Cluny the following day.

I stopped a night in Paris; took a morning express to Macon; there changed to the local line; and arrived at Cluny about five of the afternoon, having spent the best part of a hot July day in amazingly stuffy railway carriages. Masssingdale was on the platform to meet me, very thin and sunburnt, and clothed, I should imagine, solely in the interests of comfort. He wore grey flannel trousers that had seen much service, a shirt with a turned-down, unstarched collar open at the neck, an alpaca coat of local manufacture, canvas shoes with rope soles, and an immense hat of straw, such as peasants and other wise men wear when the sun is hot. He hailed me as I stepped from the carriage, and very shortly the station rang with his talk. So far as I could make out, he was on terms of intimacy with the whole staff of officials, and held it a point of honour to engage them all in conversation, for as we sorted out my luggage he asked me a hundred questions about myself, interspersed between talk with the porters. In spite of his incredible volubility, we were clear of the station and my luggage with us, before the other passengers had finished the collection of their packages.

Outside was a rough farm cart drawn by a bony and veteran horse of placid temperament, an animal without the peculiar distinction of D'Artagnan's steed, a mere beast of burden whose youth and, perhaps, whose beauty had passed him by. Auguste Vanne in much the same attire as Massingdale, except that he wore no coat, sat in the cart, his face glistening with the heat, his figure no less round than when I had last seen him. At sight of us he clambered, with much puffing, from his seat, greeted me with warmth, announced that the heat was terrible, and fell upon the boxes with surprising agility. While we helped him to pile them in the cart, I was informed of the merits of the horse.

"For the honour of England," Massingdale assured me, "I was forced to have a horse, where an ox had served me just as well."

"His name," said Vanne, mopping his face with a handkerchief of violent colours, "is Bucephalus. He is a creature of noble spirit, monsieur, and probably much older than thirty years."

"He is not fast," continued Massingdale, getting into the cart; "his amble is well known in all the neighbourhood, no means have yet been discovered by which the pace of it may be increased. Constitutionally he is of a lean habit, although his appetite is good, and his kind master generous in the matter of food. Come up, Bucephalus. I hope, Dick," he went on, as we started, "that you have not become particular about appearances. We are not much to look at, but, sir, our worth is positively amazing; also the cart is safe, although strangers are apt to expect its sudden disintegration."

The station is outside the town, and we turned off to the right, heading for some wooded hills, the cart rattling and squeaking so that I was glad to have Massingdale's assurance that the thing would hold together. We had not gone more than half a mile when Vanne let out a shout, bringing his hand down with a slap upon his thigh, and startling Bucephalus into something approaching a trot.

"*Mon Dieu*," he cried, "*mais c'est épatant!* We have forgotten the marketing."

"Auguste," answered Massingdale, as he turned the cart round towards the town again, "permit me to congratulate you; you have a wonderful head for business."

As we drove back, I saw something of the town, a red-roofed, huddled mass, grey and ancient, the ruins of its former grandeur standing out above the modern buildings, still circled by the abbey walls. It lies in a pleasant vale, the town of Cluny, with the hills dropping gently to it, hiding the bolder heights beyond; there is an air of peace about it as of a man who rests at even after a day that has not wanted in events; the signs of our own time do not war with those of yesterday, the modern buildings, finding themselves in a minority, assume an unpretentious air, leaving to their ancestors, to the medieval dwelling and to the house whose walls were raised before the Normans came to England, the rule in style and fashion; over all, showing, as it were, the manner of the place to all who see it from afar, there stands the ruin of the abbey church, a fragment, the last mutilated limb, yet in itself a thing so vast that it proclaims the whole the greatest church of Northern Europe, to which only the popes themselves could show the master. The streets are narrow and ill-paved, twisting and turning so that, if the town were not so small, and the great church a thing from which to take one's bearings, a man might be in difficulties to find his way; carved stones, snatched from their true positions when the monks were driven from their quarters, are built into the walls of shops and houses, and have grown old and reconciled in their new homes; in many of the streets, and for the most part set to some strangely altered purpose, there still stand monkish buildings little damaged, a barn or a guest-house, a gateway or the former dwelling of some high official, rich in perquisites. Even if a man do no more than pass through the town, and in so doing he would show himself very ill-advised, he will carry from it many memories of other days, and, surely, above them all the conviction that here Time rests awhile, forgetting his hurry and the long journey that he has to make, regretful that he must, one day, turn back these old buildings to the earth from which they came.

We left the upper part of the town unvisited, making our way to a small market, held in a broadening of the street rather than a square, near to a structure, more venerable than its neighbours, which I afterwards discovered to be the local hospital. Vanne sat in the cart—more, I imagine, because he wished to sit still than because Bucephalus had need of an attendant—and Massingdale and I set about our marketing. The performance amused me like a play, and Massingdale very serious about the saving of two sous was a thing

I had not dreamed that I should ever see; yet he played his part very carefully, was obviously pleased as a child at a new game, and succeeded, I should like to think, in paying not very much more than their value for the goods he bought. After many smaller purchases he finished the proceeding by buying a goose.

"To-morrow," he explained to me, "being Sunday, Loissel having arrived two days ago and you to-day, we keep high revelry. My cook," here he grinned at me in infantile delight at the possession of a servant, "informs me that she can prepare a goose better than the other housewives of the neighbourhood, and that I am to be careful in the choice of it. Watch me, Dick, you shall see me very careful."

Thereupon he led me to a stall, where presided a buxom woman of middle age, fresh and of a pleasant appearance. He greeted her by the title of Madame Marcelin, and remarked upon the weather; she replied that it was very hot, and introduced the subject of his purchase.

"Ah, Monsieur Massingdale," she continued, horribly mispronouncing his name, "but you are late. Anne Bourget informed me this morning, as we drove to market, that you would buy a goose. It is unfortunate, all the world buys geese to-day, Monsieur Massingdale. I had six this morning—oh! but you have never seen their equal—they are all gone but one. That I kept for you."

"I thank you, madame," said Massingdale, "but I am a man of affairs, I could not get here before. Show me your goose."

The bird was produced, and, to my eternal delight, Massingdale poked and pinched it with the air of a man who knows what he is doing.

"And how much do you want for your goose?" he asked.

"Monsieur," replied Madame Marcelin upon a very serious note, "you must understand that there is a demand for this bird; there is Monsieur Chaumonix of the 'Vache Noire,' who asks me to name my price for it; there is Monsieur le Curé of Château, who says that he must have it; there is Madame Boulin, who implores me, with tears, to sell it to her. Of a certainty it has a value, but, monsieur, I have kept it for you. 'Monsieur Massingdale,' I have said to myself all day, 'shall not be disappointed.'"

After this warning she named her price; I have no knowledge of the value of geese but should judge that it was beyond the bird's worth. In any case, Massingdale protested, which was no more than the due of the part he played.

"*Grand Dieu!*" he cried, spreading his hands wide, "do you think that I am a millionaire, madame, to pay you fancy prices for your geese? Besides, the bird is thin."

"Not less so, *ma foi*," replied Madame Marcelin, enjoying herself, "than Monsieur Vanne, who has not that appearance. But, have I not told you, monsieur, I could have sold this goose for more than double the money."

Here Massingdale changed his tactics; he made away with all appearance of indignation, smiled upon the woman, and dropped his voice to a confidential tone.

"Know, madame," said he, "that I find no fault with an attempt to drive a good bargain. Business, I understand it! But I am an artist, and an artist is a poor man, he cannot afford to buy expensive geese. Also, madame, I have at my house Jean Sébastien Loissel, he will eat of this goose. Ah! You have heard of him? Is it not an honour that the greatest painter in France should eat the birds which you have reared?"

Madame Marcelin professed herself much impressed. "For the artist, monsieur," she agreed, "it is another matter. You shall have your way; also you shall tell me how Monsieur Loissel enjoyed my goose. Believe me, but I shall cry my eyes out, if Jeanne Dubois, who cooks for you, does not do justice to the care which I have taken in bringing up this bird."

The bargain was, therefore, struck; Massingdale paying fifty centimes less than the original price, and departing with his purchase grasped firmly by the neck.

"Dick," said he, swinging the goose, which was not plucked, "you must acknowledge that I have learned the manner of a professional housewife?"

"I 'll acknowledge nothing of the sort," I answered. "I know nothing of the price of geese myself, but I 'll lay you a fiver to a sixpence that you paid a good deal more than it is worth for that one."

"The gods dowered you with a horribly critical nature," he informed me. "I 'll take you. However, the price is not the point. They think you a fool in these parts unless you haggle with them; why, I cannot understand, but they do. Therefore I haggle with them; it took me some time to acquire the habit, but I have it now, and am respected as a man of business."

"Good Lord!" said I, and conjured up a vision of this keen man of affairs always paying twenty per cent. more than he should.

When we got back to the cart, Auguste Vanne was reclining against my boxes sleeping placidly, and Bucephalus was wrapped in a slumber not less deep. We roused them both, and set out on the way home. As we left the town Vanne inquired the price of the goose, fingering the bird with the air of a critic as he asked the question.

"*Dieu nous garde!*" he cried, when Massingdale had told him, "but it is robbery; it is abominable. I should have gone with you; old Jeanne will never forgive me, when she hears I let you go alone. We must go back. *Mon Dieu*, I will talk to *la mère* Marcelin!"

Here, however, Massingdale's boasted business habit deserted him. He swore by all the gods that he would not turn back again; that he did not care what the bird was worth, or what he had paid for it; that Vanne should walk the whole way, if he mentioned the bargain again. So we kept on, and the fat man muttered to himself of the iniquity of the transaction until he fell asleep again.

The sun was getting low, and a light breeze gave a welcome chance of coolness. The road began to climb the hill very shortly after leaving the town, and soon entered the woods, winding its way up a steeper slope, twisting about the head of a small gorge. Little more than a mile, as far as I could judge, from the entrance to the forest, we left the high road and turned into a rough and deeply rutted track; here Bucephalus came to a stand, waited for us to get down from the cart, and then resumed his amble, as if well acquainted with the business. We three walked behind, letting the horse go on at his own pace, and at the top of every rise the beast stopped, waiting for us lest we should care to mount again for the short level stretches. The country here grew wilder, the quiet vale of Cluny was altogether left behind; we had passed from woods to forest, and to a loneliness that spoke of mountain places. The scene changed very constantly, and we came upon a greater beauty with each turn of the path. At one time we walked along a way hedged by thick woods of birch, then stepped from it into a wide space of pines, sweetsmelling and stately, with the sunlight slanting between their stems, staining the brown floor with gold; here we would climb a stiff hill that breathed us as we walked, from which we had no longer view than the trees ahead, there our way lay along a ridge and the country showed rolling about us, rich and many-tinted in the evening glow.

For the most part we walked silent, our thoughts holding us to better advantage than any speech, the chatter of the birds, already preparing for the night, giving us full accompaniment. Once as we came to the top of a steep rise, whence eastwards there lay bare a great distance of rugged land, Massingdale pulled up.

"There," said he, pointing, "Mont Blanc is clear to-night."

Far off, a point of silver on the far horizon, I saw the mountain glimmer, and was astonished as a man will be when he sees for the first time a thing of which he has often heard men speak.

Then, the track descending, we got into the cart again, and Bucephalus took us with many jolts and rollings towards our destination. We crossed a large clearing, where the tree stumps had scarcely yet grown weather-toned; rounded the corner of a smaller slope; and came upon a tiny hamlet in a valley, lying at the foot of a conical fir-clad hill, on which there showed a house of fair proportion. A sandy lane led down to the hamlet, a place of, perhaps, half a dozen cottages, and without a church, as far as I could see; the wheels of the cart sank so deep into the soil that we were forced to walk again. The evening was very still, the valley in the shadow of the hills across which we had come, and an air of calm abroad that led me to suppose the spot estranged from any struggle that induced the rush and noise of human differences.

We passed a brace of huts—they were scarcely more—then at a turn of the way came upon a larger building, white-washed and red-tiled, four-square to the winds, low and with broad eaves, a terraced garden creeping up the hill behind.

"My house!" said Massingdale, his eyes asking my approval.

"Good enough," I answered; and he laughed, I think with satisfaction.

Loissel was seated at the door, and he hailed us as we approached, waving his pipe to me in greeting.

"You are late," he called. "Jeanne announces that you are the most thoughtless of men, *mon petit* Louis; and that we are no more than fools to refuse to eat without you."

As I got from the cart and shook hands with the old man, I had it in my mind that I had done well to come to La Fontaine des Bois, but that, as far as I could see, I should spend a pleasant holiday without other excitement than the stir of many hot discussions.

CHAPTER XII

A QUIET LIFE IN BURGUNDY

I WENT to bed very early that night of my arrival, the freshness of the mountain air after the heat of a railway carriage making me so full of sleep that I could hardly answer the questions that were addressed to me. I carry little memory of that first evening, except that the talk was loud and noisy at dinner, and the food better than I had anticipated, that we sat out in the road before the door after the meal was finished, and that I fell asleep where I sat. As a sort of background to much that is confused, a setting to the dim picture of Athanasius Blinkson fast losing his grip on soberness, of Hendick back to his old talk of reform, I have the impression of the stillness of the summer night, the stars very clear above us, and the darkness soft and warm around.

Next morning, at an abominably early hour, I was aroused by a scraping and clinking above the ceiling, which it took me some time to explain; in fact, I lay listening to it for many minutes before I determined that there was some one moving about upon the roof, and then I was much puzzled to know who, in this curious household, held the tiles a good place for a promenade. However, the man above saved me further curiosity by slipping from his perch; there was a clatter and a rush, a cascade of tools and boards shot past my window, Massingdale coming after them, but saving himself from a fall by clutching at the rainwater gutter from which he hung facing into my room.

"Damnation!" said he, grinning at me. "That was a near thing. I 've made the hell of a mess up there, Dick. Give me a hand while I get into your window. Steady. Hold tight."

"Are you hurt?" I asked, as, with some difficulty, for the eaves were broad, I helped him in.

"No," he answered with the utmost cheerfulness; "but my breeches are. That rent will spoil the hang of them, my son, even when Jeanne has mended it. Also the roof is—badly hurt; I took quite a lot of tiles with me. And the gooseberry bushes would have suffered heavily, if I had landed on them."

"What were you doing?" I inquired.

"Doing? Mending the roof. Moreover, ribald scoffer, I was doing it damned well, until I slipped. I 'll rope myself on to the chimney to finish the job."

He spoke as if the circumstance was the most ordinary affair, the occupation one very usual in a host.

"Do you," said I, much amused, "make a point of repairing your own house?"

"This," he informed me, "is not the sort of place where you send up the street for a bricklayer; if there is anything to be done, you do it yourself."

"Why not write to the landlord?"

"You 're very ignorant," he replied. "A lawyer, my Richard, should know that tenants keep their houses in repair, at any rate in these parts."

"Lord help us!" I groaned. "You 'll have to show me your agreement; I 'll stake my reputation that you have been properly let in. Where is the bath you advertised? I suppose I had better get up, or you will be disturbing me by falling off the roof again."

Protesting that he would yet convince me of his capability as a man of business, he led me downstairs and to an outhouse, where, judging by the mess, two or three of the company at least had already bathed.

The house was without much of comfort in the matter of furniture, and was in bad repair, but the rooms were large and airy, being kept, moreover, very scrupulously clean by the long-suffering Jeanne. The previous tenant had been a farmer of some position, but upon his death his heirs had sold the place as it stood, and the landlord had been glad to find some one who would keep the house and garden in order while he searched for another tenant. The main door of the building opened into a large room from which the stairs to the upper floor ascended; behind this was the dining-room with a door giving upon the garden; to the right of the hall was the kitchen, occupying one end of the house, and to the left, a room of similar size, was the studio where Massingdale painted when the mood took him to work indoors. Officially, I believe, the room was considered the host's private apartment, but any one who wished to do any work which did not suffer interruption was admitted to it. On the ground floor there was, in all the rooms, a paving of red bricks, and the walls were washed with colour and unadorned by any pictures; although there was much suggestion of bareness about the house, and little that could be called snug, it served its purpose as a place to sleep in, and as a shelter in bad weather.

I breakfasted that day before eight o'clock, a thing very unusual with me, and found, when I got into the dining-room, most of the company already through with their meal. Marellac alone had not made an appearance; he, it seemed, lay late in his bed, and when he quitted it made for the hills without delay, where he would wander until evening, or, if the weather was wet, he would keep away from the others, practising for hours at a time on his fiddle. The next meal, I discovered, was served at eleven o'clock, and it was the practice of the house to suggest no common gathering until that hour arrived, for three members of the party, at least, were not here for pleasure only: Massingdale, Vanne, and Loissel were hard at work; the two former in the business of their professions, and the latter at that volume of reminiscences which has since given many of us much delight. Blinkson also, to my astonishment, I found to be a person of regular occupation; he laboured each morning in the garden with more enthusiasm than I imagined alcohol had left in him. Hendick, being the one person besides myself without employment, —for I should hesitate to say that the dreaming, which filled Marellac's head as he wandered the countryside, should be styled idleness, since it has surely given to the world a greater result than our most strenuous endeavours —I went with him for a stroll about the woods; and we climbed the hill for a nearer sight of the château, and lay upon our backs and smoked, and talked of many things but not, out of the kindness of his heart, of democracy and its creed of socialism.

After the midday meal we enjoyed an hour of idleness, for the weather was still very hot, and the practice of consuming much food at noon is one that militates against immediate activity. Massingdale, after a few minutes of idleness, left us lying about in the shade of the trees where the garden joins the wood; the mood held him to work, and he was of no use to us. So we watched him depart, shouldering his painter's materials, to the spot from which he made a picture. Blinkson, finding that I had no other plans, suggested that I should go with him into the Forêt de Goulène, where he would show me some of the beauties of the neighbourhood; so, none of the others offering to come with us, we set out alone.

Blinkson had, if possible, less appearance of respectability than he arrived at in Paris: he was unshaven; his clothes were stained, his waistcoat bearing traces of many meals long since digested; and the checks he wore had probably been fashionable in his undergraduate days. With his hat tilted to one side, his eyeglass firmly placed, and his shuffling gait that aimed at a certain jauntiness, he might well have stood as a horrid example, useful in the reform of erring youth; yet, although he was an entirely disreputable old man, as a polite society settles disrepute, I found myself inclined to take a fancy to him, and to wish, which I suppose is evidence of the same feeling, that each evening did not see him a maudlin, drunken wreck.

He walked as a man who loves the business walks, not to get to a destination as soon as may be, but to enjoy himself on the road; and for a man of his years and habits he showed an amazing activity, covering the ground with greater ease than I, with youth on my side, could equal. His knowledge of country lore was wide, his acquaintance with forestry certainly not gained in England. I fell to speculating on the man's past history, and to wondering what fault, or mischance, had brought him to the pass in which he was. He talked of many things; showed a trick of laughing at life, which I admired; and seemed disposed to turn obstinately from any solemn view or manner. When we came to any turn of the path, for we avoided the roads, which gave us a sight of pleasant land about us, or when we walked through some majestic forest aisle, he would fall silent in a fashion for which I could have thanked him, and we enjoyed the picture before us without any words.

After a couple of hours or so of rough walking, as we ascended a steep hillside, rock-strewn and bare, he pointed to the crest.

"A pipe and a rest there," he announced. "There 's a fine view, over the vineyards of the Saône valley."

He had not exaggerated the fact, for from the spot where we lay down upon the turf, finding what shade we could in the shelter of a hardy thorn, we commanded a fine stretch of country. From our little mountains the hills sloped quickly to the river, and to the broad green plain beyond: the distant range, lying towards the Alps, being lost in a blue haze.

"You think," said Blinkson, breaking the silence as we lay and smoked, "that all this is very beautiful; still having your ideals about you, you imagine it the incarnation of peace and simplicity."

I nodded.

"I," he went on, his manner more serious than it had been, "having journeyed a little farther along a rougher road, stumbling—let 's put it that way—more often as I go, have learned to know that it is beautiful, yet not more peaceful, though the noise is less, than any of the crowded haunts of men. Man," he cried, sitting up, "they fight, and struggle, and scratch here, as they do in Paris; they scream about their rights and they talk of justice, and when the chance comes they rob their neighbours and their masters, mouthing the name of liberty. The place is a hotbed of discontent; not because they are worse off than you or I, or the rest of the world, but because the fashion has come about for workmen to be discontented. To hear them talk you would think that all the suffering and hardship in the world was borne by the men who work with their hands. Fools!"

"What is their complaint?" I asked, turning on my back, and staring at the sky; "and who, particularly, are they?"

"The men engaged in the wine industry. Their complaint—the usual one; they want more money and less work; a desire which is not peculiar to them."

"Is there any special disturbance, or is the thing merely general unrest?"

"At present," he informed me, "it is only universal grumbling and discontent. The capitalist is attacked on general principles; there are agitators busy among the men, urging them on to a demonstration. Yet, as peasants go, they are well off, work is not hard to get, and wages high; however, after two or three good years there came last season a bad crop, their pay dropped, I believe, a little. If this harvest fails, and there has been too little rain, their demonstration will take place."

"Nothing serious, I suppose?" I asked; "a lot of noise and little result, like most of the strikes?"

"Depends upon the authorities," said Blinkson, getting back to his habitual jerky way of talk. "They 'll play the damn fool probably, and have the deuce to pay for their pains. Tough crowd in these parts, they rather like a row; I believe they have always been jealous of those villages that rioted in the Midi, two or three years ago. Remember the business?"

"Yes," I replied, sitting up, "but that was serious. They burnt a château or two, and there was bloodshed."

Blinkson laughed at my seriousness; he waved his hand towards the hills about us.

"Quiet valleys run with blood! Horrible scenes in Burgundy! The journalists may have their chance yet. I hope they won't, however; it would disturb our happy home."

"But," I insisted, "do you really think there is any likelihood of a riot?"

"Very little," he answered. "Probably be a lot of talk, some window smashing and that sort of thing, and, at the end, quiet, with rather worse feeling on both sides. It 's an unimportant scene in the comedy, nothing more."

He lay back again on the grass, silent, and we sat some minutes without speaking; then he suggested that we had better be moving, as the afternoon was getting on.

As we walked homewards, I was occupied in thinking of what he had told me, and in wondering whether this fight of capital and labour was anything new, as some men would have us believe, or whether it was not the old feud of the strong and the weak decked out in new garments; so that when Blinkson broke a long silence, he startled me from a reverie.

"To-night, Crutchley," said he, his watery eyes twinkling with amusement, "when you see me in my cups again, you will remember the distaste I have been at pains to remove for the moment. No. Don't interrupt. I like to embarrass people—I choose one way of making a fool of myself, you and the others have a different method—that is the whole of it. I don't want you to admire me—I 'm not asking for miracles—I want you to realise that I know what I am, that I spend my life in the best way that occurs to me, that I am a drunkard because it gives me pleasure, does little harm to other people, and because I have failed to succeed in any other business."

I remained silent. Why the man offered me this explanation, I could not guess; I certainly had no wish for it; but his manner was such, his humorous, disconcerting frankness so easily carried, as if the confession were of the most usual nature, that I could scarcely fail to meet him in the same spirit.

"Well?" he asked, seeing that I did not answer.

"I cannot imagine," I answered, since he was determined that I should speak, "why you admit me to your confidence like this; and I am not able to give you any satisfactory answer. I suppose my distaste for drunkenness is a matter of instinct."

"To begin with," he replied, sucking at his foul pipe, which wheezed and gurgled, "I have not admitted you to my confidence: that I am a habitual drunkard is a perfectly obvious fact. Then, I take it, your objection is based on æsthetic grounds?"

"Perhaps," said I.

"Good," he continued, his amusement, apparently, increasing. "You don't like me in my professional capacity, that 's clear. I 'll state the case. Probably, if I saw you in wig and gown hectoring some unfortunate witness, I should dislike you as much as you dislike me when I am drunk. See the point?"

I roared with laughter. The sodden old ruffian could certainly shorten the road with inconsequent conversation; and the picture of him in his cups as a man seriously engaged in the business of his life took my fancy mightily.

"I don't," I answered him; "I see no point at all. I believe you to be a man with a fine gift for talking nonsense."

"You make a mistake," he assured me; and although there was no appreciable change in the manner of his speech, I suddenly became aware that he was a man with a knowledge of the world far wider than I possessed, and that my former attitude to him had been one of patronage. "I have an end in view. We 'll put it, my dear sir, that my profession is the simple one that I have named, in which I claim to be something of a success; we 'll also put it that, when sober, I have some charm of manner—I succeeded in proving that to you this afternoon—and we 'll assume, quite impersonally, that my two different selves, call them the professional gentleman and the layman, so confuse the judgment of kind-hearted people that sometimes they are misguided into attempting certain reforms. When I meet a man with whom I fancy that my non-professional character may hold the larger place, I warn him. Reform is the one thing I cannot stand. You take me now?"

"Yes," I replied, devoutly hoping that my attitude during the afternoon had not been that of the superior person, for I already had a liking for the man. "I hope you don't think that I should have had the impertinence to interfere——"

But he stopped me.

"Never any knowing," he laughed, in his husky voice. "My profession is not much thought of, and many a good man has attempted the impossible, and ended our acquaintance. Are you aware that Massingdale is doing a really good picture? We 'll turn off down here and disturb him at his work."

So we let the subject drop, and did not reopen it again. It has often been a matter in my thoughts that Blinkson should have read my case so quickly, and forestalled any foolish blunder; it has also been a considerable relief to me that he did so. I never discovered anything of his history, the little he had told me on the first meeting of our acquaintance being largely imaginative, yet I judge that he had suffered from much well-meant interference in a business which he knew to be beyond the chance of change, and I am glad that he forced matters in my case, showed me the manner of man he was behind the drunkard, and that, even though friendship and pity grew in me, I must not interfere. Although he had shown no hesitation, I imagine that it was not an easy thing to do. There is another point, besides, of which I like to think, I take pleasure in fancying that by this explanation he admitted me to his friendship; in spite of his great weakness, he was one of the most honourable and kindest men whom I have ever met.

We found Massingdale finishing his day's work; with him was Marellac, seated on the ground, his knees drawn up to his chin, his hands clasped about his shins. On the way back to the house I tried to get some conversation from him, and only partially succeeded; his shyness was a thing of strength, and he had considerable difficulty in expressing his ideas.

"Have you noticed Monsieur Massingdale's face when he paints?" the boy asked me, after many ineffectual efforts on my part to arouse his interest.

"I have n't noticed anything unusual," said I. "Tell me what you mean?"

"His eyes," muttered Marellac, as confused as if he broke a confidence. "I made sure of it to-day. When he paints they lose their sadness."

"Sadness!" I cried, astonished. "You surely do not accuse Massingdale of being sad?"

"*Mon Dieu*, no," the boy replied eagerly. "He is not sad; he laughs; he enjoys his life; but, unless he is at work, his eyes are, very often, unhappy, even when he makes one laugh, monsieur."

I could get no other explanation from him, and having failed to notice the thing myself, I imagined him full of fancies, and was inclined to style him fool.

That night, however, he showed himself at least a brilliant fool, playing to us, as we sat in the road after dinner, such music as the valley had surely never heard, music that brought the peasants from their cottages, holding them and us in silence and in wonder. Then, when Marellac had gone to bed, as he did after he had finished playing, our emotions being aroused to some excitement, we began a violent discussion upon the unknown subject of liberty, and shortly the quiet air rang with heated talk, and the peasants, comfortably in their beds with the sound of music in their ears, were probably disturbed by more discordant noises. But for the intervention of Loissel and Blinkson, who introduced laughter when passion held the floor, we had likely finished the night with blows.

In a fashion very much the same the weeks went by, the household which Massingdale controlled living very quietly, except in the matter of talk, which was always clamorous. I soon dropped into the way of the place, and with books, of which there was a good supply, found plenty of amusement. We were certainly without the manners of the fashionable world; there was, besides, little stamp of learning about our conversation, and the appearance of an academic discussion was a thing unknown with us; but I will maintain that we exhibited a decent standard of intelligence and were richly endowed with enthusiasm; even at such times as the conversation was of a nature to alarm and disgust those who have no liking for plain speech, there was a pleasant spice of wit in it; there was, moreover, the great virtue of honesty, and I never heard a single member of the company confuse himself with polite conventions, or, in a manner that seems fashionable, attempt to parade certain of the passions in the guise of heroic acts. Hendick and I stood something apart from the others, although we faced no barrier to the fullest intimacy; but we lived a different life, played for other stakes, when we were away from the village and back at our work in the world again. The others, for I would count Blinkson among them, were of another make; their work led them to give importance to things which we passed by, to shun as both uninteresting and of no account matters that engaged the most of our attention. Hendick, I remember, put the point with his customary vigour one evening as we sat at dinner. "You artists," said he, thrusting his head forward, which was his battle sign, "are vile bad citizens. Because your work is of importance to the world, that is no reason why you should shirk your responsibilities under the plea that politics and business are only fit for other men, that for you your own art is enough. The man who cannot manage his own affairs—business affairs, I mean—and who is not willing to do what he can to make the government of his country better, should be regarded in law as a child." To which Massingdale replied with the ardour that the proposition demanded. "By the beard of the prophet, man," he shouted, "do you suppose that we mind what the law may think of us? Tell me, tell me, in the name of reason, why should a man, not liking them, mix himself up with the stupid amusements of other people? Would you have me play football or cricket because certain young men of my own age are fond of them? You would not. Then why ask me to study business habits, if I prefer to be robbed instead? Why insist that I should shout about good government, when you know that we shall all go to our graves being badly governed, as our ancestors were, and as our children will be?"

I hold no brief for the artist, I do not wish to defend him, he can do that well enough for himself, but I confess to a fondness for the creature, and am ready to acknowledge many pleasant hours in his company. The weeks that I spent at La Fontaine des Bois brought me to a better understanding of him, and beneath the vanity, beneath the fine contempt for other men's opinions, I came to discover both good sense and proportion; apart from his easy manner, that comes to him as a perquisite, he has another quality, he sees his own position as the outside world do not, he knows himself engaged in a very hazardous undertaking which daily renders him less fit for any other way of life. Since he always has great difficulty, and more than commonly finds it impossible to persuade the outsider of the peculiar nature of his work, and of its unsettling habit, he arrives at thinking himself misunderstood, and, being human, rejoices in the fact, running riot, very often, on the strength of it.

We enjoyed a good deal of popularity in the neighbourhood; the "Sign of the Grand Espoir," as Massingdale called the house, was much visited by local farmers and by the people of the district. They were always offered a generous hospitality; not infrequently one or more of them would sleep the night beneath our roof; and, for Massingdale had not made known to them the fact that he styled himself an innkeeper, we should probably have been ejected forcibly, while our host fought with his creditors in the neighbouring court at

Cluny, had not these good people given as much, or more, than they took. I do not think that, after the first purchase, Massingdale ever bought wine, and we were supplied with poultry and other provender in the most generous fashion. We had the run of the countryside, and might shoot and fish whatever was in season. Therefore, and I think he may justly be given credit for it, Massingdale managed to run the establishment on the small sum that he charged us, and, moreover, to supply us, and a good many of our neighbours besides, with excellent fare. How he did it, I do not know; Jeanne, I fancy, was the master spirit. She cooked, and she commanded, and she was one of the rudest old women that I have ever met. But, having undertaken the management of the house—had she got the chance she would have become, I must suppose, the chief housekeeper in hell, and would, moreover, have subjugated the devil to her ruling within twenty-four hours of her arrival—she did her work with considerable ability; induced in us all a mighty respect; and even forced Loissel to attempt some amendment of the untidy habits of a lifetime. She would bully us all like a parcel of schoolboys, if we did not follow the rules which she had framed; and I have seldom seen a master with less authority over his servant than had Massingdale. Late rising Jeanne could not at all put up with. She would bustle into the bedroom of any unfortunate member of the household who kept his bed after the hour which she had named the latest for rising—there being no locks upon the doors, we were defenceless; would cover him with reproaches; and would assume an aspect so menacing that, I firmly believe, she would have dragged her victim from his couch, had he showed signs of refusing to obey her. I was often in trouble in this respect, and she bred in me a habit of early rising, which it took months to eradicate; but Marellac was the person who suffered most in this matter: to hear Jeanne abusing him was of matutinal recurrence. She had, I think, a special fondness for the boy, but she was of the sturdy breed that chastens those it loves. One morning as I went upstairs for a pipe, which I had failed to bring to the breakfast table with me, Marellac cannoned violently against me on the stairway. "*Mon Dieu!*" he cried, considerably agitated, "she will beat me, that old woman." And with that he fled, scantily attired, into the garden. I am of the opinion that I did him a considerable service by getting in Jeanne's way, for she was in hot pursuit, crying out that it was past nine; and had I not held her up, I can conceive of Marellac occupying a position that he had rightly done with some years before. Even to such lengths as that will the just wrath of an exacting housewife lead her.

Yet, although Jeanne led us a rare life of it, although she bullied us because we would not keep our clothes in order, and cried out on us when we entered the house with muddy boots, she had many and noble virtues. She worked without intermission; and it was her wise boast that she could rule any man but a dyspeptic, since she knew how to cook. Should one of us, as often happened, make his appearance late at night, demanding food, he would have it hot and appetising, together with several apposite remarks upon irregular habits; should a dozen men, in place of seven, appear for dinner without previous warning, they waited for their meal, but when it came had no reason to complain of it; and did one of her thoughtless charges suffer an ache in his little finger, she would find him a remedy for it, which always included a special and a pleasant diet. Indeed, should I chance to fall ill, I would rather have Jeanne, with all her scolding and with all her want of skill, about me, than many another highly certified nurse. The good, rough-tongued, kind-hearted Jeanne,—if she still lives, I take it she serves others as she served us, for little pay and with scant rest, working faithfully because she prefers to manage men rather than to live at ease upon her savings. She had a master soul, and, but for the accident of sex, had been a famous general!

The drought continued; throughout August I do not think we had a drop of rain, and the vines suffered so that the vintage promised poorly. The days were for the most part cloudless, and the nights so hot that we longed to be cold again; it was, indeed, such weather as we have grown to forget, weather that a man upon a lounging holiday could do nought but praise. Early in September, however, there came a change; for the first day for many weeks the sky was covered with cloud, the glass jumped with alarming suddenness, and there was promise of a storm. All day, I remember, we had hung about the house, seeking a draught of cool air, even Jeanne being affected to something approaching idleness. Massingdale alone showed some energy, going to the neighbouring village about the sale of ducks. Something after five in the afternoon the storm broke in a deluge of rain; at the end of ten minutes the sandy road before our door was running water, and every pipe and gutter about the house was gurgling and spouting. We sat in the hall, observing the downpour through the open door, sniffing the good smell of rain-washed earth; and as we sat, Massingdale came striding into view, his clothes clinging damp about him, and in his company marched two of the most bedraggled beings that I have ever seen: a girl and a boy, the former scarcely, I should say, fifteen, and the latter not more than a year her senior. They carried packs upon their backs, and the boy a pair of stilts across his shoulder, while another pair, belonging to the girl, was under Massingdale's arm; both the children had a sodden and woebegone appearance, plodding heavily through the slush with their heads down.

Massingdale conducted them to the door, ushered them into shelter, and surveyed us smiling, while the three of them dripped puddles on the bricks.

"Allow me," says he, "to introduce Mademoiselle Charlotte Roneval and Monsieur Henri Roneval, her brother, whom I found overtaken by the storm."

At that the girl began to sob, and the boy seemed not far from it. They were an engaging pair, fresh and clean-looking for all their draggled state, and Mademoiselle Charlotte had probably passed for a beauty in her village; but the costume adopted by the itinerant stilt-dancer is not designed to weather storms, and the multitudinous petticoats and much-embroidered underclothing of her tribe made a poor show in the wet. This fault in her appearance she seemed to feel, and she stood weeping, with her short skirts clinging about her thighs, and the water pouring in rivulets down her scarlet stockings; while her brother, assuming the best front that he could manage, at best a poor one, remained close alongside, his own beribboned garb no whit the better, patting her upon the shoulder.

To this scene entered Jeanne, capable and resolute, and was immediately in command of the situation. "What does she cry for?" she demanded. "*Cré nom*, but clothes can be washed. *Vite!* Undress yourself, my girl. You will catch cold."

And, but for the intervention of Loissel, she had had the bewildered maiden mother-naked in the middle of the hall. As it was she bore her off to the kitchen, ordering Massingdale, as she went, to get himself and the boy into dry clothes without any further talk.

That evening, while the rain still hissed and beat outside, we sat down to dinner a merry company: the two children at first somewhat shy, but quickly reassured and presently talkative. They were, it appeared, from the far-distant Landes, and within their recollection had each summer toured the country, dancing on their stilts; they were due to meet their parents that evening at Cluny, but, they assured us, would not be expected on account of the storm; also, they pointed out with some insistence, they travelled much on their own account, being now quite grown up. They had an amazing acquaintance with the high-roads of France, and presented a curious mixture of worldly wisdom and childishness; their education seemed a thing of patches, for they had escaped the attentions of any schoolmaster; they were very proud of their calling, informed us particularly of the difficulty of the training, and were careful to name themselves artistes. When the boy, Henri, had discovered, by a whispered question, that Loissel was really the great painter, his excitement became a thing to watch, and for the remainder of the evening his eyes scarcely left the old man's face.

I hold it a circumstance worth noting that Blinkson hardly touched his drink while the children were present.

After dinner we gathered in the hall, Loissel making the suggestion that we should be shown some of the more difficult steps in stilt-dancing, and that—this with a gleam of amusement in his eyes—Marellac should attempt the part of fiddler. Here, however, we encountered a check, not as might be supposed on account of the high-souled musician refusing such degradation, but by reason of an unexpected modesty. Mademoiselle Charlotte would not dance before us: she was much embarrassed but firm; her mother, she announced, had forbidden her to perform without her proper costume, and had warned her against an entertainment where her own sex was not present. To urge her had appeared an indelicacy; such nice sentiments in a strolling player should surely be respected. We, therefore, made an attempt to introduce Jeanne as chaperon, but she, good woman, was busy with a washtub, and would do nothing but leave the kitchen door wide open. Massingdale, seeing that the performance was likely to be by the boy alone, attacked the situation with many blandishments.

"Mademoiselle," said he, a model of polite entreaty, "I have no wish to press you; you are, perhaps, tired and wish to rest. We therefore shall say no more. But should you presently feel inclined to entertain us, you will earn the thanks of brother artists. I understand that you have certain principles, very wise in themselves, but here, perhaps, a little mistaken. Monsieur *votre frère*, whom I perceive to be a man of the world, will explain to you that you deceive yourself. With us, mademoiselle, especially in the presence of Monsieur Loissel, you are as free from any suggestion of annoyance as when you dance with madame, your mother."

The boy, Henri, at this assumed an air of very proper importance; murmured something of his sister being still a foolish child, and took her aside for whispered talk. I overheard mention of "*le grand* Loissel" and of "*Messieurs tout à fait distingués*," and then the modesty was overcome, and Mademoiselle Charlotte went in search of her stilts.

Did Marellac, she inquired, as she prepared herself, know such and such airs? He did; all France knew them, and had known them for several generations. Good! Then would he be so good as to play them, and to take the time fast as he neared the finish?

So the dance began, in the light of glittering candles, with swish of rain above the tapping of the stilts, with now and then a crash of thunder drowning the music, and in an atmosphere cloudy with tobacco smoke. Massingdale had produced a sketch-block and worked with quickness, and in eager fashion; Marellac sat perched upon the stove, hugging his fiddle; and the rest of us were fringed around the walls. The children danced with a deal of skill and grace, calling to each other in *patois* at any changing of the step, or when their backs were turned. But the music! I would draw a veil upon the playing. The fiddler, having caught the spirit of the air, made of it what he would. Witchery and madness he gave us, a wild, unordered, bacchanalian dance without a thought for the marking of the time, or ever a care for the dancers; a wonderful riot of joyful sound, he played for us, and showed himself a vile accompanist. At first there was surprise on the faces of the two children, then distress, and finally they came to a standstill, the girl going up to the fiddler.

"Monsieur," she cried, a reproach in her voice, "it is necessary to mark the time; one cannot dance to your playing. Although," she added, remembering her politeness, "you play very well."

Marellac was full of apologies, which I believe to have been genuine, for he knew the duties of the accompanist. Having been carefully instructed for the future, he began again, and the dance went without interruption. I shall not forget his effort; it was reminiscent of a music lesson, one could almost hear the "one and, two and" of the patient governess, so well was the time marked. His face, too, was a sight not easily forgot, a picture of distress, with the eyes fixed on the dancers in apprehension. At the finish there was much applause, and the call for a repetition, which was duly given. Thereupon Mademoiselle Charlotte stalked to the fiddler, and gravely congratulated him.

"It was very good, monsieur," said she. "I reproach myself. You play excellently, when you remember the time. Do you play much?"

"I am learning," answered Marellac, much confused.

"*Bon*," she answered, with polite encouragement. "I think that you will learn quickly, monsieur, if you always think of marking the time."

They danced again, and after that again, being proud of their skill and able to see that we liked their performance; then, amid a deal of laughter, Hendick and I were persuaded to tempt fortune with the stilts upon our legs, and, even with the aid of long poles, we did little but fall about and bruise ourselves. Finally, Jeanne appeared upon the scene, announcing that the girl should go to bed, and getting her own way. Henri Roneval, not daring to face the company alone, also departed to the kitchen, where he was to sleep, and we were left alone, and fell to admiring the sketches that Massingdale had made. These, studies of certain of the girl's attitudes, seemed to me extraordinarily good, but upon Loissel they had a far greater effect; setting him laughing and smiling, naming their creator a "*bon garçon*" and "*vraiment un petit peintre.*"

The following morning, as I looked from my window upon the earth cleaned by the night's storm, fresh and pleasant-smelling in the sun, I discovered Massingdale busy with his sketch-block, and I could hear his voice raised in entreaty as he endeavoured to quiet the restlessness of the little dancer, who showed herself a very untrained model. When, later, I joined him in the garden, I found that he had made good use of the early hours, and that Mademoiselle Charlotte was already roughly sketched in many different poses. One of these studies he gave to the girl, telling her that she should sell it to add to her dowry, which instruction she has apparently carried out, for the drawing appeared upon the market the other day, when it fetched a good price; yet, although she thanked him with the strictest politeness, I do not think that she thought much of his skill, not, it is likely, considering that where Loissel was one should give a thought to lesser men.

After breakfast Massingdale and I took the two children to Cluny in the cart, and as we followed the by-road through the woods, the evidences of the storm were very plain about us: bracken and fern were beaten flat by the deluge, and little streams still gurgled where there had been no water a few hours before.

We encountered Monsieur and Madame Roneval, with a third and younger child, giving a morning performance in the streets of Cluny, and it was obvious that the woman was relieved at our appearance. Upon hearing madame play the fiddle, I realised how the daughter had learned to judge playing, and I was compelled to acknowledge that Marellac must have sounded a poor substitute, when considered as an accessory to the dancing. We parted from these excellent people on the best of terms, and had some difficulty in excusing ourselves, without offence, from being their guests at the midday meal.

From the talk which we heard in the town, it seemed clear that the storm had done heavy damage, and that there was now little chance that the wine crop of the district would come to anything at all; in fact, from the gossip that was going round, it was to be learned that many of the vineyards were altogether wrecked, so that from them there would be no harvest worth the gathering.

Massingdale was inclined, upon the way back, to a serious view of the situation; announced that the distress which would follow came at an evil moment, and predicted much disturbance. All talk of such matters was, however, stopped for the time between us by the sight of a large motor-car, a thing rarely seen in our hamlet, drawn up before our door; and when we discovered Yvonne Carrel seated in the hall, a model of fashion in a very rural setting, we had other things of which to think.

She greeted us in her laughing, somewhat lazy manner, announcing that, since she was stopping for the night at Chalons, she had determined to surprise us in our inaccessible retreat; but I thought her, despite her easy talk, playing a part which she could not quite sustain, and I imagined in her bearing some excitement or emotion that she did not altogether hide. Indeed, I hold this unexpected visit the beginning of many disturbances, the first event to mark the ending of the quiet life that we had led.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME DIFFICULTIES AND MUCH UNREST

AT *déjeuner* there was even more of laughter and of noise than was common at our meals; Massingdale, it would seem, had taken a hatred for a moment's silence, and Yvonne being seized with the same mood, the pair often talked together, so that to catch what they were saying became a matter of some difficulty. We were reproached for shutting ourselves from the world, and, with Massingdale very voluble in the van, we defended ourselves and brought a counter-attack of worldly vanity. The discussion, together with the interchange of the news of the past few weeks, carried us an hour beyond our rising from the table, then, when there came a lull in our talk, Yvonne rose, looking around the garden where we sat.

"*Bon Dieu*," said she, "it is not badly chosen, this spot where you live; I would see something more of it. Come, Louis, and your Monsieur Crutchley, show me a little of these woods and hills. Remember," she added, laughing, "I am no yokel. You must not make me climb about and spoil my dress."

The storm had passed, and we were back to the hot sun and cloudless sky again, yet there was a freshness in the air, so that the afternoon was pleasant for walking. We sauntered, following Yvonne's commands, along the bridle road to Cluny, turning presently on to a footpath which led us through scented pinewoods, and which gave us, here and there, a sight of our valley beneath, and of the château on its little hill. We walked, chatting of many things, yet of nothing with any seriousness, until we left the wood and found ourselves upon a little plateau of the hills, a hollow strewn with rocks and gorse, with here and there a stunted fir, a place no more than a few yards wide. Here Yvonne sat down, upon a rock where the sunlight lay in golden patches, showing the lichen in a hundred tints.

"Now, *mes amis*," she announced, her voice become a stranger to all laughter, "I have many things to ask you. Louis, you are become a stranger. How does the world treat you?"

"Well," answered Massingdale, seating himself beside her. "Even very well. I am doing better work, Yvonne, than I have ever done before."

"Ah! your work!" cried she, impatient. "I knew that would be well. You were born for it, *mon cher*. It is you I want to hear about. Are you well and happy?"

I thought the question strange, but I had no time to dwell on it, for there were stranger yet to come.

"Well!" replied Massingdale, laughing. "You can see that for yourself. Happy! Not less so than most mortals. What more, mademoiselle?"

But she did not reply to his laughter, and her next question came oddly serious.

"Are you prosperous? Do you make money?"

"Sainte Vierge, no!" Massingdale told her. "Scarcely a sou of it; but I am not unhappy on that account. Mademoiselle Yvonne Carrel, I have the poor man's fine scorn of wealth."

"Imbecile!" said she, and there was a sudden note of tenderness in her voice that I had not wished to hear. "Monsieur Crutchley," she added, turning to me, "don't you think he would be better with more money? If he could travel, he would be the better artist."

"Undoubtedly," I answered, not understanding to what point she led, "a little more wealth might help him, and still leave him at a decent distance from a plutocrat."

To which she did not answer, but sat staring straight before her with eyes that saw some other scene, twisting her hands in nervousness upon her lap, her face grown strained and longing. So we fell silent, and I watched Massingdale's expression change to anxiousness as he observed the woman beside him.

"Louis," she asked presently, not looking at the man to whom she spoke, "why have you changed so much?"

Massingdale asked for no explanation, as I had thought he would; he seemed to understand the question, and to answer it with what honesty he could.

"Time has a way of changing us," he told her.

"When," she continued, not appearing to listen to him, "you left England, you were different. I was often with you then. Now you avoid me. Why?"

I saw Massingdale move upon his seat, as a man who prepares himself to face a thing he fears; and, very heartily, I wished myself somewhere else.

"Things are altogether different now," he answered, and in his quiet seriousness I scarcely recognised the man of extravagant talk, who was my host. "You and I, Yvonne, are working now at more important things; we are no longer idle people living the same life. It is not true to say that I avoid you; it is something that we cannot help, that our paths run no longer side by side."

"They might run together again," came Yvonne's answer, very soft.

"They must not," he insisted. "It could do no good."

Then, it seemed, the restraint that she had set upon herself was overridden, her composure was driven away, and she turned to Massingdale, clutching his arm, hurrying her words in her entreaty.

"Understand me, Louis," she cried, "I do not ask you to forget the past. I am a woman, I can see what you think to hide. But it is past, Louis, it is past. Go back farther, go beyond it, to what we were before. No, no—you must hear me, Louis, you must." For he had shaken his head at her, his face suddenly stern. "Is it a great thing that I ask? For me it is. I know what you are; I know what I seem to you; that should make it easier, Louis. Let us go back. We are both alone now, why should we not? I ask nothing more than before. You would be free, Louis, you could leave me when you would. I do not ask your love, only that you shall come to me, Louis, my dear Louis. I am rich. You could travel. I would work for you. I——"

"Yvonne, for God's sake," cried Massingdale, his voice harsh, "stop!"

But she clung to him more closely, sobbing with a passion that his words could not affect.

"Forgive me," she implored, raising her face to him, "I did not think. You shall not touch my money. The world shall not know what I am to you. Sometimes, just sometimes, Louis, we will go away and be together. For you it is not much, just a few moments in all your life, dear; for me—oh, come to me, Louis, come to me!"

But I did not hear what he answered, for I had edged away from them, fearful that I should draw their attention by some sudden noise, and so remind them of the man whom they had both forgotten. When I had got to the shelter of the trees, I ran, only concerned that I might get away from them, get out of earshot of Yvonne's abandonment and misery. I pulled up when I had gone some distance, and sat down to smoke a pipe, but I do not remember to have tasted the tobacco, and I could not get from my head a sense of shame that I had heard as much as chance had forced upon me. I was aware of the common tragedy of the whole business, yet I could not persuade myself that, outside of the miracle that he should come to care for her, there was any chance of happiness; and against the best worldly attitude that I could summon, I held to the conviction that, in this case, Yvonne would not be able to forget. I am no moralist; I did not see the wrong in the affair—if such there be—but only the pity of it, and the wry smile of fate. Perhaps others, holding different views to mine, may urge that the trouble had its origin in what they call a sin; I believe the judgment is not uncommon. That, on any score at all, it should be held a satisfactory pronouncement on the matter, is a thing I cannot understand. When, from whatever standpoint we choose to judge our own and other people's actions, we see a constant stream of foolish deeds and perverted endeavour about us, it would seem but a miserly encouragement to any further effort to pass on, when some one else is called upon to pay his score, smug and righteous, with no more than complacent comment on his extravagance. With morality, a thing which few men see in the same fashion, the law and nature should be allowed to share the burden of correction, and the lookers-on reduced to silence, or to a decent companionable sympathy, if they feel called upon to speak.

When any man has made bad wreckage of his life, I cannot perceive any single advantage in solemnly informing him that he mistook his course.

In a very short time, it seemed to me, although it must have been half an hour or more after I had crept away, I heard Massingdale shouting to know where I had got myself hidden; so, with very great reluctance, I made my way back to the clearing. There I found Yvonne still seated where she had been before, but Massingdale upon his feet looking about the place for me. They both had now an ordinary composure, but their faces showed a look of weariness, as if the hurts which they had suffered gave them no relief, although they rested.

"I hope I have not kept you," I shouted, when I came within earshot, "but I thought that I saw a badger, and I tried to follow it up."

The excuse was a poor one; yet to have waited on their speech had surely been worse, since they were only anxious, I imagine, to have some cloak, no matter what its thinness, to hide their ill.

"Did you find it?" asked Yvonne, seizing the chance of talk.

I told her that I had found nothing, and I avoided looking at her, for I had seen in her dark eyes a pain that it hurt me to look upon.

Some sort of conversation we maintained on the way back, each of us very set on escaping for a moment from wondering what the others thought; then, as we came back to the bridle road, Yvonne made an end of pretence.

"Do you know," she asked me, "Monsieur Bocamier, the Paris broker?"

"I have heard of him," said I, surprised. "He is enormously rich, is n't he?"

"Yes," she answered, laughing curiously. "A millionaire, monsieur. He has asked me to marry him. I shall accept his offer."

I saw from his face that Massingdale already knew of this decision, and I stammered out some formal phrases of congratulation in the best fashion that I could.

"Thank you, monsieur," said Yvonne, when I had finished, lamely enough. "I hope that we shall live together comfortably. You shall see me in a new rôle, that of the obedient wife. Of course you understand," she added, with a sudden bitterness, "that I make an excellent provision for the time when my voice shall have failed. A good bargain, monsieur."

"I think I understand," I told her, letting her see that I took her real meaning.

"Then," said she, laying her hand for a moment on my arm, her eyes on my face, "you must forget, *mon ami*. This afternoon is past and done with for all three of us. I shall not, however, tell the others of my—new happiness just yet. We will keep that for a little to ourselves."

When we got back to the house, Yvonne was laughing, and Massingdale and I playing up to her example with something less than her success.

She left us very soon afterwards, declaring that our woods had kept her much longer than she had meant they should; and as the motor went ploughing up the lane towards the neighbouring village of La Verzée and a high-road, she turned and waved to us.

Later we had a letter announcing her coming marriage, and there was much comment upon it, even Loissel laughing at the way that she had sold herself. If all the women who do what she did come to the bargain with a heart as heavy, I hold the thing an evil on the score of human happiness alone.

During dinner that evening Massingdale's behaviour was curiously fitful: he would rouse himself from moods of silence to an extreme of gaiety, and would give utterance to a stream of nonsense that seemed to shame a word of sense, then he would slip back to thought again, and sit, perhaps ten minutes, without speaking. I hold it some testimony to the good sense of the company that no one rallied him upon a condition that was so obvious. After we had left the table, as we sat about the front door of the house smoking, scarcely leaving me time to swallow Jeanne's excellent coffee, he asked for my company on a walk. I went with him, although I had far sooner have sat where I was, and we took the direction of the high-road.

He walked in silence, very rapidly, and seemingly unconcerned by his surroundings; I have seldom been in company with a man so clearly disinclined for talk. When we had covered some miles along the valley, through which Blinkson had taken me on the first day of my visit, I struck at further wandering.

"Are we going on all night?" I asked.

He seemed to throw off his abstraction at my question; suggested that we should turn back, which was what I wanted; and talked about the stilt-dancers in his ordinary fashion. But the mood soon passed, and before many minutes we were silent again. As we passed through La Verzée, where, although the hour was early, there was only a single cottage showing any light, I made a last attempt at conversation.

"What the deuce is wrong with you to-night?" I inquired. "The grave could give you points in liveliness."

"Sorry," he answered. "I dragged you out, Dick, because I wanted some one with me. I 'm out to escape talk to-night. Look at the full moon beyond those hills; look at the shadows about you; be thankful that you do not walk in company with thoughts that spoil the scene for you."

"Look here," said I, determined to rouse him, "there is no sense in this. What is done is done with; you can't make it better by playing the part of a mute."

He stopped in the middle of the road, and I saw his face haggard and tired in the soft light.

"Do me a favour," he replied. "Go back and explain that I may not be home until late. You may not understand, but you are a man who has a trick of letting other men manage their own affairs. If I fight shy of this business, if I try to forget the part that I have played in it, I show myself a most damnable coward. I don't play a hero's part, but I want to discover what my real part is."

So I left him—there was little else to do—and he turned off the road into the deep shadow of the trees, and disappeared.

Loissel and I sat talking late; midnight had passed an hour or more and we were still in the hall, with the door wide open to the night, smoking, and busy with discussion.

"I have my eyes," announced the old man, as I helped myself to a last drink before turning in; "I saw that there was trouble to-day. I do not ask questions, *mon ami;* I do not want to know more than I have seen; but there is a good side to this business."

"Show it me," I asked, wanting at the moment nothing more.

"It goes to make a painter," chuckled Loissel, and I was surprised to find him so callous. "Believe me," he continued, "there is so much suffering in this world, so much goes wrong, that when out of unhappiness there arises some good, a man of common-sense congratulates himself."

After that he developed his point at some length; he showed me that Massingdale had changed, from a painter of ability to a man who might do great things, because he had found the rough side of the world; and he welcomed this last happening, which he was careful not to name, as helping to the same result. He spoke with such enthusiasm, he was so obviously persuaded of his point, that I fell in with his view, and was for seeing the best side of the business, when the subject of our discussion made his appearance. He was hot and tired, and had gained, at least, a physical fatigue.

"Still up?" said he, as he came into the hall. "I 've made a discovery. Adventure is about us; the chance of stirring deeds to our hands. I stumbled on an open-air meeting of discontented labourers, and the devil is in their silly heads. Shut the place up, you two; I 'm like an owl in the daytime for sleepiness."

He left us at that, without more talk; but I would stake a good sum that he did not sleep before we did. If he did I have no skill at all to read a man's face, when what it has to show is written as plain as a book.

We induced Massingdale to give us an account of the meeting, as we sat at breakfast some hours later.

"There were," he assured us, "about a couple of hundred of the fools, all of them sweating with excitement, and half of them men I have never seen before, representatives from the villages for miles around. They acted the thing in proper style, pleased as children with themselves and their conspiracy in a wood at midnight. Ritaud, the innkeeper at Mailly, a knave who holds the excellent doctrine that an independent working man must always be impertinent, was the leader of the crowd; an undersized animal with an unhealthy countenance and the manner of an epileptic, who hailed the rest of them as 'my brothers of the country,' was the chief speaker. He spoke in a hoarse whisper, which every now and again dropped into a croak, and in the space of about ten minutes he gave them all the proper phrases about the wicked capitalist, the right of the poor man to his work and his pay, and the march to freedom. As a peroration he rounded on the Vicomte de Ménillart, pointed a trembling hand in the direction of the château here, and promised that, if the master dared to show his face in the district, he should learn that his workmen were no longer slaves. I was sick with the swine who listened to him, for they shouted against De Ménillart with the best will in the world; yet I 'll swear there is not a better landlord in this part of France. The neighbourhood is going out on strike, I gather, within the next few days. For what reason they probably don't know themselves but the thing seems arranged. If the Vicomte comes for his usual visit here, and Jeanne tells me that the château is being opened, it 's odds on this peaceful valley becoming a sort of concert room for drunken shouting. Shall we insure our windows, my friends? Shall we institute a counter-demonstration? As employers of labour, as capitalists, as rich and idle aristocrats, we will maintain our rights! *À bas les ouvriers!* What says our socialist?"

"*Grand Dieu,*" cried Auguste Vanne, climbing on to the table to the considerable danger of the household crockery, and waving his hands in the best manner of the tub-thumper, "we have our rights! Courage, my friends, the hour approaches. We demand the right to be appreciated! An end to this intolerable obscurity! Death or fame, my brothers!"

We beat upon the table in sign of our agreement with these excellent sentiments; and the fat little man bowed to us with the utmost grace, and then implored some one to help him down. Hendick alone remained serious, and, when we were quiet again, gave us his views of the matter.

"You all know," said he, "my opinions about labour and its treatment; I have not changed them. In this case, however, I am not in sympathy with the strikers. I believe, as Massingdale has said, that the Vicomte de Ménillart is a good and just landlord and master, that is, so far as a man can be just under the present conditions. As I see it, the peasantry are well treated and well paid; the failure of the vine crop is alone responsible for the present trouble. In spite of what you may think, a socialist is not necessarily a fool, and I am not inclined to blame the employer for what is nature's doing. I should certainly side with the masters, if trouble should begin at present in this district."

"A convert! A convert!" shouted Vanne, beginning to cheer loudly; but he was restrained by Massingdale rising in the pompous manner of a president at a board meeting.

"Messieurs," began our host, very solemn, "we have to welcome in our midst one who has long been estranged from us. An erring lamb, gentlemen, has returned to the fold. I need not tell you what a deep sense of thankfulness fills me——"

Here, however, we were prevented from hearing the finish of his speech by the bustling appearance of Jeanne, who inquired whether we wished to sit at table all the morning, and who forthwith drove us out of doors. That we should waste our own time, the excellent woman informed us, making a noise like silly schoolboys, was no concern of hers; but that we should cause her to get behindhand with her work, was a thing she would not stand.

I do not think that the rest of us took the prospect of the strike seriously, but Hendick was in solemn earnest about the affair, and would, had we given him the chance, have discoursed at some length on the evil of taking action on insufficient justification. He started off for Mailly to discover for himself the true state of affairs. Vanne went with him. "For," said the fat man, "the repentant sinner wants constant guidance. We must have no apostasy in this community."

Massingdale retired to the studio as soon as Hendick and Vanne had departed; he announced that he was going to put in a day's work on a picture of Charlotte Roneval, but I fancy that he also wished to be alone. Blinkson was already at work in the garden, digging potatoes with the assistance of Marellac; so that Loissel and I were the only idle members of the company. After pottering about for half the morning, we strolled out towards the château to make enquiries about the arrival of De Ménillart, who was a close friend of Loissel's, and whom I had met more than once in the old man's flat in Paris. We encountered our gentleman as he was leaving the gates of his park, and he greeted us with the information that we had saved him a walk, since he was on his way to visit us. He had arrived, we learned, the previous evening; he was going into Cluny that afternoon to meet some visitors who were coming on a visit for a few days; and he wanted the pair of us and Massingdale to dine with him that evening. We accepted, and said that we would let him know about Massingdale, which he declared to be unnecessary, immediately thereafter beginning to talk about the discontent among his tenantry.

As we talked he led the way towards the house, and for half an hour or more we wandered in the grounds, which were neither very beautiful, nor yet well kept according to our English standard, while he expressed himself rather gravely on the situation. I had not been within the walls of the park before, and had had no chance to form any opinion of the house, except that it was low and white, with green shutters and a red-tiled roof, and that a turreted wing at one end of the building seemed older than the rest. Upon a closer inspection, although on that occasion I did not go inside, the place seemed little more than a shooting lodge, exhibited nothing of greater interest than a certain picturesque and solid comfort, and suggested little wealth, or a great distaste for show, upon the part of its owner. Indeed, from what I had always heard, I imagined the Vicomte de Ménillart to be far from a rich man, and I understood that, apart from his full share of expenses as a generous landlord, he spent very little on his Burgundian estate, keeping most of his money for the improvement of the lands from which he took his name, where, moreover, he spent very much of his time.

But I had not many thoughts to spare for the house, since the master held us with talk that did not want in interest. Although he was largely an absentee landlord, he knew the district which he owned, and he was no stranger to the people, so that the serious view which he took of the disturbance convinced me that the affair was no mere laughing matter.

As he accompanied us back to the gates, his face bore signs of worry and anxiety; he walked with his head bent, a small, thin man, very carefully dressed, his moustache and imperial already touched with grey, conscientiousness and honesty plainly stamped on his whole person.

"When I discovered how things were," he explained, as we were about to leave him, "I had an idea of sending my wife and the boy away again, and of putting off my guests. However, I have not done so."

"Surely you exaggerate the case, my friend," answered Loissel. "There will be no unpleasantness at your house."

"I hope not," said the Vicomte, smiling somewhat uncertainly. "In any case, it is too late now to alter things. Till to-night, messieurs."

On our way back, I inquired how long De Ménillart had been a father, for I had always understood that he was childless.

"Two months," Loissel informed me; "and seven years of marriage before the event. Between ourselves, *mon cher*, that is why he is become so fanciful; he imagines all sorts of dangers and unpleasantness for the mother and the baby. Yet it is worth growing fanciful, if one has a son to weigh down the balance on the other side."

I did not continue the subject, and I think that Loissel showed me this glimpse of the great sorrow of his life before he was aware that he had spoken; for he was not the man to inform others of his own private griefs, and, after a moment of silence, he spoke of something else.

After *déjeuner* Massingdale went back to work, having agreed to dine with De Ménillart; Marellac disappeared somewhere by himself; and Loissel, Blinkson, and I, after a decent interval, sauntered over to La Verzée, all three of us more taken than we cared to own with the idea that the promised strike might come to something. The afternoon was hot, and the inn of Luin fuller than was usual at the hour; we learned, for we ventured no farther than the shade of its garden, that there was, if nothing else, a great deal of silly talk going about the district, and that Dupont, the Vicomte's agent, a stranger in the neighbourhood, stood a very good chance of being mishandled.

We got back home between four and five, and being full of the news that we had heard, invaded the studio without ceremony. The room presented its customary appearance of disorder; there was a litter of odds and ends strewn about the place, and the smell of paint was strong. Massingdale sat in a low arm-chair, his elbows on his knees, his chin on his hands; before him was a finished picture, at which he stared. There should be little occasion to describe the painting; it hangs now in the Luxembourg, and is duly admired by many visitors. *La Femme* is to my nimd the greatest of its author's achievements. But, when I saw it for the first time, resting upon an easel in a bare Burgundian farmhouse, I felt no conscious appreciation of the genius that had created it, for the woman's head that appeared against the dark background was the head of Joan Onnington, beautiful and idealised. It is no girl's portrait, this picture, but the presentation of a woman, wide-eyed and sympathetic, tolerant and touched with knowledge, passionate and capable to suffer; a woman very womanly, with the stamp of motherhood set upon her face, very steadfast, and promising that here is one who will keep faith, bear disappointment without complaint, ask for no perfection, and cherish whom she loves. As I looked at the canvas I became, in some measure, aware of what Massingdale had suffered, and of how through the last two years he must have lived with an image in his heart of whose existence we had never known. All that he had shown in his painting, it struck me on the moment, was possible, and might some day be true; and it came to me on a sudden rush of pity that, from the first, he had seen this, making his loss thereby far more than we had ever dreamed.

But he did not leave us to admire his skill, or to pity his misfortune, without comment. At the noise of our entry he turned, and sprang from his chair more moved than I had ever seen him. He seemed like a man surprised with some secret that he carefully guarded, ashamed to be discovered, and angry at his shame. Standing in front of the canvas, he eyed us with undisguised resentment, and I could see that the man trembled with the violence of a rage I could not understand.

Loissel, paying no attention to his attitude, crossed the room quickly; thrust Massingdale aside from in front of the canvas, flung himself into the empty chair, and became engrossed in study of the picture. The action seemed to do away with the little restraint that Massingdale could still command; he turned upon us with a cry of passion, stuttering to get his words out.

"Damn you," he roared, "why do you come in here? Did n't I tell you that I wished to be alone? What have you come to see? Get out. For God's sake, Dick, don't look at me as if I were to be pitied. I don't want your damned pity, or your company. Get out—the lot of you."

We did not move. I, certainly, and I think Blinkson was in the same case, was too surprised to stir a finger;

Loissel did not seem to hear. As we did not go Massingdale's tone changed; he started pacing the room, and spoke with smooth sarcasm, in a fashion not more like his ordinary manner than his previous violence.

"I beg your pardon," says he; "I was most unreasonable. No man, of course, has any right to demand solitude in his own house. Please make yourselves thoroughly acquainted with my private affairs. Crutchley, go up and take a closer look at my work; follow Loissel's example. You will be able to tell me whether you think it a good portrait; also you should be able to offer me some instructive remarks on what you suppose is my condition of wounded sentiment. Stand behind the chair, you 'll get a better light. Blinkson, I must really apologise: so far I have kept you in ignorance of certain private matters. It is unpardonable. This painting, in which you all show such a flattering interest, is the portrait of a girl whom I once hoped to marry. Is there anything else that I can do to help you towards a better understanding of my life?"

I remained speechless, looking a big enough fool I am quite prepared to think, abominably embarrassed; Loissel had turned from the picture, and sat fingering his beard with an odd distress; Blinkson, the sodden, disreputable old drunkard, the man whose behaviour was a thing condemned by all persons of nice upbringing, put a finish to the scene, without embarrassment and without hesitation, showing himself on the instant a middle-aged gentleman of very kindly tact.

He stepped across to Massingdale and took him by the arm, his manner the nicest example of good-tempered insistence.

"Steady," said he. "Don't let this business become hysterical. Besides, if it 's all the same to you, I 'd far rather know nothing about your domestic affairs. There are so many little matters in my own life, you know, I have plenty to think about. I thought you were at work on the dancing girl; I suppose you finished when the light began to get poor."

The sound of Blinkson's husky, easy talk had its effect on Massingdale; he had come to a more ordinary temper before the other had finished. He grew red like a child, stammered something, turned away across the room, and then faced us with the determined look of a man who forces himself to a hated duty.

"You men startled me," he began; "I made a damnable fool——"

"Can't you leave the rest for granted?" interrupted Blinkson. "If you were to go and hunt up a dress-suit—it will take some doing—for your appearance among the nobility this evening, I think we might all be the better for it."

"My God," Massingdale agreed, "I think we might." And left us, without more explanation.

When the door had closed behind him, Blinkson made the only comment that passed between us touching the scene.

"Poor devil!" said he, and walked over to the easel.

We gathered about the picture which had caused, apparently, this singular outburst, and admired it for some moments in silence. The longer I looked at it, the more I became impressed with its power; it was not simply a beautiful face, finely painted, that looked at me, it was a living head, a thing of many moods and of changing expressions; no single moment in a life, seized and portrayed, but the presentment of a human woman, frail and wonderful—a woman resting in an arm-chair, clothed in black, to point the contrast with her skin, seeing visions in the night, the room dark about her, and the light soft on her face; a living creature, dowered with high passions, and with laughter lurking in her eyes. I could scarcely take my eyes from the thing, and I forgot to wonder at the painter's skill, seeing, for the moment, only the woman that he had drawn.

Blinkson was the first to break the silence, and he spoke more jerkily than usual.

"Not bad, that," he remarked.

"Not bad!" exclaimed Loissel, standing before the canvas in an odd excitement. "*Mon Dieu*, but you are right. It is womanhood. It is an inspiration, a masterpiece, the work of genius—no less. There is not another living painter who could have done it; there are not many of the dead who have done better. It will become immortal, I tell you," he shouted, pointing to the painting with a trembling hand. "And I have taught him—I, Jean Sébastien Loissel, shall be called his master. Ah, my friends, I could weep, I could laugh. Even if he never paint another picture—which God forbid—he has earned a place among great artists; he has done far more than even I, who believed in him, had ever dared to hope. They said he had technique without a soul; they said he could not see clearly with the single purpose of the artist; let them see this! Ah, *messieurs les critiques*, what will you say now! Let him be rich or poor, this boy, laughing or sad, it does not matter: he has shown himself above the little things of life. Good or bad, an honest man or a thief, I do not care! He is an artist. an artist of the greatest."

At this point Massingdale returned, carrying with him a bundle of clothes, and seemingly himself again. At sight of him Loissel charged across the room, seized him in his arms, embraced him warmly, weeping without restraint and muttering incoherent praise.

Of the four of us I was, certainly, the most embarrassed; I am ill at ease in face of such demonstrations, although I find them not wanting in interest, and I am always horribly self-conscious. Massingdale was not in the least concerned; he suffered Loissel's embrace without resistance, waited for the enthusiasm to moderate, then, thanking us for what we said of him, in such a manner that we could have no doubt either of his sincerity or his satisfaction, put away the canvas with a deal of care.

"There is something in the air to-night," he laughed, "that makes for excitement. First I make a priceless fool of myself—quite how lamentable an ass I was, I hope you will never tell me—then you follow, very poor seconds at the best, trying to turn my head. If I give myself time to think at all, I shall alternate between horrible humility (dangerous to me on account of its unusualness) and more abominable conceit, finishing, probably, as a jibbering lunatic. Have pity on me, gracious gentlemen. The devil 's in it, and I can't find the few clothes that I have. How, in the name of art and Saville Row, can I appear in that?"

He held up the crumpled and threadbare remains of an ancient dress-coat, shook his head sadly, and called loud for Jeanne.

With the aid of that inestimable woman and a hot iron, by dint of ransacking the whole wardrobe of the household, he at last stepped forth before the admiring eyes of the entire company, completely clad, neither well nor in any one particular fashion, but in such manner that his intention to appear in the prescribed attire was to be recognised at the first glance.

As we walked to the château in the soft darkness of a warm September night, Massingdale showed himself both nervous and in high spirits. Since Yvonne's visit he had seemed estranged from his usual manner; but the outburst of the afternoon appeared to have done him good, and, beyond a certain nervousness, betrayed in his excited volubility, he was himself again.

We were admitted to the house by an old manservant, who showed us into a deserted salon, and departed to give notice of our arrival to our host. The room, like all the house so far as I could judge, was furnished in good taste, mainly with ancient furniture; it had, besides, three long windows giving upon the garden, at the moment wide open to the night.

"I cast no reflection," murmured Massingdale, as we waited, "upon the generosity of my friends, but my appearance is vilely suggestive of the slop-shop. The flunkey noticed it, and in his heart despises me."

Thereupon, turning to a glass, he made some adjustments in his attire; stopped, his hands still hidden in the neighbourhood of his shoulder-blades, faced the windows with a gasp, and stood gaping as if he saw a ghost.

I twisted round to follow the line of his gaze, and there, arm-in-arm, staring at us in astonishment, just entered from the garden, stood Tom Onnington and Joan.

CHAPTER XIV

OF MOONLIGHT AND OF SLEEPING HOPES

WE kept silence, facing each other, for not more than a couple of seconds at most, yet Massingdale has since told me that he began to wonder if any one of us would ever speak again, and that, for his part, all hope of making a sane and appropriate remark was gone from him. Tom Onnington, in any case, was not similarly affected, for he came across the room to Massingdale with a welcome that showed no trace of any embarrassment.

"This is what we call a joyful surprise," he announced, taking the hand that was held out to him. "It is literally and absolutely years since I last saw you. What are you doing here, with Dick too—'Evening to you, Dick—and how are things going along?"

"I 'm living in a neighbouring cottage," answered Massingdale, speaking like a man dazed, and looking across the room to where Joan talked with Loissel. "Dick is staying with me; so are Loissel and some other men."

"Painting like the deuce, I suppose?" Tom enquired. "Doing down the critics in proper fashion? I heard you spoken of in Paris as no end of a duke. I 'll come round to-morrow and see the latest masterpiece. I 'm here for a few days with Joan, and then we move on to

Paris to pick up the old people. Come and introduce me to Loissel."

To a man of his high passions, more especially to one who found it so difficult to disguise his feelings, the situation was not easy; yet Massingdale faced it without public shame. As he shook hands with Joan, murmuring something inaudible in reply to her conventional greeting, he was very clearly distressed, and, I imagine, it added little to his comfort to know that in spite of our conversation we all watched him.

"I have been hearing," said Joan, speaking with the utmost self-possession, and smiling at him as at a stranger, "that you are painting some remarkable pictures; but Monsieur Loissel tells me that you are jealous of showing them until they are exhibited. That 's very selfish of you."

"I assure you," answered Massingdale, and his voice was under full command, "that any picture I intend to exhibit may be duly viewed and criticised. The studies that I have painted for my own amusement might jeopardise a slender reputation, if they were shown to lay eyes."

"I shall be quite interested to see those that you are willing to show," Joan replied, the patronage in her tone little more than an insult, her failure to find any interest in the subject very carefully conveyed.

I saw Massingdale wince, and as Joan turned to talk to me he wandered off with Tom towards the windows. I began to lose my temper; it struck me that my charming cousin was wanting in generosity. That, although she had been at some pains to snub a man who, she could guess, was scarcely happy, she had also been pleased to treat him to an exhibition of the best graces of the coquette, clearly, by every act and movement, flaunting her beauty before him. I could not recognise her in this new attitude, and I paid small attention to her remarks, being engaged on the attempt to discover her object. Fortunately, the Vicomte and his wife, very full of apologies for their absence, brought the finish to a situation that was difficult for all of us. After some very usual comments on the fact that the company was already acquainted, and when two nieces of our hostess, who were the only other guests, had made their appearance, we went in to dinner.

At table Massingdale sat next to one of the nieces, a plump, pale, languid, and altogether colourless person, and, upon the other side, Joan; for a moment or two he let the conversation pass him, then, having emptied his glass at a gulp, somewhat, I fancy, to the astonishment of the butler, he started on a stream of talk. His eyes were as bright as those of a man in fever, his face more pale than usual, yet after the first glass I noticed that he hardly touched his wine; there was about his whole person a suggestion of fire and movement, such, I imagine, as would have led a stranger to notice him before any other member of the company. His hair somewhat wild, for he constantly disturbed it as was his custom when excited, his clothes ill-fitting and much worn, he yet moved and spoke with a distinction that we others could not equal; Loissel, alone, showed something of the same caste, but age had marked him and dimmed somewhat the sparkle of his life.

Joan was beautifully dressed; had certainly developed nearer to her promised beauty; and, but for the extraordinary affectation of her manner when she spoke to Massingdale, showed the makings of a woman of wit and intelligence. I watched the pair of them with a deal of interest, and was, I am afraid, a mighty poor partner for the second niece; however, Tom relieved me of something of my duties, and for much of the meal conversation was general.

I remember that, shortly before our hostess gave the signal for the ladies to retire, the talk touched upon gambling, succeeding a discussion upon Parisian and London life, in which Massingdale had refused to talk a word of sense, and during the course of which he had set the table in a roar.

"It is," maintained, our hostess, "a very significant fact that the whole of French society is becoming daily more fond of gambling."

"The clearest sign," announced Massingdale, "that the period of temporary obscurity is past, that France moves to her proper place again."

"But, monsieur," pleaded the plump niece, very serious, " you cannot mean that you think such a thing a sign of greatness?"

"Most certainly," he assured her.

"On what grounds do you hold that view?" asked the Vicomte.

"Because," Massingdale informed us, his peculiar boy's laugh ringing out before he spoke, "your gambler worships the kinder gods; because he is a creature of hope, holding that to-morrow will be bright although to-day is dark; because he does not count his costs; because he has the spirit to do the thing he wishes without hesitation; because a risk is like wine to him; because, if gambling, sterner gambling than that of the race-course or the gaming table, were not somewhere deep-rooted in all our lives, we should be little better than worms and creeping, slimy things."

"You talk the most amazing nonsense," laughed Loissel. "What of the suffering that is brought to others by your friends the gamblers? The homes that want? The honest tradesmen—if such there be—who are not paid?"

Massingdale spread his hands out, and his voice was suddenly become serious as he replied.

"What of the chances that are missed by those who dare not gamble? What of the dulness—the one great enemy to man—that is suffered, because we are frightened at a risk? Can you name a great man of the world who did not gamble—with his life, or with success? What of the follies of the silly playing in which there is nothing to win or lose but money? It may lead to the breeding of a race of gamblers, to the coming of a generation who, hoping to advance, are not afraid to move alone, even when there is nothing but a slender path of chance before them, and loss and bitterness for any wanderer from it."

"You yourself gamble?" asked Joan.

"I sometimes risk a stake," he answered, playing with the stem of his wine glass.

"Oh, how disappointing!" cried Joan. "I expected to hear that you were a seasoned player. I imagined from your talk that you, at least, would set a good example."

Massingdale leaned back in his chair, looking straight at the girl beside him, and his voice was certainly not serious, although his eyes were steady on his neighbour's face.

"Your reproof is merited, Miss Onnington," he allowed, "but you must admit that I am young, and that it is difficult to fulfil all one's ideals. However, I improve. Hitherto I have been too much inclined to cease playing when my losses have been heavy. Now I think that I have learned to double my stake when the play is against me. I hope to show myself a more persistent player in the future."

Joan did not reply, and I fancy that her colour deepened, for Massingdale was now no longer ill at ease or in any embarrassment, but our hostess rose and put an end to the talk.

"I will not listen to any more nonsense," said she. "I hope, Monsieur Massingdale, that some day you will become a serious person."

"*Bon Dieu*, madame," cried Massingdale, "why should you wish anything so horrible?"

But Madame de Ménillart refused to be drawn into any further discussion, and, laughing at the "absurd painter," as she called him, withdrew with the three girls.

When the servants had left the room and we sat with our coffee and liqueurs before us, the Vicomte dropped something of the polite conventional manner that he had affected during the evening, showing us the anxious man beneath.

"The situation has developed rather alarmingly," he stated. "I tried to reason with some of my tenants this afternoon, but they would not hear me. I hardly recognised them for the men that I know. Also—which, I think, is far more serious—Dupont, my agent, has been very roughly handled. He is a man of hot temper and does not want in courage, and I am afraid that, perfectly naturally after this, he will only get into worse disagreement with the men."

"What are the workmen's demands?" asked Tom.

"Broadly, that I shall employ the labour and pay the wages of a good harvest during a bad one," De Ménillart replied. "Much of the harvest labour is casual. I have neither discharged nor impoverished any regular hand, but I cannot afford to pay men good wages when there is no work for them to do, and no wine for me to buy their pay. I know that the failure of the crop has caused much suffering. Half the poorer families depend upon their harvest earnings for their comfort in the winter, but I am not responsible for it. I am quite willing to help them as much as I can, but I cannot meet their demands."

"Of course not," Tom agreed. "Stick to your guns, by all means. What will the result be?"

"Ah!" said the Vicomte and sat silent, staring before him in evident trouble.

Loissel, who sat next to our host, replied to the question. He was obviously determined to take a lighter view of things.

"A little unpleasantness," said he, "a great deal of noise, much drunkenness, some horseplay, perhaps a procession with songs at the gates of the park, that is all."

De Ménillart smiled uncertainly, then turned to Massingdale, who had kept silence.

"You, my friend," he enquired, "have lived among them for some months. They speak of you as a friend. What do you think?"

"In what way was Dupont knocked about?" Massingdale asked.

"He was stoned."

"Was he hurt?"

"Yes; a nasty cut on his head."

"Is there much drinking going on?" Massingdale continued.

"Much more than I should like to see," replied the Vicomte gravely.

"Then," said Massingdale, and for some reason we trusted, against our wishes, to his opinion, "I should look out for trouble. There is too much disturbance now in the wine trade in France, some of it the fault of the Government, some due to the big manufacturers. You cannot expect to escape it."

"What do you advise, then?" asked De Ménillart. "Do you think"—he hesitated somewhat at a conclusion—"that you could say something to the leaders? Really, Massingdale, they seem to look on you as the only friend they have."

Massingdale laughed. I was astonished at the change that had come over the man. All his fantastic manner had dropped from him; he no longer gesticulated when he spoke, and somehow he had brought the lot of us to listening to his words in silence and respect.

"No," he answered; "I can talk many forms of nonsense, but not the sort that would suit a half-drunken labourer out on strike. I am sorry, Vicomte, but it can't be done. You will not give way to them, that I know. There is not, however, any reason why things should be very serious. A little rioting; some stacks, possibly a barn or two, burnt; a good deal of wine stolen, and, as Loissel says, that is all."

"Do you think," our host continued, and he was now very serious indeed, "that it would be advisable to send my guests and my wife and son away?"

"I am sure that it would do more harm than good," Massingdale told him. "Your tenants watch all that you do, and they would call such an action an insult to them. Drunkenness is all you have to fear. See that they don't get hold of much to drink. Knock in the barrels in all the cellars that you own here, and very little will happen."

"Yes, my friend, yes," murmured De Ménillart.

"You are right there, but it is not easy to do. They will not like it."

Talk dropped between us for a moment. We were, I fancy, all busy with imagining the chances of the next few days. Then the Vicomte rose.

"You are a poor comforter at best," he laughed, addressing Massingdale. "But we must not forget our duty in the salon, and we must not talk of our fears when we get there."

After we had spent half an hour or more in polite conversation, carried on to the accompaniment of the indifferent playing of the plump niece, who sat at the piano, I must suppose, because she disliked conversation and not on account of any love of music, we wandered out to the terrace in front of the windows. Seeing that the others were engaged in talk, Tom and I made our escape with the intention of securing a quiet smoke in the gardens. The moon was full, and already high in the heavens, the scene about us more beautiful than in the day, and the night still and fine, with no cloud in the sky. Turning down a path which was hidden from the terrace by a shrubbery, we came to a summer-house built upon a little platform on the hillside, and commanding from its balcony a fine prospect of the valley beneath. In the thin light the country seemed to sleep softly and in great enjoyment of its rest; a light mist lay in the hollows, calm and untroubled, like a great lake of water lapping the feet of the hills; and all about us there was no sound to disturb the quiet of the night. On every side, the highlands shut us in, dark and silent, with the deep, rich shadows hanging heavily upon the slopes; and full on our little gallery the moon shone, lighting the place for us with gentler light than that of day.

The summer-house screened us from the path behind, and we leaned upon the hand rail, staring in silence at the sloping hillside underneath our feet. After a few moments Tom stirred uneasily, threw his cigarette away, watching its fall with close attention, and then began speaking quietly, as if the night affected him.

"Tell me, Dick," he asked, "is Massingdale's dress an affectation or is he really an impecunious devotee of the arts, without the money to buy himself a decent suit?"

"He is pretty well on the rocks as far as money is concerned," I answered, in the same low tone.

"I 'll be damned if I can understand it," Tom argued. "The man is more than a mere bug at his job, he is a fine artist. I saw some of his work the other day, and every one was talking about it."

"It 's a slow business," I informed him, "and Massingdale does n't seem in the least concerned about making money. It 's quite impossible to talk business with him. However, although he won't say anything about it, I fancy he came so near to starving about a year ago that he is anxious not to get into the same pass again."

"The devil he did," answered Tom. "I never heard of that. Confound it, here is some one coming!"

There was a noise of footsteps on the path at the other side of the summer-house, so we stepped into the darkness of the shelter to see who came to disturb us. The place was clearly never used, it was thick with dust, the door stood, wedged, half-open, and after the moonlight the inside was as black as the pit; through the windows, of which much of the glass was broken, and through the door, we had a good view of the open space behind the building, a little gravelled circle with a tiny basin, empty of water, in the middle, a place shut in with trees, with an air of neglect about it, as if no gardener came there. Just entering the open space, not four yards from our shelter, and with the moonlight strong on their faces, walked Joan and Massingdale.

"Curse!" whispered Tom in my ear. "Don't move, Dick. They won't stop here, and I 'll be shot if I want to meet them together."

I was of his opinion, and, like a couple of fools, we gave no sign of our presence, being for our pains forced into eavesdropping in a fashion which I do not care to think about. For, after the first few seconds that we had wasted, to discover ourselves became impossible.

Joan stopped while Tom was whispering; she had glanced at the summer-house, and had come to a stand the other side of the basin, her left foot resting on the edge. She was without a shawl or any wrap, the moonlight gleamed on her shoulders and arms, and showed her a woman very beautiful in face and figure, of which fact, I take it, she was conscious at the moment, for she looked at the man beside her as if she were sure of her power.

"Well, Mr. Massingdale," she said, playing with a gold chain that hung about her neck, "I am very curious to know what you have to say to me."

The man stood about two feet away from her, somewhat stiff and strained in his pose, his face pale, his eyes steady upon the girl in front of him.

"You are," he said, giving no direct reply to her question, and speaking with a curious distinctness, somewhat slow, yet scarcely above his breath, "more of a woman than when I left you. You are much nearer to the beauty that will come to you. But you are bored.

Why do you let yourself grow bored in this good world, Joan?"

The girl ceased playing with her chain, moved her foot from the rim of the basin, and met her companion's glance with steadiness.

"I don't think that this conversation amuses me, Mr. Massingdale," she replied, laying a slight emphasis upon the title. "Will you take me back to the house, please?"

Massingdale did not stir, and as he answered there was no change in his voice or his expression.

"I cannot prevent you from returning," said he, "I can only ask that you will not. You have nothing to fear from me—except the inevitable contamination of my presence. If it pleases you, I will not make use of your name. Why have you tried to become like many of the girls of your own age and station, when in doing so you find so little profit?"

"Mr. Massingdale," cried Joan, her colour high, her head thrown back, "you forget that you have ceased to be anything but a stranger to me. I wish to return to the house."

"Yet you will wait until I have finished what I have to say," Massingdale answered calmly, and Joan did not move. "You say that I am become a stranger to you. You make a mistake. When, on a certain spring day, you made me certain promises—promises that you had a perfect right to break—you killed the strangeness between us. It is dead, long dead; not you, not convention, not distance, not absence, neither suffering nor wrong can give it life again. Therefore, you will hear me."

"Please finish what you have to say as quickly as you can, I am getting cold," Joan asked, and although her voice was calm and polite, she no longer looked at the man to whom she spoke.

He, for his part, stood silent a moment, his eyes alone showing the strength of his passion, then following an odd gesture of his arms, he spoke again, his words hurried, his voice low and sometimes trembling.

"I do not seek to reopen the past," he pleaded; "I do not ask to know what you still think of me; but I must speak. You and I have stepped beyond the borders of convention. For a little time, once, we were more than polite, civilised people together, we were man and woman making each other's real acquaintance in the hope that our journey together might last till death. I know what you would say: it is not true. It is not done with, although it may be past and finished, that time when we learned to know each other. You cannot kill the past: that which you have done must live, to affect your life and mine until the end. Love may be gone for you—I do not want to talk of that—but you must not forget that it once lived. Although I may be the blackguard that you have named me, I was once your lover; you once talked to me of the real things that move us; you once showed me the woman that lives in you. Do you think that I forget that? Do you think that, no matter what the change in me, you should bring between us the barrier of strangeness, should deny me the few words that you would give to an old friend?"

He stopped; waited for some answer; and then, since she said nothing, continued speaking.

"I met you to-night," he went on, "not knowing, until I saw you, that you were in France. I watched you. You knew that I should do so; you were sure of it. You played for me a silly comedy; the mood took you, and you had your way. You showed me the beauty of your eyes—I knew before that they were beautiful; you showed me that you had the power to appeal to a man's senses, to make him mad and longing—I have never doubted that you could do that, if you wished it; you showed me that you could play the part of the coquette—there you were strange to me, but there is no woman on God's earth who cannot play the part with a success according to her beauty. Why you did this I do not know. Were you afraid that I had forgotten that you are beautiful? I should have remembered that when I first saw you again."

He paused a second time; but still Joan had no words for him. She held her hands clenched at her sides, and there was something of fear in her eyes.

"You played a silly comedy," he repeated, seeing that she did not answer. "I am no such fool that I cannot see beneath your playing. You are tired, bored, you have lost all real interest in the things about you. I want to know why. I am an artist, and I do not like to see beautiful things spoiled. I am not less steadfast than other men, and I do not forget. I see you wasted, dimmed, your true self hid, and I must know what it is that hurts you. I will know it." The man now moved for the first time since he had begun speaking; he stepped close to the girl, his eyes shone as in fever, and his voice was broken. "Oh, I know your answer to me," he told her; "I know that I behave as no ordinary gentleman should. I am no ordinary gentleman. You cannot check me by calling my manner not polite, not that of your class, not that of mine. You sent me away, once, and doubtless you thought that I should not trouble you again. I did not mean to do so; but I met you, and you were pleased to play with me, and by your playing you made me talk. What is wrong with you? Why do you pretend to be a fool? Can you swear to me, remembering those weeks we were together, that you are content, that you have forgotten all the hopes you once professed, that you are happy in forgetting them?"

Massingdale ceased speaking, and the sweat stood on the man's forehead, and his breathing was laboured. Joan moved a pace away from him, drawing herself to her full height, her colour gone, but her voice clear and cold.

"I think," said she, "that to an ordinary understanding you might seem to reopen the past. Perhaps I do not properly gather your meaning, but it appears that you invite me to reconsider a decision that I arrived at when I last saw you. I have no need to reconsider it. It seems that you are in no mood to take a hint. You say that you have imagined many peculiar things about my manner to you this evening. I will speak very plainly so that you can make no further mistake." Here, with careful deliberation, she took stock of him as he stood in front of her; and when she continued she laughed, not in amusement. "Before," she told him, "I asked you to leave me, because I preferred not to share your somewhat divided attention; now, I ask you to avoid annoying me with either your ideas or your wishes about myself, because, although sincerely fond of the art which you profess, I do not consider that I must therefore submit to the impertinence of an out-at-elbows painter, who happens to proclaim an interest in me."

I imagine that she had intended to hurt Massingdale, in which case her success was great, for he collapsed at her words as a man who has no more fight left in him. His hands, which had been half held out to her, dropped to his sides; the passion and the fire went out of his eyes; and for a moment he bent his head so that she could not clearly see his face. So for a moment they stood, not moving, in the moonlight, and there was no sound to bring disturbance to their thoughts.

Then Massingdale drew himself up, motioning to Joan to precede him down the path.

"Explanations, I think," said he, his voice quiet and without expression, "are not needed. I must remember, Miss Onnington, my position. Will you come back to the house? I hope you are not cold. I am really very thoughtless."

She passed him without an answer, and he followed her up the path and beyond our sight.

When the sound of their footsteps had ceased, Tom and I came out of the summer-house, and, without any word spoken, turned down a path to the right, so that we might appear upon the terrace from another direction. As we made the circle of the upper part of the gardens, I expressed something of my feelings.

"I feel a most infernal cad," said I, staring at the path in front of me.

Tom grunted, and we were nearing the terrace before he spoke.

"I wish to God I could break somebody's head, or my own," he announced. "I 'm ashamed to face either of them after this."

Which was very much my own view of the case.

When we got back to the drawing-room we found the nieces had disappeared; Joan was talking to Loissel, and Massingdale laughing with his host and hostess.

Tom and I burst into apologies, to cover our embarrassment rather than to oblige politeness, alleging that the fineness of the night had tempted us to stroll.

"Don't tell them, madame," implored Massingdale, to all appearances a creature divorced from care again, "that they were missed. They only seek to be flattered."

"We missed them no less than we did yourself, *mon ami*," retorted the Vicomte, smiling.

"Then," replied Massingdale, "their absence was very deeply felt."

But Loissel had interrupted us with a suggestion of departure, and we prepared to go. De Ménillart said that he would walk to the gates with us, and Joan, who had been talking eagerly with Loissel, announced a similar intention; Tom, therefore, suggested that he had better come as well; and we all left the house together. We strolled to the entrance to the park in pairs, Massingdale walking with our host, and I with Tom; arrived there, we stood a few moments talking, enjoying the beauty of the hour.

"One of you had better come up in the morning," suggested the Vicomte, as he shook hands, "to exchange opinions on the situation. I expect Dupont about midday, and he will probably have something to say."

"Sir," cried Massingdale, in his most fantastic manner, "you shall not be deserted. A body of self-sacrificing artists, humble men of lofty ambitions, shall gather round you, to sell their lives, if need be, most dearly in your cause. Sleep comfortably on that thought, Vicomte. Hallo! what 's that?"

He pointed down the road, and there, about thirty yards away, a man's figure, just emerged from a belt of shadow, lurched and swayed. As it rolled uncertainly towards us, I recognised Blinkson, even less in command of himself than was his habit in the evening. He halted a few paces in front of us, solemnly removed his hat, bowed, and nearly collapsed upon his face in the endeavour.

"*Madame et messieurs*," said he, enunciating his words with care, "*je vous souhaite le bonsoir*." Then seeming to recognise Massingdale, he hailed him by name, and broke into English. "I 'm keeping watch," he announced. "Guarding 'gainst secret attacks of canaille. Don't see the Vicomte. 'Evening, m'sieur le Vicomte, if you 're here. I 'm guarding house and home, m'sieur le Vicomte. No trouble, 'assure you."

De Ménillart stared in astonishment; Joan showed disgust; we were all, I think, annoyed; but Massingdale did not let the scene lengthen. He had the old drunkard by the arm, almost before the man had finished speaking; and his laughing voice, indulgent and cheerful, followed the other's without a pause.

"Good man," said he. "Excellent thing to do. Keeping an eye open, eh? But, Blinkson, we can't do any more good here. I think we might have a look at the La Verzée road, however. Care to come along?"

"I won't be hurried," declared Blinkson, preparing to resist. "No hurry."

"None at all," agreed Massingdale, letting go his arm. "Crawl, if you like. Only I think we ought to be moving soon."

So, after some murmured words which did not come to us, the pair staggered off together, Massingdale guiding the drunk man's erratic steps.

"Is that," asked Joan, as Loissel and I hurried our good-nights, "one of Mr. Massingdale's friends?"

"It is," said I.

But she did not push the topic, and we left her a very picture of disdain.

CHAPTER XV

OF DEATH AND OF SUSPENSE

THE following morning we hung about the house or the hamlet, doing nothing. Blinkson, never at his best in the early hours, was silent, and looked even more sickly than his wont. After breakfast he found Massingdale and myself together in the garden, and he made us an apology for his exhibition of the previous evening. The sodden old fellow was very penitent, and, I believe, more distressed than he cared to show; it is a circumstance which I take no pleasure in recalling, that I must have appeared to him both surly and inclined to parade the superiority of virtue.

"I am not," said he, coming up to us where we smoked our pipes upon a bench in the sunshine, "in the habit of exhibiting my accomplishments before ladies. When I do so, as I am afraid I did last night, it forces me to contrast myself with other people. I don't like doing that. Was I very bad?"

"You were," said I, and was sorry on the instant that I had said so. For Blinkson winced as if he had been struck, and his shaking hands fumbled with his watch-chain, and his glass dropped from his eye. He turned half away from us, and his whole attitude was that of a man aware of an irremediable shame.

"I wonder," he inquired presently, and in his voice, from which much of the huskiness and all of his usual wheezy laughter had gone, there seemed to sound the echo of former days, of the man of parts and position whom drink had not debased. "I wonder how you men manage to put up with me. If the tables were turned I don't think I could stand it."

Massingdale took his pipe from his mouth, and tapped out the ashes on his boot, watching the operation with care.

"If," he answered quietly, "either I, or Dick here, or any of the others had never done anything foolish or wrong before a woman, we might be in a position to call you names; even so I hope we should n't. As things are, let 's drop the subject. I, personally, manage to support your presence without any wound to my finer senses; what is more, I should be damned sorry to lose your friendship."

Blinkson turned his back upon us hurriedly, and walked away down the path, his loose, shambling figure seeming shrunken and old. We joined him shortly afterwards and began talking of the strike; during which discussion I can only hope that I showed a more kindly generosity.

All that morning and during much of the afternoon we hung about the place talking of nothing but the temper of the peasants, and the chances of there being a disturbance. The thing filled our attention; we thought of nothing outside of our quiet valleys; yet we had no further knowledge of what the malcontents planned, and for some reason or other we made no attempt to remedy our ignorance. Hendick and Vanne took the gravest view of the affair; their excursion to Mailly had impressed them with its seriousness, and the former was loud in his denunciation of an agitation which he styled unjustifiable. About midday Loissel went up to the château for news and returned without any. Dupont, it seemed, had not arrived, but had sent a messenger stating that he was delayed and hinting at more alarming news to follow. We sat long over our meal discussing the nature of these alarms, and were in consequence duly brought to book by Jeanne.

"You are all the same," announced that worthy woman, breaking in on us as we smoked around the table. "There is no difference in you men. *Bon Dieu*, they say that women talk! You not only neglect your own work—about which I do not care—but you prevent me from doing mine—another business altogether."

And she drove us out of doors without ceremony.

We found, during the afternoon, that the men of the hamlet were all away, although their womenfolk assured us that they were not working in the fields. Even to our small settlement, so far as we could gather, the unrest had spread.

The summer of that year was the warmest and the driest in my recollection, and it seemed that there was no chance of the fine weather breaking, so that the September evenings were as hot as those of an ordinary July. We sat late that afternoon about the door, as was our custom, and the dusk fell about us soft and quiet, pointing a fine contrast to our most warlike talk. I made the comparison aloud to the others, and we were speaking of it when Dupont came riding from the château.

He was a big, fleshy man, with a long moustache, and a loud voice; in talk he was somewhat domineering, and his manner was rough; yet he was spoken of as an excellent man of business, and not unjust, though stern. Beneath his hat he wore a bandage round his head, dressing the wound he had received the day before.

He bade us good-evening, falling at once into talk about the strike. It was already so dark that I could scarcely see his face, but I made it out fatigued and anxious, yet showing no sign of fear.

"Things go badly, my friends," said he, leaning from his horse. "There is bad trouble about. Monsieur le Vicomte wants as many of you as care to go at the château. These fools may attack it. Yes, I speak the truth. At Mailly, at Azé, in all the villages through which I passed, they were drunk as owls. The talk was bad, moreover, bad, my friends. I give you my word for it, I have had a time. Stones thrown at me; a gun fired off, to frighten my old horse, I suppose. It would take more than that to frighten him. Well, I must go on. Don't forget to go up to the château. I go to give word to the military—they may be wanted. *Au revoir, messieurs.*"

He raised his hand to his hat, set his horse moving, and turned down in the direction of the hill track to Cluny. Not twenty seconds after he left us, when he was still no more than a few feet away, the report of a gun set us all jumping; and the big man, without a word or cry, fell from his horse. The animal, true to his master's boast, did not bolt, but after rearing for a moment, stood watching, it seemed to me, the fallen figure.

We all ran to where Dupont lay, only concerned with the wounded man and forgetting his assailant. We loosened his collar, lifted him with what tenderness we could, and carried him to the house. Our care, however, was not needed; he was dead before we got him into shelter; indeed, I cannot swear that he still lived when we ran up to him.

Of the ensuing confusion I carry no detailed record in my mind. This sudden and undreamed appearance of so great a thing as death found us unprepared, too much excited when we faced it, without any knowledge of what we should do. Before, we had thought of the whole business as little more than an experience which promised much interest, possibly some annoyance, but which did not touch on tragedy; now, with a dead man, who had been strong and well and active only a few minutes back, lying still amongst us, no light view was possible, we were thrown, with sudden violence, from all the paths we knew, and set to wander in an unknown country more bleak and stern than we had seen before. If we hesitated about the way that we should go, if we wasted time, it was not, I think, through cowardice, although a great distaste for the whole business had come to us, it was because, being strangers to any work of this kind, we struggled with a confusion of passions the call of which we feared to act upon. The quiet night was now no longer quiet for us. Death and violence filled our minds with unaccustomed thoughts. Yet I hold it no shame to us that we came slowly to the new position, that, being ordinary men reared in secure protection from the sights and sounds of war, we did not at first realise that the old manner of our life was, for the moment, superseded, giving place to simpler, quicker action.

We had placed poor Dupont's body on the floor of the hall; some one, I think it was Vanne, had set a rolled-up coat beneath the head; Jeanne had appeared with candles, by whose dim light the scene was lit. Massingdale was on his knees beside the dead man, listening for some faint stirring of the heart; and upon the shirt, a garment of striking pattern as I remember it, for Dupont had loved show in his dress, there grew a larger stain. We waited for Massingdale to finish his examination; it seemed, somehow, the thing that should be done, but I do not think we doubted the result of it. After his passage, Death leaves a stamp upon the human face which may not easily be overlooked.

In a very short time Massingdale looked up at us, and his expression, I take it, was much the reflection of our own: something dazed, carrying the mark of awe, yet with some wilder feeling slowly being born.

"I don't think there is any doubt," said he, rising to his feet. "Dupont is dead. We can't do anything. He was shot through the heart, I believe. Will some one make certain?"

I took Massingdale's place beside the body, and after I had searched for any sign of life, Blinkson followed me in the same business. It was quite apparent that we looked for something we should never find, but at the moment a horror held us lest the man should still be living, should still be on the nearer side, and should find us idle, giving him no helping hand.

When we had made certain that a life had ended here beside us, we spoke of the murder quietly, in the hushed tones that seemed the dead man's due. That the murderer had got away seemed certain; that we should do something to discover him was the thing of which we talked. While we discussed the means of finding the man and bringing him to his punishment, Jeanne left us, to return in a short while, with the request that we should help her.

"Messieurs," said she, her rough voice quieter than its wont, her simple peasant's face calm and serious, "it is not well that Monsieur Dupont should lie here on the floor. Will you carry him to a bed? It is ready.

I will see that he lies as a man should when he is dead."

We did as she asked, glad that the body should be away from our sight; and I think that through this intimate association with dead humanity, for on account of the narrowness of the stairs and the great bulk of the thing we carried our task was not easy, we came to a clearer seeing in the matters that were yet to do. We were forced, in my case with strong physical repulsion, into handling, sometimes roughly, that which had hitherto been set apart from our experiences; we had the horror of this murder somewhat differently exposed; and in losing the feeling of strangeness that had before enveloped us, we awoke more active passions, of anger and of vengeance.

When we were again in the hall, leaving Jeanne to perform the offices in which she took a solemn satisfaction, we talked with a greater freedom, although, for some time at least, to no practical effect.

"How far is this business going?" asked Hendick, leaning against a table, and making an obvious effort to subdue his usual tone of argument; "that is what we have to decide before we do anything more. The man who killed Dupont was not drunk; on the other hand, he may have acted from personal spite—we must not forget that."

"What caused him to do it does not much matter," I argued; "the effect on the other men will be the same. Most of them are probably drunk by now; when this gets known they will know themselves in for serious trouble, and will probably get more violent than before. We ought to go up to the château."

"Dupont was shot with a rifle," said Loissel. "One could hear that. The thing must have been carefully planned."

Vanne, in his shirt-sleeves, for he had not put on his coat again, interposed his word; his usual high colour was gone, and he wheezed and panted in his emotion.

"We must do something," he cried. "We cannot let him lie up there, while we stand here and talk. We should communicate with the military. We must go and help the Vicomte."

"The military!" asked Blinkson. "What can they do? Besides, it would take too long. There will be a drunken crowd of fools in front of the château before the authorities know of this. Go up to the house, by all means; they have a car there; they can move quicker than we can."

"There are women at the château," interrupted Marellac in his soft voice, "and these men will be drunk—mad with drink."

"Come on," said I, and made towards the open door.

But Massingdale, who had taken no part in the discussion, who had, instead, paced the hall in silence, stood in my way. The man was transformed; he seemed on fire with some excitement; the dreams were chased from his eyes by a blazing anger. Yet, when he spoke, his voice was calm and quiet, and after the first few words he dealt with practical things.

"Stop," said he. "Wait. We are not playing now. We have something to do. We must kill the man who killed Dupont. My God," he went on, "we will show them that we can fight; we will show them that they cannot shoot men in the dark, and expect the law only to deal with them. I am glad this has come. Yes, glad. We will do things to-night. We are done, for the time, with quietness, with talk. We begin to act." He paused, but only for the fraction of a second, and then spoke again more quickly, as if there were no question but that we should agree with him. "Whether they know of Dupont's death or not," he argued, "they will visit the château to-night. We 'll meet them. You, Dick, and Loissel, go up to the house; explain things to De Ménillart, and have the car got ready. Telephone through to Cluny. Hendick, you must stop here with Marellac. They might come by one of the paths over the hills up this way. Send up to the château if you hear them coming. Bring Jeanne up, and leave the place, if they are very wild. Auguste, you must take the by-road to Bassy. It 's clear to-night, if you go just beyond the little pinewood you can see a mile ahead to the top of the hill. Directly you see anything run to the château. Blinkson, there is a place about a quarter of a mile down the road to La Verzée, just clear of the park wall, where you can get a good sight ahead. I 'll take the bridle road that leads through the Forêt de Goulène to Blanot. If Ritaud is leading them, they may come by that. We must find how they are coming, so that we can get the women away in the car without meeting them. We 've a shotgun and two revolvers. Hendick ought to have the gun; I don't want anything. We had better be moving."

We did not dispute his arrangement; it was as good as any that we should have settled after much useless talk. Instead, Hendick went to look for the weapons, and Marellac disturbed Jeanne in her last services to the dead man, to tell her what we did. As we prepared to go, Blinkson broke into a laugh, and although it sounded oddly in that house which had suddenly become the shelter of so grim a burden, I think that it marked the change in our attitude now that action was to hand.

"This is an extraordinary business," said he. "I feel a better man for it."

He had certainly arrived at a more dignified appearance than was common with him, and I was surprised at the purpose in his face; yet I think that I realised something of his meaning, and that, to some extent, I felt as he did.

Then Jeanne appeared with food, thick sandwiches of bread and meat, and made Blinkson and Vanne and Massingdale take them, urging that no man was ever the better for going hungry to his work. And Loissel, his kindly old face serious and sad, took up the last word, repeating it as we left the house.

"Our work!" said he; "I ask myself what that may be."

"There is an honest man now dead," cried Massingdale, his voice suddenly tremulous with passion. "Killed, shot without a chance of fight, because he did his master's business faithfully. If my work may be to end the life of the man who killed him, I ask nothing better."

And it did not occur to me that here was a curious sentiment in a man who had been all his life very peaceful; or that, in a country highly civilised and duly ruled by law, we started upon work that, a few days before, had seemed impossible, going to it with little wonder and small attention to its unusual side. A dead man lay behind us, and in the manner of his dying he had strangely altered all our thoughts.

Our ways did not lie long together, for we had scarcely begun the ascent of the road to the château, and were not more than a few hundred yards from our house, when Blinkson and Vanne took a turning to the right; Massingdale kept with us for another hundred yards, and then, with a wave of his hand, he followed a path upon the other side of the way, disappearing quickly into dense shadow cast by the high banks. Loissel and

I kept on our way in silence until we got to the lodge gates; there we were challenged by a groom who stood upon the other side with the barrier locked between us, who carried a gun, who had with him a large dog of uncertain breed.

The man admitted us without delay, informed us that we should find his master at the house, and was, very clearly, anxious for any news. We did not, however, stop to satisfy his curiosity, but, with the simple statement that things went badly, hurried on to the lighted building at the end of the avenue. There we encountered another servant, also armed, doing sentry-go in front of the house, and we saw the Vicomte's car standing in front of the main door. On this occasion we did not have to wait for the appearance of the master of the house, but were shown immediately to the drawing-room, where we found De Ménillart, and with him Tom and Joan.

The Vicomte was pacing the room as we entered, while his guests sat near the open windows; all three of them were plainly disturbed, and the host made no attempt of any kind to hide his anxiety.

"Ah," he cried, turning as we entered, "you have come, my friends. I thank you. And the others? They come presently, perhaps? You have heard Dupont's news? You have seen him? He thinks that these men will attack the house to-night. I"—here he seemed to pause—"I am anxious that my wife and child, my guests also, should escape any danger. The car leaves in a few minutes. Dupont should by now be near Cluny. He went to warn the military; and they should send us help at once."

Loissel's voice was very quiet, as he interrupted the other's talk.

"No, Monsieur le Vicomte," said he; "Dupont did not go to warn the military."

"Eh?" questioned De Ménillart sharply. "Why not?"

"Because he was shot as he left our house," stated Loissel, his tone hardening to anger. "He died as he fell from his horse."

The Vicomte recoiled a step like a man who takes a heavy blow; he stared at us in horror. Joan gave a low cry, and her colour fled, leaving her white, with frightened eyes upon us. Tom rose from his chair, crossing to where his sister sat, and putting his hand on her shoulder; he showed little sign of being affected by the news, but I noticed that his mouth had suddenly hardened.

"Dead!" murmured De Ménillart, as if he did not fully realise our meaning. "Dupont dead!" And then, a moment later: "But this is awful. This is war."

"Where are the others?" Joan asked, and her eyes were on mine in deep anxiety as she put the question.

"They are safe," I answered, and heard her sigh. "No attempt was made to harm any one but Dupont. They are watching all the roads to the château."

But De Ménillart seemed to wish for no other news; he straightened himself and it was clear that he had come to some decision.

"We must not waste time," he cried; "the car must start at once. It is built to hold two, with an extra seat behind. It cannot possibly hold more than four. Miss Onnington has assured me that she will not go on the first journey, therefore my wife and child, with my two nieces and a man to drive them, must leave at once. If necessary, I will have a carriage or horse got ready at once for Miss Onnington and for Monsieur le Lieutenant."

"What you propose is quite impossible, Monsieur le Vicomte," old Loissel announced with slow deliberation. De Ménillart turned on him like a man at bay.

"Impossible to send my wife and child into safety!" he demanded. "In God's name, why?"

The old painter ran his hand through his beard, as if the occasion called for no excitement; standing squarely in front of the Vicomte, he looked down, smiling, on the smaller man.

"There is no reason why you should not seek the safety of your wife and child, my friend," he answered, in his slow manner. "There is, however, good reason why you should not send them off, unprotected, when you do not know by what road these gentlemen are coming to visit you. The car must not meet these creatures on their way."

Thereupon, we explained the situation as we understood it, and pointed out that as all the roads were watched we ought to have good warning of the approach of the rioters, which would enable us to send the women off in the car along some way where they would not be stopped.

"You might ring them up at Cluny," I suggested to the Vicomte; "you are on the telephone here, are n't you?"

Tom laughed; he had taken an eager part in the discussion.

"We have tried already," he interposed. "They 've dished us there, Dick. Cut the wires or something. We can't get an answer."

"The devil!" said I. The business seemed to grow more serious as we saw more of it; I heartily wished that the women were safely away.

"There is nothing to do but wait," announced De Ménillart, starting to walk the room again. "The car is ready; when we hear news it can go. My wife is with the boy; I won't worry her yet. I blame myself, Miss Onnington, for having allowed you to come here. I feared trouble, and should have put you off."

"Then you are very foolish," answered Joan, making a show of taking the matter lightly. "Tom and Mr. Crutchley will look after me. Don't worry about bringing me here."

"Glad you let us come, sir," said Tom cheerfully. "Besides, we shan't come to any harm. You have four men watching the park walls; they 've got guns. It is my opinion that any show of fight will send these fellows off with their tails between their legs. If you don't mind my interfering, I should sugggest that you send one of the house servants on a horse to Cluny. Just as well to let the authorities hear from you."

"Certainly," agreed De Ménillart; "I 'll see to it." And he rang the bell, giving the necessary order to the old man-servant who appeared.

Tom was clearly determined that we should fall into no gloomy mood, for he kept the conversation going without pause, laughing at the whole business, telling Joan that she would be able to talk of it afterwards until all her friends were sickened of the subject, and praising the Vicomte for the originality of his entertaining. Although our talk lacked wit, and was often kept alive with difficulty, it was better than silence, and helped to pass the time. We did not wander from the chances of the night, such an excursion would have been impossible under the circumstances, but we assured each other that the affair would turn out as the usual strike demonstration, and that we should get to bed quietly rather later than usual; we did not mention the dead man lying in the hamlet. In spite of our careful conversation there would occur pauses in which we all seemed to listen; and had the smallest noise come to us from outside, I think that any one of us would have heard it, even though he were speaking at the time.

The night was fine, with a light wind blowing from the north-west, the moonlight brilliant on the gardens, and the countryside as still as on all the other nights that I had lived in it.

Tom strolled to the windows, and looked out.

"I rather think," said he, "that we 've struck the best billet. I should n't fancy hanging about a dark wood alone. Beastly creepy performance. Massingdale is in the woods, is n't he, Dick?"

"Yes," I answered. "He chose the job. I 'm glad it did n't fall to me."

Joan got up and snuffed a smoking candle; she seemed restless, but her colour was high again, and she showed no sign of fright. It struck me that she tried to avoid asking a question, yet could not keep herself from it.

"But there is no danger?" she inquired. "Mr. Massingdale and his friends don't run any risk?"

"I don't know," replied Tom shortly. "Anyhow, it 's a lonely game. Plenty of time to fancy things. Hallo!"

We were still and listening at his words, straining to catch the smallest sound. Faintly, far away, yet clear beyond mistake, came the sound of many voices, a confused noise, tiny and distant, as of shouting and singing. It seemed to come from straight ahead, from the direction of Bassy, and it was an uncomfortable thing to hear on the still summer night.

Tom stood very straight, his head slightly inclined towards the open air, and as his back was turned to us we could not see his face. The room, I remember, was abominably silent, except for that far-off shouting, which to my imagination appeared to grow louder with an impossible rapidity; there seemed no living thing about us. At the end of a few seconds Tom turned round and left his place by the window; he smiled at us, apparently well content, and I will swear that he enjoyed himself.

"Well," said he, "things are beginning to move. We 'll have a go at showing these musicians something. Vicomte, may I take command now, as you suggested?"

De Ménillart nodded; his whole attention seemed taken up with listening to the noise outside.

"Then," continued Tom, standing in the middle of the room, and speaking with a certain emphasis, "you won't mind if I remind you that we are not playing. What I tell you to do must be done."

He waited at that, but no one spoke.

"Good," he went on. "That's understood. Vicomte, will you go and bring your wife, your son, and your nieces into the hall? See that they are quite ready to start in the motor."

Our host got up without a word, and left the room; it had been arranged between Tom and him that when the necessity came the guest, having some acquaintance with commanding, should take control of the situation.

"Monsieur Loissel," ordered Tom, when De Ménillart was gone, "please go to the gun room—you 'll find the butler in the hall to take you there—and see that all the firearms that may be of any use are brought in here. By the way, did you people miss your dinner?"

Loissel told him "yes."

"Then," suggested Tom, "you had better tell one of the servants to bring some food in here at once. Make them bring enough. We 've plenty of time to eat before the fun begins, and our dinner was a bit short, so that we 'll join you."

I had not seen Tom in this capacity before, and the easy way the manner sat on him made me thankful that he was with us. He had the habit of command that assumes a ready obedience, and we dropped at once into carrying out his orders, where we had probably stopped to think about their wisdom had they come from one of ourselves.

"We 'll shut these windows," he told me, as Loissel departed on his errand. "No need to have the whole place open. Leave the middle one, and fasten the shutters outside. Keep inside, Joan, don't show yourself. Our friends are getting nearer, and there may be other lots about besides this one."

As we were fastening the shutters of the second window, Tom spoke to me in a whisper.

"We appear to be in a deuce of a hole, old man," said he. "These blighters don't seem to stick at murder. Keep your eye on Joan when I 'm doing something else; she is so confoundedly excitable."

I was assuring him that I would do so, when there came a shout from the hillside in front of us, somewhere, I judged, about the limit of the park. Clearly on the quiet air there came the call to halt from one of our own men, and then another voice calling, whose words I did not catch.

"What 's this?" I heard Tom murmur. "They 're not near yet."

And then Joan appeared from the room behind, and stood between us. Tom turned on her angrily.

"Go back!" he cried. "I told you to keep out of sight."

"Let me stop, Tom," she urged; and in the clear moonlight, which streamed upon this side of the house, I could see her large eyes scared and bright, yet she did not tremble and her voice was steady.

"This is not the game, Joan," replied Tom sternly. "Back you go. See that that food is ready."

The girl turned without further protest, disappearing into the lighted room; and we remained straining our ears for other sounds, just beside the open window.

The noise of shouting was now much nearer; a tune roughly bellowed, and, often breaking off short in a roar, was plainly distinguishable; and away to our left a like noise, only fainter, was to be heard. I nodded towards it, and Tom replied in the same fashion; but our attention was chiefly fixed upon the gardens ahead, from which there came no more disturbance. Presently, however, the quiet of our immediate surroundings was broken, and ahead of us, where the hill dropped steeply at the farther side of a sloping lawn, we made out that some one was running towards the house, and, by the sound, that he seemed in a prodigious hurry. His appearance from the belt of trees that bounded the lawn was preceded by a puffing and panting that I knew well; it brought me the vision of a humorous, bearded face stuck without any visible neck on to a corpulent body, and of little eyes that twinkled even in the thick of physical distress.

"It 's Vanne," I told Tom; "and by the time he gets here he 'll be half dead."

Almost as I spoke he emerged from the trees, pounding desperately across the lawn, his breathing enough to frighten any one. We hailed him, and he dropped into a walk, waving a hand feebly in sign that he had heard. A few seconds afterwards he stood beside us on the terrace, and it was plain that he had taken Massingdale's instructions almost literally, and had run most of the way from his post. The sweat streamed from him like water; his face was purple, the veins and arteries standing out like cords about his head and neck; and he laboured at his breathing, with bulging half-closed eyes, so that I imagined him at the point of death. He was past speech, and could do no more than stand before us, fighting with his exhaustion.

Tom said nothing, but, slipping his arm beneath the man's shoulders, half carried him into the house; there he lowered him into an arm-chair, and called on Joan to bring a drink. She did not need the call, and had handed Vanne a glass almost as he subsided in the chair; from which thing I deduce that she had not obeyed orders, but had watched us from the window, and so had guessed what would be needed. Vanne took the glass although he did not drink, and he summoned a smile to thank the girl who helped him. Therefore, seeing that he would recover, which at his first appearance I had doubted, I left him, and made for the table where the food was set. Loissel and De Ménillart had come back, and the old man was eating while our host stood beside him silent; through the door, which was open, I saw the nieces, seated close together with frightened faces, and the Vicomtesse, rocking her baby to sleep. Then Vanne began gasping out his news, and I gave my attention to him again.

"You hear them," he spluttered between attacks of coughing. "Sixty or seventy. All drunk. They bring with them a cart. Barrels in it. Oil I think."

"Good enough for us," interrupted Tom, standing in front of him. "You take a rest and get your breath again. You 're clearly the sort of man we want, only you must n't kill yourself. You must have sprinted!"

Vanne, somewhat recovered, laughed and coughed, pulled himself out of his chair, and went over to the table, where he was given some food and wine by Joan, who made him sit down again.

"Well-plucked little man, that," whispered Tom, turning to me. "Does n't bring any good news, though. If they are bringing oil they mean business. We must get the women off, and chance it." He raised his voice and addressed the Vicomte. "I think you had better get your wife and the others into the car; we shan't do any good by waiting. Steady a bit: here 's another of the outposts!"

For Blinkson had come from the hall while Tom spoke, and, scarcely less than Vanne, he showed the signs of his hurry. He looked about him quietly, getting his breath, and he held himself straight with the looseness of his ordinary carriage disappeared; his eyes had lost their dulness, and the sodden appearance of the man was changed.

"What news?" asked Tom.

"Bad," panted Blinkson. "Nearly a hundred of them, I should think. Mad drunk. Enough firing with them to burn the whole place in twenty minutes. They are coming across country; should be here in less than half an hour."

"Thanks," answered Tom. "Help yourself to something. You 'll want it before this is finished."

He stood in thought a moment, his face set and hard. I looked at Joan to see how she took this news, and I saw her busying herself with helping food, seeming very self-possessed, although her pallor showed her not blind to the danger. The noise outside was now much greater, and sounded even in the midst of our talk. I am not ashamed to say that I felt my heart setting my pulses a quicker stroke.

Then Tom issued his orders, speaking very distinctly without raising his voice.

"Get the car filled," he commanded. "It must make the best of a bad job, and go by the bridle road to Cluny. Is the going very bad?"

"Yes," said I. "You 'll want a horse to help it up the first bit out of the hamlet."

"Very well," he answered. "Please see to that too, Vicomte. The horse had better start immediately; the car should follow in five minutes."

De Ménillart went out of the room, shutting the door after him; and I make no doubt that he said good-bye to his wife and child as a man in the pass that he was might. Presently he returned, before the given time, I think, and the noise of the departing car came to us clearly through the open door. The strain of the situation was beginning to tell, and our conversation had, for the most part, died, or lived only in fitful bursts. The ominous noise outside, growing louder each moment, the different voices distinguishing themselves from the general sound, held all our attention; and the picture of hoarse, ill-clad, sweating, drink-maddened crowds was, I fancy, in all our minds. I walked to the window, and was called back by Tom; I tried to laugh with Joan, and found that I, not less than she, could not manage it; and finally I sat down beside her, wondering why Tom did not give us something else to do, why he stood in the middle of the room listening, apparently content in idleness. Then, not five minutes after the car had started, a shot sounded loud in the night, the second that had startled us that evening; and after it, following close upon the report, a scream of agony, the cry, it seemed, of a human creature in mortal pain.

That settled us. The sound had come from the other side of the house; we fled in a body from the room, Joan in our midst, running out of the main door of the house, and listening for some other noise. Tom alone remained behind, and I heard him roaring at us to come back.

We waited in strained silence, the servants mingling with us, and we heard no other sounds than those to which we had listened for some time, and the distant beating of the car. So, something reassured, we returned to the drawing-room, there to face Tom's wrath. He stood where we had left him, and he showed no other emotion than a flaming anger.

"My God!" he cried, as we trooped back, "it seems I deal with a crowd of idiots. Must you go rushing about like children, because a hare screams when it is wounded? Dick—Joan—I hoped you had more sense. Bring in those servants out there. I 'll show the lot of you I mean to be obeyed."

CHAPTER XVI

ACTION

WHEN the servants had come, sheepishly enough, four women and three men, into the room, Tom addressed us all, speaking deliberately and seeming to choose his words.

"You make me waste time," he began. "We 'll have no more of this rushing about. Monsieur le Vicomte has asked me to command here; I intend to do so. Our chances of coming out of this business without loss rest very largely with you. We are all in considerable danger; you can increase that danger or diminish it as you please. If you do not obey me—the matter rests with you, I have no authority over you—I do not waste my breath in issuing orders. Which is it to be: prompt obedience in everything, or your own management?"

He waited, eyeing the lot of us steadily.

"We obey you absolutely, Monsieur le Lieutenant," answered the Vicomte formally; and we made a murmur of assent.

"Very well," assented Tom. "Remember what you say. You," he went on, turning to the servants, "know what to do. You have already been instructed. The women had better sit in the dining-room, and not the hall. Keep your wits about you; to a single whistle you give no attention, even if it is repeated; at two in close succession you come as quickly as you can into the hall. You can go; and unless you hear the two whistles you do not move from your posts."

The seven men and women left the room; from their faces, and the women were badly scared, I think that they felt, not less than we did, that somehow they had committed a shameful action in rushing to the door. Tom made an excellent commander.

When they were gone, he walked to the sofa, where the arms were set out; took a revolver, of which there were three, for himself; handed another to De Ménillart; and gave me an old rifle that had once been used for big game. Then he asked Loissel whether he could shoot, and the old man answered that he could not use a revolver to any effect, but might manage a shotgun; this he was given. The third revolver was not used, since Blinkson and Vanne were already armed, and beside it there remained another shotgun. As we were helping ourselves to cartridges, a shrill whistle sounded from the park ahead. I know that we started, but we waited for Tom to move, and he made no sign; then, very shortly after, there came another whistle, more to the left, and still Tom was silent; finally, more clearly it seemed to me than either of the others, a last note was blown from the direction where the scream had sounded, where Massingdale had watched in the woods. At that Tom's expression changed; he passed his hand up to his mouth, and I read in his eyes the anxiety that he had hidden from us so well.

"Three of them," he murmured. "We 're pretty well surrounded."

Then he moved to the window, closing and bolting one side of the outer shutters.

"Those whistles," he told us, as he finished, "were from our men in the park, telling us that they had sighted the strikers. You can hear that they are getting close." The noise, indeed, was now so great that we had to raise our voices when we talked; a dull, confused shouting, that broke out occasionally in shrieks and cries. "Our men," continued Tom, "will close in on the other side of the house, to keep the avenue open. The third whistle suggests a party we had not expected. Massingdale was out there, I think. He has not reported."

It seemed that he made the statement simply, implying nothing, announcing an obvious fact; yet the shot and the scream were in our minds, and a new terror held us. I tried to persuade myself that a hare had cried, that absence did not mean disaster, but the whole business seemed differently cast now that this possibility was ahead of us. Joan had given a sort of sob when Tom made his statement; she thought no more about appearances or past pretensions, but ran to where her brother stood, seizing him by the arm, her face raised to his imploringly.

"We must do something," she pleaded. "We can't leave him. Oh, Tom, you won't leave him!"

He put his disengaged hand on her shoulder, looking down at her in sympathy; and his voice was very gentle as he told her that it was not in his power to do anything, that in all probability Massingdale was perfectly safe. She, therefore, seeing that he spoke the truth, did not urge him any more, but went over to the fireplace, leaning her hands upon the chimney-piece so that we should not see her face. And in the moment which followed, while no one spoke in the room, the roar outside seemed to have lessened, as if the strikers struggled up the hillside, and so had other uses for their breath.

"We should have five minutes more, I think," announced Tom. "Vanne, get into the next room, the library; you can command the south side of the house from there. You 'll find the shutters closed and the windows open. Don't take a light. Fire if any one tries to get near the wall. Loissel, take the dining-room; we 'll want as many as we can spare on this side. Keep a lookout towards the other end of the terrace. Mind the lights are down. Hang about for a bit, Blinkson; when the show begins, go wherever you think help is wanted. Remember, all of you, two whistles in quick succession must bring you to the hall. Report at once, here, if the place gets alight anywhere. Off you go."

At his direction, those of us who were left in the drawing-room moved the heavier furniture towards the open window, so as to make a barricade in case we were rushed; Joan meanwhile, put out most of the candles, leaving the place in a half-darkness. While we worked, lifting the heavy pieces without a thought to the exertion, our attention towards the gardens, waiting for a sudden burst of shouting and the trampling of men's feet, the noise of a horse, desperately driven, sounded above the strikers' voices; the beast was pulled up before the front door, which we heard opened, and a moment afterwards Massingdale burst into the room. He seemed to look round for some one, and finding Joan, frowned, as if little pleased. He had no hat, his clothes were torn and stained, and a great scratch, on which the blood had dried, ran across his face; his hair was standing about his head like a broom, and his eyes were wild with excitement; but he spoke quite calmly, and helped himself to the spare revolver and some cartridges without hesitation.

"Just in time," he gasped; "I did n't want to miss the beginning. The soldiers ought to be here in half an hour or so. I 'll explain later. Ritaud is leading the lot who came past me."

He dropped into silence like the rest of us; and I saw that his eyes had turned again to Joan, and that she, after the first glance as he entered, had not looked at him. But I had other things to think about than unrequited affection, and I paid no heed to her expression.

A sudden roar, as if every man among the strikers exercised his lungs to their fullest extent, burst out from round the corner of the house; it was taken up straight in front of us, and again by the party to the left. The lawn upon the farther side of the terrace grew on the instant covered with figures, shrieking and shouting, dancing and waving their arms; a sight, showed by the soft light of the moon and backed by the dark shadow of the trees, that I am not likely to forget. The din was awful; all restraint and all reason seemed gone from the men, yet no one of them advanced to the terrace, or came nearer than thirty or forty yards from the house. Within the drawing-room there was no sound. We waited, I, at least, gripping my gun with an odd sense of satisfaction; and we watched for some sign from Tom. He leaned against the closed shutter, staring into the gardens, and a yard behind him stood Massingdale, very still and upright, with the Vicomte by his side.

At the end of a few seconds, which I counted minutes, Tom turned and whispered to the men behind him; then at their answer, I imagine, beckoned to me.

"Kneel down," he told me; "don't show yourself. Sight between the slats of the shutter; and fire, if I sign to you. Hit the spokesman, if there is one."

Upon that he led the way out on to the terrace, the Vicomte and Massingdale following him. I felt Blinkson and Joan draw up behind me as the three men walked into the garden; and I had to make the girl move as her skirt brushed against my trigger arm. After that my attention did not wander from the events that passed outside.

De Ménillart stood between the other two, against the balustrade just to the right of the main steps leading from the terrace; and at sight of him the crowd in the gardens screamed in their fury, yelling to those who were round to the left that he had appeared. He waited a moment, his heels together in a stiff military attitude, his head carried high, then he held up his right hand, and a comparative silence fell on the mob.

"My men," he shouted, his clear, high, well-bred voice losing nothing of its usual dignity, "this is not the way to act. I assure you, on my honour, that by these methods you will gain nothing from me, and only punishment from the State, who, represented by the soldiers, will soon be here. If, on the other hand, you go back to your villages, I will do my best to see that you do not suffer for this. All of you," he cried very distinctly, "except the man who killed my agent, Dupont. He shall be punished."

A jeer, a burst of jeering rather, greeted him as he finished speaking; hoarse voices yelled foul oaths into the night, and others fouler obscenities; the mob swayed, and screamed, and danced again, but they did not advance. Then Ritaud, the innkeeper of Mailly and the chief malcontent of the district, stepped out from among them, and an instant silence followed his appearance, a silence more frightening than any noise. The fellow carried a dead hare by the heels; he stood insolently staring up at the three figures on the terrace, his right hand resting on his hip, and his eyes were mad and wild with drink and passion. He was a squat fellow with pig's eyes, a bullet head, and a coarse, vicious mouth; the sort of man, I reckoned him, who lives on talk and other people's work.

"*Bonsoir*, patron," he screamed, and the crowd behind him yelled with laughter. "You would give terms to us, patron," he went on, tutoying the Vicomte. "It is well. But we don't want your terms, *bourgeois;* we will dictate our own. You were very haughty yesterday; now you shall watch while we amuse you. Then—*eh bien!* then we 'll see. Eh, my comrades?"

He was evidently held an orator among his friends, for they roared with delight at his words, and it was some moments before he could make himself heard again. Finally he secured silence; seeming, when he began afresh, inspired to greater efforts.

"You see this hare," he shouted, holding it up. "It is your hare, patron. We are going to make a little fire to cook your game before your eyes. Oh yes, Monsieur le Vicomte, you 'll be warm enough in your fine house. You 'll find that the poor working-man, by whose work you live, can sometimes defend himself. One word more, patron. You have an English guest—your dam has gone with her brat, I suppose—I saw the girl this morning in your garden. I 'll come and fetch her before the hare is cooked. She will make a fine dessert. I 'll show her that a poor man can kiss and——"

He never finished the sentence. I saw Massingdale's right arm go up; and, together with the report of his revolver it seemed, Ritaud dropped where he stood, writhed a moment on the ground, and then lay still.

Following the shot there was a moment's pause, as if the sudden action had taken the strikers by surprise, had given them a certain timidity; but the lull did not last long, a few seconds perhaps, and then we were done with any waiting. Ritaud raised himself on his elbow, spoke to the men about him, though his words did not reach us, and was lifted in their arms and carried out of sight among them. Immediately another leader appeared in his place, the agitator from Paris, I discovered afterwards, who gesticulated and screamed before the crowd, waving his arms towards the house, very obviously urging the attack. The strikers, I will say so much for them, needed little invitation; with a roar that spread round the corner of the house to the left, they advanced with a rush, scrambling and swearing, jostling each other in their eagerness. I did not look for Tom's signal, but fired straight at the man who led the rush, and to my shame, I missed him; at the same time I heard the three revolvers on the terrace going, and all round the house, it seemed to me, the firing had commenced. It was not on our side alone, the strikers had arms with them which they used wildly, and, in that first attack, to no effect. One shot hit the shutter about three feet above my head; I heard Joan exclaim; turned to see if she was hit, and saw her wiping the blood from a splinter scratch upon her forehead. At the same time Blinkson seized her by the shoulders, forcing her without ceremony to the back of the room. Then, as I looked back to the garden again, I was almost upset by the entrance of the Vicomte, Massingdale, and Tom, who slammed the shutter behind them as they slipped into the house. I peered between the slats; saw a great bearded fellow at the top of the steps; fired at him, and sent him flying, like a dummy, the way that he had come. Tom was beside me, the Vicomte and Massingdale at the window to the left, and Blinkson on the right; the mob was now swarming on to the terrace, and we snapped at them as quickly as we could, hoping for as much effect as possible. We must have damaged them more than they liked—by luck rather than good shooting, for it was impossible to get a decent sight of them through the shutters—because they stopped the rush and retired behind the shelter of the terrace wall, where we could not touch them. Owing to the slant of the slats we could not see far into the gardens, but could hear them moving about and shouting to each other.

"This won't do," said Tom. "We can't get at the devils here, or see what they are up to either. Blinkson, take a run round and see how things are going on in the other rooms. Vicomte, you and Dick had better get up-stairs. Wait a bit, I 'll have a look—damn!"

I had been attending to the loading of my rifle, an abominable instrument that jammed whenever I tried to work it quickly, but jumped back to squinting through the shutter at his exclamation. I was not comforted by what I saw. A barrel was being hoisted on to the balustrade, a barrel with a flaming rag in the bunghole; and the men who placed it in position were out of sight and reach. Tom had opened the shutter so that through the crack we could see more plainly what was happening; but there was no sign of any striker, they had crouched beneath the terrace wall, or had taken shelter among the trees. While the barrel rested for a moment on the coping, Massingdale kicked the shutter wide, and made an attempt to rush out towards the burning oil; but Tom caught him by the neck and threw him back into the room.

"You fool!" he cried, and two shots hit the framework of the window as if to point the remark. "They know enough to cover that damned tub."

As he was speaking, the oil burst into flame; the men behind gave the barrel a heave; it fell from the parapet, rolled across the terrace, and brought up against the wall of the house, burning furiously. Almost immediately the shutters, behind which the Vicomte stood, caught and crackled.

"I see your point," said Massingdale, with a laugh that was no affectation, and still seated on the floor where Tom had thrown him. "We 're all to die in company. I call that sociable."

Then Blinkson ran into the room.

"Outbuildings well alight," he announced. "Wind setting towards the house. Got your own fire, too, I see."

Tom turned to the Vicomte, who had stepped away from the burning window, and on whose face there was a bitterness which we could not share.

"We can't save the place, sir," he stated. "We shall have to run for it."

De Ménillart nodded, looking round the room sadly. I think that, at the moment, he had forgotten the danger in which we carried all our lives, and that he remembered only his household gods that were being sacrificed; on which count I hold him a man of courage and of feeling.

So Tom, having obtained his consent to abandoning the place, blew two shrill calls on the whistle that he carried, and ordered us into the hall; not too soon, for the fire had already spread to the other windows and was hot on our backs as we left. While the household was assembling, no one seeming very anxious to linger at his post, Tom spoke to me a moment with strange earnestness.

"Stick by Joan, Dick," he said; "and remember—it seems an extraordinary thing to say in a civilised country like this—it is far better that she should be dead than in the hands of these drunken swine to-night."

"I won't forget," I promised him. "I 'll see that she does n't come to that."

We shook hands on the bargain, and he turned to give orders for the retreat.

We were to make for Massingdale's house in the hamlet, which could be far more easily defended than the château; and we were to go there in a close body, the women in the middle, trusting to the ditches at each side of the avenue to keep away the main rush of the strikers until we had got a decent start. Our one chance seemed to rest on the quickness with which we made our escape, on the possibility of slipping out of the house before we were noticed. There had come no firing from the direction of the drive, and there seemed a fair chance that the four of our men, who had watched the park walls, would be waiting for us there; in any case, we were in no position to choose a course of action, but had to make what we could of the only one that was left to us. So we formed up at once; Loissel, Vanne, and the three men who had been in the house being the van of our squad; the women servants and Joan, with myself as a sort of personal attendant, in the middle; the Vicomte, Blinkson, Massingdale, and Tom bringing up the rear.

The hall door was flung open, and we rushed out, having instructions to run for the shelter of the drive as hard as we could. Fortune was with us, and we got to that shelter, such as it was, without mishap. The strikers were so pleased at having set the house alight at the first attempt that they had forgotten us for the moment, as Tom had reckoned that they might, and they danced and shrieked about the blaze like evil children. Half a dozen or so of them were on this side of the house, armed with no more aggressive weapons than a couple of barrels of oil, and they showed no sign of fight, but ran off round the corner of the building, yelling loud that we escaped. Three of our men were waiting for us at the head of the drive, the fourth, we learned afterwards, had been knocked on the head as he made his way from the wall. So, with some hope of making good our escape, we started on the retreat down the avenue.

We ran. Reckoning time everything, we made what pace we could, which, since there were women with us, was not as fast as we had hoped. In the shadow of the trees, with here and there a shaft of moonlight falling like a silver band across our path, in the warm night air, and with the good scent of woods about us, we stumbled and hurried, a new and warmer light growing behind us, casting fantastic shadows on the way ahead. For perhaps fifty yards we advanced without hindrance, and then a burst of shouting told us that the pursuit had started. I did not look round, but I could hear the noise of a considerable number of men running in our direction. I was too much concerned with keeping the maid-servants from any breakdown, which was a thing I feared more than the attack behind us. They were feeling the strain of the unaccustomed pace, and they panted and gasped, clutching at each other as they ran. Then one of them, looking over her shoulder in terror, missed her footing and fell sprawling on the path. We got her on her feet, Joan and I, as soon as we could manage it, but the incident had checked us during some few seconds, and the advance-guard, not hearing the noise of the fall, had got some yards away. I looked behind and saw that Tom's party had faced about and stopped, so that they might meet the attack with more effect; thinking, therefore, that we could give them no help, I urged the women to start running again, to catch up those in front. Here, however, I met an unexpected resistance. Joan absolutely refused to move: she would not, she declared, leave the others behind. I had no time to argue; the servants were already moving on—they at least were only intent on safety—and I did not wish the party divided; that Joan was moved by some idea of facing the danger I did not ask or care. It is one thing to refuse to save one's own skin, it is another to be entrusted with a woman's safety. I seized her round the waist, and attempted to carry her off. For all her slightness she was amazing strong; in that my first and only struggle with a woman I found that I had a harder job of it than I had thought. As I staggered along, imploring her to do as I ordered, I was suddenly aware of three of the strikers emerging from the ditch on the left side of the avenue. I let go of Joan on the instant, at the same time shouting to the others for help. Then, as the men rushed at us, I got in front of her and attempted to use my gun, with which I had been mightily hampered in my struggle with Joan, as a club. I was a shade too slow. The foremost of the men was on me with a stick; his blow I partly guarded, but it sent me flying sideways, and I came heavily to ground. Before I could get up, the brute had made a rush at Joan, whose expression, as she stared in horror at him, I do not like to remember. Then, as I scrambled to my knees, Blinkson dashed into the fray; he hurled an empty revolver straight at the head of the man who advanced at Joan, and the fellow went down like an ox. With a cry of fury, the old man, his eyeglass hanging broken from its cord, sprang barehanded at the second man, who came to take his fallen fellow's place. I was on my feet now, just behind Blinkson, and I saw what was coming but could not stop it. The second man, a huge ruffian with a red beard, fired an ancient pistol point blank at his opponent, who staggered back into my arms bringing me again to ground. He fell across my legs, and for a moment I lay there unable to get up; in that moment the man with the red beard had seized Joan in his arms, his face was close to hers, his eyes alight with his foul, drink-fired passion. As I attempted to struggle up to him, the third man came along, jealous of his comrade's capture. I caught him by the leg, and pulled him over. Then, for the whole affair was a matter of seconds, Massingdale followed Blinkson in answer to my call. His face was like a dead man's in colour, and if ever a man has shown the lust for blood plain written in his expression, he did at that moment. He got the man, who held Joan, by his throat, gripping him from behind and forcing him backwards; then, as the fellow loosed his hold of the girl and tried to fight his assailant, Massingdale, using only one hand on his throat, snatched a revolver from his pocket, and with it brained the man he held. As the body slipped to the ground, I heard him curse the dead thing that he had killed; and after that he turned to Joan.

Then Tom and the Vicomte, with the men who had joined them at the head of the drive, came up, and we started down the avenue again. About thirty of the strikers stood in a body in front of the house, uncertain what they should do; we made the most of their hesitancy, and forced the pace of our retreat as much as possible. Loissel, Vanne, and the others in advance had discovered that there was something wrong, and waited for us, so that we moved in one body; now, however, we no longer ran, but walked together, keeping a sharp lookout about us.

The peasants behind us, who were each moment being reinforced, did not take long to decide upon a course of action, and half of them were already crawling along the ditches before we had covered another fifteen yards. The château was now well alight; the crackle and roar of the burning, the shouting of the strikers, and, immediately about us, the quiet rustling of the trees, combining to a strange effect. The black mass of the building, its windows showing forth a fiercer light than they had known before, faced us when we looked back, and before it there ran and danced the figures of the strikers, silhouetted with something of a touch of fantasy against the glare. The memory of that scene is unfaded with me. I can see it now much as I saw it then; I can feel the night air blow cool and sweet about me; I can smell the smell of burning; and, though at times I find them indistinct and blurred, I can recall the set, anxious faces of my companions, and recollect how we moved in silence, having neither thought nor time for words.

Before we had moved far, before the first peasant in the ditch had crawled ten feet, Massingdale halted and swung round. Tom called out to him to know what he did, and for answer he pointed back along the avenue to where two bodies lay together, moving towards them as he did so. Then I remembered that Blinkson lay where he had fallen, that I had not thought to look whether he was little or much injured, living or dead; and I grew hot through shame of such forgetfulness.

Massingdale ran to where the old man lay, a huddled heap that did not move, and as he ran he paid no attention to the strikers ahead of him. Joan was beside me, and I caught a sight of her face, drawn and very white, with strained eyes staring before her; she had put a hand upon my arm, and her fingers gripped into my skin through the coat-sleeve. The peasants made no move until Massingdale stooped to pick up the wounded man; then, with a howl of anger or triumph, they sent a volley of stones at him, and the men on the drive broke into a run. He stood up straight, all his movements seeming very deliberate; produced his revolver, and fired the five chambers into the mob; following on this, he stooped again, the fierceness of his attack having given him a momentary respite, seized Blinkson in his arms, and came staggering towards us. A second volley of stones fell round him, many of them hitting their mark, but he struggled on. As he got back to us, as we made way for him so that he could carry his burden into some sort of shelter, I saw that his head was bleeding from a gaping cut, and that he had the dazed look of a man not fully conscious. The situation was, however, not such as to permit much observation, and the moment he had passed us we formed in a line across the road, firing at the crowd in front. The fusillade of stones was getting uncomfortably warm: De Ménillart had been hit on the wrist, and had dropped his revolver with an oath; one of our men was down; and Vanne had doubled up, gasping, from a blow in the wind. I had fired my last cartridge, and stood useless, yet not caring to desert the others and seek shelter, guarding my head as well as I could, imagining that here was the finish for us, and picturing the shape that it would take, when the noise of galloping horses sounded behind us, and a sharp voice called out a word of command.

"Make way," it shouted again. "Make way, messieurs. We 'll settle them now."

Even as the man behind called out to us, the mob in front halted, and the stones fell about us no more; the next second the strikers were flying in all directions, we were scrambling in the ditches, and a company of cavalry, led by an officer who saluted us as he passed us, cantered by. I have often made the usual English criticism about the appearance of the French conscript, I still see no reason to deny that he is abominably badly uniformed, but I there and then determined, and I have not changed my views, that he can be an uncommon useful fellow at a pinch. As on that September night we, lying in a ditch, watched him ride past in goodly numbers, we all of us named him in our hearts, or so I fancy, the most satisfying picture of military power that our eyes had ever looked upon.

After the troop had passed, while from all about the burning house the shouting suddenly ceased, being exchanged for an occasional shriek and the noise of horses galloping and of men running, we remained in the ditch, without any speech, so far as I remember. I became conscious of a great bodily fatigue, and of a desire to sit still, doing nothing, thinking of nothing, more strong than I had hitherto experienced; I leaned against the bank, listening in somewhat detached fashion to the sounds about me, and giving little or no attention to my companions. As I rested, aware vaguely that the others did as I did, a sergeant and four privates came riding back to us.

"Monsieur le Vicomte de Ménillart?" he inquired, addressing the silent company in the ditch.

"Yes, sergeant," answered the Vicomte, stepping on to the road.

"Captain Monet presents his compliments to Monsieur le Vicomte," continued the sergeant, saluting stiffly, "and he suggests that Monsieur le Vicomte and his party should go down to the village. The château cannot be saved, and it is, doubtless, monsieur's wish to be under shelter again as soon as possible. As for the strikers, Captain Monet says that he will very soon settle with them."

The suggestion seemed a good one, and we followed it at once. Wearily, with little talk, we got on our way again, accompanied by the five soldiers, and we walked down the hill towards the hamlet, even De Ménillart expressing no wish to see the last of the destruction of his home. Blinkson we carried as tenderly as possible; he was conscious, but seemed in a bad way, although he assured us that he did not suffer. When we were clear of the avenue and out in the moonlight again, we could see something of the alteration that the night had made in our appearance, how we were all grimed with dirt, and dishevelled, with white, tired faces, and eyes that showed plainly the strain which we had stood. Tom alone appeared to some advantage, seeming little affected, and cheering us all with an occasional word; Massingdale stumbled along, his head down, a handkerchief bound to his wound. He has since told me that he remembers very little of what happened after he had taken Blinkson in his arms, until he was back again in his own house and had drunk some brandy. Joan, looking very slight and shaken, although she made no complaint and refused to be helped along, walked between Tom and De Ménillart, her eyes turning very often to Massingdale, who went just in front.

So, very far from a gay company, and carrying in our midst one who bore testimony to the serious nature of the evening's happenings, we arrived at our house, and were met by Hendick, Marellac, and Jeanne, even our good housekeeper showing some change in her usual placid manner.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PASSING OF A GALLANT GENTLEMAN

THE house seemed very quiet as we entered it; the hall had been set in order, and was no longer littered with our belongings as it was wont to be; the whole place had the trim appearance of a house to which the inmates return after a lengthy absence, and in which they recognise a precision of arrangement that is unfamiliar, no chairs pulled out of place, no books and pipes lying about untidily. Having nothing else that she might do, Jeanne had busied herself in removing all traces of habitation from the hall, leaving the room bare and formal, which, had she had her way, it had always been. The appearance of the house, I say, struck me with its contrast to that which we had just been seeing, but the clock upon the wall, which ticked solemnly in protest against all hurry and excitement, brought me a greater astonishment, for it marked some minutes short of eleven; all our fighting, all our waiting and watching, which had seemed like many nights in one, had filled no more than a few hours of the evening. We had played with high passions; we had been in company with death; we had broken the common conduct of our lives, and had seen the world in different colours; and it was not yet the hour for bed.

Whatever had been her anxiety and her excitement, Jeanne was very soon her ordinary self; no one directing her, she sorted out the servants from their masters, had them into the kitchen, and was back again with wine and brandy; then, having set the refreshment on a table, she came to where Joan sat.

"Mademoiselle will drink this," she suggested, offering some compound of wine and hot water which she had prepared. "Afterwards there will be much to do. Monsieur Massingdale and poor Monsieur Blinkson need attention."

Joan took the glass and drank from it, thanking Jeanne; although she looked more inclined to break down than to work again, the call to attend on the sick roused all the woman in her, and she followed Jeanne from the room with some appearance of eagerness.

Meanwhile Tom, Hendick, and I went up-stairs to fetch a mattress on which to put Blinkson, who was half collapsed and in no condition to be moved farther than was necessary. As we collected bedclothes, Hendick explained how he had passed the evening in great suspense, not liking to leave the house, yet loathing the inaction; how he had gone with the car some way towards Cluny, helping to get it up the hill; and how, finally, judging by the noise and the burning château that things were going very badly with us, he and Marellac had started out to join us, and had been overtaken by the soldiers.

We brought the bedding down-stairs, and made Blinkson as comfortable as possible upon a couple of tables drawn together. He had been shot in the abdomen, and was apparently wounded so badly that, had there been skilful aid to hand, it had done him no good. He was quite conscious, though very weak, and he talked and laughed with us, refusing to listen to any words of pity, although he knew even better than we did that he was a dying man. Joan, who had not been used to such sights and services, helped us to secure his ease—secured for him, would be a truer statement, all the ease that he could look for—arranging his pillows, smoothing the clothes about his neck, in such fashion as a woman does by instinct, and a man by practice, not so well, after long acquaintance with the sick. Then, when she could do no more, she turned to Massingdale, who sat on a chair near the fireplace, where he had been, silent and dazed, since we entered the house.

"I want to dress your head for you," she told him, putting down the basin and the rough bandages that Jeanne had prepared.

Massingdale looked up stupidly, making an attempt to rise from his chair.

"I 'm quite fit, Miss Onnington," he explained. "Don't bother about me."

Joan pressed her hand on his shoulder, so that he should not move, smiling at him as a woman will when she tends a sick man or a child.

"I want to see this cut," said she. "You must n't move. I shall hurt you, because I 'm very clumsy."

Yet her hands were light and tender, and her touch, by the look of it, scarcely to be felt, as she bathed his matted hair.

"It 's very good of you to take so much trouble," answered Massingdale, trying to rouse himself. "That stone knocked me half silly. I can't talk much."

"I don't want you to talk," Joan replied very softly, and it seemed to me that her lips trembled. "I want to bathe your head for you."

Massingdale did not answer. His head rested against the back of the chair and his eyes stared dully, and with no expression in them, at the ceiling. Joan bent over her work so that I could not see her face. When she had finished, she mixed a glass of brandy and water and brought it to Massingdale to drink, smoothing the bandage that she had tied about his head as he took the glass. Then she left him and came back to Blinkson.

I sat beside him. Although for the most part he lay silent with closed eyes, he seemed anxious that some one should be near him. Joan put a hand on his forehead, and he looked up at her and smiled.

"Better?" she asked.

"I 've got beyond the better stage of life," he answered, his voice very weak. "I am in that condition when a medical man would permit me anything for which I had a fancy. I 'm not afraid, Miss Onnington, to look this particular truth in the face."

"Oh," cried Joan, as if the thing frightened her, "you must not talk like that! You will get well again."

"I shall be rid of this particular ill and many others pretty soon, I fancy," he answered, with some return to his old manner. Then he felt for Joan's hand and held it. "Let us change the subject," he continued. "I should like to think, Miss Onnington, that the real impression that you got of me, gained in our first meeting, has been somewhat obscured by to-night's events. I should not like you to think of me as I really am."

Joan knelt beside him, and her voice was low and broken as she spoke.

"You must not say things like that," she entreated. "You must not think them. I see you as you really are—a very brave man who gave his life to save me from annoyance. I have forgotten all about the other man. Do you imagine that I shall think of him when I remember that you—you——"

"Died is the word you want," replied Blinkson; "only you should not weave romance around me because you think I died for you. I am no more than a very undesirable old man who is rather glad that the finish is in sight." He paused, and his eyes stared into some far distance wherein he seemed to see things that were pleasant, then he came back to earth again, and he smiled as he looked at Joan. "Think of me," he asked, "as kindly as you can. Don't try to forget the faults. If you cannot manage to take the bad with the good, you have a lot of loneliness before you. I believe that you will escape that—that you will be able to love and understand. The one is certain to fail without the other."

He closed his eyes again, letting go Joan's hand, seeming suddenly sunk in forgetfulness. Quite plainly, although his mind worked clearly, he was slipping the moorings that held him to life and all other affairs kept little hold on his attention in view of the unknown voyage ahead. Since he seemed comfortable and did not move, Joan left him and joined Tom and De Ménillart, who talked with Hendick and Loissel.

Very shortly afterwards the car arrived back from Cluny, having come by the road through Donzy and Azé, and with it came another motor and Captain Monet. The soldiers, less than half of whom, it appeared, we had met, had dispersed the strikers after making many arrests, had failed to save anything of the château, and were taking steps to ensure, so far as they were able, that the district should witness no more violence. The excellent captain was in high good-humour, although careful to maintain an appropriate gravity of demeanour. He paid us all many compliments; congratulated Tom upon his management of the affair; and allowed us to perceive that we were fortunate in having been rescued by an officer named Monet. After explaining that he would spend the night on duty, and that those who remained behind need not anticipate further inconvenience, he urged that the two cars should be filled at once, as Madame de Ménillart awaited their return with a very natural anxiety. Accordingly it was arranged that the women servants should ride in the Vicomte's car, and that the other and larger motor should take Tom, Joan, and De Ménillart himself. There was no possible reason why they should not start immediately. All that they might wish to do at La Fontaine des Bois could be done the next day, and so without more delay they prepared to start. Tom made an attempt to induce Massingdale to go with them, but it was unsuccessful, as I had imagined that it would be. Therefore, when everything was ready for them to leave, they came to where Blinkson lay and said good-bye to him. De Ménillart and Tom shook hands with the dying man in silence, and I think that he understood the thoughts which they could not express, for his eyes lighted as if he were well content. To Joan he spoke, holding her hand between his own.

"Good-bye," said he, all the huskiness gone from his speech. "Don't waste your pity on me, Miss Onnington," for she was more moved than I had often seen her. "There is no pity in my death. I had to die sometime, you know. Just as well now. Rather a good finish—better than I expected. Good-night."

She waited a moment, looking at him very sadly. For the last time she smoothed the sheet about his neck, then turned quickly and hurried out of the house.

Massingdale and I went to the door to see the car depart, and I noticed that Joan did not look in our direction until the motor began to move, and that when she turned to us she looked at Massingdale with something of fear in her expression. He leaned against the wall, haggard and weary, like a man who wakes from troubled sleep to find new difficulties and sorrows about him, and he stared after the car until it disappeared into the night.

After some discussion, in which all our arguments against his watching failed to move Massingdale from his intention, we left him and Hendick to sit with Blinkson, and the rest of us went to bed, Loissel and I lying upon mattresses in the dining-room. I slept heavily until three o'clock, when it had been arranged I should take Hendick's place. Upon going into the hall I found Blinkson dozing, death's stamp already on his face, and Massingdale seated at his side with papers spread before him on a table.

"You might witness this," he said, handing me a pen. "Blinkson has made a will."

I took up the paper, and glanced through it. The name that was upon it I did not know, but Massingdale explained the change before I could mention it.

"He took the name of Athanasius Roderick Blinkson because, as he told us a little time ago, it was a suitable title for a fool. He explains the *alias* farther on. I think that you, Hendick, and I are the only men who know what his real name is. We keep it to ourselves."

I saw that the document was sufficiently in order to stand, that it was chiefly in favour of Massingdale himself, and that, besides the bequest of a ring to the dying man's sister in England, it provided for the giving of some memento, to be chosen by Massingdale, to "each of my companions on the night of my death, if they care to accept the same." He had been, it seemed clear, a very lonely man, for besides ourselves, chance acquaintances of his last years, his sister was the only person of whom he made any mention. I witnessed the will, and put it down, turning to the man whose last wishes it expressed. He lay very still, breathing heavily, his face showing little sign of pain, and in its mortal pallor more dignified than I had seen it.

I took my place beside Massingdale, and together we watched for the end, not thinking it necessary to summon the others to be with us. For a long time he remained still, sleeping; then he roused himself and complained of the cold. We put more blankets over him, for which he thanked us. Once he wandered in his talk, calling out some woman's name; but he soon came to consciousness again, and lay with his eyes open. Again he spoke of the cold, and as we made efforts to warm him, lighting the fire although the night was hot, he talked quite coherently.

"I feel like a gentleman again," he informed us. "Drink and a certain fastidiousness go badly together." Then, after a pause: "I 've had no worse a time than many men." Finally, very softly, as if to himself: "What next, I wonder?"

After that he dozed again, sometimes opening his eyes to look at us, and, if he met our glances, smiling. About ten minutes before five, when for some time he had been still, he seemed to stretch himself, a long breath came from him, and so he died.

We remained many minutes silent; Loissel, who had come into the room very quietly some little time before the end, standing at the dead man's feet, his great, shaggy head hung forward, his tall form upright. Then Massingdale stood up, passed a hand across his eyes, and walked to the door.

"My God," said he, "I 'm tired."

Thereupon he opened the door, stepped out into the road, and lifted his head to feel the cool wind blow on it. The dawn had already broken, the birds were chattering, there was a light grey cloud over the sky, and the morning air was fresh and sweet. Loissel covered the face of the dead, arranged the papers which were lying untidily on the table, and joined Massingdale outside. I followed him.

As we stood together, listening to the small, quiet sounds about, thinking of the cheery kind companion whose death we had just watched, there came to disturb us the sound of a trotting horse. A few minutes afterwards a gig came round the bend of the road, and one of the doctors from Cluny, Rolin, a round, red-faced, comfortable little man, several times previously our guest, never until this moment our medical attendant, drove up to the door.

"Impossible to get here before," he cried, saluting us. "Been in trouble, I hear. Silly lot of fools in these parts. Where 's my patient?"

He was out of the trap, and across the threshold before he had finished; then, as he saw the candle-lit room with that which it contained, he made a clucking sound with his tongue, and hurried forward to the body. We waited outside while he conducted his examination and in a few minutes he joined us.

"Hopeless from the start," he stated. "If I had arrived before, I could have done no good. Not much suffering in such a death, hemorrhage is kind in that way. I will come later and conduct the usual *post-mortem*. The authorities will require it." He rubbed his hands together, looked at the sky, then tapped Massingdale on the arm. "I 'll stitch up that head of yours," he announced. "I hear you have cracked it. Good thing for modern art the stone was n't a bit heavier. Now, rouse that good woman of yours, and we 'll get to work."

We found Jeanne about to begin the new day's business and a very few minutes afterwards she had what Rolin required laid out in the studio. The little doctor worked quickly, saying little until he had finished; but when the bandages had been fixed to his satisfaction, he faced the three of us with an air of command.

"Now," said he, "I have to deal with moderately sensible men. Birth comes and death comes—I have seen them both to-night, with a short half-hour drive dividing them—and each of them is surprising in its way; but after the one and until the other comes a man has his duty by his own body. I have seldom," he surveyed us fiercely, "seen three sorrier-looking scarecrows. You have got to change that, my friends. Go off and get some sleep—I 'll stop a bit and help your woman—but, if you pitch me any nonsense about being unable to rest, I 'll have done with the lot of you for three hysterical fools."

We offered no opposition to his commands; we turned in, and slept, all three of us I think, dreamlessly and without turning on our beds. Nature has her soft moods, and of sleep, the kindliest gift that she has, she is not always miserly.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PARTING OF MANY WAYS

OVER the events of the next few days I will not linger. When I recall the weeks that I lived with Massingdale in his house at La Fontaine des Bois, I dwell long in thought among the quiet days that went before the strike, and over the fighting itself I do not hurry, even at Blinkson's death I often pause, but of the final days of our stay I do not care to think; that retrospect has too much of gloom about it, and in reviewing it I find neither pleasure nor profit. The ceremonies subsequent to death are to most men, I suppose, purely distasteful; the hired workmen about the house, whose melancholy profession it is to arrange burial, the unnatural air of repression, and the numerous occasions on which the deceased person is made the subject of unwilling conversation, bring to the healthy mind revolt and anger. If there is any sorrow in the hearts of those who await the burial of their dead fellow, it becomes an intolerable burden that they should be compelled to discuss the cause of their grief with strangers and officials; and, giving small heed to their necessity, they are inclined to cry out that these long formalities are no better than needless cruelty to the living. With such things, with inquests and inquiries, with the coming and going of many unknown persons, all seeking information and asking that the same sad tale might be retold, we were constantly engaged; two dead men, both come to their end by violent means, lay beneath our roof, and we were set about by a swarm of officials who gave us little peace.

Two days after his death the widow Dupont came, with relations and friends and much attendant pomp, to take the body of her husband to the village where he had lived; I can only hope that we behaved on that occasion in a fit and proper manner, for beneath the pride of notoriety, which the circumstances seemed to have conferred upon her, I believe that Madame Dupont nursed a real sorrow. The following morning we took Blinkson to his grave. He lies in a corner of the little churchyard at La Verzée, and no tombstone marks his resting-place. We who had known something, but very little, of his life, and the others, Tom, Joan, De Ménillart, and certain of the servants, who had known only the gallant manner of his death, stood by his graveside; and, since he had so expressed his wish in the will that he had made, no ritual of religion was used when we made him our farewell. So we left him to lie among the quiet Burgundian hills, to rest after a losing battle. What his story was I do not know; why a life that had opened with so much promise had failed in its achievement, I have made no effort to find out; but this I do know, of this at least I am convinced, he did no harm to any but himself, and if laughter when the heart is sad, if kindness that does not waver, that is not a thing of moods, be reckoned, as they must be, among man's virtues, he was a better man than others of more seemly living. He had learned to be alone, a bitter lesson; he listened with laughing sympathy to the tale of our woes and sorrows, he encouraged our hopes and our ambitions, yet he never sought to share the burden of his own load with others, rather choosing to go his way in solitude. Let this, then, be his epitaph: He gave, and he did not take. The wrong, and the shame, and the waste of his life were very great, yet they are easily forgotten by those who knew him, because of the laughter and the happiness that at all times followed him. He went to his death deprived of all his heritage, exiled, yet without whining at his fate; that we shall think of him as of an honoured friend, remembering with shame those times at which we slighted him, will be, I fancy, the treatment that he would have asked. May he rest—in forgetfulness.

Joan and Tom left Cluny for Paris the same day that Blinkson was buried; the Vicomte remained a couple of days later, very much occupied with his affairs, estimating damage, which was great. Then he too left, and we were alone again; but the spell of the place was broken, leaving us, also, anxious to be gone. When the last of the inquiries was finished, we took our departure with little delay: Hendick went first, straight to England; Loissel and I followed, making for Paris, the former taking with him the picture now entitled *La Femme;* finally, but a full fortnight later, Massingdale, Vanne, and Marellac made their farewells to the farmhouse which had been the scene of so many different happenings.

The strike hardly survived its victims. The authorities acted with an unaccustomed firmness, and after one or two minor disturbances the agitation ceased. Ritaud, who had been badly wounded in the leg by Massingdale's shot, was proved guilty of murdering Dupont, and duly, and very expeditiously, if the report be correct, guillotined. I heard of his punishment with some satisfaction. The whole affair was advertised for a short while in the papers, was made the subject of a certain amount of talk, and was very soon forgotten.

The last act which we played in the farmhouse was very much as many of the earlier ones, save that it lacked one player. We had explained our departure to Jeanne, who showed no surprise; we had the house somewhat dismantled and many of our things packed, for Hendick went early the next day, and Loissel and I followed the same evening; and we sat, after dinner, in the studio, for we had taken a distaste for the hall. The conversation turned, as it was bound to do, upon the disbanding of the company; we had grown to such intimacy together that the occasion of this parting could not be passed by in silence.

"I wonder," said Hendick, leaning back in his chair and staring at the ceiling, "whether we shall all sleep together again under the same roof. I imagine that it 's rather unlikely. Even Massingdale may become a busy man in course of time."

"The odds are against it, against the sleeping together, I mean," I allowed. "We ought to meet, though. Gather in Paris once a year. Eat a commemorative dinner together."

"How the man makes a god of his belly!" laughed Massingdale. "Although gastronomic—shame on me!—because, rather, it is gastronomic, the idea is a good one. I will spend my brilliant and lonely youth seeking new cooks. Each year you shall gather at some unknown restaurant, there to criticise the genius of some obscure prince of *chefs*. Men will watch our yearly meeting with anxious hearts and mouths that water in anticipation; when we shall have set the seal of our patronage upon an eating-house, however small, the world will flock there, confident of its excellence. Already, in fancy, the laurels are about my brow; I hear men speak of me with awe. 'Excellent man,' they say, 'he could not paint, but he had the nicest taste in cooking.' It is enough, *mon* Richard."

Loissel chuckled; it always pleased him when Massingdale talked nonsense.

"My part shall be to house you, my friends," said he. "Any of you, all of you, who care to come to me shall be provided with beds, other devices for comfortable living, and any quantity of the good caporal tobacco, which you hate."

"I," cried Vanne, twirling his moustaches, "will search all Paris for musicians, that, after we have eaten, they may make divine music for us."

"And I," began Marellac, "shall criticise——"

But Massingdale interrupted him.

"You," he announced, "will fast, my son. You will do nothing else but make us the divinest music of them all; the other players, poor devils, will mouth, and gnaw their nails, their beautiful long nails, when you have played."

Marellac grinned, well pleased; and I turned to Hendick.

"You and I," I suggested, "having nothing else to do, will overeat ourselves."

To which he cheerfully agreed.

In such manner we arranged for many dinners that have never yet been served.

Then Massingdale, who since the strike had seemed ill and depressed, extravagant in his talk when he spoke, but more silent than usual, called for more foolishness. His face, beneath the turban of bandages, showed thin and white, but his eyes were alight with laughter, and his excitement ran high, as it often did without apparent cause or reason.

"*Mon père*," he cried, addressing Loissel, "lift up the veil of the future for us; show us the hidden years. Speak of our destinies; forecast both triumph and defeat, joy and sorrow. We part to-morrow; give us a stirrup-cup upon our journey, and see that it is not bitter. Silence, loved companions, the old man speaks."

Loissel waved his pipe, assumed an air of prodigious solemnity, and dropped his voice to its deepest tone. He greatly enjoyed a farce.

"I see," he announced, "a grave and learned gentleman, clothed in beautiful scarlet and ermine, wearing a full-bottomed wig—a judge of law and of men, famed for his dignity. His name is Crutchley."

We applauded this wonderful foresight.

"I see," he continued, "two men walking on the boulevards, passing the Theatre of the Vaudeville; one is a professor, greatly esteemed, world-famed for his impassioned teaching on the subject of sociology; the other is an impresario with a long black beard, not a slight man, who talks eagerly and with much gesticulation. They speak of the coming visit to Paris of a violinist who holds tears and laughter at his command. They discuss arrangements for protecting this great musician from the too ardent adoration of his audience. Is that good?"

We said that it was.

"Lastly," he went on, smiling beneath his beard, "I see a man of middle height, dignified, well clothed and fed; he has the appearance of a person of great distinction. He walks in the galleries of the Louvre, on Monday when the public may not enter, and if he encounter any official he receives a very careful salute. His air of criticism is very strong; he looks at the great works about him, seeing all their faults. Finally, he halts in front of a sea-scape, a poor thing in such a company; his face is full of pity that would hide contempt. Beneath the picture there is the usual plate; besides the title it bears the name Jean Sébastien Loissel, with two dates following: 1840–19——"

Massingdale sprang from his chair, shouting.

"Stop!" he roared. "Don't say it. Don't say it."

Loissel leading us, we rocked with laughter. I had not before discovered Massingdale to be superstitious, and the circumstance pleased me immensely. He, however, insisted that we were the fools, not he; in his curious nature, guided more than most men by its emotions, certain prejudices, suspicions, fears, ruled very strongly. That any one should name the date of his own death was, it appeared, a thing he could not hear in silence.

"I 'll have nothing of your future," he told Loissel, when our laughter had subsided. "I despise it. Dignity, you say! Learning! Distinction, prosperity, position! Away with the lot of them. What have we to do with such things. I, sir, decline to walk in the Louvre, despising my masters and the great dead. Moreover, although they advance white-waistcoated stomachs before the eyes of all men, I will not even drink with your abominable old men. Let them get to their clubs or their favourite *cafés*, among their pompous and absurd companions. The judge—*mon Dieu!* I can picture him, making bad jokes upon the bench, and boring his unhappy associates in private life. And a pedagogue with an impresario! If this is to happen, then let the heavens fall about me; roll up, O sea, engulf me in your cool depths, I have no further use for life. By Bacchus, by the laughing nymphs, by all that is foolish and pleasant, I could extract a more amusing future from a gipsy at a fair!"

Loissel leaned back in his chair, so that it creaked beneath his weight; drew at his pipe until it gurgled comfortably; and solemnly shook his head at our excited host.

"So, young man," said he, "you do not wish to become respectable and famous; you despise an honoured old age; and you would not have your friends men of substance and standing."

"Let all the great gods be my witness," cried Massingdale, "I would not! If fame is to come, we will welcome it; if prosperity, we 'll not refuse it; but in youth, in maturity, and in our declining years, may we avoid respectability, encourage folly, and be the constant companions of all that is irresponsible. I like one thing—only one thing—about your absurd prophecy."

"I am saved, then," sighed Loissel, "from absolute disgrace. What is the one good point that I have made?"

"Marellac," answered Massingdale. "To him you gave a human rôle—exactly the one that he will play. Picture him well on in years, long-haired, in very good conceit. He 'll stand, after his concerts, in the privacy of his own lodging; he will wear a smile of tender remembrance; and he will seriously affirm that 'these women are the devil, although, poor little dears, they have every excuse.' Marellac, my infant prodigy, they will adore you; weep on you; sigh for you; pester you; comfort you; hate each other for you; you will destroy the happiness of quiet homes; distract maidens and matrons of all ages; make innumerable male enemies; and—and, you sad-eyed dreamer, you austere child, you will enjoy it all."

The boy moved uneasily, coloured, and then made answer, his tone that of protest.

"I do not understand you," he told Massingdale. "I believe that you were serious just now when you said that you did not want respectability, although you laughed as you spoke. Why, almost in the same breath, do you make a joke of the things which you hate? I have often heard you rage against the man who tries to attract women, to make them love him, to amuse himself with their pain. Why do you say these things? You do not mean them."

Vanne smacked his hands upon his thighs, rolling his eyes at the ceiling.

"But," he cried, "it is incredible! The little imbecile asks, very seriously, why Massingdale talks nonsense. Why does the moon reflect the sun? Why does a mirror give back the image of what is before it? Because they must, small fool. So must the excellent Massingdale give forth the thought that is at the moment in his mind."

This was so good a summary of the case that we heartily applauded it, procuring thereby a graceful bow from Vanne. Massingdale, however, had changed his mood; he showed suddenly very serious. Standing with his back to the empty fireplace, gesticulating freely, seeming very convinced of his point, he spoke.

"Why not?" he asked. "Why not practise what I told you in jest? We talk of honour, morality, right, yet we do not know what they mean. Why not follow where our passions lead?—they are not always passing; win where we can, lose, if we must; love a hundred women or one, as the mood takes us; be in practice what we often are in thought—animals. If love is more than all the world beside, then we are cowards to allow it to escape so lightly, to let convention, money, a thousand little things, stand in its path; if it is not, if it is a passing appetite like hunger and thirst, a thing easily satisfied, then we are fools, for we are at the pains to mate together, burdening ourselves with solemn vows. If we accept a compromise, as we mostly do, making our marriages things of convenience and sober sense, act up to it. Why talk of faithfulness, when comfort and satisfaction are the only aims?"

He stretched out his hands, demanding the reply which he did not get. Instead, Loissel turned to Marellac.

"Get out your fiddle," he suggested. "Our friend is wild to-night; charm him to earth and sober sense again."

Massingdale making no attempt to force a continuation of the talk, the boy played to us. It was the last time for many years that I heard him, except on the concert platform, and he made the music that he always does make, wonderful, magic, sad or joyful, as he wishes. He gave us many things, all of them simple country airs, old songs, of distant lands and times. Finally, when he had us waiting on his mood, he played the *Flowers of the Forest.* He showed us the open Scottish hills, grey and wild; he sounded the far-off, distant wail of pipes; and he made us realise that men had died, that hearts were broken, that bitter sorrow reigned alone.

Some minutes after he had ceased, Massingdale got up.

"What devil of melancholy is in you to-night?" said he. "Your infernal genius and your dirges have raised the past about us. We shall sleep with memories of dead men and hopes as our companions. The gods send that, when you get older, you will not have so great an affection for inducing sadness."

Very shortly afterwards, still, I think, with the spell of Marellac's music on us, we went to bed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ATTITUDE OF AN OLD ARTIST

I HAD already been too long away from home, and I only stayed four days in Paris, as Loissel's guest in the Boulevard Haussmann. During that time I repeated the same things about our recent adventures, anybody who called being certain to open the subject, until I had developed something of the manner of the professional guide, and finally took to escaping if strangers made their appearance. The newspapers, I noticed, referred to Massingdale as a young artist of genius, when, before he had provided them with copy, they had only noticed his existence, but had overlooked the genius, in criticising the shows where he exhibited; now, however, he had become a painter "whose forthcoming work would be awaited with a lively and confident anticipation." I take it the advertisement did him no harm.

On the second evening of my stay in Paris, Loissel invited the Onningtons to dinner; they were going back to England the next day, Tom being anxious to get a little time at home before his leave was finished. It was much of a relief to be with people who knew the facts about the strike, and to refer to the matter, if we wished to do so, without lengthy explanations.

While we were still at table Tom put a certain aspect of the affair more plainly than I had thought of it before.

"If you come to think of it," said he, "we owe a good bit to Massingdale; but for him we should have been fairly in the cart."

"How is that?" asked Admiral Onnington. "You have n't said anything about it until now, my boy."

Tom laughed.

"No," he agreed; "I forgot about it. I believe that the others did, too. Still, the soldiers came a few minutes after we most needed them; about ten minutes, I should say, before it would have been too late. Massingdale—I never asked him much about it, and he would n't volunteer anything—guessed that we would have somebody watching the park walls, and so, finding that the crowd coming in his direction were taking a short cut, he started off for some farm or other to find a horse. He did find one, and took it. Then he rode into Donzy—I think that 's the name—got on the telephone, and rang up the military. He seems to have made a pretty hot appeal, for they turned out some cavalry at once. After that he came as hard as he could back to the château. Supposing that the man we sent had been the only person to warn the authorities—he got to Cluny after the soldiers had started—a good many of us would now be keeping company with poor old Blinkson."

"If that is the case," said I, "it looks uncommonly like our owing our safety, possibly our lives, to Massingdale."

"Something of that sort," Tom answered. "He came out rather well that night. I expected him to be far more excited, and not half as practical."

"Why?" asked Joan, playing with her bread.

"He is n't exactly a slow-blooded man," Tom informed her; "judging by his ordinary behaviour, I imagined that he would be pretty nearly wild."

"But," added Admiral Onnington, "it is very often your excitable man, the fellow who can work himself into a rage over ideas, who turns cool in a crisis."

"I won't say that he was cool," replied Tom. "Did you catch sight of his face when he downed that red-headed beast who had got hold of you, Joan? He was n't cool then; I never saw bloodshed so clear in a man's eyes before."

Joan shuddered; she was in no danger, I imagine, of forgetting the incident.

"Yes," she answered. "It was awful. I don't want to think of it."

"Really, Tom," admonished my aunt, "you should not dwell on these things. It 's terrible to think that you were actually killing people."

"It would have been far more terrible—for us—if it had been the other way about," he answered cheerfully.

Here, however, Loissel interposed and led the conversation to other topics; he was anxious, it appeared, to avoid further discussion of Massingdale's character.

We sat, after leaving the dinner table, in the room which Loissel used as a studio, for the flat was at the top of the building where roof-lighting could be obtained. That the apartment is furnished with a nice regard for effect, is no matter for surprise; that it is exceedingly comfortable, well stocked with deep chairs, old cabinets of gracious form, books, and pictures, beside the store of artist's implements, is what those who know the owner would expect; that the place is a sort of museum, containing innumerable relics of the seas, is a fact with which only the chief intimates of the old painter are acquainted. It is a maxim of his that any one who acts the showman of his own possessions stretches friendship beyond its natural limits. He would as soon bring forth one of his treasures, before he had been asked to do so, as he would refuse to help a struggling artist; that he should do the one or the other seems to me inconceivable. If, however, he entertains guests who explore his collection from other motives than misplaced politeness, I know of no man who can better explain the histories, all of them uncommon, of the strange mementoes of his wandering. A fat volume might be filled with their stories, and it would be a book of many delights. Bits of spars, blocks, old figure-heads; minted gold that has rested long beneath the sea; carved panels from tall ships that foundered centuries ago; pistols, swords, yellow charts, and faded log-books; the relics of seafaring men from all parts of the world; the familiar objects of many sailors dead and gone: all these are to be found locked in his cabinets, stored in his cases, hanging upon his walls. And of all of them he will tell you the same thing: they came to him through no dealer's hands, they have seen no shop interior, but rested, until he found them, on far-off beaches, floated in deep waters, or were treasured, uncomprehendingly, by natives on whose shores the sea had laid them. From wreck and storm they come, and were scattered far and wide, on coral reefs, on rugged northern foreshores, until a wandering painter picked them up, to lay them by against the time when his voyaging should have ceased, so that when he sat at home, in comfort, he might still have by him some record of the restless, hungry waters that he loved.

Joan, while we men sat still in decent content started wandering round the room, picking things up and asking Loissel for their history; presently my uncle joined her;

then Tom; finally, we were all at it together. Our host, not displeased, I fancy, would give us here and there a piece of information: how he had found one thing in the China Seas, another in the Mediterranean, another in the Pacific Isles. About one object only did he speak at any length; even then, it would appear, he was fearful of boring us. Joan had taken from a cabinet, unlocked to satisfy our curiosity, a worn and faded volume, the log-book of the *Jane Peters* of Bristol.

"That," said Loissel, seeing her handle it, "interests me greatly. I found it, half-buried in sand, on one of the smallest islands of the Seychelle group, forty—no, forty-two years ago. How long it had lain there I can only guess. The *Jane Peters* sailed from Bristol the 4th May, 1751, bound for India. You may read there the record of the voyage, which was prosperous, until she had left Madagascar some days; then you have it recorded that she found bad weather; then—no more. More than a century afterwards I find her log. Francis Peters was her master, and Jane, it is probable, his wife or daughter. How long she waited for his return, if she did wait, hoping that no news might be good news, I cannot learn; yet so many years afterwards I find out more of her Francis than she ever came to know; how he sailed on, and was lost, and where the sea received him. Oh, but I have many dreams that I can dream when I sit before my fire with these wild sea-gifts about me."

We studied the old book with care; eyed the cramped and faded writing with something touching awe; and had, also, our dreams of the *Jane Peters* as she dropped down the Avon on the tide, left the channel behind her, and sailed out to her distant doom. Even when he filled in that last entry, I will warrant, Francis Peters hoped to sight the Clifton gorge again.

After that we left the relics of the seas alone, fearful lest we should happen upon something of smaller interest and so spoil a fine impression. I turned the talk to the subject of Loissel's memoirs, pages of which I had seen; and the author assured us that, if they were ever finished and appeared in print, such tales as that of the *Jane Peters* would not be lacking in them. Then, when we had drifted on to other topics once again, Loissel got up from his chair, faced us from the hearth-rug, and spoke of a matter that had been some time, I fancy, in his mind.

"There is," said he, "a little point of business that I would speak about. I break a confidence, though not my word, in mentioning it." We stared at him, but he continued very calmly. "I am, however, convinced that I do right. There is a picture that I would show you; a picture, a very great picture, by my pupil, Louis Massingdale."

So I understood what he was about to show us, and wondered, while he got out the canvas, what his object might be. He placed the painting on an easel; arranged the lights about it so that it might be seen as well as possible, then took his stand in front of the fire again. "You will find it," said he, "worth looking at."

I, with the others who had not seen it, studied the picture for some seconds, finding new beauties in it; then I turned to watch Joan, who would not, I imagined, fail to show some interest. Her colour was high, her embarrassment great, her interest and attention fixed. There is not, I suppose, a woman, nor has there ever been, who could feel anger when a painter, even though he be a cast-off lover, shows her more beautiful than she, in fact, appears; when, however, this same painter leaves his subject's features as he finds them, exaggerating nothing, glossing nothing, and founds the subtle changes in the painted face upon expression, showing how fuller beauty might be gained, then the living woman, discovering many points that her mirror daily misses, adds regret to her satisfaction, and, perhaps, resentment, carefully hidden lest she should confess her weaknesses, to her regret. That Joan was both interested and embarrassed, I have already stated; what her feelings were beside she was most careful to hide from us.

Admiral Onnington spoke the first comment; he had scrutinised the painting with an extreme of care, going close to the canvas, then standing back again.

"I am absolutely astonished," said he, making use of an unwonted precision. "I had not the smallest idea that Massingdale could, or ever would, do anything of that sort."

Tom put the matter with a greater force.

"Lord," he announced, "this knocks spots off his other work! It ought to bring in most of the adverse critics. What we call flattering as a portrait, is n't it?"

Loissel did not wait for other opinions, and he made no reply to the two that had been offered; he looked at us all as if he sought our attention rather than our admiration.

"I was asked," he explained, "to house this picture. Massingdale's wish was that I should not show it to any one. But you see it now, my friends; thereby I have disobeyed his wish and brought you some embarrassment." He paused, shrugged his shoulders, and spread wide his hands. "I have a reason," he continued. "I am aware of what is past; I know that you think of him as a man who has committed a dishonourable, an unpardonable act; yet I show you this painting, guess-ing, perhaps, something of your feelings, and I ask you to urge, very strongly, that it should be exhibited in public."

He turned to Admiral Onnington, and seemed to wait for his reply.

"I am afraid," answered my uncle, somewhat stiffly, "that I do not see the necessity for that. I cannot understand why you should expect us to urge the matter."

"I ask you," returned Loissel, "because, unless you do express your willingness to see this picture exhibited, I am much afraid that it will not, for some years, in any case, be shown to the public."

"But, Monsieur Loissel," argued my aunt, "that question should surely be settled by Mr. Massingdale himself. You must see that any exhibition of this picture would cause my daughter a great deal of unpleasantness; all the unfortunate talk that went about before would start again. I cannot think that this picture ought to have been painted, and I am sure that Mr. Massingdale would keep it from public view, as you suggest, for some years, if he were asked to do so."

"I am convinced that he would," Loissel assured her.

"Then," replied my aunt, as if the matter were already settled, "you agree with me. Will you tell him that we do not wish it exhibited?"

Loissel straightened himself; he was a very commanding old man.

"I will not," he answered sternly. "If you wish a great picture suppressed, madame, you must not ask me to help you. But," he added, his voice become more gentle, "you will, please, listen to me before you decide. I know very well that this painting may cause some unpleasantness to Miss Onnington. Fools will use their memories, and there will be talk. That is the one side; I will show you the other. It is not an easy thing to gain one's living by any art; the way is, of necessity, so hard that there is no cause to make it harder, even though you do not like the artist. If the matter stopped there, I do not think that, on account of a little inconvenience, you should interfere with a poor man who is struggling hard; but the matter does not stop there, it goes beyond, very far beyond. You say that this picture should not have been painted."

"Certainly," interrupted my aunt. "I think that Mr. Massingdale should have asked my daughter's permission before he painted her portrait."

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" cried Loissel, raising his hands towards the ceiling, his great head bristling with excitement. "You do not understand. You realise nothing, nothing at all, madame, of what an artist feels. It is not a portrait of your daughter—this! It is a great picture of a woman. He paints it, that boy does, without a model, without even a lay figure to help him with the clothing. It is in him, the picture that he would make; it burns in him, fills his mind, guides his hand. He thinks of nothing but this great idea of his; he works at it, having no other idea than that he must create the thing he feels. He is inspired. He should have asked permission! *Seigneur!* do you think that the man who could do that—that, madame—alone, seeing only his own vision, would stop to ask, would cease his work unless blindness or death compelled him? I tell you that a great artist did that; and he was inspired—inspired."

I had never seen the old man so moved; his voice shook, his hands sawed the air, his English became broken and almost difficult to understand. Yet he returned to the attack with no more than the slightest pause for breath.

"You do not understand," he repeated. "The rules that you make do not apply to this. It is different—quite different. All life is not just gentlemen and ladies acting together in a polite comedy. He, this boy that I have trained, is more than one of these well-mannered players. He does great things; he is full of passion—perhaps of foolishness. It would be quite wrong, you tell me, I think, for a gentleman to show a picture in which your daughter's face was used, if she did not wish it. Yes, madame, quite wrong for a gentleman, but quite right for a great artist. It is of the great artist that I speak—I, Jean Loissel, who have never done such work as this. He works, the artist, for his art; he must make the beautiful things that he can. That is his faith and his honour, to which he must be true. Do you think that I betrayed a confidence, do you think that I abuse my position as your host, without cause? I tell you, no. If you refuse to urge him to show his picture, Mr. Massingdale will not allow it to be seen; if you were to say to him what you have said to me, I am afraid that, perhaps, he would try to destroy it. I am very sorry for you in your private difficulties; I am also sad for him, because I love him like a son; but this is no private matter. He is young; it is impossible that he forgets the way you think of him. He is very likely to do foolish things. Will you, because of this quarrel, to stop a little talk, allow him to hide something that the world should see? Is it right that we, and the men who shall come after us, should lose this picture?"

My aunt did not reply; Tom moved uneasily in his chair; my uncle and Joan gave no sign of their feelings.

I dared not speak, for I believed that Loissel spoke the truth, that Massingdale would destroy his painting, if he thought that Joan had seen it and disliked it, and believing that, I had no choice between silence and an unseemly outburst of oaths. That Massingdale's first chance of gaining fame should be lost, that the picture should be spoiled or hidden, through his own idiotic sense of what was fitting, or on account of the Onningtons' obstinacy, was more than I could stand.

Then Joan broke the silence, which grew unbearable.

"Please tell Mr. Massingdale, when you next see him," she said to Loissel, "that I admire his work more than I can say, and that I hope that he will exhibit it in the Salon next spring. Make him understand that I mean what I say."

Loissel crossed the room to where she sat, seizing her hand and patting it.

"Mademoiselle," he murmured, his deep voice very soft, "you, then, understand. I thank you. *Bon Dieu*, but I thank you."

Tom made no attempt to hide his satisfaction. He had always considered his family's attitude towards Massingdale as absurd; and on no other grounds than that he knew something of the man, he had refused to believe him guilty of the actions of which he was accused.

"Good work, Joan!" he cried. "Of course he has got to show the thing, and make his name by it. I had an awful moment thinking that you would object. My eloquence was just about screwed up to concert pitch; I was on the point of giving tongue, when you saved the company that entertainment. You 're not a bad child, Joan; I begin to see your merits."

"Don't be ridiculous, Tom," my aunt interrupted;

she did not share our relief. "The matter, of course, is settled. If Joan wishes the picture exhibited, I have no more to say. I am surprised, I confess."

"I can't understand why, mother," Joan informed her. "You surely must agree with Monsieur Loissel; we should have done Mr. Massingdale a great wrong in objecting. We have absolutely no right to interfere with his work or his career."

My uncle made an effort to turn the conversation; he would have stood by his womenkind whatever attitude they had taken, but he was not displeased, I fancy, at the turn of events.

"Well, well," said he, putting his hand on his daughter's shoulder, "since you have made up your mind, my dear, let 's pass the matter over. I 'm very glad that you have been able to do what you have done. We 'll hope that Monsieur Loissel is right, and that the picture proves a great success for its creator."

"As for that," laughed Loissel, now all content again, "there is no doubt."

So the fate of *La Femme* being settled, we talked of other things; and our host was at great pains to conciliate Mrs. Onnington, who held out distinct, yet unobtrusive, signals of offence.

When his other guests had gone, Loissel filled and lit his cherrywood pipe, settled himself in his arm-chair, and smoked some minutes without speaking.

"If," said he at last, "your little cousin had not agreed with me, I should have been forced into telling a great many very difficult lies. We would have taken no risks with that, my friend." He pointed to the easel. "And now," he continued, "we will talk of youth and folly, and also of the very pleasant times that we have had together."

Which, with other matters, kept us from our beds until Paris slumbered heavily about us, making the most of her short rest.

When I got back to London I found many things to keep me busy, to twist my thoughts, during most of the hours of the day, into less diverting shapes than they had adopted for two months or more. The law is full of interest; its practice does not lack incident; but the lawyer, although he is continually in contact with uncommon types of his fellowmen, lacks something of gaiety in his professional life, and is, or should be, a stranger to the irresponsible. I was nourishing a small and very tender reputation; I was looking forward to the time when the income that I earned would pay the chief part of my expenses, and I found the occupation sufficiently engrossing.

Once only, in the course of six weeks or so, I got down to Elsingham. On that occasion I found Joan had got rid of the bored manner that had grown on her some months before, and was herself again, taking interest in most things, more ready with sympathy and understanding than formerly, and somewhat inclined to hold conventionality a supreme folly. She talked a good bit about women having something to do in life, yet she gave no hint of an intention to embark on any career open to them. I got the impression that she was trying to come to some decision; on what point I could gather no idea. Gatton was my fellow guest for the week-end, and his chances of persuading Joan to marry him seemed to have disappeared. I was sorry for him, as he had been met a fair half-way along the road when I had last watched his advances; and I would lay a wager that he had, on this occasion, come to Elsingham to put the finish on the matter. I travelled back to town with him, and he was a gloomy companion. During the course of the journey he volunteered two statements, both diagnostic of his condition: he informed me that his luck had been dead out for some time past; and later, without any nearer reference to my conversation than before, that "sooner or later the damned thing is bound to turn." I expressed a desire to hear of its doing so, and we reached Liverpool Street in more hopeful mood.

Shortly after this I received a letter from Loissel, the purport of which was that I should use every inducement that I had at my command to persuade Massingdale to pay a visit to England. "He talks," wrote the old artist, "of all sorts of things. He suffers from the reaction that was inevitable after our adventures. His picture of the stilt-dancer is finished, and he has, for the moment, no work to do." From the rest of the letter I gathered that Massingdale was talking of leaving Europe and voyaging to the East, which excursion he could not afford; that there had been a fearful scene when Loissel explained that the Onningtons had seen *La Femme*, which was what I had expected; and that even Paris, his much-beloved city, could not charm away the unrest in his excitable heart. A return to England, which he had not seen for two years and a half, could do him no harm and might do him some good: so the old man argued, and so I thought. He could not for ever be an exile, and a visit to London and his own kind would cause him to go back to Paris, where for many reasons he intended to live, in a more settled mood. He could raise money on Blinkson's legacy, and for a short time live the life of other men of his breed, and age, and station.

Therefore, I wrote to him producing all the arguments that I could discover; begging him to be my companion in Brick Court once again and urging him to stay with me at least a month. I got his answer, which was characteristic of Massingdale in his less wordy mood, by return of post. It ran:

"HONOURED ADVOCATE,—Whomsoever you may happen to defend is safe from the law's punishment! Prosecute a man and you have damned him, even in his innocence! I 'll come. Are you mad? I think you must be when you talk of four weeks—in London. Before half that time is passed, I—more fortunate than Alexander, an ancient great man—shall have discovered new worlds to conquer, and shall be already in the tented field; *i.e.*, a new studio that I have my eye upon. God be with you, Richard; I 'll let you know when I purpose to arrive.

"K. L. M."

CHAPTER XX

MORE UNREST, BUT OF A DIFFERENT KIND

MASSINGDALE arrived, why I have not been able to discover, on a Sunday morning, having travelled by Havre and Southampton for no other reason, I believe, than that it happens to be the slowest method of journeying from Paris to London. Friendship should be above politeness; therefore I did not meet him at Waterloo, but contented myself with preparing breakfast for him in my chambers. He put in an appearance a few minutes after ten, and he wore the air of a man who suffers the world's folly with resignation.

"Greeting, Richard," he announced, as he stood in the doorway. "In that you live in this country, I pity you; in that you are cheerful in it, I admire you; in that all its multitudinous horrors have never lured you to public protest, a thing perfectly useless but occasionally satisfying, I find a circumstance that fills me with awe and wonder. Sir, I slept so sound upon the boat this night that I allowed no time for breakfast; being upon English soil in the grey of the Sabbath morning, I was not permitted to eat—such would seem the hospitality of the natives; therefore, I hunger. Eggs? They shall be buttered, Richard! Bacon? You have that? Fried—no room for doubt there! Marmalade? And tea—as you honour me, no hint of your vile coffee! Ten minutes ago I was engaged with the framing of excuses, I was preparing to announce my instant intention of returning whence I came; now, since you in your great wisdom have set before me my country's chiefest glory, I am content to stop a little while—perhaps, even, to brave another Sabbath. Breakfasts and beer—you break an egg with the skill of a master—have held many wavering Britons steady in their patriotic faith."

"Why did you arrive on the Sabbath?" I asked.

He waved the butter dish, which he carried towards the fire, in the air, expressing his inability to answer me.

"There," he replied, "you touch on the inexplicable. How can any man account for his actions—yet I have heard many try. Perhaps," he added gravely, "some hidden vein of asceticism would give you your explanation; perhaps I wished, for my soul's good—a worthy cause—to suffer inconvenience."

Throughout the meal and for the rest of that day he talked an endless stream of nonsense, occasionally touching on some subject that he treated with respect, but immediately shying from it as if he was afraid of seriousness. I realised that Loissel had written the truth when he stated that Massingdale suffered in the reaction after much excitement, yet I knew the man sufficiently well to let his mood run without any attempt to check it, to wait until, of his own accord, he spoke of the future and its promise. The scar on his head showed plainly beneath the hair of his left temple; he had the appearance of a man much worried, and he was very thin; but his laughter was not forced, and for the moment, at least, he had shut his eyes to the things he did not wish to see, dwelling in a condition of mental inactivity.

For several days he kept to the same business; talking extravagantly; wandering London in search of amusement while I was at work; and, in the evenings, keeping me company in whatever I proposed by way of entertainment. About a week after his arrival, on a Monday night, if I remember rightly, his temper altered, and he showed me much of the unrest and trouble of his life.

We had dined at the Cock, and had gone back to spend a quiet evening in my rooms, for the night was foggy and wet, offering little inducement to drag a man from his arm-chair and his fire. My neighbour, and Massingdale's successor in the rooms across the staircase, came in soon after we had settled down; he stopped an hour or so, and, being a man who loved argument, deliberately trailed his coat in the hope that we would step upon it. In other moods Massingdale would have seized the opportunity with eagerness, and the small hours would have seen us, dry-throated and voluble, very far from the point where we had started; but on this occasion he refused the challenge, scarcely spoke at all, and convinced the visitor, who met him for the first time, that he was either naturally taciturn or unnaturally, in view of the hour, inclined to sleep.

When we were alone again, he stirred the fire into a blaze, filled and lit a cool pipe, and lay back in his chair, staring in silence at the dancing flames.

"If," said I, after some few minutes, "you want to dream, I 'll read through some papers. I 've got quite a busy week before me."

"Dream!" he echoed, sitting up. "I have no use for dreams to-night, Dick. We 'll talk. I was at the docks to-day."

"Well? What of it?" I asked, judging from his manner that he was heading towards some wild decision.

"This," cried he, sitting forward and playing with the poker: "I am going away, out of all this, to see something of other lands. I 'll get a sight of the sun; I 'll fill myself with colour—rich, brilliant, bright colour; I 'll learn something of the things I have often dreamed about."

"O Lord!" I interrupted; but he paid no attention to me, his thoughts being fixed upon the plans of which he spoke.

"I fell in talk with the skipper of a barque," he continued. "She is named the *Laughing Girl;* is now getting in her cargo, and is due to sail for New Zealand to-morrow week. I went to the owners and spoke them fair; they are willing to give me a passage aboard of her for almost nothing—a pound a week, all in. The junior partner in the firm is a man whom I knew slightly at Cambridge, and he settled the thing for me. I sign on as an extra purser—the usual game—and, of course, have nothing to do but use my eyes, and enjoy myself."

"You have n't signed on yet?" I gasped.

"No," he answered; "there is no need to do that until the day before we sail. Think of it, Dick! Many weeks at sea—real sea, not water seen afar off from the decks of a steam hotel—a sailing ship, and, at the end, the Pacific Isles. That 's where I make for, the Pacific Isles! To the sun and the flowers, the eternal booming of the surf upon the reef, the finest climate, the happiest people on this earth."

"You don't seriously mean this?" I asked.

Massingdale turned his head towards me, holding the poker raised. I could read nothing but astonishment on his face.

"Why should n't I mean it?" he questioned.

"Because the whole idea is absurd," I retorted, getting up from my chair and standing in front of the fire. "You have not got the money to go rushing off round the world. You 've plenty of work to do, and a name to make as well, and if you start obeying every whim that takes you, you 'll finish in an asylum or the workhouse."

I was playing for an outburst of words, for a heated contradiction, a flood of passion, and then, as I hoped, a reaction and some acceptance of my points. I was disappointed. Massingdale showed no excitement. He put down the poker quietly, leaned back in his chair, and looked up at me steadily.

"You 're going a bit astray, Dick," he remarked. "I have got the money. Blinkson left it to me—something over a hundred and twenty pounds a year. I 'm a sort of Crœsus, my friend, compared with the beggar that I have been. As for my work, that shall not suffer. Loissel did what I propose doing, and I am content to follow him. Lastly, you speak of this as a whim. Why? You know something of me—do you think the decision is, therefore, so extraordinary? You ought to have guessed that I should not remain many months hanging about when I had the chance to wander. Have you anything more against the scheme?"

I did not reply for a moment, searching without success for some argument that might persuade him. In my own mind I held the plan a piece of folly, yet I could find no means of making him see as I did.

"Of course," I told him at last, "I expect you to do strange things. That is part of your life's business. Also, I don't want to interfere in your affairs. But—we need not dwell on the point—we are friends, and I should like to get at your reasons, if you care to give them. Why this sudden decision?"

He stood up, and in the light of the hanging electric lamp I saw his face weary and sad. He paced the room restlessly, as he always did when things disturbed him, and he spoke without pausing in his march.

"You ask me a question that I cannot answer," said he. "I 'm out of tune with this way of living. That, I believe, is all there is to say. I must live my life as I see it—the old cry that is nearly always true. I have something to do. Except now and again, when things look very black, I believe that I shall be able to do it. You need not tell me that I have started well. I know that better than you do—much better. The start is important, but the road is rough all the way along. You are playing a gambling hand yourself, and you know that a little carelessness, no matter when it comes, may ruin the work of years and spoil the future. It is that that I fear. Painters are not made with technique alone. Skill is not much good, if the man behind it is a fool. I 'm not bored, Dick. I find almost everything about me full of interest as I always have, but I can't see straight. The world has got twisted. Lately I have been faced with a choice of evils: to see the ugly side and show it, which means damnation, or to pretend to see the sunshine when it comes to me filtered through the mists, which will end in artificiality and hopeless failure. Therefore, I 'm off. I 'll get jogged up, stirred out of this fool's mood, and back to the proper thing again."

Again we fell silent, and then I put him a direct question.

"This fool's mood, as you call it," I asked him, "is it connected in any way with Joan Onnington?"

He jerked his head back, looking me very squarely in the face.

"It is," he answered.

I thought that I had found the way of persuading him against the voyage, and urged my point.

"Won't time right the business anyhow? Surely this mood is only the natural result of seeing her again."

Massingdale came up to the fire and leaned on the back of the arm-chair in which he had been sitting.

"Should you call me a misanthrope?" he inquired abruptly.

"Hardly," I replied, astonished at the question.

"Should you think me without affection, and careless about other men's opinions of me?"

"Certainly not the first; very slightly, perhaps—really not at all, the second."

"Then," said he, "your remedy cannot be applied. I have quarrelled with my father, and while I am in a position to run across him any day, I cannot forget the circumstances that make us avoid each other. I am considered a sort of amusing scoundrel by most of the men I used to know. I have met them again—some of them—in the last few days, and it is very clear what they think. That goes against the healing effect of time. I 'll be damned if any man can stand being treated as a kind of criminal, and maintain both his good conceit and a decent regard for the acquaintances he happens to meet. I wish to keep both."

He hesitated, staring before him, seeming uncertain whether he would add something more to his explanation, then, having made up his mind, spoke again, but more quickly and in a lower voice.

"That is not all, Dick," he continued. "There is another reason why I should go beside that. For the last two years I have been persuading myself that time would right things—most of us cling to that belief; now I am convinced that it will not. I forgot all the practical details. I just dreamed that, given the chance, I could set the business straight again. I got the chance —I made things worse."

"Are you sure of that?" I interrupted, not with any idea that he was mistaken, simply because it seemed to me the thing to say.

"Quite certain," he answered, and started pacing the room again. "I have got on the other side of the ditch, and as I won't or can't cross it again, there is little sense in thinking of the fields behind that I once played in. I hope for all sorts of delightful country ahead, but just at the moment the old things that I miss about me bulk rather large."

I did not offer any comment; I was thinking of the moonlit garden at La Fontaine des Bois and of Massingdale trying to use his chance, as he called it, and of his failure. The hanging lamp was well shaded so that my face was in shadow as I stood before the fire, for which thing I was thankful, since I felt, and very probably looked, uncomfortable. Suddenly, after he had taken several turns in his pacing to and fro, Massingdale burst out into speech again, passionately, with many excited gestures.

"I 'm sick at the whole fool business," he cried; "more than half the thing is sham. We are afraid, the whole lot of us, afraid to appear what we really are. Some people call it civilisation. My God! if they are right, then to be civilised is the worst and final evil. It is cowardice, fear—nothing more. We call in theories, nice modern theories of which we are so proud, to hide the truth from us. Violence is wrong, we say; strength is an abuse; passion a thing to hide. Suffering, and evil, and cruelty must be forgotten when we plan the future. Your politician secures votes by talk of pretty, humane schemes which he knows in his heart are doomed to failure; your socialist and democrat calls out that nature may be superseded if the people will only govern themselves, because he is a fool and would rather deafen himself with the noise of his own folly than take one glance at the truth, which is plain and strong and cruel. We artists are no better. We explain our art, we tell the world how it is really beautiful and for their good, because we are afraid to stand by ourselves, do the thing that appeals to us, and take the reward or the failure as it comes. When we paint a picture or when we write a book, we are intent to show that it is done in the interest of humanity, that it embodies some noble lesson of truth and beauty; we dare not cry: 'There is our work, to us it is good, accept it on its merits.' If we did so, we should proclaim ourselves individualists—mark the word—careless of our neighbour's good, just what we really are. We are afraid to call ourselves such names, so we wallow in stupid, meaningless talk. On all men's lips there are phrases about the good of humanity; everywhere societies are formed to prevent cabbages from suffering injustice, little boys from being brutalised by whipping, or gentle murderers from being killed; we must carefully, in all that we write and all that we say, avoid the mention of cruelty and the triumph of the strong; we pity the dark ages when men fought and robbed each other, when chivalry existed, when fewer men covered their actions by the pretence that they worked for others; we profess a virtuous honour for the blackguard who thinks only of himself; and beneath all the noise and outcry, behind the fine text-bedaubed front that we show to the world, we struggle and fight, perform our little tricks and knaveries, kick the weak and cringe to the strong, as our fathers did before us. We are horribly afraid of pain; ashamed of any simple honest sentiment; inclined to make a virtue of drifting along in a herd, because we have not the courage to stand alone; beyond that—nothing, not one single good point that the men who made us had not got."

His long oration finished, he dropped into an armchair and gazed with fiery, indignant eyes at the glowing coals.

"It 's a full indictment," I laughed, seeing him silent again, "and, doubtless, there is a good deal of truth in it, but——"

"But," he interrupted, his passion subsided, "it 's the complaint of a fool. I know that, *mon* Richard. It 's the way I feel at present; therefore, I 'm much better away. When I come back, I shall be able to laugh at it, which is its proper treatment. Meanwhile, I 'll take myself where the talk is of a different sort. What about a walk? It is abominably stuffy in here."

He threw open the window, and let in much raw, yellow fog; shouted that here was the night to wander London; refused all my enticements to draw him back into discussion; was firmly denied my company; and so departed to find the beauties of London, which the weather very effectually obscured, and the delights of nocturnal rambling, which on such a night, I should imagine, were hard to come upon.

CHAPTER XXI

A WOMAN DECIDES

THE following morning I received a note from Joan, asking me to meet her that afternoon. She was, her letter told me, stopping in town with the Wrants, and would give me the great joy of taking her out to tea, as she wished to talk with me. She appointed a meeting-place, the vicinity of some confounded draper's shop, and, contrary to her usual custom, for she was in the habit of assuming that her wishes would be met, she detailed the methods, several alternatives, by which I was to communicate with her and arrange some other time, if the one that she had named did not suit me. Remembering certain signs that she had exhibited when I was last at Elsingham, a horrid fear seized me, as I read her letter, that I should drink my tea that afternoon to the accompaniment of a dissertation on women's work, followed by an announcement, disguised as a request for advice, that the girl was about to become a hospital nurse, a poultry farmer, or the proprietress of a shop—something, in any case, that involved a large amount of labour in which she took no interest. I sighed at the prospect, hoped that I had misjudged the case, and resolved to do my cousinly duty of supplying my company and such entertainment as was required of me. That settled, I divided my attention between the breakfast in front of me and hinting at obstacles in the way of Massingdale's proposed travels. He, ignoring my efforts for his welfare, began to narrate his experiences in the fog, and, such is the power of the man's tongue, he caused me to forget the remarks I had prepared for him while shaving, and, moreover, to sit talking far longer than I had intended.

At four forty-five that afternoon I arrived at the meeting-place which had been named; about thirty seconds afterwards Joan put in an appearance, a very charming figure of a girl, seemingly in the best of spirits. Whether it is poultry farming or nursing, thought I, the thing seems to have got hold of her fancy. But at any time, more particularly when met in the street, it is hard to read a woman's intentions in her face; and I had to content myself with observing her obvious excitement.

"Dick," said she, "I 'm going to be awfully nice to you; but I 've made a mess of the start."

"That 's sad," I allowed. "How?"

"It is one of your cherished convictions that no woman is ever punctual. I should have been five minutes late, then you would have been content, but not bored with waiting."

"If you stop here talking," I replied, "simply to show that abominable extravagance in furs enables you to keep warm, I shall get bored just the same. Where do you want to go?"

"Anywhere," she answered; "anywhere with cosy corners where we can sit and talk."

"I am to be honoured with your confidence, my cousin?"

"Lots of it, Dick," she laughed. "I have decided to do all sorts of funny things."

I groaned, believing that my worst fears would come true, and hailed a cab. We drove to one of the many tea-shops where the price that he pays for his refreshment is the only remarkable point that the visitor is likely to notice, and we chose a quiet table in a corner, as far as possible from the inevitable orchestra. And there, for some minutes, we amused ourselves with casual talk, making no use of confidence. Joan asked me how the briefs were coming in, and I made a suitable reply; we discussed the latest fashions in women's dress exhibited around, on my part with small appreciation; we criticised the music, and agreed that its absence would cause us no regret; we marked time very carefully, awaiting the occasion of more important talk. Having the time to watch her closely, I discovered that there was much nervousness mixed with Joan's excitement, that she wore an air of purpose, which she was at little pains to hide; and that these, together with the other feelings which moved her, which she did not show to me, combined to produce in her face something of the effect that Massingdale had prophesied in his painting. Very clearly she had something of importance to say to me, and covered with small talk her efforts to find its best expression. Therefore, I consumed my tea and kept the conversation alive, knowing that she, or, for that matter, any other human animal, had better come to the announcement that holds their attention by the road that they have chosen, without blundering assistance from others who do not understand their real purpose.

She did not keep me waiting for any long time, and when she began to give me her confidence, she did not start farther away from her point than most of us do on similar occasions.

"I suppose," she suggested, breaking away from our criticism of the orchestra, "that you had a very good time in France last summer."

"I did," I agreed; "an excellent time."

"It makes an enormous difference what sort of people you are with," she continued. "To live in a farmhouse like that with ordinary people, who must have something definite to do in order to keep themselves amused, would be simply impossible for more than a week or two."

"Of course, we were a most original and distinguished crowd," I laughed; but she had fallen silent, and kept her eyes turned towards her plate, where she was seriously engaged in cutting a pink and unwholesome looking cake into small cubes.

I determined that the prelude was finished, and I watched for the next movement with interest.

"Dick," she announced very quietly, without looking up, "I want to get married."

"I believe," I suggested, noticing the heightened colour of her cheeks, "that the wish is a fairly common one, and that, in the case of a maiden with your charms, it is very easily fulfilled. Do I know the man?"

"What man?" she asked, very industrious with the cake.

"The man you wish to marry. Who else?"

She gave me no direct answer to that, but ceasing to play with the cake, and putting her elbows on the table, she looked across at me steadily.

"Mr. Massingdale is staying with you, is n't he?" she asked. "The Wrants told me that he was."

I judged the conversation to have become sufficiently interesting to demand my full attention, so I also leaned across the table, in order that we might talk without being overheard.

"He has been here for the last week," I answered; adding, without any effort to hide my astonishment: "Is this purely irrelevant, or has it anything to do with what you were saying before?"

"Everything," Joan told me; and I admired the way she kept her eyes on mine, although her embarrassment was great. "It is the answer to your question."

"You mean this?" I gasped.

"Is it a thing I should be likely to say, if I did not?"

"No. I beg your pardon. I suppose you know, Joan, how glad I am to hear this, and all that. But, what—why have you—well, what is going to happen?"

I found the sentence somewhat hard to finish. I wanted to ask why on earth she had told me this; and how she proposed to explain to Massingdale the change in her attitude; and why the change had come about; but these are questions that may scarcely in decency be put, or that, being asked, are not likely to be answered. However, Joan did not stop at a half confidence, and, having started, gave me the whole tale. One hand supporting her head, screening much of her face from the room, the other playing with the much-battered pink cake, her eyes sometimes meeting mine, yet more often lowered, her voice low and steady, she explained her purpose to me.

"I want you to help me," she informed me, hurrying her words; "that is the reason I have told you of this. I know it is the sort of thing that ought to be kept to oneself, but you never talk of other people's affairs, and—I must have your help, Dick."

"Don't flatter me, young woman," I interrupted. "Tell me what I can do."

"Take me to your rooms—now. I want to get something over, while I 've still got the courage. I want to meet him at once."

If I did not whistle, I came very near it; and Joan certainly saw that her request caused me a good deal of surprise, for she hurried her explanation as if it were a relief to be able to speak of the matter.

"I have been blind, absolutely blind," she pleaded, "since I heard about that miserable business. Until a few weeks ago, I have thought only about myself. I was angry. I thought that he should have ceased to take any kind of interest in any woman besides myself. I said a lot of things I did not mean, and when he would not defend himself, I thought that he did not much care. I did not believe that he had done anything that was dishonourable, but I imagined that I was only a little thing in his life." She was silent a moment, arranging the crumbs on her plate; then she went on with her tale again, her voice scarcely more than a whisper. "His going off to Paris made it worse, although he had always told me that he would do it, if he could ever get the money. The thought that he was probably happy, doing the work that he loves, made me glad that I had done what I had. I believed that his painting was more to him than I was. Now I know that that is true—and I don't mind. Then I did. I expected his life to be just one thing—without ambition or character, a horrible, stupid life that would have died a few months after we were married. For quite a long time I used to tell myself that he was careless of everything, shallow, amusing, caring only for the moment. I think that, sometimes, I believed it. I was n't happy, and I tried to find things to amuse me. It was hardly a success."

She paused again, and seemed so absorbed in her thoughts that she forgot to play with the cake. I sat still, very interested to know what she was going to tell me, waiting for her to continue the story.

"Dick," she added presently, "I 've learned all sorts of things lately, things that most people know as they grow older—that is, they must know them if they are going to be happy. I have discovered what I want; that is always important, is n't it? I have discovered that what I thought was carelessness is something different: sympathy, interest in all things, love of living, I don't know what to call it, but it is something that I want. It is the sort of thing that makes people live together far more happily than anything else. I suppose that you, and Monsieur Loissel, and the others have known all along what he was, and how different he is to other people, how much greater. Don 't laugh at that, Dick; you know you think he is. Well, I learned that too a little time ago. I 'm not going to tell you how I found it out. Perhaps you can guess. But, when I saw that he was following out his ideals where many men would have been afraid of the poverty, I began to think that I had made a bad mistake; and, when I discovered that he could laugh and work, and make every one who met him amused, although his life was very difficult, I was quite sure that I did not mind what he had done, or would do. I only thought how much I wanted him. He tried to talk to me at La Fontaine des Bois, the night before the riot; I would n't let him."

It was now my turn to occupy myself with the contents of my plate. Women have observant eyes, and when I am peculiarly ashamed of anything I find it hard to hide my feelings. Therefore, I took no risks, and did not look up for a moment or two.

"He asked me why I had altered," Joan continued, in the same low voice. "He seemed to know better than I did that I was not seeing things properly. I was beginning to know what a fool I had been, and it made me angry to think that he guessed the truth. I said something that I knew would hurt him very much. It did. He showed me that, but nothing more. Dick," she went on, and I saw that she had raised her eyes from her plate, and was making an effort to cover her nervousness with a smile, "I am going to do a most unmaidenly thing. I 'm going with you now, to tell him that I have made a mistake. Is n't it a shocking thing to do, Dick?"

"My Lord!" said I, staring at her.

"You see," she exclaimed, "I happen to know that I can trust you both. Whatever happens—in any case—you won't give my horrid conduct away. Then, in the second place, I would much rather do this, honestly, than just meet him again and do my best to get him back; that way would be much easier, but I think it 's rather cowardly. Last of all, he is the sort of man who will understand, and—and he won't pretend anything. I 'm quite sure he won't pretend anything."

For the first time she showed me the full strength of her feelings, sitting silent, suddenly grown white, with a look of strain about her, as if she held herself calm with an effort. How much anxious thought, how much unhappiness, had gone to the making of this attitude of hers, I can never know, but that the position was not easily taken is very obvious.

She expected some comment from me. I gave her the best that I could command.

"I can't form any opinion about this," I informed her. "These things are not in my line. Because it happens to be direct, avoids compromise, and cannot well be misunderstood, I should judge it about the best thing to be done. You and Massingdale are not strangers; but I really don't know. There is one thing I must say—like asking 'No spades, partner?'—it is better to say it, although it may be unnecessary. You can't go back, if you do this, Joan. It won't be all nice, high romance; there will be poverty to face. You must expect to have him as he is. There is not the slightest chance now that he will become a respectable member of society, or that, for some years in any case, he will be anything but a poor man. If you are willing to put up with all that, to try to help him, not to endeavour to make him earn a position and a reputation at the cost of good work, I will take you round to Brick Court now; if, however, you care more for your own comfort, and ease—because the other way will be pretty difficult—I 'll do every single thing that I can to prevent you two meeting. I have spoken, mademoiselle."

"I think I rather like you when you speak," Joan answered, smoothing and arranging her gloves on the table. "But you assume rather too much. You talk as if things were settled—I wish they were."

"I quite realise," said I, "that you are bound to say that, it 's part of the game; but since I notice that you have eyes, which, I believe, you use for something else than ornament, I decline to think that you are at all uncertain on the point. Let 's get out of this, however; we can talk outside."

When we were in the street, I started to stroll along, quite determined that I would take no initiative in the proceedings. Joan, however, seemed impatient; she asked me to call a cab. I did so, and we started for the Temple in silence. Her desire for conversation seemed to have passed; her nervousness had very much increased.

"Rather an anti-climax," said I, as we drove along the Strand, "if we find the quarry out."

To which encouraging suggestion I got no answer.

As we climbed the stairs to my chambers, I made a final effort to break the silence, basing it on a genuine desire for information.

"Although my rôle is unimportant," I announced, "I should like to know what it is. What do I do?"

"You just come in and wait," Joan told me, adding: "It 's going to be awful, Dick."

I laughed; the affair came within the dominion of higher comedy, and I am eager to extract what diversion I can from life.

At the door of my sitting-room Joan drew back so that I entered first; she, most certainly, was missing the humour of the situation. Massingdale was smoking in front of the fire, a large atlas resting on his knees. The room was in deep shadow except for the bright patch underneath the shaded lamp, which did not spread much beyond the arm-chair and its occupant; a litter of tea-things stood on the table and the hearth-rug, and the air was misty with tobacco smoke. The place was warm and comfortable, and the man before the fire evidently very much at his ease. He looked up as I entered, turning quickly again to make a grab at the atlas, which was slipping from his knees.

"You back, Dick?" he said. "Somebody has been round to see you, a clerk of some sort. He worried me, so I told him that you were defending the Archbishop of Canterbury in a libel action against the Great Mogul, and that you would dine at Lambeth afterwards. This atlas of yours is no good. I can't find my route— I 'm sorry—you did n't say you had got a visitor with you."

He had risen at the sound of Joan's entrance, had come half across the room, distinguishing nothing, I imagine, but furs and a hat, and had recognised her as she moved nearer to him. He stood quite still staring, as if he doubted that he had seen right. Joan held out her hand to him.

"You did n't expect to see me, did you?" she asked, hiding with considerable skill whatever emotion she felt. "I heard that you were in London, and I made Dick bring me. You 're quite fit again, I hope? I can see the scar."

Massingdale pulled himself together with an obvious effort.

"The terrible wound is healed," he assured her. "Won't you come by the fire, your hand feels very cold? I always make a mess, if I 'm alone, but it 's the only comfortable way of having tea."

He began collecting the things that were on the floor, and Joan sat down in the arm-chair that he had left. It struck me that he took more time than was necessary over the operation, and that of the three persons in the room he, although he knew nothing of the meaning of the visit, was probably the most ill at ease. When he had finished, he leaned against the mantelpiece, watching Joan quietly, the signs of wilder passion in his eyes; I, being the spectator, sat upon the settle by the fire, only asking that I might not be dragged into events; and Joan, having loosened the furs about her neck, began to draw off her gloves with a certain deliberate care.

"You were looking at an atlas when we came in," said she to Massingdale, "and you said something about your route. Are you going back to Paris again so soon?"

"Not to Paris," Massingdale answered, "to the Antipodes, to the Pacific Isles, to the other end of the world. Dick thinks I 'm a fool, I think that I am wise. So do great men differ. Europe is dull, or so I find it; youth is mine, that can't be denied; and the jolly world is wide. Don't you agree that I am wise, Miss Onnington, to go sailing off to seek my fortune, in a real sailing ship, with all sorts of things about to happen to me? Dick and suchlike croakers are soulless animals to sneer at such a chance."

He spoke in his best laughing manner, his head back, his eyes sparkling; he told you plainly that there was purpose behind his laughter, that this was his way of treating such things as held his fancy; and his enthusiasm and cheery toleration of any opposition covered him like a cloak. If he had known Joan's purpose in visiting him, he could not have played a better throw to win her admiration; for he showed us how he was determined to take all he could get of the joy of living, and, whatever of sadness or of difficulty he might happen upon, to keep his attention fixed on the sunshine rather than on the shadow.

Joan sat back in her chair, looking up at Massingdale.

"You have decided to go?" she asked.

"I sail in a few days," he answered.

"And you ask for my opinion?"

"I should like it."

She seemed to hesitate a second, and then, in a voice very low and distinct, keeping her eyes on his, she gave her answer.

"I want you to stop here. I don't want you to go away."

Massingdale stepped forward, and stood over her where she sat. Among the many moods that I had read upon his face, I had found no such excitement as he now showed.

"What do you mean?" he demanded roughly. "Tell me what you mean."

"Must I tell you with Dick here?" Joan replied, holding up her hands to him. "I have been an awful little fool, Kenneth."

Massingdale gripped her hands in his, leaning forward and staring into her face.

"My God!" he cried; and then checking any further exhibition of his feelings, turned to me. "Dick," he shouted, "go and look after that fool clerk of yours; go and whistle on the stairs; go and take a whisky and soda with the devil, if you want to; but as you love me, get out of this."

I retired; and if my exit, as I take to be the case, suited them as well as it suited me, we were partners in mutual satisfaction, which was, I assume, the only emotion that we shared amongst us at the moment.

Of the subsequent explanations, congratulations, warnings, surprise, satisfaction, and displeasure, I do not propose to write; they left Massingdale as they found him, except for the outpouring of a great number of words and not a few of his favourite gestures. With him and his fortunes, until he reached a certain point in his career, I have been concerned, and I see no reason for a lengthy and inessential divergence from my chief topic. That he was duly and legally wedded to Joan Onnington in the parish church of Elsingham, towards the end of the following April, is the fact that concerns him and his history most nearly; yet there happened other events before that ceremony took place, which show him as he was with varying degrees of clearness.

The Onningtons and others affected had to be informed of the turn of events. I have reason to believe that they accepted the inevitable with a good grace; I avoided all occasions of explanation, as far as I was able, although, being held an accessory to the business, I was sometimes compelled to be present. My aunt, finding that resistance was no more than wasted energy, smiled upon Massingdale, and made a successful attempt to forget that he had not married her daughter three years before; my uncle, after protesting that no man could possibly marry, being a pauper, did his best to alter that condition, and thereby encountered much opposition. Captain Massingdale, coming home on leave as soon as he could upon hearing the news, had an interview with his son, of which I know nothing. Afterwards they appeared very much as they had been some years before, and seemed both of them anxious to persuade the world that things were well between them; yet I fancy the hurt that they had both suffered went deeper than they, wisely, mean to show us, and that though the wound is healed the scar will always be between them. They are held by most of their acquaintances as models of parental and filial good-comradeship, and justly so; for their friendship has withstood a shock that would have wrecked a weaker union, and remains still strong, in spite of damage that cannot be entirely hidden. One incident, which occurred soon after their reconciliation, shows something of the difficult way that these two walked: Captain Massingdale wished to recommence making his son an allowance, but this Kenneth would not have. I was present at the discussion, and I joined with the father and common-sense in an attempt to force the income on the son. Massingdale, however, had his own ideas on the subject; insisted that he would be independent, since he had chosen his own career; and would, I believe, have finally refused the money had not his father pointed out that the whole property was entailed, and must form part of his inheritance, if he survived. At that he agreed to accept the smallest income that would keep him and Joan from absolute penury, should the painting fail to earn him bread. It was quite plain, or so I imagined it, that Massingdale would not be able to accept any favours from his father, no matter how ordinary their nature, until he had proved his ability to live by his art; and this circumstance, for Captain Massingdale realised the cause of it and how it was not only foolish pride on his son's part, stood for many years in the way of their complete comfort.

One person alone, of all his friends, found no single point that might bring her happiness in the whole business of Massingdale's marriage; Yvonne Carrel, I imagine, saw in the affair the death of impossible hopes. She said and she wrote nothing, so far as I have ever heard, beyond a formal letter of congratulation; but even in the midst of her success and her riches, for she had married the man who had bought her, she mourned the ending of her dreams. She had arranged her life, in so far as she had any hand in its arrangement, wrongly or with insufficient care, which you will; and one day she was hurt, doing that which she had done often before. Because she had so often done this thing in safety, with no harm, perhaps, except the one she could not realise, she was far removed from any cure, and had to pay the price that was asked of her. Convention is often irksome; nature has, and must have, different rules for men and women; and when the reckoning is handed in we often find it an ill job to settle.

Finally, Joan and Massingdale settled down in Paris, holding it the best place for him to finish his apprenticeship. While they were travelling after the marriage, *La Femme* was shown at the Salon, and attracted a large amount of attention and of talk. They live in a small flat to which belongs a large studio, in the region of Montmartre. Joan is somewhat famed as a hostess, and is content, at which I confess to some astonishment, to do more than play at poverty; for Massingdale's genius has not yet lifted him from the rank of a poor man. Vanne, a very constant visitor, is inclined to offer testimony to the excellence of their household.

"*Mon Dieu*," he will wheeze, when I get him alone, "it is altogether as it should be: the wife a woman of wit, and beautiful, the husband a great artist. They understand each other, too, which is not so common. He was born under some lucky star, our good Massingdale. So much the better for him, and, since madame keeps open house, for us."

And the little man will sigh, thinking, no doubt, of his unpublished sonatas, and the fame and comfort that will never, I am afraid, come his way.

So, in Paris, at Barbizon, sometimes in England, often travelling, Joan and Massingdale make the journey together; and I am ready to call fool the man who denies that they were well advised to take the risks and dangers, in view of the greater happiness. The one an artist, a creature excellently fitted to find the rough places which lie beside the smooth in his life's voyage, the other a woman, showing much that a woman ought to show, and therefore equipped in proper fashion to experience sorrow as well as joy, they are not likely to make their destined haven without the experience of storm and tempest; but, since I may claim to know something of them both, I hold it probable that they will sail together more surely than they did alone, and, however foul the weather they encounter, that they will come through to sunny waters, little battered, and able to use the knowledge that the danger brought to them.

Some day, I suppose, they will settle in England, but, until they do, I shall look for many pleasant days in Paris, with Massingdale before the studio fire, and Joan, more restful in her attitude, laughing at the extravagance of her lord's conversation. And two things I shall look for above others: sympathy for many different men and their ideas; and—this beyond a doubt—no lack of talk.

THE END

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