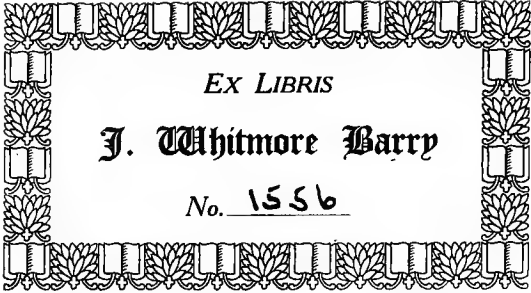


# DEVIOUS WAYS

GILBERT CANNAN



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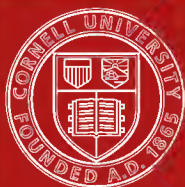
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# Devious Ways





# Devious Ways

By

Gilbert Cannan

AUTHOR OF "PETER HOMUNCULUS"



NEW YORK  
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1910

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To B. H.

*(For a most important birthday.)*

I gave the child an elephant,  
The girl a silver bird,  
I give the woman all I have—  
My soul writ word by word.

I take the moon from out the sky  
To make a present rare;  
I take a handful of the stars  
And bind them in your hair.

My heart must be most queerly made—  
I think I must have two;  
For one I give to my good wife,  
And one I give to you.

For each man loves what he has made,  
And I made you divine—  
The woman is for all the world,  
The child is always mine.



## PART I



## I

DAVID dreamed of soldiers, thousands of them, an endless line of moving creatures, dazzling in scarlet, with legs swinging, a forest of them. Being barely five feet in height, David was most obsessed with these legs, and the power of them was terrifying; there was such violence in their stride. Legs kicked out into the air, bent at the knee, straightened again, descended, and the scarlet mass moved on. Toy soldiers pleased by their colour, these mighty creatures by their force, and, the world being made for David, he was grateful to the God of Battle, who was also the God of three gentlemen called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It was chance that had brought him in contact with the military, the chance of his mother's being ill, so ill that for quiet he had been sent out with his sister and small brother to an absurd patch of ground, wherein a handful of men waged perpetual warfare with a grimy and a poisoned air for the life of a few trees, shrubs, and hardy plants. This was called in the neighbourhood "The Park," and to David, who for years had not seen other trees, it was a very splendid place, wide enough to contain the largest dragon and the fiercest knight, the mightiest warrior and the most distressed lady that his fancy could create. Here were great battles waged and brave deeds wrought, fierce animals were slain, cities were freed, and savages subdued, and here by the little pond David could gratify his piratical ambitions, or weave mighty spells to summon monsters from the vasty deep. In the grotto by the hill at the farther end of the pond a band

of robbers would meet and wait upon the orders of their moody chief, Bloody Judas, for, though David was a puny child, he held hulking boys in thrall, and his wrath was feared. He had the power of strange words, and by rolling polysyllables could quell the rankest mutiny, though when the soldiers had appeared no power of words nor wrath could keep the rebellious band from desertion, and Bloody Judas was left pale with rage, chewing at the place where his moustache ought to have been, until the shrilling of fifes and rattling of drums called irresistibly, and robberhood was cast aside, for David, tingling, to speed as fast as his little legs would carry him in the direction of the display. Yet there was sufficient of the dignity of the outraged captain to make him avoid all his henchmen, and he thrust his way to the front to stand with lowered head and hands in pockets, surveying his army, for, mighty though the world might be, there was nothing in it that he did not regard as exclusively his own and born at his birth for his delight. The soldiers set him in such a ferment that when they had passed he was in no mood for games other than the direction of an army, and when his followers had foregathered he fell to drilling them. So slovenly were they, and so unlike the magnificent march of the soldiers was their walk, that in the end he dismissed them and burst into a flood of angry tears. His case was not improved by the intervention of a kindly old gentleman who, finding him alone and weeping by the lake, patted him on the head and said:

“Are you lost, my little man?”

David turned angrily with the retort:

“Lost?—I have been dreaming of an army.”

This was in his most precise and mincing English, for he had one speech for his playmates and another for his home and great occasions such as the present.



The old gentleman gave him a penny, which David flung far out into the middle of the pond, where a duck, marking its descent, dived for it, and came to air again with a rueful countenance.

"Some day," said the old man, "you will be glad of that penny."

"I'd be glad of it now," said David honestly and mournfully.

With that he took to his heels and joined his sister, who, though she was most curious to know what the old gentleman had been saying to him, forbore, so high was the pinnacle on which she had set her brother.

David, therefore, dreamed of soldiers in the uneasy sleep which was all that was vouchsafed to him on this night, when there was so much stir and uneasiness in the house.

The thing had happened twice before in David's life, but never had he been so conscious of the greatness and terror of it, never had there been such whispering, such bustle, such solemn conclave, and never had he for so long been kept from his mother. Always she had asked for him, and had him with her during the day, near enough to touch him, to stroke his hair, or suddenly to pull him down from where he sat on the great bed prattling to kiss his ugly little face and smile wanly at him with her soft eyes.

David's mother was his friend, the great comrade in his exploits, the lady whose trophy he wore in his helmet, the distressed maiden whom his valour rescued from beasts, caitiffs, and base magicians. Together they lived in brave realms of chivalry and fancy, realms of David's creation, into which she entered gladly as a relief from the poor realities of her existence as wife, mother, housekeeper, nurse, servant, drudge; a wretched existence of screwing, scraping,

constant sickness, constant worry and agitation, of small calamities and joys, mean problems and no success; a scrambling through life, primitive without the freedom of the primitive. She was the slave of every creature in her house, and ungrudgingly, generously, she strove always to satisfy the demands of her husband, her three children, and to bear with ill-humours and injustice. She accepted. There had been so much of calamity in the gradual descent since her marriage that she was numbed by it, not crushed so much as dulled in her perceptions of life. She found escape in David. They were sufficient for each other, and this fine intimacy gave the child that self-reliance and splendid audacity of imagination which made him a power among others of his age.

In his fevered dreams David conceived his mother as a Princess laid under a spell by an enchanter, so that from all others than her knight her beauty was hidden, and with his striding army he marched through half the world, braving dangers by all the elements, to the castle where she lay. Did a forest spring up, then a path was hewn through it, or did a lake lie in the way, then a crystal bridge sprang. Wild beasts were charmed by song, and horrid serpents were strangled by a Herculean arm or trampled by the hoofs of David's white charger.

Now the charger reared, for the enchanter himself stood in the path, and in his hand was a great and dazzling light.

"Out of my path!" cried David with a great voice. "Out of my path, thou limb of darkness, thou sentinel of evil, or I will assuredly slay thee."

Fear came upon the magician, and in a quavering voice he said:

"David, I want you to run and fetch the doctor."

By some queer divination the boy, though not alto-

gether clear from his wild imaginations, arrived at knowledge of the urgency of compliance. Half in his dream, half out of it, his eyes blinking up at the magician-father looming above his bed, he groped for and scrambled into his clothes—little knickerbockers, thick stockings, jersey, heavy boots—and was soon down the stairs and, cap in hand, out into the street away to the doctor's house.

There he stood in the raw night, panting under the dim light cast from the red lamp, and scanned the row of gleaming brass bell-handles. They were labelled "Day," "Night," "Visitors," and David wondered whether he were a visitor, and also, because it was near dawn and the sky was overcast with pearly-grey and chill half-light, whether it were day or night. Eventually he pulled that labelled "Night." He was hard put to reach it, but, standing on tip-toe, he laid his hand on it, hurled himself backward, and evoked in some remote region of the house a jangling peal.

He stood and shivered, thoroughly roused now from slumber and wild fancies to heavy knowledge that his beloved mother was ill, and that here in this house was the power to dethrone suffering. He was impatient, rang again, and louder than before.

A window above the door was thrust up in its sash, and a tousled head appeared, from which there came a peevish voice:

"Hallo!" it said, and David made no answer, for he was suddenly afraid, so much fierceness was there in the voice.

"Hallo!" said the voice again. "Who's there?"

"Me," said David, now very ready to weep. He would gladly have been anybody else, but there seemed no help for it, and he must be David Brockman, and very small at that.

"Am I wanted?" said the voice, more loudly and fiercely.

"Yes," said David.

"Who by?"

"Will you come to mother?"

"Who's mother?"

"My mother."

"Who are you?"

"I'm David."

"David what?"

"David Brockman."

"Is Mrs. Spencer there?"

David concentrated all his attention on this strange question. There certainly was in the house a large woman with a jolly laugh and red cheeks, a woman of some kindness and much ill-temper who was called "nurse." She appeared at intervals in the house when his mother was a-bed, and she drank stout at supper with his father. He did not remember that she had ever been called Mrs. Spencer. However, if only to answer the question, he was prepared to say that nurse and Mrs. Spencer were one, and that she was indeed in the house.

By the time he had resolved his doubts, however, the head was withdrawn, and his answering "Yes" was lost upon the cold air. The window was shut, and he was alone in the street, very cold, very miserable, very helpless, dreams gone, warmth gone. He stared up at the doctor's house, a curious, flat, ugly dwelling of brick, old, shabby, and wondered whereabouts in it was the tonsil which had been removed from his throat in the surgery three months before, and where in it dwelt a bewitching creature with golden hair, braids and tresses of it so thick that she seemed to be all golden. Her name was Helen, but to David she was golden, and, next to his mother, the

most beautiful lady in the world. He had seen her just once, and though he had foresworn all woman-kind, the vision of her was ever present with him in all adventures, her golden hair floating always against the black of his mother. He saw them now, the two creatures, starry and splendid, and in a worshipful state he stiffened himself and swung his arms, as was his way at the beginning of a quest.

The door of the house opened, and the doctor emerged, bag in hand. He greeted David respectfully, and David, as a brave man should, swept low to the healer.

“How is your mother?”

“She’s in bed,” said David lugubriously, as though he could say no worse.

“Your father at home?”

“Yes,” said David.

They were silent for a space, the boy trotting by the side of the little grey man. David eyed the bag curiously.

“You don’t really bring them in that?”

“Bring what?” said the doctor, startled.

“The babies.”

“E...e...e-h? No. N-o-o. No.”

“Because Tush Williams says that mothers bring them themselves.”

“Who is Tush Williams?” This was by way of creating a divergence, but David was not to be turned aside from the path of inquiry.

“Storks and gooseberry bushes, father used to say . . . but . . . I’ve never seen a stork, and I’ve never seen a gooseberry bush. I saw the soldiers the other day.”

The swift leaping from one subject to another startled the doctor.

“Oh!” He could find no better remark.

"Do you think they were going to a war?"

"There aren't any wars now."

"But if there aren't any wars, where were the soldiers going to?"

To a man struggling to gather his wits from drowsiness for the practice of his profession this persistent questioning was maddening, and it was a relief to the doctor that these words should have brought them to the house.

David rattled at the letter-box, and his father, half-dressed, haggard and worn, came quickly to the door and opened it. There was relief in his eyes when they beheld the doctor, but he stood weakly fumbling with his moustache and made no sound of greeting. Lachrymose he was, lean, hungry; his hair was tossed, and on his chin a full day's beard, red and unpleasant. His eyes were red-rimmed, and the lids of them also were red and swollen, and tiny veins stood out.

"Man," said the doctor, "what is it?"

"She's dying!" said David's father. "She's dying, man! She doesn't know me . . ."

He choked, and drew his shirt-sleeve across his eyes and under his nose.

"Nonsense, man." The doctor brushed him aside and passed up the narrow stairs, David following him with his eyes to see that at the top he was met by the nurse, who might or might not be Mrs. Spencer, and that they stayed for a moment in whispered conference.

David turned to see his father staring also up at them, a thin swaying figure. David ordinarily was afraid of his father; he was now afraid of something in the man greater than himself.

The man's eyes turned to find his son's fixed in inquiry. For a moment he was angry, and wished to dash his fist into the little face with its thin cheeks and

wide, staring eyes; then, shaking with grief, he swooped suddenly, caught the boy up in his arms, lurched with him into the living-room, and fell to sobbing and wild tears, rocking, rocking, rocking, his face pressed close against his son's.

David also wept, and clung to his father, awed by this proximity to a man weeping and rent by emotion; yet, even in this moment his father was a creature remote from him—a thing of immense power, not always benevolent, rather fearful, and only the stranger by this display of fallibility. He smelled curiously; his beard was rough and hard upon David's face, and presently in his rocking he hugged the child so close, and pressed his face so hard against the child's face, that in the small mind all else was forgotten but physical pain, sheer pain, so that he struggled to break loose, thrust out with both his tiny hands, beat with clenched fists, wriggled and struggled to be free.

So he stood while his father, choking down his sobs, stayed in his rocking, and, a hand on each knee, stared and stared. He reached out an arm to touch, and David, in fear, leaped back and broke into a roar.

“Hush! Ssh! You little devil. Hush!”

David checked himself, and was for a moment ridiculous with wide open mouth and hands beating the air.

“Hush!” said the man. “Get to bed.”

David crawled whimpering from the room, and slowly began the ascent of the stairs. His eyes were blinded with tears, he was shivering, and groped, groped through a thick darkness, out of which, as he mounted, there loomed a wide figure that descended upon him, enveloped him, and, as it stumbled, crushed him against the wall. David strove to cry out, but could not, and presently a heavy hand crashed about his head, a swinging blow with a fat hand twice, so that his ears buzzed, and a sickness came upon him,

and blind rage. He kicked, and was seized by the scruff of his neck and hurled upstairs to drop sprawling, and while he lay he heard the woman's voice.

"Why didn't you go yourself 'stead of hauling the brat out of bed?"

Then his father's voice, guttural and so harsh as to be almost unrecognizable:

"You—I'm—I was tired, and it—it was so cold."

David crawled back to his bed and lay, fully dressed, face down, fists clenched, all his body rigid, shaken with hate and injury. Tears came at length, and soon, worn out, he fell asleep.

When the morning was come he rose, woke Nicholas his brother, who had been undisturbed by the doings of the night, and was in the middle of his scant ablutions, when his father came into the bathroom, and stood for some moments awkwardly shifting from one foot to another, and fingering his silver watch-chain. He was yet more haggard, his eyes were more red, and he seemed curiously shrunken. David turned to look up at him without taking his hands out of the water in the basin. His father held an arm up in front of his face. In a curious thick voice he said:

"You've—you've got another little brother."

Tears oozed from David's eyes and trickled down his nose into his mouth. He spoke no word, for the whole world seemed black.

"Mother is very ill."

Tears came faster and fell. "Father" had been a word of power, of menace, and here was this man shrunken. From a looming thing he had become for David the world's smallest, and yet entangled inextricably with the great things of his life, so that though it were no sharing, yet there must be perforce a common interest in the great mother, the shining lady of dreams.



In his broadest vernacular David said:

“A’m glad she’s not a gurl.”

This use of the dialect dragged his father from the eminence he had occupied, and relegated him to a lesser world.

“I think,” said David’s father—“I think . . . mother wants to see you.”

On that David passed out to the front of the house, and, without knocking, passed into the bedroom. The doctor was still there, and the large woman whom David had encountered on the stairs. The doctor was sitting by the bedside; the woman was busy by the fire, and when she saw David, made to eject him. The doctor held up a finger, and leaned forward to scan the face of the woman in the bed. Her lips moved, and her head turned in the direction of the place where David stood. The eyelids fluttered, and then opened, and the eyes smiled.

She moved her hand, and David came to her, took and kissed it as in their foolish games of chivalry. He climbed, then, on the bed, warily, lest he should hurt her, and buried his face in her thick black hair. Her hand stole to his head, and her fingers twined in his stiff locks; her eyes closed, and there seemed to be much happiness in her.

“David,” she said. “David, it’s a little brother for you. For—forgive. . . . Dear, dear David, it has been a foolish game—just, just you and I, and—and the—world. Say—say—it again, just once, David.”

The child, rising to his knees on the bed, recited solemnly the words that she had taught him. Her eyes opened and gazed lovingly in the eyes of her son.

“You are the most beautiful lady in the world, and stand for truth, honour, virtue, the love of all creatures, and the hatred of all wickedness: I am the most

unworthy knight, and, strengthened by the great love I bear you, I fight most valiantly for the right."

A little cry came from the woman—a cry of great gladness and keen sorrow—and they brought to her the new child. David gazed upon it, kissed it.

"Kiss me, David."

They kissed, and David was hurried from the room by the nurse.

His father was summoned, and David was given his breakfast of porridge and milk, and, with Nicholas and Audrey, his sister, set out for the grimy and unwholesome building which a benevolent city council provided for the education of the young Brockmans and their kind.

## II

HENRY BROCKMAN had been for fifteen years on the point of making his fortune, but had never achieved it. He had inherited a small tannery in a little town in Cambridgeshire, together with a sum of five thousand pounds. An only son, he had been pampered by a mother who fondled and bullied him by turns, and, with only small education, had been taken into partnership by an indulgent father, whose interest lay, not in his son, not in his business, but in the translation of the works of Ariosto and the investigation of Etruscan relics, in which pursuit he had so driven his wife and son in early years from pillar to post that they had reason to loathe the name of Italy, and sought distraction in the light frivolities of the town society, wherein they became, by reason of their foreign travel, considerable personages.

While the Brockman family was thus divided, the business which supported them was conducted by a faithful and honest manager, who had come in time so fiercely to resent interference on the part of his employers, father and son, that, to avoid the discomfort of his tart comment on their incompetence and ignorance of all the lore of tanning, they ceased to take any more active part in the business than to adopt his reports and approve all his suggestions for innovation. The elder Brockman retired more and more into his study, while Henry developed into a leader of fashion and judge of manners, and devoted himself to the task of climbing to the ranks of the county society. Being easy of address, adaptable, and of moderate good

looks, he found no great difficulty in achieving his end, and was fairly installed when romance and business entered into a conspiracy to strike him from his perch.

Romance attacked the young man first, bewildered him, swept him headlong.

There were in the town two ladies of mysterious origin and retiring habit. None knew whence they came, nor for what reason they were so little responsive to kindness shown and visit of inquiry. Wild rumours floated, and there were epidemics of gossip, but no credible theory had ever been evolved, and to all probings both ladies—the elder and the younger, aunt and niece—answered only with the politest of smiles or an exasperating compliance. It seemed that they would fall in with the basest suggestions, and one after another gossiping woman retired humiliated, and, curiously enough, silenced, until want of occupation produced a recrudescence of speculation.

Mrs. Brockman was piqued, and again and again, more resolutely and valiantly, returned to the charge, fortified by the simplicity of her temper and the shallowness of her nature. A woman of small imagination, she was endowed with an easy faculty of invention, that by its very facility flouted probability and every law of nature, and from her vast store of knowledge of the more foolish class of fiction she was able to supply in detail a whole succession of histories for Miss Andrew and Margaret her niece.

Her greatest triumph, however, was the occasion when she induced the ladies to visit at her house to inspect her husband's collection, but this triumph was her undoing. The elder lady displayed so lively an interest in all the old man's darling objects and theories, and showed herself so well informed and so sensible of all that was most charming to him, as to engage an interest such as he had not for years shown

in any human creature, and there sprang up between the two a rare friendship.

Now, though Mrs. Brockman, like Michal, despised her husband in her heart, and for many years had asked nothing of him, she became in part jealous and in part petulant that he should so abruptly emerge from his hermitage and find happiness again in human relations.

She became scandalous and something of a termagant. Her husband blandly ignored her tongue, as Miss Andrew ignored her ebullitions and foolish inventions, and the poor woman was really unhappy. She became so utterly sentimental that upon two occasions she engaged in little scenes with Miss Andrew, but retired worsted by that lady's quicker intelligence and wit, which, without being malicious, flickered and stung.

Henry was away from home, swaggering in London, while these events were destroying the peace of his home and disturbing the smooth running of the machinery; and though his mother wrote him a full and inaccurate narrative, he was too much engaged in repairing a broken heart to give much attention to the matter. Ambition more than a real affection had prompted the foolish young man to propose for the hand of a young lady of high degree. The disparity was so great that he had stood for long gasping on the brink and shivering before he dared to take the plunge, which he never would have done, but that the young lady, possessing a keen sense of comedy, had indulged it at his expense, and by a thousand and one cunningly devised trifles had given him what might be encouragement and yet none. Henry nerved himself to the encounter, met disaster, almost wept. After confidence of his blighted hopes to his good mother, he had obtained from her fifty pounds with which to

purchase balm for his wounds. In London he fell into low company, and laid here the seeds of the ruin of his material welfare in later years.

He returned to find revolution in his home, and his mother, in the direst extremity, utterly routed by Miss Andrew, and suffering under a new irony which had appeared in his father. Still in a state of injured vanity, he at first ranged himself on his mother's side and was her champion, but there came a day when he encountered Miss Margaret Andrew in the street, and fell a victim to the charm of her black hair and brave colour, and though he still strove to lacerate himself with the pleasant torture of the image of his lost charmer, it came to pass that the woman of his dreams took on more and more the features of Miss Margaret. Yet, for his wounds were still sore and apt to twinge, he was timid, and dared not woo. Indeed, he fled the goddess, and on their rare encounters he stood fatuous and mumchance in her presence, was wildly sensitive, and, did she laugh, found himself ridiculous in her sight, and raged.

Old Brockman in his new-found jocularly twitted his son, and bore the news of his strange affection to the cause of it, who, poor solitary that she was, found joy in it, and, but that the young man was so very foolish, could have been kind to him. With her aunt she liked the father and endowed the son before she learned to know him with all the finer qualities of his sire. Thus, without meeting, interest was bred in each, and seeing all her defences undermined, Mrs. Brockman took her spleen to bed and nursed it, while her menfolk, to the huge delight of the gossips, blindly pursued their whimsies.

Some miles away upon a hill was a grove of yew-trees, planted in ancient days for bow-wood, and hard by this were traces of a Roman villa, which the elder

Brockman had undertaken to exhibit to Miss Andrew. He proposed that Henry and Margaret should be of the party, and the young people, both with much misgiving, consented. Accordingly, on a fine day in the late autumn, in a nipping air, so that both ladies wore furs, fox and squirrel, they set out in an old barouche, that knew all the tricks and wickedness of generations in the town, and were not long in reaching the desired spot.

Prudent Margaret had brought a basket for sloes and blackberries, if there should be any, and while their elders prosed about the remains, the young people plunged into the dangerous mystery of the grove, dark yews, and flashing glades. Here the veriest shrew, the basest and most sordid of womankind, were entrancing. What wonder, then, that there came a spell upon the doltish youth to make him fearful of this wondrous She. And she, peeping over her brown fur at him, softness in her eyes and dancing merriment, how could she but find him a stalwart and a hero?

So it was; and presently—neither had breathed a word as they walked through sweet gloom towards a sky all red—they came upon a jewelled place of blackberries, glossy and fine, sloes, and soft-hued spindle-berry. With a little cry she ran and plucked, plucked and pulled. Henry, coming after, stood behind her, not aiding her, but close to her, gazing down at the rounded cheek so glowing in the keen air, and the tip of the nose, and the soft black hair. She was disturbed, and plucked no more. She stumbled, and he caught her in his arms.

“Oh, Margaret!”

“No, no!”

There was such pleading in her eyes that he let her go. She wandered from him, and he, fearful, stayed

for some moments, but then followed. For long again they did not speak. An envious bramble caught her by the hair as she stooped, and Henry must release her. His fingers touched her glowing cheeks, and touched again. She was free, and, tossing back her head, she laughed.

“It—it is like—like silver sounds,” said Henry, and was at once ashamed to be so much a poet. He blushed.

To touch him, for she could not speak, she laid her hand on his arm. He took and kissed it, then caught her to him. Then she clung to him, and hand in hand they wandered through the grove, stealing glances at one another, still afraid of what had come to them, but happy and rejoicing in each other.

The elders found them kneeling opposite each other on either side of the basket, playing a childish game of clapping hands and kisses, and popping blackberries each into the other’s mouth. Their lips and even their cheeks were stained with the juice of the fruit. They did not perceive the intruders. Old Brockman shook with delighted laughter, and said:

“Every woman in love is enamoured of an ass.”

“For shame!” said the gentle lady.

“True enough.”

He coughed loudly, and they emerged into full view. Henry sprang to his feet, and stood blushing and shifting like an awkward boy.

Margaret came to her aunt, and was chid for kneeling on the damp grass. Margaret dared to laugh.

During the homeward drive an impish spirit came upon old Brockman, and from his vast store he recounted anecdotes of love sacred and profane, which Henry much resented. On the brow of a hill the old man declaimed:



“I went a-roaming, maidens, one bright day  
 In a fair garden in mid-month of May.  
 I gazed and gazed. Hard task it were to tell  
 How lovely were the roses in that hour,  
 One was but peeping from her verdant shell,  
 And some were faded, some were scarce in flower

“For when the full rose quits her tender sheath,  
 When she is sweetest and most fair to see,  
 Then is the time to place her in thy wreath  
 Before her beauty and her freshness flee.  
 Gather ye therefore roses with great glee,  
 Sweet girls, or e'er their perfume pass away.  
 I went a-roaming, maidens, one bright day  
 In a fair garden in mid-month of May.”

“That,” said the old gentleman, “is Poliziano’s, the friend of Lorenzo. . . . He knew the music of such things.”

Henry was troubled. This was an aspect of his father that he did not know, save that somewhere in his memory there lingered the image of such a man, and the tones of just such a ringing voice. Margaret, sensible of uneasiness in him, stole her hand to his arm. Henry was glad of her.

The old man chuckled.

“Look at the fool!” he cried. “The eternal fool, the human fool!”

Henry reddened.

“No small thing, Henry. In all the important matters of life it is better to be a fool than an angel.”

This was beyond the young man, and he began to rage inwardly, and though Miss Andrew strove bravely to divert the old man’s wit, he was not to be withheld from his sport.

Nevertheless, the wooing of Henry prospered exceedingly, and under the perpetual taunts of his father there was tapped in him a vein of obstinacy which Margaret took for strength, so that in her eyes her

lover waxed ever more heroic. During their courtship she was radiant, and Henry began to believe himself a fine fellow, and even upon occasion ventured to cross swords with his father.

Mrs. Brockman was miserable, and took refuge in hypochondria. She retired to her bedroom, and rarely considered herself well enough to see any person but her doctor. Margaret was brought for her inspection, and though the girl was all sweetness, she found little favour.

"Not good enough for Henry," was the maternal verdict, so frequently repeated that Henry began to believe that also, and became so odiously patronizing in his relations with his fiancée as to exasperate his father, who, in conference with Miss Andrew, implored her to forbid the match.

"The girl's green," said the old man. "Green. Henry's a born fool, and the son of a fool; by upbringing a puppy. It is she who is too good for him."

"It is their marriage, not yours or mine."

"It's a plaguey odd one."

"All marriages are odd."

Time passed, and the lovers were wed, Henry thinking what a fine thing he was doing for Margaret in taking her into his bosom, and Margaret rejoicing in the winning of so magnanimous and fine a gentleman. She was a tender and a loving wife, and pampered and petted her husband until he was swollen with tyranny. Before long she had wearied him, and he took to prolonged absences on the score of business. The old manager was fast becoming decrepit, and Mr. Brockman insisted that it was time for Henry to begin to learn something about the tannery and its ramifications—not such a simple matter as Henry supposed—and after a time it occurred to

him that it might be as well to make the acquaintance of the firm's connections in London. These visits became both more frequent and of longer duration. Margaret was unhappy, but never uttered one word of complaint. She cherished always the image of the hero-husband, and though she had learned bitterly how far Henry fell short of this, and in how many mean and small ways, yet she contrived by an adroit blending of the visionary and the real to find him worthy of worship.

David was born and her life became full. Her husband was incapable of sharing the great things that had come to her, was jealous of the child for a little, and then only peevish. He went his way, and for three years David was the light of her world. She gave her husband all that he asked, and only suffered because he did not ask more.

To Henry the amassing of a fortune became the sole aim and end of life. He had only the vaguest notion of the methods of the builders of fortune, but he applied his wits to it as he had applied them to nothing else. While his father was alive he was bound hand and foot to the tannery, and could indulge his new passion no more than in a few surreptitious operations with Throgmorton Street, very rarely with success; but by the careful calculation of his gains and a total disregard of his losses he both justified himself and fortified his belief in his own astuteness.

After the death, within a short space of time, of both his father and mother, he was free, and master of a considerable property. No scheme then was too wild for his consideration. From the tannery he was naturally led to wattle, in which, according to his friends in London, there was certainly a fortune, since wattle is the best bark employable for tanning and will only grow in certain climates. Henry flared

to the prospect, and after a series of visits to London, proudly presented Margaret with a copy of the prospectus of the Uganda and Nai Robi First Wattle (Parent) Company, Limited, wherein his name was writ large among the directors.

He was likely, he told her, to make between twenty and thirty thousand pounds from the business, and with that should breed yet more thousands. She believed this as she believed everything that he told her, but did not exhibit that enthusiasm in the visionary fortune which he had half expected.

Henry became important, and purchased a fur coat, which he used to don for his fortnightly visits to London.

From one of these he returned in a state of collapse, with drawn face and eyes beaming with tears. He refused to speak, was cross with Margaret, and brutal with his children—there were now two. Finally he helped himself to a stiff dose of whiskey-and-water, and then told her that he must sell the tannery, as there was a crisis in the wattle business and ready money was needed.

Margaret, who wished for nothing but that he should be happy again, made no further inquiry, and did not tell her aunt, who became suspicious, anything of the truth, for she had divined that Miss Andrew had come to detest Henry so cordially that anything concerning him would be twisted to condemnation of him. Not for worlds would Margaret have even her aunt know that the heroic Henry had fallen low.

Disaster came, and the money that he had from the sale of the tannery followed the rest into the pockets of London rogues, Henry never suspecting but that they also had lost by the liquidation of the Company. The unhappy fool came to his wife for comfort, loudly lamenting and babbling suicide. She saw that

he was fed, and so subtly flattered his vanity that soon he was on his feet again, sanguine and full of curses of the law of chance, and vowing that he would quickly win again all that he had lost, and more.

Margaret very wisely insisted on an examination into what was left to them out of the wreck. Upon this it appeared that they had house property in the town and its neighbourhood to bring them an income of two hundred pounds a year.

“We must leave this house,” said Margaret.

“We must go to London,” said Henry.

Margaret demurred. London was to her a place of bewildering wickedness and folly, and to it rather than to her husband she attributed their catastrophe.

“There is no place like London for brains,” said Henry.

“Have you any?” said Margaret, with a rare flash of malice.

Smarting, Henry turned and railed at her, stormed and flew into a passion. She was sorry, but he would not listen to her words of self-reproach. In tears she left him, and before going to her bed hung over her children where they lay asleep.

She was for the first time afraid of her husband, and for the first time she permitted herself to see him as he really was—just silly. Again and again she told herself that there was no evil in him, that he was just a child, but a terrible child, and as she passed into sleep the vision of his face twisted in rage came to her, and she shivered and moaned a little.

In these days she was more than ever kind to him, fortifying herself, as was her custom, with the words of Volumnia, to which her aunt had drawn her attention upon her marriage:

“ If I had been the wife of Hercules,  
Six of his labours I'd have done, and saved  
My husband so much sweat; ”

and while he took peevishly the poverty which he had brought upon his house, she, who more truly suffered by it, bent to it, and with fine courage adapted herself to all the changes of life to which she was submitted.

The descent was slow, but in the end the Brockman family joined that nomadic class which lives upon the credit of its gentleness, passing from place to place as the patience of the tradesmen in each is exhausted. In the early passages of the descent living was bitter, for the pride of class was strong in them, but this became deadened or worn away by the discovery of kindness in the coarser folk among whom their lot was cast—kindness so ready and responsive to all need of it that they learned to close their eyes to what had at first disgusted them. Henry was in part assimilated by the class; Margaret never was, and though her beauty was faded, her hands coarsened by rough work, and her mind narrowed, the fineness of her perceptions blunted, yet she was ever a rare nature and a bright spirit shining in the baseness of her surroundings.

Something of this she communicated to her children, to whom she told, besides her tales of chivalry and true love, stories of the days that were gone, of her dear aunt and Henry's father, of old houses that she remembered, of learned gentlemen and fine ladies, legends of her family and Henry's, and she never tired of weaving romances of the grove of yews, which she peopled with all the simple, honest figures of old folk-stories—a curious dream-world, yet a glamorous, and, to David, certainly the only real world. Audrey was never so much in sympathy with her mother; indeed, though she stood in awe of her

father, she inclined more to him, and, whenever he permitted it, sought his company, and often in the evening would sit silent while he smoked his pipe and stared gloomily into the fire. Sometimes, if he were in a good mood, he would take her on his knee, and talk to her of the days in store when he should have made his fortune, and she should ride in a carriage and wear silks, and be given a husband mighty fine. Audrey was so pleased with this husband that she demanded details of his appearance and possessions, and her father delved in his memory for a suitable sentimental hero.

While the family was thus divided against itself, each section living in its own fantasy, the folly of the husband plunged them deeper and deeper into the morass. He tried one occupation after another, only to be ousted by rivals, not always more competent than himself, but more versed in roguery. He was all things in succession, but nothing for long. He began hopefully in association with some of the gentlemen with whom he had come in contact through the ill-fated company, but they, finding his simplicity no more profitable to themselves, soon dropped him, and he was left to wander hither and thither, dragging his family in his train, attracted always by the prospect of an easily-procured livelihood. He contrived well enough while it was possible to sell a house here and a house there to remedy the periodic deficiencies in his finance; but when the painful truth presented itself that the process made inroads upon his income, and that he was left with only two houses, which, while occupied, brought in fifty pounds a year, he was just bewildered, and made full confession to his wife.

Upon this she insisted that the houses should be transferred to her name, and that he should seek some

employment which should bring in a salary and at any rate keep them from starvation.

This they found not so easy as they had supposed, for Henry set a high value on himself, and could never understand why it should be in the power of coarser men than himself to buy his services so cheap. Those to whom he applied resented his instinctively assumed superiority, and quite reasonably refused to employ a man with so little of the instincts of the employee.

After one thing and another had been tried and found wanting, Henry at length swallowed some of his pride and became agent for an insurance company, and in the wretched little house in the suburb of a northern town whither they had finally drifted, set up a brass plate with this legend:

*"Rock and Eagle Assurance Company, Ltd., Capital £6,000,000.  
H. BROCKMAN, Agent.*

Here, after nine years' wandering, the family came to rest. Here Nicholas was born, and here were collected the remains of the household gods which had been so jealously preserved by Margaret through all their vicissitudes. Some she had had to sell, old cabinets and heavy pieces of furniture too cumbrous and bulky for the houses in which they must dwell, but small things, such old works of art as had been in the elder Brockman's collection, old jewels that had been for generations in the family, trophies of travel, portraits, books—these Margaret cherished, and bitterly resented all efforts on the part of her husband to convert them into money.

"I am a Brockman, and I do not care," he said.

"I am your wife, and you shall not."

She had some vague idea that there was a rare value in them, and clung frantically to her idea.



In truth, these treasures, from the atmosphere they gave to her house, were a bulwark to protect David and the children from the devastating influences of poverty, for they were gracious things. There were books to sow seeds in David's mind, some with pictures, to create the first impressions of the world; there was a large Bible in German text illustrated with woodcuts, whereof that depicting the Flood—angels pouring buckets of water upon a barren waste of land—most deeply impressed itself on David's mind, and provided him with the origin of the pond in the Park. On this tome he was allowed to sprawl every Sunday, provided he were clean enough, and Margaret, while he was yet a baby, would explain the pictures to him, and with the true art of the storyteller would talk of the patriarchs as though they were her friends and persons intimately concerned with her welfare and that of all her house. When, after David's infancy had passed, she read aloud to him, she cast this same glamour over the persons in the books she loved, so that even the villains in them, though she made them frightful indeed and of a horrid wickedness, yet were alive and called for pity in their sorrows. Many of these old books, with their benevolence and greatness of heart, were new to Margaret, and having a simple horror of all "cleverness," she took to reading them with some misgiving, but forced herself to continue where she had begun, for David's sake.

The bitterest that she had to contend with was her husband's utter irresponsibility in the matter of the education of his children. Living as they did now here, now there, it was difficult for David to receive tuition. At first she vowed that no child of hers should attend a board-school, and sent David and Audrey, when they were of an age, to various

little private schools kept by incompetent widows, or poor ladies with husbands to support—places where the ruling word was “genteel.” At length, however, when they had reached their poorest, she squared to the inevitable, and one by one the children were sent to the nearest board-school, where facts were crammed into them by women so drilled in the science of teaching as to have become machines. Here, in a class of sixty, David was shouted at, bullied, clouted, pinched if he were inattentive, and so harassed that he passed through every lesson as in a fearful dream. He was marked even here as a creature of different clay from his classmates, but, unhappily, this very singularity only served to draw upon him the harsh rigour of the master when it became necessary to single out an object for the preservation of discipline. Wretched though the child was, a curious loyalty and stubbornness in him closed his lips, so that his mother never knew of the injustice meted out to him, and, though she marked bruises on his little body and shed tears over them, yet she never guessed but that they were from the roughness of his playmates. Audrey suffered less. She had more adaptability than her brother, and while she was with the other children of the neighbourhood, became one of them.

All the greater joy was it to David after the horror of the week’s school to share the Sunday with his mother, and, as Don Quixote, to range through the region of La Mancha; as Sam Weller, to attend on the good Pickwick; as Tom Jones, to win gallantly through adversity; or to pass with her into the enchanted world of Shakespeare and be the Orlando to her Rosalind, the good Duke Orsino to her Viola, or a clown to follow her with dog’s devotion through the world.

Though David noticed no change in her, yet, as

the years passed, his mother became even more frail, the burden of adversity weighed more heavily upon her, and there came an evil day when she spoke harshly to the boy—a dire calamity, though she quickly soothed him.

Then she was ill, and again ill. There was an epidemic—all three children were laid low. She nursed them and herself succumbed. For months it seemed that there was always sickness in her house.

Thereafter she was more sorrowful, less interested, less eager in her happy hours, and yet for it all only the more tender. Word of complaint was never on her lips. Where Henry had lost so much, she seemed only to have gained in virtue and strength to withstand devastating influences. In the last days he came to offer her an homage which, while it puzzled her, was, for the joy it brought her, reward enough, and, having won this, she was in a state of exaltation.

“Promise me, Henry,” she said—“promise me that, whatever happens, you—David shall be free of the world—that—that you won’t—make him—like—like these others.”

Henry promised.

“There—there has been happiness—too.”

“Oh, Margaret!” He burst into tears and kissed her hand. “It—it was once so white.”

She smoothed his forehead and made soothing sounds.

He sat sobbing with bowed head, and seemed to wait for more words to come from her, but she was silent again, and presently she slept.

Then came the day when David was sent to fetch the doctor, and his mother was lost to him.

### III

THERE were black days for the children.

Mrs. Spencer, the midwife, stayed on and on. She was as honey to them, but, taking their lead from David, Audrey and Nicholas were suspicious of the woman, and often openly rebellious. Henry was appealed to, but was so busy nursing his grief that he was impotent.

First impulse had driven him to his children, and they had received him gladly; but Miss Andrew had arrived upon the scene, and, after being closeted with her upon several occasions, Henry had become more morose, taciturn, and unapproachable than ever before.

The good lady at first begged him to return to his birthplace, and this he refused to do from a horror of ridicule. Upon this she offered to take David off his hands. Unfortunately she had lost her temper with him, had addressed him in such direct terms, and had so roused the devil of obstinacy in him, that he stood with butting head and railed at her.

“I’ll have none of your charity—none. I’ve made my bed, and I’ll lie on it. Your own words. I’ve fouled my own nest, and I’ll live in it, I will; and what’s good enough for me is good enough for my children. I’m not the first fool in the world—I’m not——”

She was scared by the heat she had aroused in him, and pitied him. In a flash he turned in upon himself, and took to examination of his own case.

“Send David to be alone?” he cried. “If I’d had brothers and sisters would I be the fool I am?”

This chance lighting on truth gave him a rare confidence, and he strode up and down the tiny room with his hands on his hips.

“Do you think it has all been easy for me? I knew nothing—I was a jay to be plucked—plucked—that’s what I was, a jay. If my father—but he could never do anything but jeer at me and sneer at me. There was nothing but what he would sneer at it. Even that day when she and I—he sneered then. I never knew him—the sort of man he was, I mean.”

“A good man wasted.”

By this Miss Andrew too was weeping and mopping at her reddened eyes with a flimsy square of cambric.

She waited. Henry strode.

“You will not, then?”

“My children stay with me.”

“You will let them visit me?”

“Margaret never would——”

“There was such pride in her.”

Henry sat, and for some moments they were silent, furtively stealing glances at one another. They were seeking common ground, and could not find it in the dead woman, so different was the image of her in each.

Then Miss Andrew laughed, suddenly and helplessly laughed. In Henry, sore in his grief, and sore against this woman, her laughter slammed down on the desire for understanding. He winced from her, and though she saw at once what she had done, she recognized that it was irreparable, and yet to herself would not admit it. She returned to the assault, but so black was the world to Henry, so limited and so frozen, that all that she said scarcely reached his

ears. Tears blinded him, and he sat leaning forward and rocking from side to side. She spoke to him fair and strove reasonably to set before him his case.

“You see, life has not been kind to you.”

That touched Henry’s imagination, but the exercise of it hurt him yet more. Depths stirred in him, and he was tortured.

Miss Andrew abandoned the assault and stole swiftly from the room. She was angry with herself, bitterly sorry.

She sought the children, and found them consuming tea, bread and jam in the kitchen, under the supervision of Mrs. Spencer.

The two women eyed each other, and were at once hostile. Mrs. Spencer bobbed and went on cutting bread and butter, holding the loaf against her bosom and cutting inwards.

Shyness overtook the three children, and David licked his fingers. For this he was chidden by the midwife in good round terms.

Audrey, with a rebellious pout, said:

“I’ve seen you do it.”

“Oh!” This was a gasp of indignation, all the more fierce from the inability to give it adequate expression. The midwife’s ordinary rubicund countenance took on a purple hue. “Little girls should be seen and not heard.” And then she muttered: “Not that you’re much to look at, ’cos you ain’t.”

Miss Andrew kissed the two younger children, and proposed that David should accompany her to the terminus of the tramway. On the suggestion the boy produced his cap from some recess of his clothing, flung it on to his head, and, with a large slice of bread and jam in his hand, was already half way out of the door, when he was sternly recalled. He stood sulkily swinging his right leg, and to avoid the cho-

leric eye that glared upon him, took a large bite of bread, and anointed his pallid cheeks with the crimson jam.

"Ask your father," shrilled the woman—"ask your father if he'd like a child of his to go stravadin' the streets like that—and him a gentleman too!"

David, thinking that neither Miss Andrew nor the termagant were regarding him, put out his tongue. On this she flew at him, took and shook him until, to Audrey, it seemed that her brother had five heads.

Pale with rage, David stood, but clenched his teeth, and would let no sound pass.

"There!" The woman turned in triumph to meet scornful eyes. On this she cringed, laughed nervously, and said:

"You—you must have a firm hand with them, or—or—and their father's that soft with them——"

"Will you wash yourself, David, and come with me?"

David turned and rushed headlong to hide the tears that had come to his eyes.

"You see, ma'am, you're not used to children, like I am, though I never had none of my own. You must be firm with them——"

Miss Andrew devoted herself to Nicholas, and won his confidence, so that he held one of her hands tightly until David made his reappearance. To relieve the strain of the situation, Miss Andrew asked:

"You are staying here?"

"Well, ma'am, there's the baby to be looked to—and a sweet little thing it is—and as I always reckon on a three weeks', I'm as well here as anywhere until my next."

"I see."

"And poor Mr. Brockman needs as much lookin' to as any baby—he's took it that bad——"

"Yes."

"They do say, ma'am, that when a woman dies like that she goes straight to heaven."

With these words the whole of the woman seemed to change, and a new light came upon her. She who had been coarse, vulgar, shrewish, was for a moment an aspiring creature.

"It is a beautiful idea."

Said Audrey:

"Can I have some more jam?"

And the question of food replaced celestial thoughts in Mrs. Spencer's mind.

Miss Andrew fumbled in her purse and presented Audrey with a shilling, Nicholas with a sixpence. She took David's hand, bowed a gracious farewell to Mrs. Spencer, and returned to the unhappy Henry. He was cowering over the fire-grate, thrusting at a large coal.

"To say good-bye, Henry." She held out her hand, and he, rising, took it. "Forgive me if I have hurt you. I wished only to help. . . . I have only little, as you know, but what there is. . . . I ask you not to think ill of me."

"No, no."

"You will not reconsider?"

"I promised Margaret."

"David is coming with me a little way."

"Yes."

"Good-bye, then. You will not come to Bardon?"

"Never! Never!"

"You will let David come some day?"

"I'll think of it."

"Good-bye."

She and David marched out into the cold air. David, as her guide, assumed an immense dignity.

"You don't remember Bardon, David?"



“Oh, but I know it! Mother used to tell me about the tolley, and the great church, and the river, and the old barouche, and the yew grove, and grandfather, and all the people—Starks, and Chews, and Bastables. . .”

“What do you want to be, David?”

This was food for pondering, and David walked with bowed head for some minutes.

“Rich,” he said.

The answer found favour, for Miss Andrew patted his shoulder. David looked up into her face.

“You must be very old.”

“Fifty-nine, David.”

“You’re not father’s aunt, are you?”

“Some day I will tell you about your mother.”

“I’d like to know——”

“When you come to stay with me——”

“I—oh, I want to see the house—and father’s house, and—and all that——”

David ended abruptly, for the horrible idea had seized him that this sedate lady with the silver hair and gown of sober grey would want to kiss him in the public street. So strong was the presentiment in him that it overwhelmed all other thoughts, and reduced him to a lamentable state of terror. Several times he was on the point of flight, but, having undertaken to conduct her through the maze of streets, he would not leave her until they came to the corner where stood the tramcar. Here she turned, and David shrank out of reach.

“Good-bye, David, and thank you. Will you write to me sometimes?”

“Yes, I will.”

She pressed half a sovereign into his hand, and left David gasping at the shining gold.

“O-ooh! Crimes!” he said, and taking out his handkerchief, he placed the coin in the centre of it,

and wrapping it up, stowed it away in his deepest pocket.

Then he broke into a shrill whistle, and turned homeward, kicking a stone in front of him as he went. In imagination he bought the universe for ten shillings, and scattered its treasures for largesse among the creatures of his ken. All the same, it was irritating to him when, having kicked his stone with unusual precision in front of him, it came hurtling back and struck him on the ankle. He looked up, prepared to battle with an assailant, to find Tush Williams, his chief ally, standing in the attitude of salute.

“Well met, Captain.”

David was at once lofty.

“Well met, thrall.”

“What?” said Tush.

“It’s a new word—thrall;” and David spelled it.

“I suppose it’s all right,” said Tush submissively.

“It’s in the books. . . .” David dived deep in his pocket. “Tush! I’ve got gold!”

Tush took in a hissing breath, and his eyes grew like saucers in his head.

“I had one once, an’ I lost it, an’ father whacked me.”

“This is mine.”

“Did you—did you steal it?”

David was sorely tempted to invent a highway adventure.

“Aunt gave it to me. She’s mother’s aunt, not father’s.”

“Let’s look at the date.”

David shut the coin from his ally’s devouring eyes and restored it to his pocket.

“Aren’t you going to spend any of it?”

“When the christening’s done. We’ve got a baby in our house.”

Tush was at once sympathetic.

“I shall ask father to call it Tush.”

“I was christened Eustace. When are you coming to the Park again? It’s not the same without you, Captain. I tried to be captain, but it’s not the same.”

“You!” David was finely scornful and exultant that he had been missed, the more so because he was jealous of Tush, who had a certain romantic glamour from the fact that his father was a policeman.

On the order of his captain, Tush gave a full narrative of all adventures and events during the days of seclusion. Suddenly he said:

“I’m going to leave school.”

The announcement was calamitous.

David received it in frigid silence. Tush whimpered. The pride and pleasure of the prospect were taken from him.

“I don’t want to leave.”

Still David was silent.

“Struth, I don’t. By hæmorrhage (this was an oath of David’s coining) I don’t.”

“You do.”

“I don’t. Slit my weasand if I do.”

“Slit your weasand and I’ll never know.”

“Stap my vitals.”

Tush’s voice, just breaking, rose to a squeak and ended in a husky rattle. He was almost a foot taller than David, long, lanky, coltish. His brown eyes looked dog-like in their appeal.

At length David stopped, and stood facing his henchman.

“Thrall,” he said, “there is a penny at the bottom of the pond. If you fetch it, you don’t want to leave school; if you don’t, you do.”

Tush set his teeth and accepted the amazing proposition, accepted also the connection between the test and the object of it. What was important to him was that David should believe.

"You'll see me do it," said Tush.

On this they parted, David promising to rejoin his band at the earliest opportunity, Tush hurrying to find an audience to whom to brag of the feat demanded of him.

Audrey met her brother in tears.

Her shilling had been taken from her by the tyrant Spencer, and she had been given a dole of one penny for spending. A similar fate had attended the gift to Nicholas, except that he had been given twopence.

David, on these tidings, resolved to say nothing about his treasure, and made the mistake of breaking his habit of aloofness with the intruding woman by a babbling account of his meeting with Tush Williams. She was at once suspicious, and pounced.

In sweetest tones came the question:

"What did she give you, dearie?"

David hated to be called "dearie," and out came his lower lip.

"I asked you a question."

She was hanging over the fire stirring a mess in a stewpan.

David muttered.

"Eh?" said the woman, with a quick turn of the head.

"I said nothing."

"What did she give you?" There was open menace now, and though David had a sinking in his stomach, he squared to her.

"She gave Audrey a shilling, and Nicholas sixpence. What did she give you?"

"Tush Williams is going to leave school."

"I didn't ask you about the Williamses. What did she give you?"

"Find out."

On this there came a volley of shrill abuse.

"Impudence."

Audrey and Nicholas were openly rejoicing in the defiant words. Fierce glances were darted at them, and they relapsed into nervous giggles. Mrs. Spencer took a deep breath, and seemed to lash herself into a fury.

"Well? You won't speak, won't you? Ungrateful varmint! Here's your poor mother scarcely cold in her grave, but you will come with your pudgy face, your mealy face, sulky, an' won't speak when you're spoken to. Come on, tell me, will you? . . . I'll tell your father."

Henry, attracted by the noise, and glad of anything which could break in upon the hard stupor that was upon him, came at this moment into the room. At once the woman turned to him.

"Mr. Brockman, am I to be insulted in your house by your children, or am I not? Am I to 'ave any authority with them, or am I not?"

David surveyed his father with a curious aloofness. Audrey and Nicholas trembled for their brother's fate, but he seemed reckless.

"Am I to be obeyed, Mr. Brockman, or am I not?"

"While Mrs. Spencer is in this house you will obey her."

Thus went the fiat forth. David heard, but seemed not to hear.

"Do you hear—David?"

"Yes. She drops her aitches."

"There!" said Mrs. Spencer. "There!"

David saw a long arm stretched out towards and above him, a long, lean hand spread and descend, and

felt himself lifted clean off his feet. He heard a howl of terror from Audrey, and saw Nicholas' face stretch to a yell, and then lost all consciousness in physical pain, ignominy, shame and blind anger.

The ten shillings were taken from him and banked with the Post Office.

Mrs. Spencer was thus established as an abiding presence and power in the house, and though thereafter his father made overtures of friendliness to him, David withdrew into the wilderness, and the image of his mother was ever more and more present with him. Audrey and Nicholas, though they made a brave show at first, yet were won over by the force of custom as time passed and still Mrs. Spencer continued to sojourn in the house.

When it came to the christening of the baby the ascendancy of the woman was fully established, for though Henry suggested that the boy should bear his name, and David threw out "Eustace" as a suggestion, together with Anthony and Andrew (Eustace Anthony Andrew Brockman rang finely in David's ears), she swept aside all suggestions and took her stand firmly for "John." Further, she squashed Henry's propitiatory desire that Miss Andrew should be asked to be godmother to the infant, and, piping her eye, professed a desire to stand godmother to the child she had nursed and tended from its entry into this wicked world.

"I've looked after its precious little body, and who better is there to look after its little soul—bless 'im!"

David by this time knew better than openly to protest. He made a silent resolve that, come what might, the child should be to him Eustace Anthony Andrew. He expected some sort of protest from his father, but was staggered when, with an immense

show of dignity and condescension, Henry acquiesced in every proposition, and gave to the detested woman, with her scolding tongue and her dropped aitches, her blowsy colour and her coarse hands, so intimate a right in a Brockman. Having gained so much, she ventured farther, and suggested the addition of Spencer to the name of John. John Spencer Brockman—water and fire were not more inimical than Spencer and Brockman. David looked to his father, but found him insensible to the horror of the juxtaposition.

With these names the youngest son of Henry Brockman was endowed by his godfather and godmother in its baptism, during which office, because he failed to accept the tradition that he must cry aloud, he was pinched in the skin of his right thigh by his fond godmother, who held him tenderly in her arms until such time as he must be handed to the officiating clergyman.

When he did cry under such provocation, he cried lustily and with the full power of his lungs.

He was a marvellously ugly infant, so that David, with his head full of barbaric stories, was sorely troubled about him, and, indeed, succeeded in persuading Audrey and Nicholas that this was no true brother of theirs, but a changeling substituted by the malevolence of the witch who had forced herself upon them in the guise of Mrs. Spencer. So successful was he in convincing the younger children of the truth of this theory that he plotted with them to put the matter to the test in accordance with time-honoured recipe by casting the babe into the fire, when the counterfeit would disappear with malicious laughter and the real would be restored.

Unfortunately, Audrey, who was much troubled in her mind about the matter, divulged the plot to her

father, and David was punished by loss of liberty during three days.

At the end of that time he ran amok and was brought home by a sympathetic crowd of boys bleeding profusely from the nose, with two of his teeth knocked out, a cut lip, a black eye, and a dislocated thumb. He had done battle with a butcher-boy who, having tormented Nicholas upon several occasions, suddenly found himself surrounded by a horde and challenged to combat. He was at first brazen.

"There's your cagent," said David, and tapped the lout on the shoulder.

"Coward!—coward!—funk!" yelled Tush, who was holding David's coat.

"Who's a coward?" said the butcher-boy.

"You are," sang the horde. "'Fraid to 'it one littler than yourself."

"Yah!" said the butcher-boy, and put out his tongue.

David, with an imperious gesture, enforced silence.

"Leave him to me," he said. There was set purpose on his face, his nostrils dilated, and there was a glint in his eyes. He rolled up his shirt-sleeves to reveal his puny arms.

"You'll break," said the butcher-boy, and drew back to survey the fierce challenger.

"Will you fight?" said David, and danced about sawing his fists in the air in the approved fashion. He smote the butcher-boy on the nose, and he, roused to fury by the pain of it, threw out his great fist blindly, and, catching David in the eye, sent him sprawling. Up he got, however, and darted at the butcher-boy's bulk, closed with him, and hammered on his nose until it bled and swelled. So the fight went on, David smiting twice or thrice to the butcher-boy's once. They both blubbered under the pain they



were enduring, but still David darted and struck, and still the butcher-boy lumbered and smote, and when he smote, then David measured his length on the ground.

All was in order. Tush was David's second, the butcher-boy found one among the throng, and all the while the boys kept up a volley of cheers as now this, now that, blow told:

"Go it, Brockman!"

Tush, with his voice playing him tricks, cried, as he had been taught to do:

"A Brockman! A Brockman!"

As time was called David came staggering to the fight, while the butcher-boy grew more and more gigantic, more looming, more difficult to hit. But ever David cried through the sobs that strangled his voice:

"Will you give in?"

This he cried as he struck the giant in the wind, and so incommoded him that at length, partly because there was no rancour in him, and partly because he was long overdue in his return to the shop of his employer, he announced that he would give in.

"Will you shake hands?" said David.

They shook hands, and David swooned. He was carried home by his vanquished adversary and the faithful Tush, while the other boys followed and recounted the whole fight, so that they had quickly swelled the glory of David's achievement, and through the neighbourhood the fame of it was noised abroad, and Nicholas, as brother of the hero, came in for a share of it, the more so as David was for many days confined to his bed and could not enjoy the worship that should have been his.

On his arrival home he was washed and brushed, his wounds were anointed, and it seemed that all was well with him, for he was able to give a more or less

coherent account of the adventure. However, after he had been put to bed at his usual hour of nine, he was found wandering about the upper rooms of the house, light-headed and babbling strangely of witches and evil fairies, of magicians and true knights, of horned beasts and fair maidens in distress, of ships and pirates.

“Thrall, thrall, thrall!” he cried. “Yield, or I will give thee into the jaws of Zachary Few!”

Then he sang:

“Few, Few the chimney-sweep  
Steals little children in their sleep.  
Where does he take them?  
No one knows;  
Zachary eats them,  
And thinner grows.”

He stole into the room that had been his mother's, and standing by her bed, he said:

“Oh, mother, mother!—it's so ugly—it can't be ours—she's changed it: mother, mother, mother, mother—father's beard hurts so. There's such a lot of things that hurt, mother—oh!—I can't remember it—I want to say it, but I can't remember the words, and they're hurting my head. I am the most valiant knight. . . .”

He was captured, and while he was drawn from the bewildering thoughts crowding in his head he seemed not to be conscious of the arms that held him or of how it was that he progressed. His legs kicked and his arms swung in a swimming motion, and he made as though with his head he were shaking through water.

They had him tucked up in his bed, and his father went for the doctor, who announced concussion of the brain, and insisted on complete quiet. He was ap-

palled by the boy's battered condition, and investigated the cause of it. The tale delighted him, and he regaled his daughter with it, and from that told her what he knew of the history of the Brockmans. The mother he described with enthusiasm.

"Just that fine spirit," he said, "indomitable, splendid, even in failure—courage—David."

"I'm sorry for the father."

"Just no character. How she ever came to marry him I don't know. But I don't know either how your mother ever came to marry me."

"You were very handsome when you were a young man, father," said Helen.

"Ugly enough now."

"Only fairly ugly."

She came and sat on his knee, and twisted his grey hair, an attention that he dearly loved.

"You'll be as pretty as your mother was."

"I'd like to be half as pretty."

"I'll give you David Brockman for a birthday present."

"Oh! Father, how old is he?"

"Thirteen, they told me."

"It will be a very dear present."

Thus, while David was in his bed, babbling strangely and suffering for his insane combat with the butcher-boy, he began to exist for Helen Crosby, she of the golden hair, a slight wisp of a girl twelve years of age, already imperious, and with her father—a widower—something of a tyrant.

## IV

WHEN he reached convalescence David's first visitor was Tush.

He entered the room awkwardly, and stood twirling his cap and grinning.

"All hail, Tush!" said David.

Tush knelt.

"Nay, do not kneel."

"I got it."

Tush fumbled in his pocket and produced a penknife, five sticky and dirty sweets, a ball of string, a handful of marbles, a piece of sealing-wax, and finally the penny. He held it out in the palm of his filthy paw, and broke into a delighted guffaw.

"I marked the place by the tree and the summer-house, like where you said it was, an' I dived, an' I dived, an' I got it——"

David held out his hand and took the penny. Then he borrowed Tush's knife and scratched on it "T. W." and the date of the exploit.

"I'll punch a hole in it, and then you can wear it."

"Ay, I'll wear it."

Between them they drilled a hole through the penny, threaded it on to a piece of string, and it was hung round Tush's not too clean neck. The simple hobbledohoy was delighted.

"It'll bring me luck," he said. "I'm going to be a barber, father says. What are you going to be?"

"I think I'll be a general, but I'm not sure. I expect I'll have to go into an office first."

"It's in the shop where father has hisself shaved. Old mad Lintott wants a boy to lather, an' father

asked if I'd do, an' old Lintott said 'e'ed try me. So I'm goin' on Saturdays until I'm old enough to leave school."

"Saturdays!"

David was up in arms at once on this. The occupation of Tush meant the loss of him on the day of days.

"There won't be any more fun then, Tush."

Tush had not realized this, so enthralled had he been by the prospect of lathering hairy chins.

"I 'spect there'll be fun in the shop."

Captain and lieutenant eyed each other sorrowfully. There was such awful scorn in David's face that Tush could not bear it, and turned away.

"I can't 'elp it," he said—"I can't 'elp it. Father shouldn't 'ave 'ad me born quite so soon."

The effort of thinking over this cause of all the trouble quite exhausted his capacity, and he stared stockishly. Slowly he turned and left the room.

David called after him, but, though he heard, he lunged desperately down the stairs and out of the house, so weighed down was he by the force of the tragic sense in the absurd boy who had so pompously presented him with his penny. Yet it was not long before he had recovered, and was off blithely with some comrade of baser clay.

Left alone, David was soon wearied of sitting still, and, though it was expressly forbidden, stole downstairs into the room which enshrined all his mother's treasures of old days. The history of each had been so often recited that there was comradeship in them, so that David was able completely to forget the loss of Tush, staunch Tush. From mantelpiece and table he took all the fine things, old Italian brass and copper, china, ormolu, and lacquer, ancestral silhouettes, and small drawings of fair ladies, and, surrounding

himself with them on the floor, he removed himself to an island, where he lived with the gentlemen and ladies, children and loyal servants, who had filled the histories with which he had been enchanted and enslaved from babyhood. Margery Brockman—she was there, and Stuckey Vyse, her sailor lover; old Hippisley, Andrew the physician, and Henry Andrew, who had lived in the great house at Woovens in the west country; old Martin Brockman, the curmudgeonly physician who had given the lie to one of the King Georges; John Scoones, the buccaneer and lieutenant of Paul Jones; and Bessie Andrew and her brother James, who had been involved in the Gunpowder Plot. These all had names and walked in the flesh, but there were others, many of them who thronged upon the island, clustered like swarming ants—a kingdom without order save that in the centre of it David towered and ruled indeed, mighty and yet powerless; for events so crowded in upon each other, adventures trod so closely in upon each other's heels, as to make confusion worse confounded. It was all beginning and beginning, but never in any exploit, any quest, was there an end. David suffered from the bewilderment of the merging of one adventure into another.

His mother had never known of the island. Her share in the game had been the pouring into David's mind of these personages from the history of both sides of his family, and she never knew that in the early hours of his long nights he transferred them to his island kingdom. So he reigned alone, and though in the Park he sometimes translated into action events that had happened in the island, he always did it with some queer shame and diffidence, so that never such success attended his efforts as when they were the inspiration of the moment. Nicholas and

Audrey were impossible. During the long hours in bed he had endeavoured to translate Eustace Anthony Andrew thither, but had never been able to escape from the fact that the infant's name was, after all, John Spencer. Besides, the island was no place for babes: the dreadful Scoones had been known to eat child's flesh on the high seas; and, Spencer or no Spencer, the life of a Brockman must be preserved. In such turmoil in his island was David when plump out of the troubled skies descended Helen into it. In the case of an ordinary addition to the population, the person, he or she, just sprang no man knew whence, and, upon obeisance to the Towering King, was admitted to the throng, and wandered in and out of now this, now that, adventure.

With Helen it was far otherwise. No sooner was she perceived than a mighty shout ascended to reach the ears of the King, and he, glancing down, saw her being drawn in a carriage, golden as Napoleon's or the Lord Mayor's. Upon this, mounting his favourite charger, he ran at full gallop to meet her, and, handing her from her carriage (her hair was so golden that the sun, for the first time in the history of the island, sulked behind a cloud), stooped to kiss her hand, and then and there proclaimed her his Queen.

Cheer upon cheer rent the air.

"That is," said His Majesty, stooping to the shell-like ear of his new-found consort, "if you are not already married."

"I would rather be a Queen than married."

The crier proclaimed the match. There were universal rejoicings, during which the vile Scoones was pardoned for all his villainies, and the king made a grand progress through his domains. As the cortege neared that pinnacle of the island where formerly the monarch had stood, he realized with hideous force

that he had forgotten to provide a palace, and stole a nervous glance at his consort to see whether she had noticed the omission. She was calm and smiling. The King *sotto voce* ordered Henry Andrew of Wootens to procure a palace, and at once, such is the power of Royalty, there stood a golden mass of buildings, by whose drawbridge were rows of bowing lackeys in red plush and powder.

During these magnificent events Mrs. Spencer saw only a small boy and a small girl rather shyly regarding each other.

“This is Miss Helen Crosby come to see you, David.”

But the boy heard nothing. He bowed to her as Sir Walter Raleigh bowed to Queen Elizabeth to lay his cloak in the mud for her golden-shod feet. It was a curt little nod that he gave her, but he had never any doubt of the magnificence of his salute; neither did he dream that there was in her no conception of the exalted rank to which he had raised her, nor of the words which he had put into her mouth.

She was all friendliness, and while Mrs. Spencer removed from him all that was fragile and left him only surrounded by gleaming brass, she stood surveying with the closest interest his honourable scars.

Mrs. Spencer left them, and David was just about to enter the palace when his consort turned to him, eyes brimming with tears of love, laid her hand gently on his arm, and said:

“Let me see your teeth.”

Island, palace, lackeys, countries, and mob all vanished, whisked away, except for Scoones, who lingered for a moment to make a hideous grimace and to shake his fist, so that David noticed for the first time that on his wrist were tattooed two serpents and the skull and cross-bones. Then Scoones also van-



ished, and David turned to inquiring Helen, and grinned to display the gap in his teeth.

"Did you swallow them?"

"No. Spat 'em out, with lots of blood."

"O-o-oh! . . . You look so pale."

"Nothing to what I have been."

"Which eye was it?"

"They were both black, and yellow, and purple—and this one was bloodshot."

This delight in realistic detail was too much for Helen.

"I'm glad I didn't see you like that."

"It was nothing," said David airily, and was then seized with a sudden bashfulness, for he looked at Helen for the first time fairly. His awkwardness infected her, and for some moments neither spoke.

"Squat," he said, having mentally tried first "Won't you sit down?" and then, "Will you take a chair?" only to find both impossible of utterance. He plumped down on the floor himself.

"She's not my mother," he said, with a nod in the direction of the door by which Mrs. Spencer had disappeared.

"I know," said Helen.

"That's mother." And he jabbed in the direction of a portrait in pastel, the work of some vagrom artist who had dwelt for a time in Bardon.

"She's lovely," said Helen, and David warmed to her.

"How many brothers have you?" he asked, purely by way of making conversation.

"None," said she.

David thought for some time. Then he said slowly:

"I dare say Audrey wouldn't mind sharing with you."

Helen accepted this in silence, and David, unused to any challenge of his ordering, passed on from this informal adoption to the thing nearest in his mind.

"It's a pity you're a girl."

"I'm glad I'm a girl."

"You can't be a lieutenant." And David mourned the loss of Tush, mourned in true Biblical fashion, turning his face to the wall.

Helen was with him in a moment.

"You—you can't understand, because you're a girl."

"Girls," said Helen, "can understand anything."

Then and there David revealed to Helen the miraculous island, and brought its chief inhabitants one by one to do homage. She was gracious, and extended her hand to everyone except Scoones, who was presented to her in such lurid colours, with so full and particular a description of all his horrid achievements by land and sea, that she was affrighted, and could not let his lips touch her.

"Scoones, begone!" thundered David, "and be for ever banished!"

The craven Scoones spat venomously, and crawled from the throne-room, vowing vengeance.

"Ha!" said David, "he will come back with great ships to lay waste our shores."

Helen shuddered, until David ordered that twenty galleys should at once be built, and a special barge with silken sails to bear the island's queenly treasure.

Upon this phrase Helen cried, and clapped her hands in ecstasy.

"Oh, David, you are splendid!"

In his heart David agreed with her.

"Nicholas and Audrey will be back from school."

"Do they play?"

"They! No. This is *my* game."

“And mine.”

David's face fell, and Helen thought it must be for her.

“I love it so.”

“It's not that. . . . I can't ask you to tea because, you see, we're poor.”

This was letting in reality with a vengeance. And David winced as Helen seemed to notice for the first time the great age of his clothes. It was a relief to both when Audrey and Nicholas came shyly in to see the pretty girl.

Nicholas seemed to have some doubts as to whether she were real or not, for his mouth and eyes made three round “O's,” and he edged to her nearer and nearer until he could touch her, and then, horror of horrors! she stooped awkwardly and kissed him, though she made no attempt towards a similar salute with Audrey. It was because Nicholas was so little.

Mrs. Spencer came then with the baby in her arms, and thus Helen made the acquaintance of all the family.

“I came to ask if David and Audrey might come to tea on my birthday next week; but—I should like Nicholas to come as well.”

Mrs. Spencer thought they might, and said she would ask their father.

Upon this Helen took her leave, and was whirled away in her father's brougham, which, to the great excitement and envy of the neighbours, had been waiting in the street for her during the whole of her visit.

Events in the Brockman household had drawn the attention of the inhabitants of every house, from the golden-haired lady at Number One to the dirty old music-master at Number Fifty-seven. “Them Brockmans” had always been an enigma since early

days when Margaret had gently but firmly repulsed all advances. They called her haughty, and though in a sense they respected her, yet it took very little to set their tongues wagging maliciously, and often some wicked story had come home to Margaret to set her chafing against the environment to which Henry's folly had brought her and her children. When she lay ill gossip ceased, and kindly overtures were made, all the more touching for their very ineptitude.

In his raw state Henry had savagely beaten back all offers of assistance with his children, and with a firmness rare in him had forbidden Mrs. Spencer to hold intercourse with any person in the street. With this, out of the curious respect she had for him, the woman complied, though not without protest.

"One must be affable," she said.

"I fail to see the necessity," said Henry, and declined to enter into further argument, but went about his business.

She was terrified of his silence and did his bidding, though she suffered agonies from the consciousness of what things began darkly to be whispered of her. The curious interest of the yellow-haired lady as she passed or met her in the street maddened her, and dearly would she have loved to flout her. She was often tortured, but if she could only win a word of approval from Henry, if he would only listen to her with some show of interest while she talked, she knew content and peace. She had a horror of those hours when, the children being long since in bed, he would sit brooding, brooding over the fire, and not speak one word or seem to hear anything that she said, while the clock tick-ticked and she could hear every scurrying mouse in the wainscotting, every sound in the house next door, every flicker of a flame and every stirring of a coal in the fire, until she was al-

most at screaming-point. Sometimes she would rise to steal away so that she might know if he were aware of her, for almost always when she did this he would turn in his chair and follow her with his eyes. Sometimes he would frighten her with grim chuckles or wild laughter, though what sad joke it was that tickled him he never would divulge; or he would sit with a vacant eye cocked at her so steadfastly and unwinkingly scanning her as to cause her to fidget and to pat now this, now that, part of her person or clothing. So dreadful did this vacant eye become to her that she involuntarily crooked her finger in the instinctive and wild desire to pluck it out. Most terrible was it when in the end of its scrutiny it winked, slowly winked at her, as though to invite her to participate in some jest, grim and fathomless. There was fascination in the terror of it, for nothing in her life had so brought her to a sense of the abysmal depth of humanity. At its most fearful it made her giddy, and yet the man enslaved her, enveloped her, and so illumined the world for her that she was to herself new, strange, and large. In these hours there was with her a rare sense of space, sometimes so chilling that she ached to touch the man—just to touch him, his hand, his face, or his neck, or the hair of him, but never, never did she dare. To escape from it she forced herself to talk, and talk, and talk—remembrance, old tales, stories of her wedded life, of her dead husband—a clerkly soul, small, incomparably small now in her recollection—of her work and the weariness of it, of the tragedy and comedy of life as she conceived them, of domestic detail and finance, of anything, anything only to blot out the formless thing that filled all her being. Sometimes she would succeed in striking an answering note in him, and he would emerge from his gloom and so charm her with

his ease and, as it seemed to her, his infinite variety, as to send her wildly rejoicing to her bed, where she would lie long gazing at the child sleeping in its cradle by her bedside. If he let her steal away from him with the full iciness and horror upon her, then she would take the babe and hold it close to her for contact and warmth, and long into the night she would lie staring into the darkness, dry, parched, aching, starting at every sound in the house, listening for his tread upon the stairs, waiting for the inevitable stumble in the dark and the muffled oath, just to hear his voice and to know that he was no longer sitting there, just sitting, brooding; for while she knew him to be there she could not sleep, so vivid was the image of him in her mind.

There was no strife in her, for she offered no resistance to the stream that swept her along. There was never in her any effort to investigate the nature of the thing. What came to her she accepted, and asked no more, and though a change was wrought in her she had no suspicion of it, no idea that, where she had been harsh, coarse, and overbearing, she was now gentle and kind, and where hard and mean, now soft and generous. Though the children, even David, were won over to her and now came gladly to her, gave her confidence, she took this for inevitable, and had no thought of connection between her easier relations with them and the thing that possessed her.

As the children came to her, she grew closer to their father in sharing them with him, and, though there were the baleful hours, yet she grew stronger to win through them, suffered less under torment, was less chilled, and came in time to catch glimpses of happiness. These she snatched and hugged to herself, crying aloud for very joy. Only in these moments did it

seem to her that the man was conscious of what was in her, and then he loomed most fearfully and shook where he sat, and was so ghastly that the little singing voice in her quavered and died, and all the horror came again, new, crushing.

Through it all there was in her no thought of escape—none. She watched the man and learned his ways, learned how to make him comfortable, how to bring him ease, and how best to drag from him those moments of graciousness which were so precious to her. She learned what in herself most jarred on him, and brought new soothing notes into her voice. She marked the moments when it seemed that he most realized her presence and to perceive well what manner of creature she was, how gowned, how coiffed; and yet she never forced herself upon him, never strove to draw his eyes upon herself. Just that nothing should hurt him and she was content, almost glad; yet, when with childish bluntness Nicholas said to her, "You're nicer than you used to be," she was in a flutter and had a new timidity in Henry's presence. The growing sense of purpose wavered in her, and gave birth to a straining this way and that, of what she had been and what she dimly saw. In this tussle custom and old habits of mind gained, and she was left craving, with the new light that had dawned upon her fading. There was relief in this, and she assumed a masterful control, against which Henry first rebelled impotently, in peevish outbursts of railing temper, and finally accepted.

He was comfortable, and did not know how much he had come to lean on the rude strength of the woman until the hour came for her departure. They had never spoken of her going, and she had stayed long past her usual period, receiving her weekly fee.

Then came the summons. From habit she pre-

pared to go at once, sent messages to the client, and packed and had all prepared before there was in her any troubling of the mind. It was late afternoon. She sought a neighbour who would look after the children until Henry's return, and then found that she could not go. One excuse and another she made to herself, ran to her room on pretence of seeking something left behind, set all in order in the kitchen, and turned from one room to another, from this to that, and back again.

At length she heard his footstep and the sound of his key in the latch. She was dressed in her cloak and bonnet, smart in her uniform of blue linen. On an impulse she flung her cloak from her, and after some fumbling at its strings, for her fingers trembled so, she removed her bonnet and left them in the room—the drawing-room—whither she had strayed in her restlessness, and ran to prepare his evening meal for him. Almost magically she made the kitchen spick and span, thrusting the children's litter into drawers, coaxing the fire into a bright blaze, drawing the curtains, so that when he entered all was bright and comfortable—the kettle sang and belched clouds of steam, while she, buxom and comely, stood with the red glow of the fire on her face.

He crept silently to his corner and began to remove his boots. The fire warmed him, and he broke into muttering, then into a boisterous mood. He began to whistle, and seemed so surprised to find himself doing anything so blithe that he ceased, and his jaw dropped. There was a sort of snap in his head, his whole body shook, he gasped, and gasped again, with two fingers eased the collar at his neck, then rubbed his knees, sat rubbing so, gazed into the fire, up into the woman's face, back to the fire, then half up, and into his eyes came an expression of wonder; then he was quizzical for a flash again, in gloomy depths, and finally, pull-



ing the end of his meagre moustache, he said slowly and with infinite deliberation, "I'm—an—ass," and laughed thinly. A queer, crackling laugh it was, rusty. It hurt her, for she was used to the man numbed.

"One would think," she said—"one would think that—that you was—were glad I'm going."

She waited for the effect of her words, but they had been as futile as all her babbling talk had been in the strange evenings. He was engrossed in the contemplation of himself.

"I met a man," he said, "who called me ass, and I've been wanting to laugh ever since."

Then he ate as she had never seen him eat—wolfishly, hungrily, and with great relish. He drank, and called for more and yet more. He seemed to swell, his face shone, and his eyes darted hither and thither. It seemed as if there was much in the room that they had never seen.

The woman's heart beat wildly, and then sank. She dwindled and was small, and when she spoke all the new refinement had left her voice; it was thick again. She stiffened herself and drew on her professional manner, alert, quick, and a little hard.

"You'll be wanting a woman for the baby," she said.

Henry sat chuckling, and his eyes twinkled as though they were answering the winking of some distant star. Some cloud came between him and the thing he wished to see, for with both hands he brushed away.

This passing of Henry from her world into some region unknown and incomprehensible to her roused the woman to anger. She stood above him, and at her shrillest almost bawled into his ear:

"There's David, and Audrey, and Nicholas, and John. What are you going to do with them?"

If she had hit him in the stomach he could not have collapsed more utterly. A chuckle passed into a moan, he ceased to seek inspiring light, wincing and shivering under the sharpness of present affliction.

"I—I—I dunno. There they are, bless 'em! Little—little bellies to be filled, and—David to be made free of the world. Free of an empty stomach—free to be a worse fool than his father. Free! There's no freedom—and no comfort in prison—and—and it is very funny."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Brockman."

"Wait. Just you wait. I'll get back—I'll . . . I know—I know—wait!"

He passed swiftly from the room, but quickly returned. He gave the woman money, and an old jewel, which at first she would not have from him; but under persuasion finally she took it, murmuring thanks. Then she said:

"I'll come back any time you want me, Mr. Brockman."

Henry wagged his finger in her face, turned abruptly from her, and, seizing hat and coat in his flight, passed out into the night—a night of rough weather, driving rain and gusty wind, that tossed and whirled the rubbish in the dingy streets through which he fled.

Mrs. Spencer burst into a storm of tears, gathered her belongings, and, after extinguishing all the lights, left the house to seek that in which her services were required to bring yet another human creature to his heritage of laughter and tears, hope, and foolish courage. From time to time she fingered the jewel in her pocket, and the vision of Henry as a man among men, valiant, strong, and pitifully weak, glowed before her. She found herself talking, and recognized the words in her mouth for these:

“Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, good Lord.”

Light and Henry were inextricable ideas, and never were more luminous than when she came to the house of Edward Bailey, a bald little salesman in a draper’s shop, an honest man, a good citizen, a churchwarden, an ornament to Church and State, but common, freely and without revolt breathing the grimy and sunless air of the place. This man gave Mrs. Spencer a warm welcome, treated her in all things as an equal, and oppressed her by his formal cordiality and easy assumption of a consuming interest in all his affairs.

Henry meanwhile was striding savagely through mean streets, miles and miles of them, black, grimy. He was clutching at an idea, the first real idea born of his own consciousness that had ever come to him. It was elusive, came near, then swiftly darted back into rolling mists. Henry threw back his head, squaring to the buffeting wind, and rejoicing in the beat of the rain upon his face, for it brought comfort, dulled the pain of the new thoughts stirring in him.

He came to the public-house which had for years enjoyed his patronage. He stayed on the threshold, and pushed open the door. He heard a voice raised in argument, a thick guttural voice, dogmatic, raucous:

“These ’ere pensions: wot good do they do? Six millions, an’ where’s it all to come from, I’d like to know? Tell me that. That’s what I want to know.”

“From the same place as the sixty-six millions for the army and navy, I guess.”

“Oh, that! That’s necessary. This ’ere country’s done, down, flummuxed. We got no men to govern us——”

Henry let the door swing to, and turned away. The voice of the dogmatic creature had grated on his ears, and he shivered when he remembered that he

had met this man on terms almost of equality, had eaten and drunk with him, visited him in his house, had even presented him to Margaret. He translated the man to Bardon, and was at first sore, then troubled by the sorry spectacle he made in the gentle atmosphere of old days. He laughed ruefully, and so passed into a frenzy of recollection and correlation of past and present. He continued his solitary march.

He was for the first time keenly conscious of the dinginess of the place in which he was wandering, the place which he had made his home, and of the dead weight of it upon his spirit. The idea was stirring in him, but could not find shape. His thoughts were blurred, confused, inconsequent. He was conscious as he had never been of the stir of human life all about him, but could find no central point, no clue to elucidate the whirl of it all. He wanted to think, but thinking hurt him.

“David, Audrey, Nicholas, John—little bellies to be filled. Escape—Margaret—poor Margaret!—poor, poor Margaret! Poor Henry!—oh, wretched Henry! Escape—ships—sea, air, trees—air—sweet air, wide air. . . . Music—sea again, always the sea—meadows. . . . Dull, dull, dull. . . . Why? . . .”

(This arrival at the interrogation which is the human privilege was the worst shock that he had yet suffered. He glared, and for a moment was blank, so that even his legs refused to perform their function. A mongrel which for long enough had been dogging his footsteps, seeking to adopt him, seized the opportunity to sniff at the ends of his trousers for trace of other dog, and, finding none, leaped about him, and yelped to command attention.

Henry welcomed the interruption, patted the dog, wondered why it had the head of a retriever and the

legs of a spaniel, and when it followed him, bade it go to its home. The dog eventually succeeded in making him understand that it had no home worthy of the name, and refused to leave him.

"I can't afford to pay for your licence," said Henry. The dog wagged its stumpy tail in contempt of the exchequer, and Henry amused himself on his homeward way with finding a fitting name for such a cur. He eventually pitched on "Jones."

When Henry reached his house, Jones raced in to the kitchen, shook himself, curled up, and went to sleep.

From force of habit Henry found himself slinking into his corner by the fire, but sprang from it, discovered that he was wet through and very hungry. He foraged for a meal, which he shared with Jones, whom he woke for the purpose, and went to bed thinking that the house was empty, cold, and no abiding-place. Then came the "Why!"

The answer sounded pat from the darkness: "Margaret."

Jones slept in the kitchen all night, while Henry lay awake in his bed, turning and turning over in his mind what next he should do. Eventually he fell asleep, dreaming that he had just made out a cheque for fifteen hundred pounds to buy Jones a collar.

In the morning there was a new vigour in him, and he shared in David's delight in Jones, who, waking early upon the arrival of the charwoman sent by Mrs. Spencer to tend the Brockman household, had then thought it advisable to explore the house, and coming to David's room, had forthwith leaped upon his bed and awakened him by frenzied licking of his face.

Nicholas was terrified, but David leaped to his feet, and in a trice had Jones submissive and adoring.

"Such," said David, as he made Jones lie down—"such is the power of the human eye."

## V

ROOM was found for the dog on the island, where he was set to guard the treasure-house, and was taught to snarl and show his teeth, to crouch for a fearsome spring at the mention of Scoones, or Mrs. Scoones, who was none other than Mrs. Spencer, thrown to the buccaneer when he had come brazenly to demand the hand of Helen of her rightful lord. Thenceforth Mrs. Spencer was ranged in the minds of both David and Helen on the side of evil, and they shunned the poor woman as a noxious and menacing thing, an ever-present peril. She paid periodic visits to the house in her afternoons of leisure, and stayed long hours for Henry, who was not often in the house of an evening, for he was away in pursuit of the materialization of his idea; but she clung doggedly to her self-imposed task of oiling the machinery of the household, which, under Audrey's direction, was apt to grow rusty and creak ominously.

It had not taken Audrey long to develop matronly qualities. John was her especial care, and the satisfaction of his physical needs her prime duty, after which she would, with the assistance of the char-woman, see that David and Nicholas were fed. She was stern in the matter of cleanliness, and enforced the use of the tooth-brush, in accordance with the principles she had imbibed from her mother. She was particularly adroit in her handling of David; never questioning his supreme authority, but, by sheer in-

sistence and tactful abnegation of self, bringing him to the conclusion in every matter which she in her own mind had fore-ordained. This was especially the case in the matter of John, with whose welfare David considered himself equally charged. He was proud of the charge, swaggered about it, and was consequently as wax in the hands of his sister, and of Helen, who joined with Audrey in her base deception.

Helen was a two-fold traitress, for not only did she, with Audrey, cozen the heroic David into the duties of an under-nursemaid, but she recounted all his island exploits to her father, to whom they brought great joy and much laughter, though his manner of receiving the adventures was as solemn as Helen's recital of them.

He was glad that Helen should have such a playmate, but at the same time he never lost sight of the practical issue and the difficulties he foresaw for David and his family, but was content to let well, or ill, alone for the present, though from his charity he was sorely tempted to enter upon the task of redemption at once. Henry was difficult. He saw little of him, but the man was so raw and sensitive that upon any attempt to deal practically with the question, he scented condemnation, and rose at once in loud protestation. It seemed that there was nothing to be done but to await the outcome of the stir and upheaval in Henry, whether he would retire bruised and crushed before the weight of adverse circumstances, or would, with the strength of roused dormant qualities break through and wrest from the world security and peace—the peace of strength.

“It must be,” said the physician, to his reflection in the mirror. “It must be with all of us, the peace of strength, or the peace of weakness resigned.”

He was not a little surprised to find that he had gained Henry's confidence.

Henry first scented the man under the professional gentleman on the night of Helen's birthday-party, to which David, Audrey, and Nicholas, in their finest raiment, repaired. There had been some difficulty about John, but Mrs. Spencer, arriving during the conclave, had found a kindly neighbour to take charge of the infant on the auspicious evening.

She herself arranged to be present for the dressing and equipment.

David had seen a brooch in the window of a small jeweller's shop, and had set his heart upon acquiring it for his Helen. He revealed the project to his father, and, with some misgiving, asked for some of the ten shillings that Miss Andrew had given him. To this Henry demurred, and David sulked until a more glorious present was given to him in the shape of a brooch that had been his mother's, old filigree of silver set with paste. This she had worn most constantly, and Henry gave it grudgingly and yet with a joy almost as great as that with which David took it, for Helen had been a delight to him also since her coming. The thought that the gift would not be wholly his brought some chagrin to David, but this was quickly swallowed in the contemplation of its splendour; and it was with pride that he gave the little packet, and watched the excitement of its opening, and the dancing light of glee as Helen showed the jewel to her father, and came to David that he might pin it to her frock. This he did awkwardly and with little grace, and a sudden shyness overtook him. This Helen swiftly overcame by an appeal to him as of right as to what games they should play, and David devised such sport as to keep the little gathering hilarious and excited. He glowed with



pleasure in the newness of his devising. And from this and that, one game to another, plunged to the revelation of his island that Helen might be truly a Queen. The game was hot and swinging mightily along when David suddenly realized what he had done, and flung himself full length upon the floor and mourned. This was taken for some new turn in the game, and Helen frowned for silence, until it should appear what next there was.

Pale, and with lips quivering, David rose to his feet and moved with such determination that the throng parted before him, and admiring eyes followed him when he moved; for there was no suspicion of disaster, or that this was other than the outset of a new play. Audrey was the first to scent the trouble, for she knew this aspect of her brother. She turned to Helen, found that she had just divined the truth, and from these two the knowledge spread so that the life died out of the party, and Nicholas, who had been thrilled and quivering from a fight with a savage tribe, set up a howl, and was only induced to cease by a plentiful offering of cake, which he anointed with his tears as he devoured it.

Upon this scene Jones entered with his lumbering trot, smelt once, twice, paused at Nicholas, and made straight for David, leaped upon him, licked his face, and so roused him that the boy, who had just vowed, like the English King upon the loss of the *White Ship*, never to smile again, leaped to his feet, knelt to Helen to crave pardon, and plunged into a riotous game.

The maid came to announce that Henry was below, come for his children; and Dr. Crosby went with her to seek him, forgetting that on his head he wore a fool's cap of green paper, spangled.

The melancholy Henry stared at him in amaze-

ment, and took the hand proffered to him, wondering at the warmth with which it gripped him.

"They must stay a little longer. Such a splendid boy! I've never had such fun." He chuckled and fixed his pince-nez. Henry's pallor struck him, and the coldness of his hand.

"You are cold. Is it wet out of doors?"

"My dog," said Henry awkwardly, and looked round towards the door as though he were anxious to escape.

"He came straight to David. Come and be warm." The doctor took Henry by the arm and led him into his consulting-room, where a bright fire burned, casting a warm light on great chairs, instruments, and books, shelves on shelves of them. Here they sat, and Henry was drawn little by little to talk of himself.

First he told how he had come by Jones, of the wild walking, and his most miserable solitude.

"It's killing me," he said. "I don't know, I'm afraid of thinking, but I must. It is as if—as if there was something that I must think about, and I don't . . . I don't know what it is."

He shivered and gulped.

"And . . . and over and over again I keep saying to myself . . . it's something I learned at school. . . . I was at a public school, you know. . . ."

There was no reason why the doctor should make any remark on this, but Henry waited until there came:

"Yes, yes."

"It's Shakespeare, I think. . . ."

"As thinking on no thought I think,  
Makes me with heavy nothing faint and shrink."

Do you know that? . . ."

The doctor rose and paced about the room; an absurd enough little figure, with his fool's cap now dropped over one eye. He took and crumpled it up, and cast it into the fire. Both watched it flare and blaze away, and the light ash of it soar up the chimney, shedding sparks.

"Those sparks, they say," said Henry, "are passing souls."

The doctor came and laid his hand lightly on Henry's shoulder.

"Ten years ago," he said, "my wife also died."

A sharp little cry was wrenched from Henry, and then stifled. He lunged with his foot and smashed a great coal, so that the fire blazed and roared.

"I dragged her down and down," he said. "We had everything. If I'd been drunk, it could not have been worse; but I was just a fool. I never saw myself until . . . until . . . and now, I don't know. . . . I've no friend, and those that know me think of me with a pity more damnable to bear than if they flouted me. . . . I'm nothing . . . a fool, a coward. . . . I'd put an end to myself if I could . . . if I weren't . . ."

"I'm glad you've told me this."

"Much good it is to you. . . ."

"You must come again and tell me more."

"I?"

"I never knew an ill but there was some remedy for it."

"But I'm—I'm so rotten."

"Bosh!"

There was asperity in the voice. The doctor was more than a little exasperated by Henry's complete despair.

"It's true, I sit and sit and sit by the fire until

I'm heavy. . . . I see the thing I want to do, but it is out of reach. . . ."

"Stretch for it."

"I'll never touch it."

The little doctor flew at Henry, shook him by the shoulders, and when he rose to his feet took on a pugilistic attitude, and punched away at him until he was breathless.

"Better for that?" he cried, and gave Henry a swinging blow on the ribs. "And that? And that?" This last was a stinging slap on the face, which stirred Henry so that he smote vaguely, and sent the little man flying against the book-shelves. Then he broke into a roar of laughter, and arm in arm they mounted the stairs to the scene of revelry.

Nurses and mothers had arrived for the other children, and there was a huddling on of wraps and cloaks, a bidding of farewells, a collection of trophies and illicit spoils, a kissing. From all these David, holding Jones by the collar, stood apart in awful dignity.

Helen came to him.

"Oh, David, what is it?"

"The island's gone, and you . . . and everything. I killed it all."

"It don't matter. You're still David."

"Oh!"

There was ringing contempt in the exclamation, and David turned loftily on his heel.

Helen stamped her foot.

"Oh! oh! oh! If you weren't so conceited, you'd see that it doesn't matter a bit about your old island."

David left her without a word. She turned to Audrey, and kissed her with such warmth as to astonish her and drown in her all the envy that she held of Helen's ease and manifold graces.

As they walked home she sang the praise of Helen, with Nicholas piping an echo to her words. David chafed, turned to his father, only to call forth still more ringing praise. They twittered so of Helen—Helen this and Helen that—that the bumptious boy took umbrage, and, deeming Jones to be the only rational member of the party, marched ahead with him until they came to the house of that neighbour who had taken charge of John.

Audrey knocked and asked for her brother, to be told that Mrs. Spencer had called an hour ago and taken him with her. She came to the rest with the intelligence. Henry swore.

“She’s Mrs. Scoones,” said David to Nicholas, and filled the child with apprehension.

“Will he be there?” he asked.

“We’ll make Jones eat him—and her.”

She was there, in cloak and bonnet, to be sure, but showing no sign of immediate departure. She was greedy for news of the party, and asked how Miss Helen had been dressed, what cakes there had been for tea, what games had been played. She examined all the little gifts brought home by the children, and was loud in exclamation. She, too, lauded Helen, and brought David’s frown upon her, but was insensible to it, for all she said and did was directed to Henry—was, indeed, done with an eye cocked upon him.

She packed the children off to bed, and, finding Henry foraging, reproved him, and bustled to prepare his meal. She was all smiles, ingratiating, and found great delight in Henry’s responsiveness, while her talk was of Helen and her father.

From that in her floundering confidence she passed to Mr. Bailey, her client, his wife and baby, and openly contrasted his house, manners, and customs

with those of the Brockman family, and, worse still for Henry, protested her devotion to him and all that was his. The purport of her remarks was cunningly conveyed, and a few weeks earlier might have weighed with Henry, brought him something of the comfort and assurance of which he had so sorely stood in need. Now it revolted him, and he saw the woman coarser and more vulgar than she was. He remembered David's flouting, "She drops her aitches," and forgot all the rest, all that she had done for him in his most helpless hours.

"Much obliged to you, Mrs. Spencer. I don't know what we should have done without you."

"Very kind of you to say so, I'm sure, Mr. Brockman. I 'aven't been very 'appy since I 'ad to go."

The honest creature glistened with emotion; and the dropped aitches rang ominously in Henry's ears. He shifted uneasily in his chair, and only wished that the woman would be gone.

She fell to an absorbed study of her boots, so that Henry's attention was attracted to them. He saw that one of them was cracked, and that added to his irritation.

"I want to come back, Mr. Brockman."

"Oh!"

"The children can't look to themselves; they're not like common folk's children."

"H'm."

Henry lit a pipe, and sucked at it for the space of some minutes.

"It's such a 'ome," said Mrs. Spencer with great fervour, unconscious of another dropped aitch.

"Home!" said Henry, startled at this view.

"'Ousekeeper to a gentleman, a widower," said Mrs. Spencer, and stared abstractedly into the fire. Had she thought of herself as of the Heavenly Host,

there could not have been in her countenance an expression of greater beatitude.

"I'd take general's wages," she said, as though self-sacrifice could do no more.

"When do you leave Mr. Bailey's?" said Henry.

"He wants me to stay on, but I'd leave if she was dying to come to you and them sainted children, Mr. Brockman."

Henry was tempted to enter into explanation of his circumstances with her, but could not, and sought refuge in prevarication.

"I—I don't know," he said. "I must think it over. Next week. I'll let you know next week."

Mrs. Spencer beamed. There was hope, and Henry had been so courteous, so unlike what she had known of him before. She beamed upon him, and after some exchange of commonplace and further rhapsodic praise of every Brockman possession and quality, took her departure. Henry escorted her to the door, and to the gate of his little patch of garden (like all the other gardens in the street, it contained an elder-tree, a hawthorn-tree, and a little grimy lawn), and then bade her good-night. As he mounted the steps of his house the brass plate of his present small vocation caught his eye and roused rebellion.

At once he strode into the house, after some search found a screwdriver, and removed the offending brass with its mocking inscription, proclaiming him representative of so huge a sum of money. His first thought was to bury it, and all the past along with it, but he recollected that the plate was the property of the company, and that, for the present at least, until some opportunity should come, he must fulfil his bargain or drop to a yet lower state.

He had at least the satisfaction of prompt action,

of having taken the first step in a new direction; but he was fearful lest David should question him. He hid the plate under his bed, and invented a lie to account for its disappearance on the morrow.

He went to bed chuckling, but was quickly under the inquisition of the new questioning spirit, and though he slept, he slept uneasily and in snatches, turning this way and that and moaning. Mrs. Spencer was to him a question in the flesh, and in the glimpses he caught of her among the shadowy persons that haunted him her figure bore a remarkable resemblance to a mark of interrogation. Just so portly and rotund it was, and just so cabalistic.

On the morrow, after the business of the day, he betook himself to the doctor's house, and was welcomed.

"I more than half expected you," said the doctor, and thrust out his hand. Henry eyed it uneasily, as though he more than half anticipated another blow.

"Tut," said the doctor; "sit down."

Henry sat uneasily on the edge of a chair and stared about the room.

"It's—it's long enough since I was in a room with so many books," he said. "My father loved books, and so—and so I hated them."

"My father," said the doctor, "made soap, and never read anything but the most pessimistic utterances of the prophets of Israel. . . . You'd like a cigar?"

Henry took the tobacco, and fell to smoking, still sitting bolt upright on the edge of the chair and watching the little doctor as he flitted about the room. There was something comically birdlike in his carriage, in the cocking of his eye as he looked over his pince-nez, in the cooing and fluting of his care-



fully controlled voice. Henry was pleased by the alertness of the man and his keenness.

After some time, during which the little man had flitted hither and thither in the room, obviously waiting, it occurred to Henry that he was expected to make a remark. He sat more bolt upright than ever, opened his mouth two or three times, and then, in a voice devoid of all expression, he said:

“Life is so difficult.”

He was at once fearful of the consequences of this remark, and more than half expected a torrent of platitudes. To his surprise the doctor skipped a little more vigorously and broke into a chuckle.

“There is no authority either in the law or the prophets for our expecting to find it easy. My good sir, why should it be easy? . . . It’s all striving, striving, striving, first to get bread, and then to be men and women. I was romantic once. My father’s soap factory was not good enough for me, not honest enough—such things they put into the soap. I vowed that I would do something to benefit the human race, and, casting about, I came to think that there could be nothing nobler, nothing more honest, nothing purer, than the life of a physician. I braved the parental wrath, flung away from soap and into the study of the human frame. Well, I had almost finished my course when the awful truth was forced upon me that here also was no honesty, that I should be pretending to knowledge and powers that no man can have. With elaborate preparations I stole away, and hid myself from all my friends to brood over the problems of life. I found infallible reasons to justify suicide, but somehow I did not come to the act. That restored my sense of humour, and I saw then that what we think and what we do are two widely different things, and that there is something in us,

some sense of life which impels us to dive through and through even what we know to be rotten, assuring us that on the other side of it is right waiting us—right and peace of mind. I have pinned my faith to this sense of life, as I call it, and I have striven to live by it, to keep it from being overlaid by prejudice and conceit, and my own intelligence. Tut, man! It is the thing in us that is bigger than ourselves; it does not answer questions, but it is that which makes it possible for one's life to run full circle, and in all these books. . . .”

Here he waved his hand round the room, and then cleaned his pince-nez.

“In all these books I have been able to find no systematized philosophy which can do that. . . . You see, we live by what we don't know just as much as by what we do. It does not do to despise intellect—whether you have it or no—but it is just as well to keep it in its place, the second. Sense of life first, intellect second. Intellect first, sense of life second, and you make a man a machine, a fascinating, efficient machine, but a mischievous, smashing its own and the happiness of all those with whom it comes in contact. It is the horrible fate of the philosopher that no one understands his philosophy but himself. . . . Probably this philosophy of mine is all wind to you. . . .”

“Well,” said Henry, “I don't quite follow it. You talk so fast.”

This seemed to tickle the little doctor hugely, for he threw his head back and shouted with laughter. He sat opposite Henry, and, holding his right knee in his two hands, peered at him, smiling over his pince-nez.

“Well, let us come to the practical common sense of it.”

"I've had a rotten time of it," said Henry.

"I know . . . I know."

"I mean lately. I never thought about it at all before. It seemed natural somehow that I should sink, and sink. I was always thinking what I would do when I had made the money. It never occurred to me that—that I shouldn't make it until I had lost nearly all that I had. Well . . . I'm thirty-eight."

He threw up his hands as though the worst had been said—the final word.

"How much have you left?"

"I could scrape together a thousand pounds."

"Tut! Start again."

"If I lose that? . . ."

"You won't."

"I don't think I am quite like other men."

"Ha! ha!"

Henry tugged at his moustache.

"My dear Mr. Brockman, if you don't wish to sell yourself as a machine you must supply your fellow-men with something that they want."

The blood rushed to Henry's head, and he began to sweat, for this was his idea, the idea that in its conception had so tortured him, set forth in plain terms, alive, vivid! He hugged it to him—his first-born. There was such promise of fertility in it that it dazzled him.

"Ye-es," he said. "Yes. That came to me when I began to think about myself. . . . But, I don't know—what——"

"Feed the brutes."

"Eh?"

"As I say. Feed the brutes. I don't often go to town, but I would rather eat a potato from a barrow than enter any of their eating-houses."

"But I don't know. . . ."

"You can buy the knowledge."

"But, but . . ."

"It is the one thing in this town that is conspicuously ill-done."

Henry took another cigar. The linking of his splendid idea to an eating-house hurt him not a little; but he had given himself into the hands of the doctor, and must follow whithersoever he might lead, for so soon as he strove to break away he found himself floundering in fog.

"Granted that you know nothing about it. But does any man know anything about any venture? I think failure is almost always the result of cocksureness and unwillingness to learn. If you don't like to think of yourself as an eating-house keeper, call yourself a restaurateur; it sounds just as well as—as—What are you now?"

"Insurance agent," said Henry. "But—but how—"

"Jewdwine."

"What is that?"

"Jewdwine is a man—a fat, corrupt, overfed man—dishonest, unscrupulous, bankrupt. He has spent his life in trying to persuade people to buy what they do not want. An honest venture will be a refreshing change for him. What he is doing in this vile little town I do not know; but there he is, pat to our purpose. He has a wonderful knowledge of the psychology of advertisement. . . . I will send Jewdwine to you, and he and I will soon have you on your feet as a restaurateur—unless you can think of another and more exalted calling."

Henry had some misgivings, but did not confess to it. He consented to meet Jewdwine in a few days, thanked the doctor, and took his leave in a state of violent depression. He had some vague no-

tion that he was too thin to ply such a calling successfully, conceiving the arch-type of restaurateurs to be a veritable Bung.

He harked back to his idea, and rejoiced in the magic of it. For the first time in his life he felt solid ground beneath his feet. Some of his old visions of what he would do with the boundless wealth that should be his came back to him, and they were vain and comfortless in the light of the new ideas and the practical sense which the day's interview had infused in him.

By way of preparing himself for the advent of Jewdwine, he shaved his moustache, and was pleased with his distinguished appearance without it; but, in studying his profile, wished that he had been endowed with a little more chin. However, he speedily forgot the sight of his profile, and, if he ever thought about it, supplied himself with a chin larger even than Wagner's. (A portrait of Wagner hung in his bedroom, though that master's works would have been torture to him.) The children commented on the absence of the brass plate, and duly received the concocted lie. They were given no hint of the impending change which was so materially to affect their fortunes one way or the other, up or down. As to the sacrifice of the moustache, David alone made a remark, though Nicholas was so obsessed by the tremendous change in his father that he haunted him, staring with goggling eyes.

Long before the advent of Jewdwine—there was some delay—Henry had made up his mind to follow the advice given him. He was sufficiently accustomed to the idea to feel that he was in very truth a heaven-sent restaurateur, and he frequented the grubby cellars which were all that the town could boast, and took stock of all their arrangements with

a keen professional interest and no small contempt. He even inspected shops and other premises with a view to their conversion to his purpose.

Finally he wrote to Miss Andrew, and, recollecting the circumstances of their last parting, had some difficulty in finding words. He was at first flippant, beginning "My dear aunt, I have shaved my moustache," and, though he was delighted with this humorous gem, yet had sufficient delicacy and tact to feel that it was *mal à propos*. At his second attempt he contrived to strike a truer note of repentance, remorse, and confidence in the future, begged her pardon, hoped that in the near future she would invite David to stay with her as she had promised, avowed his purpose of selling all his remaining Bardon property, and declared that in the very near future he would be able to write her a cheque for many thousands of pounds, as some small return for all the kindnesses and benefits showered by her in the dark and dismal past upon himself and all his family.

This done, he felt himself in a position to flatten all upstarts who might arise to question his supremacy in the art of supplying food to the slaves of industrialism. Having proclaimed himself for what he intended to be, he thought that there was very little left to be done, and that the creation of a large and lucrative business was as easy for him as the producing of rabbits from a hat for a professional conjurer.

## VI

JEWDWINE had very much the air of a professional conjurer. His appearance was majestic, but greasy. He was jocular, and in laughter robustious.

His face was almost purple in hue, and his eyes bulged crab-like from under his bushy eyebrows; his ears were forced out by the grossness of his neck, in which, at the base of the skull, was always a pronounced crease.

He took a humorous and simple pleasure in himself. As he panted and wheezed his way into the chair which Henry offered him, he said, "I'm a bloomin' advertisement, I am," and crowed with delight.

Henry was at his most *gauche*, and sat surveying the wonderful creature, who blew out his checks until it seemed that they must crack, then suddenly loosed and collapsed like some india-rubber toy.

"I 'ave to do that at times," he said, "to free the toobs, otherways I 'ave the asthma bad. It's wonderful 'ow I live, but I do, you see. That's 'ow I come to see the doctor, through the asthma."

An inquiring eye roved round the room, a plaintive eye it was. It roved, and presently came round to Henry, who divined its question and produced whisky. He was for procuring soda, when out of the immense flesh of Jewdwine issued a little husky voice uttering one word:

"Neat."

Henry did not join him in his libations, but sat wondering how he should broach his purpose. He

was conscious also that his visitor was taking stock of him, and of all that was in the room.

"Yes," said Jewdwine, and his voice was cleared of its huskiness by the raw spirit—"yes, you *do* want a hadvertiser."

"Oh!" said Henry.

"This 'ere commerce," said Jewdwine—"this 'ere commerce is a scramble. It ain't no glove fight, an' there ain't no time to stop to wipe yer nose when you get yer claret tapped. You've got to start in fair, an' think yerself so big, an' look so big that no one 'll dare to 'it yer. If anyone spits in yer face, ye've got to spit, and spit straight in 'is eye, so's 'e can't see while you steal 'is job. 'Tain't a bit o' good talkin' about honesty—sing 'ymns out o' business. You can't be honest if the others won't. Straight. I been all over the world. I been in India, which is purgatory; I been in America, which is 'alf-an'-'alf; I been in London, which is 'eaven; an' I'm stuck 'ere in the north of England, which is 'ell. Can I 'ave a little more whisky? Thank you, Mr. Brockman."

Henry plied the monster, now panting and at his huskiest, and still could find nothing to say. Mr. Jewdwine came to business:

"About this 'ere little do, Mr. Brockman. It's a good idea—a restaurong, a real restaurong, a bit o' London in the provinces, a bit o' light in the murk. *You* know London, of course, Mr. Brockman?"

"I used to go to London a good deal," said Henry, striving in vain to force into his voice something of Mr. Jewdwine's ecstasy.

"Not—not for Exeter 'All, I 'ope."

"No," said Henry. "Oh no. Where is it?"

"Where indeed?" said Mr. Jewdwine, waving his hand airily to indicate the passing of that excellent



institution. "Gone, Mr. Brockman—gone." He tapped with a fat finger impressively on his knee.

Henry began to be annoyed with Mr. Jewdwine. With a firmness surprising to himself he said:

"I'm going to start quietly. The important thing is to give good food."

"You can feed 'em out of your 'and with swans orf the King's table for all they'll come to you if you don't give 'em something to talk abaht. There's all sorts of advertisements, Mr. Brockman: there's polite advertisements like a doctor's carriage, and there's vulgar advertisements like all those pictures in the streets. People is vulgar, and 'arf blind, an' deaf, so that you 'ave to flap a bloomin' rainbow in front of their eyes an' blow a bally band o' trumpets in their ears for 'em to know what's goin' on in the world. Well, I'll 'ave that rainbow, an' I'll 'ave that brass band, an' I'll 'ave all these 'ere insecks in this 'ere coal 'ole runnin' to us with their 'ands in their pockets to buy a bit o' 'eaven in 'ell."

Here Mr. Jewdwine caressed his shining pate with his fat hand.

"Where are you to be found, Mr. Jewdwine?"

Mr. Jewdwine produced a card.

"That's my 'umble 'abitation and my name."

He studied Henry's appearance, garments, boots, and then, with a wistful expression in his eyes and a compassionate note in his voice, he continued:

"What do you say to fifty pounds an' ten per cent. of the first year's profits?"

He pulled his nose and waited.

"By all means," said Henry, having no wish to haggle with the man.

"Done! Mr. Brockman, you're a gent. Put it there."

He rose wheezily and held out his hand. He shook Henry's hand up and down for some time.

He tapped his nose with his hat, then noticed that he had left a little liquor in his glass, and drank it off.

"Glad to have met you, Mr. Jewdwine," said Henry.

"We'll knock 'em. I'll think it over, an' directly any inspiration for the restaurong comes to me, you shall 'ave it."

He paused, and revolved slowly in his mind all other possible subjects for discussion, and though he made several attempts to open fire again, cut himself short, and finally left abruptly.

Henry heard no more of him for some days, during which he impatiently awaited news of the sale of his Bardon property from the agents who had received his instructions. From them at length he received the intimation that a purchaser had been found, and that, after deduction of fees and commission, he would receive a sum of just over eleven hundred pounds.

By this time he had selected his shop, at the corner of two of the main thoroughfares in the centre of the town, and close to all the principal warehouses and offices.

Henry was disposed to give Jewdwine his fee at once, but was persuaded by Dr. Crosby to withhold until there had been some sign of a disposition towards useful activity. Henry accordingly wrote, but evoked no reply. He called at the address, but saw only the Anglo-German landlady, who, breathing stertorously from her laboured ascent of the stairs, stared blandly for a little, and then said:

"Mr. Yoodvine iss not to house."

"Where is Mr. Jewdwine?"

"I know not. He is like dat. He iss gone, and den I do not know if he iss always gone or for only a liddle time. Den he comes again and pays always. He is a peaudiful man is Mr. Yoodvine."

Henry had come to pin his faith on Jewdwine, and, conscious of his solid presence, had soared to heights of activity and initiative never before possible to him. He had the floating of the restaurant well in train, had contrived to come to all manner of decisions without any too fearful qualms, simply because he had the feeling that whatever he did would become pregnant by the booming foreshadowed by the facile and splendidly confident filibuster, as Dr. Crosby had called him. And now Jewdwine had vanished into thin air. It was as though he had never been, and, himself—Henry Brockman—felt that the ground had been cut away from under his feet, and the liabilities he had undertaken with so light a heart filled him with sickening dread. He could not turn back, and he had no strength to go forward, so trenchantly did Jewdwine's dictum as to the need of setting people talking come home to him. Standing there on the doorstep face to face with the German woman, Henry laughed nervously.

"It's—it's of no consequence," he said, turned tail and fled. He plunged home, making a mental calculation of all that he would lose if the venture should be abortive.

The disappearance of Jewdwine was fraught with serious consequence for the luckless Henry, for it chanced that on this same evening Mrs. Spencer returned to the charge. In the new assurance of the wider outlook and hard work Henry had gently but firmly declined all her overtures, and as often as she broached the subject declared that his plans were very undecided, and that his present domestic arrange-

ments, unsatisfactory though they might be, must continue until he could see some light ahead. He could not refrain from dark hints of tremendous change in store, but gave no clue to the direction from which it should come. All this mystery only strengthened Mrs. Spencer in her purpose, and gave confirmation to her conception of latent and wonderful force in this man among men.

On this evening, filled with misgiving as he was, he met her more cordially, and listened with a show of interest to the gossip with which she invariably prefaced her statement of her dear ambition. Encouraged by this, she came more directly to the point.

"If things goes well with you as you hope, Mr. Brockman, you must have someone for the children—and why not me?"

"If—if——" said Henry. "It is all if——"

"But you are doing so much, Mr. Brockman?"

Henry had imagined that all his movements were secret, and that, if change there was in him, it was within him and invisible.

"You're a changed man, Mr. Brockman."

Then he told her all that he had done and what he hoped to do.

"I have everything in order. It's just—just clock-work now, and I must see that everything is properly fitted together. There'll be mistakes in the beginning; there must be."

He was quoting Dr. Crosby, but all the same there was masterfulness in his voice. In persuading Mrs. Spencer that he was a fine fellow, he was also persuading himself, and this was his undoing, for with extraordinary swiftness of mind she possessed herself of all that he had done, bound it together, and gave it back to him as a living and important thing. Thus he was delivered into her hands, and almost

before he was aware what had happened she was again installed in the house, and as firmly as Jones, who quickly recognized her authoritative position, and more than any other in the house accepted her as a dispensing providence. She was humble and meek in all that she did, but none the less was she all-powerful, and what she willed, though he might have no idea of it, Henry did, and did it with confidence and alacrity. Not only was he controlled in the conduct of his domestic affairs, but in all the business of the restaurant hers was the guiding hand that brought all to a successful issue.

Jewdwine also was enslaved. Henry had made exhaustive inquiries, for him, but in vain. He reappeared abruptly, without any explanation of his defection, exactly the same in appearance except that the light of war was in his eyes. He wagged his head as portentously as ever did Lord Burleigh, tapped his nose, and winked, while all the time he swelled with what he called inspiration.

In these exciting times he was perhaps a little more asthmatic than he had been, and certainly his capacity for neat whisky was by no means diminished by his unrecounted adventures.

He was here, there, and everywhere, bristling with suggestions and inventiveness.

It was Mrs. Spencer's habit at their conclaves to be seemingly engrossed in some other occupation, so that her presence had always the air of being adventitious, and yet, in spurring Henry's diffidence and dissipating the bombastical and impractical from Jewdwine's inspirations, she contrived that no discussion was unprofitable.

Jewdwine boomed. He appeared in all public places in the town more and more startlingly dressed, talking in clubs and bars, in offices and outside the

various exchanges, of how he was going to wake the place to life, give it some colour in its grime and the dim light under its pall of smoke; caused paragraphs to appear in the papers and sandwich-men to parade the streets. He caught a drunken scene-painter, and for a miserably small sum persuaded him to design a flaring poster of a turbaned Indian presenting a steaming dish of curry to Ideal Women—the Ideal being Jewdwine's. By sleight-of-hand he produced a real Indian, whom he christened Ali Baba, and paraded him in a costume more gorgeous than that of any rajah, borrowed from the wardrobe-mistress of the local theatre, and the Indian, as Jewdwine had foretold, produced the desired glamour.

Had he had his way the restaurant would have been a veritable Indian temple. Indeed, he commissioned the drunken scene-painter to make designs for panels depicting elephant hunts, polo, bazaars, and other features of Indian life; but Mrs. Spencer was so adamant in her refusal to consider the scheme that he had reluctantly to countermand his order. She thought him an old fool, and when he was at his most absurd rated him and told him that his extravagance would wreck the whole venture. This would sober him a little, but never for very long, and he would break out again more wildly than before, until Henry would be roused to quivering pitch of irritation. Had the two men been left to work together they must have quarrelled and brought their flimsy fabric about their ears. The woman fused the oversensibility of the one and the vulgarity of the other, and by her incisiveness and prompt decision time and again staved off catastrophe and brought what seemed to be hopeless confusion to a clear and definite issue. She saved Henry much waste of energy—and he worked frantically—by directing his efforts upon the

point where they were most needed, so that there was always a steady progress being made behind the flaming erection which Jewdwine builded with such immense enjoyment.

The opening was a success, and the account of it in the press next day, and by those who had been present at it, brought a horde of visitors, more than could be accommodated. Henry was elated, sanguine, and almost equalled Jewdwine in his fertility in the conception of other schemes.

Mrs. Spencer, with a half-knitted stocking on her clicking needles, said:

“Wait. This will die away, and you may or may not be left with a steady business.”

Henry laughed and rattled the money in his pocket.

“I’ve been looking out for a new house,” he said.

“What are we to do with Jewdwine?”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Spencer, counting her stitches to make sure she had not dropped one. “Drown him—except that he wasn’t born to be drowned. He’d float.”

Henry laughed again.

“It was a fine idea of mine,” he said, “to start a restaurant.”

## VII

JOHN SPENCER BROCKMAN was more than a year old, and had already several teeth, when the tide of his father's affairs turned. His appearance steadily improved, and in the new circumstances he vied with his father as to which should grow the stouter. The lean moustachioed Henry was altogether lost in a plump, clean-shaven gentleman of the middle classes by the time that the infant was of an age to clothe his progenitor in the respect and awe which were his due. The stouter Henry was altogether an easier and more amiable, more appreciative and more generous parent than any of the elder three could remember, and Audrey and Nicholas, in the brighter surroundings, the larger house and more comfortable life that he provided for them out of the proceeds of the restaurant, speedily forgot all fear of him that they had ever had. David never did, and grew ever more fanatical in his devotion to his mother's memory.

In this he had been fed by Miss Andrew, with whom his father had consented that he should stay during the period of domestic upheaval, when it was felt that success was assured. He was furnished forth with new clothes, his father allowed him to draw some shillings from the savings-bank, and presented him with a shining piece of gold for spending in Bardon. He donned one of his new suits, and swaggered forth to show himself to Helen, for he had come to lead a dual life, dwelling as much in the doctor's house as in his own, and Jones followed



him in this as in all things. The old life of marauding in the Park had long been abandoned in favour of the gentler attractions of Helen's company, and the possibility of long hours spent among the books in the consulting-room. The passing of Tush had rendered the old sports tedious, and, in the end, when the mockery of it had become intolerable, David, after full palaver and the smoking of many pipes of peace, formally disbanded, laying upon each of his followers the charge of defending the fame of the fair Helen. This they swore to do with mighty oaths, though the majority of them were in complete ignorance of the existence of the lady.

After a painful interview with Tush Williams, David renounced the world and all its vanities, and betook himself to a cell by a winding river over against a nunnery, and devoted himself to the study of the sages. The nunnery was invented to account for the presence and incursions into his solitude of Helen, who came often to disturb his peace from sheer irritation with his new delusion, the exact nature of which was not divulged to her, for she had never won complete reinstatement after her base conduct with regard to the island. Sometimes, when she came upon him in his monkish posing, David would totally ignore her; at other times he would beam benignantly upon her, blinking through imagined spectacles of horn, and give her wise sayings and instruction in the way that a maid should grow. She bore with him, but on one occasion he rose, blessed her, and declaimed:

“ ‘ Grace was in all her steps, Heaven in her eye;  
In every gesture dignity and love.’ ”

“ Rubbish! ” said Helen. “ Don't stand there blinking like an old owl, ” and was so boisterous and

violent with him that she shook all the strange dreams out of his head, and brought him again to earth. After that painful experience, David refrained from all didacticism with her, and emerged from whatever strange employment he might be at only to tell her stories which she swallowed greedily.

This feasting upon dreams was not good for the boy, and he grew more and more unwholesome in complexion, more difficult in temper, and in all things more vague. His father, busied with his scheme, noticed no change in him, and though Mrs. Spencer marked it, she ascribed it to perverseness and some devil in him that made the governing of him impossible.

Helen told her father of David's strangeness, impelled thereto by an impassioned denunciation of all womankind.

"Begone!" David had thundered. "I will keep my mind and all the precious gifts with which Heaven has enriched my soul inviolate. Begone! for I will never set eyes upon thee more."

With that he looked upon her so steadfastly, and with such a queer light in his eyes, that the child was terrified, and clung to him, then shook him, shook, and shook until he was dazed and lost his thread.

"What's the matter, Helen? Helen?" said David. "Oh, my head is hurting so!"

"Oh, David, you said—you said I was—I don't know what, only you said it so—so fearfully."

David was at a loss, for he could remember nothing.

Upon this report the doctor hurried to Henry, and warned him that David must be looked to.

"He is such a strange boy," said the doctor. "I think he must be a poet."

"Good God!" said Henry, and was so appalled that the doctor broke into ribald laughter.

“It is a thing that may happen to any man—to have a poet for his son. God help us all! . . . It seems that the butcher boy has knocked him clean into another world.”

“His mother and he,” said Henry, “they were always——”

“I remember——” said the doctor. “Are you prospering?”

“We shall leave this house,” said Henry, with a wide gesture to indicate the greater space that he had chartered.

“And Jewdwine?”

Henry laughed.

“Jewdwine has been up to London and come back bursting with notions.”

The doctor returned to the discussion of David's plight. In the upshot Henry declared his readiness to send the boy away.

He wrote to Miss Andrew, and after David had swaggered for many days as an experienced and dauntless traveller, he and his little baggage were placed in charge of the guard, and after many hours of travelling, he arrived at his destination, where he was met by a trim little maid, who said that her name was Susan, and that she belonged to his aunt. The old barouche had been chartered, and in this they jolted over the three miles that lay between the little town and the station, David eagerly gazing for known landmarks, while Susan and Robert Pollard, the driver, beamed upon each other, and carried yet further the most engrossing business in the world.

“This,” said Susan, “is Master David Brockman.”

Robert touched his hat.

“I knoo yer father, Master David, and I knoo yer grandfather, and my father knoo 'is father.”

“My grandfather,” said David, “wrote a book.”

"My grandfather," said Robert, "kep' a public-ouse, same as my father."

"My father," said David, not to be outdone, "keeps a restaurong."

"Times is changed," said Robert, looking wise.

"Yes," said Susan. "Things is not what they was."

They entered the town; David rose excitedly to his feet, and asked to be shown this building and that. He saw Miss Andrew's little white house with its green door and shutters long before they came to it, and cheered lustily. As they crossed the river he showed Susan where his father had caught a great fish, and Robert slapped his thigh.

"A Brockman," he vowed; "every inch a Brockman!" And Susan, rising to his enthusiasm, hugged David to her bosom. In the gladness of his heart he suffered her.

Robert pointed to a house.

"That's where you was born, Master David." They came then to the little white house, and David knocked on the green door with the shining brass goblin who hung there. Miss Andrew admitted him, divested him of his overcoat and hat, and brought him into the little sitting-room, where all the chairs were covered in flowered chintz, and bowls of lavender scented the place. Susan retired to make tea for the traveller, and David was made welcome, sitting in the largest chair round-eyed, taking in all his surroundings. Everything was smaller than he had imagined it to be, but the neatness and the fragrance had not at all been in his dreams.

He was awed by Miss Andrew, and, because he was tired, tongue-tied. She wisely forbore to pester him with questions, and treated him at once as though he had always been her housemate. He was shown

his room: a little white room that had been his mother's in old days—a portrait of her hung where, from his bed, he could see it—and was delighted to be in it. He was solemn, and went about the house caressing things with his hands.

“I suppose,” he said, “there are many things of mother's that are no more—living things, I mean.”

“Yes, many,” said Miss Andrew. The boy with his white, pinched face, and his eyes so like Margaret's, troubled her. “I'm glad to have you, David. We must send you back with a brave colour.”

This brave colour came soon to David's cheeks. He was supremely happy. He met all the Starks, and Bastables, and Chews, and many more who had known his mother and father. He wandered over all the country-side. He visited the yew-grove, and wrote of it to Helen. He bathed and learned to swim lustily. He played games and learned to row and ride. He made friends with all and sundry, from the ostler at the Blue Pig, kept by Robert's father, to Captain Scoones, a descendant of the buccaneer, at the old house on the Lynn Road. He was up and about from early morning to late evening, hot-foot on the quest of adventure, which he found in abundance. Among the boys of the place he compelled just the same admiring loyalty as from those in the park at home, and led them into even braver regions of romance.

He had a sycamore-tree by the river, in the top of which he made a retiring-place and tower of observation, from which to spy upon the manœuvres of beleaguering hosts. The yew-grove was to him the home and harbourage of a race of hostile giants, from whose oppression he had been sent to deliver Bardon.

In the evenings he gave an embroidered account

of all the day's doings to his aunt, when she was not deftly drawing from him an account of all the changes in his family.

"Father has shaved his moustache," said David.

"M-p-p-p!" said his aunt, and her lips worked in and out.

"John," said David, "is not nearly so ugly as he was. I used to think he must be a changeling. Audrey is going to another school, now that father has such a lot of money."

"Would you like to go to another school, David?"

"I'd like to leave school like Tush. Tush is in a barber's, but they don't let him shave anybody yet. Father's much fatter now."

"M-p-p-p! You wouldn't like to live with me here always, David?"

"No."

This was disconcerting.

"Do you remember my asking you what you would like to be?"

"Yes," said David, though he had forgotten.

"It would be better for you not to stay at home—in that place."

"Oh, the new house is much bigger."

Miss Andrew had divined how the land lay with regard to Mrs. Spencer; indeed, she had quietly marked traces of the Spencerian atmosphere in David, and had devoted herself to their eradication; no very difficult task, for David sucked up greedily all the family tradition which she added to his store, and was quickly at home in the new serenity in which he found himself. His great achievement was that he translated all his family into it, and Helen, and her father, and Jones, and even Tush lathering chins. He fenced all these round about with the great tradition, barring out Mrs. Spencer and all that was

hateful to him in the northern town. He was mightily content, and had no suspicion but that all must be well.

A rude shock awaited him. He had letters from Helen, and from Audrey, and occasionally a note from his father, telling him how matters were progressing with the new house.

One night, after he had told his aunt quite solemnly how a great serpent had arisen from the river and had been slain by himself, with a little assistance from Basil Stark, his doughtiest henchman, she produced from the pocket of her black apron a letter, adjusted her spectacles, and in a most awesome tone said:

“I have news for you David.”

David waited.

“Your father——”

A wild thought crossed David's mind that Jewd-wine might have murdered his father for his much gold.

“Your father is going to be married.”

David's jaw dropped. This was worse, far worse. He foresaw what was to follow.

“He and Mrs. Spencer are to be—to be married next week, and they want—they want me to keep you for three weeks longer, until—until they return.”

“I—I can't ever call her m—mother,” said David. Then he saw that tears were trickling down his aunt's cheeks. He dared not speak, for there was such a lump in his throat. He stole away. The great tradition had crumbled. Mrs. Spencer had broken in through the tall fence that should have kept her out.

For some days neither David nor his aunt referred to the subject. He strove manfully to conceal his tragic mood from his playmates, and above all from his aunt. The poor lady was so crestfallen, so completely mournful, that she reduced David to the low-

est pitch of gloom. In the evenings they sat talking, if they talked at all, at random, skirtingly, until there came a letter from Helen conveying the news, which had just reached her through Audrey.

"Father has said nothing about it, but I can tell he is angry, because he sat tapping with his foot on the ground, and sent me away when I wanted to pull his hair. Oh, David, if it had been my father instead of yours!"

Miss Andrew read the letter, and at once broke into talk of David's mother and of his grandfather.

"Has your father ever told you about your mother? I think you are old enough to understand. . . ."

"Helen says I am two hundred years old," said David, sighed, adjusted himself in his chair as if to show that he was conscious of it, and felt the burden of his years.

"You know that men and women love?"

"Yes," said David stoutly, his thoughts aflame with stories of lovers tender and true, all the lovers in the likeness of himself, and all the ladies in the likeness of Helen.

"My sister," said Miss Andrew, "was your mother's mother; this is her portrait." She indicated a picture that David had taken for a portrait of herself as a girl. He looked up at it now, and then gravely across at his aunt.

"You are like her, too, sometimes. She was very dear to me, and I have never seen any girl more beautiful. We were poor girls in Scotland. Our father had been a minister, and in those days there was nothing for girls to do but to go out as governesses. I went straight from home to a family in London. The boys who were my pupils are great men now. The father of these boys was kind to me, and gave me a freedom in his house and a consideration that girls in



my position rarely received. My sister, Mary, was allowed to stay with me when she came to London to seek a situation with another family related to this. I do not know—I saw nothing, knew nothing, until she came to me, beside herself, weeping, for she did not know to whom to turn. . . . Your mother was born, and Mary, my sister, lived in France with her for many years. Our relations would have nothing to say for her; she was condemned; and, because I took her part, I, too, quarrelled with them. . . . When Mary was dying she sent for me, and gave Margaret, your mother, into my keeping, together with the money that had been given to her—for your mother's father had been kind and generous, and given not money only—— We wandered from place to place, seeking no company other than our own, until we came to Bardou, when Margaret fell in love with this little white house because of its green door. . . . We came here, and rejoiced in our home, and still we were to each other all in all. . . . I was perhaps wrong; I don't know. The world has changed so much—changed even then more than I knew. Poor Mary, and poor Margaret! And yet Mary's was a happier life than Margaret's. . . .”

She seemed to have forgotten David's presence, and to be musing to herself. David leaned forward, and strove to find a tale out of his store to sort with this. He thrust out his little thin legs. It was rather a dull story. Only the word France in connection with his mother had touched his imagination. He knew much of France, and the stories of her wars. He placed his mother in the France of Napoleon, and began to weave adventures for her, with himself as a humble but dashing lieutenant in the Guards. He introduced the boys who had been Miss Andrew's pupils as his comrades in the regiment.

"How many boys were there?" he asked, and his aunt laughed.

"Four," she said, and going over to the old bureau in the corner she produced a sketch and gave it to David. It was a rough portrait of the artist's father, and was subscribed:

"Lord St. Justin, by his son John Fielding," and to this was added in a neat hand, "aged twelve."

The healthy snob in David grew big.

"Did you teach lords?" he asked, almost incredulously.

"Why—yes—John is my lord now." David's respect for his aunt was visibly increased. He regarded her with a sort of wonder.

"I say. I never saw a lord."

"They are much more like other people than is generally supposed."

"Tush saw a lord once, and he said he had a red cloak and white fur on it."

"M-p-p-p!"

"I say, I wish mother had married a lord. Who were the other boys?"

"John's brothers—Geoffrey and Anthony and Michael."

"No sisters?"

"Eh? No-o-o—no."

"Who was mother's—mother's father?"

"Lord St. Justin."

"O-o-h!—Jiminy!" David wagged his arms in excitement. "Then I'm a lord. Is he dead?"

"Long ago."

David turned to John's handiwork.

"Fancy a lord being able to draw."

"They all did something, and did it well."

"I say, I'm not really a lord, am I?"

"Not really, David."

“Oh!” He was disappointed. What he had made of his mother’s story Miss Andrew could not divine. To circumstantiate it she rummaged among her treasures and old relics, showed him sketches of her own, of the house in London; old daguerreotypes of the various Fieldings, and of Mary, and one of David’s mother as a girl; old letters showing the Fielding crest; a sketch by herself of Monkshood, the great house in Lincolnshire; pieces of brass and china brought from various places in France during the sojourn there; a ring that had been the gift of her lover to the unfortunate Mary; a necklace too, and bracelets; and all the time that David was fingering these, tales of the life in the great houses sounded in his ears, until he was gorged with them, and so excited that there was no holding him. He was stuffed so full that he could not shape the wonderful tidings, and had only the vaguest notion as to who was who in the narrative. His mother stood out clearly enough, but Mary was shadowy; Lord St. Justin was immense, and John Fielding by his handiwork was cognizable; but for the rest they were as indistinct and filmy as ever the unnamed characters had been on the island. That these great personages were his, bound up with his existence, was solid fact, and in the contemplation of it David felt himself growing, and presently he fingered his chin as if to make sure that there was not a beard coming.

David turned pale at the thought of the greatness that was his. The only doubt in his mind was as to how the matter would affect Helen. Then he found that she also was changed, that there was an acute pleasure, almost a pain, that he had never known before in the thought of Helen.

He nursed this painful pleasure for some days, and then found that his thoughts were all upon matri-

mony, which had never seriously been within the region of his contemplation. Helen—Helen—and a marriage feast. . . . The thought roused suffocating emotions in him.

He attempted on the Thursday to write to Helen, but found he could not, that words would not flow. Thoughts came into his head that he dared not think. He found himself blushing for no reason, and was for the first time conscious of the singularly brazen love-making that had been between Susan and Robert Pollard ever since he had been in Bardon.

He fled from all mankind, and took refuge in the yew-grove, where sweet torture awaited him, for he remembered all his mother's old tales of lovers in this very place.

He strode manfully through its glades and dells, crying, "Helen—Helen!" and then wishing that he might catch the word again; it seemed such a sacrilege to utter it. He treasured her letters, and when it chanced that Susan, finding one of them, had burned it, he abandoned himself to the blackest despair.

Yet he was capable of thrusting aside the whole if there came some employment more engrossing and fruitful, and all his tenderness evaporated at the prospect of a meal. He gave little thought to the story that his aunt had told him, being content to leave it blurred, and to swagger in the light of the noble name into the wooing of Helen. He was a blustering lover until in the circle of his thoughts he came to the projected alliance of his father with Mrs. Spencer. He was ashamed that such a thing could be, but did not grapple with the problem of the attitude he should adopt until there occurred to him the ghastly word, a word to chill the bones more than any incantation:

"Stepmother."

In David's lore there were so many villainous step-

mothers. He was haunted by that frightful woman who had given the heart of her little stepson to her husband in a stew. He frequented the flour-mill by the bridge to ponder the possibility of taking home a millstone to drop upon Mrs. Spencer's head, until it occurred to him that the penalty for such an act would be rather severe, and that it would be a pity if a fair young life were cut short. Still, resentment burned in him, and would not be assuaged. The flame of it was fed by his aunt's stories of the precious life of his mother's childhood, which, though David had lived in it in imagination, was by the new light cast on it yet more startlingly in contrast with the meanness of the surroundings in which he himself had grown. In the old life there were the lord and his son, the Honourable John; in the dull little street were Mrs. Spencer and the charwoman, the dirty old music-master, and the golden-haired lady. Here in Bardon were great trees and a wonderful river; in the dull street were the starved elderberries and the hawthorn, and all that there could be for contrast with the lovely river was the canal where the barges were, a ditch so foul and oily black that the notice forbidding bathing was a mockery. The canal and the river were not more startling in contrast than Spencer and Brockman, with all its tender associations. He set his teeth.

“What can I call her?” he said to his aunt.

“She will be Mrs. Brockman.”

“Oh!”

Miss Andrew had marked how the boy had brooded on the question, and she admired his spirit, but was curiously helpless. She longed to keep him with her, but dared not broach the subject to him. She was not friendless, but often she sighed for some bright creature to bring life into her little house, to break

its ordered neatness, to dispel the preserving scent of lavender which was over all. This David had done in the few weeks of his stay with her, and she was loath to let him go, and once more to sit old-maidishly prim, with no immediate creature for tending.

She spent many hours twisting the problem this way and that, looking at it from every side, anxious only for the best for David. To take him from brothers and sisters, father, and this woman, who, though she might be common through and through, was yet good-hearted, and had shown herself generous, and, from what she had gleaned, capable, might be dangerous. Life might be hard for David, but if he were to grow to full strength, would not such a tempering be finer than the soft air of Bardon and the close protection, the too tender atmosphere, of her house? David had touched her to a knowledge of the half-life she had known, living, as she had always done, in the tragedies and emotions of others. She was reminded bitterly of her failure with Henry, of her failure to give Margaret strength, and the rude sense of life which should have made her close with Henry at the outset of his folly, and preserve herself and him from the utter wreck of their fortunes. She blamed herself, and for long hours in the night she cast and recast her life, Mary's, and Margaret's, only to come back to this—that she had hidden herself away, and from horror of all that had been had striven to encase herself and Margaret so that nothing hurtful should ever enter in. The result had been disastrous, and yet so deeply was the instinct rooted in herself that even now she found herself wrapping David round with sentiment to preserve him from all hurt—David in lavender.

Notwithstanding this realization of disaster sprung from tenderness, what she desired more than any-

thing else in the world was that David should not be taken from her, and when his father wrote that he must return to resume his schooling, she answered with a plea that he should be allowed to stay. Henry, swollen with his small success and the adoration of his new wife, curtly reminded her of the remarks he had made on a previous occasion with regard to this subject; a little malevolently he gibed at the poor woman, and reminded her that he was now, or hoped soon to be, independent of such offers of assistance.

“Commerce,” he said—“commerce is the note of the age. I establish a business which should be enough for David; it is good enough for me. I’m done with being a gentleman. . . .”

This struck ominously, and David found his aunt in tears. She explained to him the full story, rebuking herself for a foolish old woman.

“I’ve lost touch with it all,” she said over and over again. “This is no place for you, David. It is out of the world. It is a refuge. Let it be that for you.”

David was embarrassed by the old lady’s emotion, and did not know what to say. He did not wish to relinquish all that the little northern town held for him, but Bardon also was sweet; between the two it was for the great powers to decide, for he had little or no appreciation of free will in his affairs. Yet at home there was Mrs. Spencer, but there were also Helen and John; in Bardon there were trees and the river, beasts and birds, but also there was Miss Andrew’s enormous age.

When he realized that his time was come, and that he must return, he spent his every penny in buying presents for his relatives and Helen. Susan attended him, and, giggling, suggested that he might like to purchase a wedding-present for herself. He bought

her a salmon-hued pin-cushion of velvet, and was publicly embraced for it.

"If you'll wait," he said, "we will be married on the same day."

"Robert," said Susan, "is in a 'urry; he's that fond of me."

Two days later David was loaded with gifts—among them John Fielding's drawing of his father, which he had coveted—and despatched in the old barouche, Miss Andrew standing at her little gate to wave her handkerchief until they had disappeared across the bridge and round the corner into the station road.

Basil Stark and many others of David's new friends assembled at the station. He promised that he would write to them, and bade them all to the joint wedding of Robert and Susan and himself and the fair unknown. Robert threw back his head and roared delightedly, and Susan burst into happy tears.

The train moved out, and David hung long out of the window, gazing and gazing, torn with angry regret that he could not take the place with him. Then it occurred to him that in his last words to his friends, his last burst of eloquence, his voice had played him tricks, and made sounds like those of Tush at his most erratic. His voice was breaking! Delight in this discovery banished all other thoughts of regret and disquiet from his mind, and he fell to talking aloud to see of what his voice was capable. When his voice rose in a squeak and was lost he was delighted; when it suddenly leaped to a bass note his joy was almost unbounded.

He was beaming and mightily pleased with himself when his father met him at the station, and conveyed him to the new house. It was wonderful, but, compared with the marvel of his new voice, just noth-



ing. He beamed as he had never beamed, even on his stepmother.

“My word,” she said, “but you ’ave grown.”

David did not wince at the dropped aitch. Deliberately forcing his voice down, he said in his very gruffest:

“Yes.”

He could not trust himself to say more, but giggled nervously.

Audrey took him to display all the wonders of the new house.

“I’m going to a new school,” said Audrey. “And, oh! David, they’re going to send you away.”

David received the announcement in blank silence.

The new house was semi-detached, the very height of Spencerian ambition, but its atmosphere damped David’s spirits, and he chafed against it. It was filled with new furniture, and though David could here and there recognize an old friend, all that was new reeked of Spencer and set him longing for Bardon.

He told Audrey about the lord, and later showed her the drawing of the Honourable John, whose connection with herself lay altogether beyond her comprehension.

She took the story to her father for elucidation. He looked across at his new wife, swore under his breath, and told Audrey she would understand by-and-by, in such a tone that she shrank from him. In these days Henry had grown fat, proud of himself, of his work, and of his new wife. In attaining the semi-detached house she had set the crown on her ambition. She was inordinately house-proud, and had laboured to create her ideal of a home. Henry was as wax in her hands; she moulded him, and before David’s return had everything about to her liking.

Audrey and Nicholas were happy enough, and John was not of an age to care about anything so only that he was properly fed. All was well, and all wheels ran smoothly until David returned.

Dr. Crosby had divined that there would be trouble, and had skilfully bred in Henry's mind the idea that it might be as well if his strange and incomprehensible first-born were sent to school.

Discussing the project in his nuptial bed, he said:

"It would be better for both of you, my dear. You know how he used to try your temper. . . . They will perhaps whip the damned poet out of him."

"I was thinking," said Mrs. Henry Brockman—"I was thinking that perhaps we might take in one of the rooms over the shop next month, and start it as a vegetarian room; there are so many Socialists nowadays."

## VIII

THE school selected for David was a second-rate public school, built on a dismal hill in North-East Yorkshire. He hated it so much that he came to conceive hell as a treeless waste wherein some fiend had erected a massive pile of grey stone. Almost as unhappy was he in his holidays, for he lost touch with his brothers and sisters, and even with Helen, who suddenly grew into a tall and dashing young woman, beside whom, in spite of the fluffiness down upon his cheeks and chin, he felt miserably small. The change took place during one Easter term. They had wept at parting, had broken a silver ring, and lo! upon his return she received him with gracious but cold condescension, and when, obstinately butting against such a cruel change, he strove to interest her in his exploits and his sinister yarns of school-life, she turned from him, and was off with Audrey upon some purely feminine search. Utterly bereft, David was forced to turn to John, for Nicholas by this had his own circle. John was four years old, and very speedily reduced David to a condition of thralldom. David, the mighty hunter, the invincible knight, the magnifico, slunk miserably in the train of the baby mind, and was most agonized lest it should be discovered to what a plight he was reduced. Audrey scented his degradation. John was deserted, and for days David moped miserably until he bethought him of Tush.

The shop in which that stalwart had begun to lather chins was close by the scene of David's historic battle with the butcher-boy. He repaired thither, and sat

for some time upon a hard chair reading a copy of a vile comic journal, over the top of which he studied the shop.

It had two basins, two operating chairs; it was untidy, frowsy, and smelled of soap and cheese. It was decorated with advertisements of various brands of tobacco and portraits of actresses of a bygone generation. On a card it was announced that hair-cutting would be performed for threepence, shaving, shampooing, singeing for twopence; chiropody and manicule were both offered at a moderate price, though the words must sorely have puzzled the clods who were old Lintott's patrons. Two of these were now in the shop, a ferrety fool and a greasy bully—an attorney's clerk and a butcher. Old Lintott was clipping the hair of the one, while Tush was shaving the other.

Tush was a man. He wore trim little moustachios waxed to points, and his hair was waved and greased in a monstrous curl through which a comb was thrust. He twittered as he plied his craft, and parleyed with the butcher of things that were of no interest to either. Yet David was envious of the flow of words, of the easy assurance, the light poise of Tush, the airy confidence with which he discussed this and that measure promoted by Government for the welfare of the masses.

"Yes," said Tush, as he skimmed the butcher's fat chops with his razor. "Yes, we must keep an eye on Germany."

"These is hard times for the meat trade," said the butcher.

Old Lintott turned on this, scissors and comb in hands, and brandished both.

"Germany? Fiddlesticks! Keep your tongue in your head, Williams, or talk of things you under-

stand. I say, give us a governing class that don't want to govern—better than a governing class that can't. That's what I say."

"I'm a Tory, I am," said the butcher, starting up, lathered as he was and with the towel round his neck. "Gimme the British Empire."

"I would give you," said old Lintott—"I would give you anything to keep you quiet. What'd you do with it if you had it?"

"I'd—I'd eat the Germans," said the butcher.

"You'd sell them as mutton in your shop." Old Lintott chuckled over this grisly fantasy, while the butcher, scenting insult, pawed the air and growled ominously. His little eyes started from his head, and he licked his lips.

"I'd take all Little Englanders and crack their heads," he said at length.

"I could not crack yours with one of your own choppers," was the quiet rejoinder.

"My 'ead's as good as yours."

"Better, because it's thicker."

The attorney's clerk chimed in here, and demanded that the cutting of his hair should continue. The old barber returned to the operation, and the butcher submitted himself once more to Tush.

David was disappointed. He had been excited by the violence of the battle of wits, and had hoped that there would come a bloody conflict, had indeed had visions of the butcher holding the old barber by the throat and cracking his head with pounding fist. He admired the huge breadth of the butcher, the girth of him, and the bull-neck. Pitted against such a man the little barber was puny and almost inconsiderable. To his great astonishment they parted most amicably, and without rancour. The butcher paid his twopence and rolled out of the shop, wiping his chin in his blue

apron. Tush busied himself with his shaving tackle.

"That's a fine man, Mr. Lintott," said the attorney's clerk.

"As good as another. How is business with you?"

"Well. But there's trouble in the office."

"Oh?"

"Too many partners, and partners' wives, and partners' daughters, and partners' nieces, and partners' widows. . . . Nothing for us chaps. I do all Mr. Vaughan's work; he gets fifteen hundred for it, I get a hundred and fifty. . . . It's crool."

"Birth," said Lintott cryptically. "Birth. You're born to have or not to have, and there's no way out."

"Give everybody a chance, I says."

"Everybody is given a chance."

The words rang in David's ears. He had come to the shop in Ishmaelish brooding on the hardness of his lot. He dropped the paper from his hand and leaned forward to catch what more might be said. The rustling of it drew Tush's attention. He adjusted his chair, took out the comb from his curl, replaced it, folded his hands, and said:

"Next, please."

David rose to his feet and passed over to Tush; then, when he found himself the taller, and was glad of it, he drew himself up and held out the hand of patronage to his old boon companion.

"Tush, how are you?"

This was not at all what he had meant to say. Tush dropped his scissors, gasped, and in a moment had taken David's hand in both his and was pumping it up and down, laughing.

Old Lintott turned an inquiring eye. Tush slapped his thigh.

"It's David, guv'nor—David Brockman—grovved, guv'nor. Look at 'im! Ain't 'e a masterpiece?"

All this time he was pumping David's hand up and down, and patting it and gurgling.

"David, guv-nor. 'Im as licked the butcher-boy."

The old barber scanned David.

"Shave him," he said, and turned to the attorney's clerk, who was now bending over the basin with his head white with shampoo suds.

David felt his chin. The prospect of being shaved was dazzling.

"Will you?" said Tush. "Lord, to think of David with a beard. Let's look. . . . Ay, there's a beard coming."

He drew his fingers caressingly along David's chin.

"Soft yet; but they come quickly. You'll 'ave a chin as blue as a slate. 'Ow's Nicholas, eh? 'Ead back, Mr. David. You're away now?"

"At school," said David most miserably. He laid his head back on the rest which Tush lowered for him. His neck was swathed in a towel and a little square of paper laid on his shoulder. The lathering began. Tush beamed. David opened his mouth to ask a question, but the lather smothered him, and the taste of it was noxious. Tush's professional pride was injured, and he set aside personal interest in David, and applied himself firmly to the shaving. The razor flashed down one cheek. Tush drew back to survey.

"Your nose has grown, Mr. David."

Mindful of the lather, David spoke no word. The other cheek was shaved, sponged, and powder applied.

"Soft—soft, Mr. David. There! Shaving makes it grow."

David looked at himself in the spotten mirror. By this time the attorney's clerk also had taken his departure, and old Lintott was free to watch the splendid operation. He leaned against the chair vacated

by his patron and folded his arms. He combed his sparse little grey beard and watched the two boys with winking eyes. In their red rims they glowed and danced in merriment. They were not conscious of his scrutiny, but pursued their business absorbedly and with delight. He contained himself for a time, but when David demanded to see the lather and the hair in it he clapped his hands to his side and broke into a chuckle. On this David turned, but old Lin-tott was in a paroxysm of coughing and busied with arranging bottles of the hair tonic, his invention and especial pride, on the shelves above the basin. It seemed that he would take no notice of them. Reassured, David turned to Tush.

“How is your father, Tush?”

“Bad, Mr. David, bad. 'E's not been well since 'e 'ad to leave the Force.”

“Leave the——?” The catastrophe was almost beyond belief.

“Yes. My dad's that kind. It was these 'ere unemployed. They was out in the square, out to smash, they was, an' dad was told off to go out agin. Well, they was that 'ungry an' ragged an' wretched-lookin' that dad, 'e couldn't 'it 'em. The serjeant, 'e ups an' 'e clouts a woman. Dad, 'e got so mad that 'e ups with 'is truncheon an' fetches the serjeant a whack on the 'ead. Then a nipper, 'e ups and is off with the serjeant's 'elmet. Now, you can do a'most anythink to a p'leeceman, Mr. David, but if you offs with 'is 'elmet 'e goes mad. So the serjeant, 'e goes mad, an' all the p'leece goes mad, 'cept dad. The p'leece charges in an' whacks an' beats an' kicks the unemployed, until dad could stick it no longer, an' 'e turns agin the p'leece. To save talk, they just turned 'im out o' the Force. But it's agin 'im, Mr. David—it's agin 'im, an' no one'll 'ave 'im. There ain't nothink



more sad than a p'leeceman wot's turned agin the Force. . . ."

Tush shook his head sadly and stropped his razor. He brightened, however, in a moment. His voice dropped to a whisper. He looked furtively across at his employer; then he stooped to David's ear and hissed exultantly:

"Mr. David, I'm coortin'." He giggled and nodded his head thrice, preened himself, and strutted. Queerly, the tidings made David angry, but he professed interest. Tush fumbled in a pocket behind his apron. "This," he said—"this is 'er."

He held out in the palm of his hand a photograph, the size of a postage-stamp, of a plump-faced girl, foolishly smiling to show poor teeth. She had the hair, the hat, and the pose of a wanton, crying aloud against the stupid innocence of her face.

"Ain't she beautiful, Mr. David? That's not a bit like 'er really—not 'alf good enough. It's 'er figure, an' 'er walk, an' the way she 'olds 'erself. Sometimes, Mr. David, I'm sick with it, an' can't see to shave, an' sometimes I want to 'it 'er. . . . Ah!"

David returned the photograph. Something of his old lordliness returned to him.

"Cleave to her," he said.

Unknown to them, old Lintott had crept up, and had listened to their last words. David's admonition was too much for him, and he broke into a loud guffaw. Both David and Tush cringed as though they had been caught in some forbidden act, and Tush hastily thrust the photograph away in the recesses of his person.

"Ay," said the barber, "tuck her away! Tuck her away! Hide your treasure from vile eyes. Hide her, and be sure that you'll bring her low, and she you. . . . Blind! . . . Cherish your blindness for

the little that you have it—cherish it, hug it, for they'll not let you have it long. The world of fools that run and run and run, the world of cowards!”

His voice rose to a shriek, cracked, and he stood looking more than a little foolish, blinking owl-like from one young face to the other.

“Heuh!” he said. “Frightened you, did I? Mad? I *was* mad once, but that was years ago, before either of you came into the world. Here in this very house. But that's all over. I am no longer a man, but a little machine, to snip and snip at hair, scrape chins—threepence one, twopence the other—old, cramped, twisted, worn! That is I—in a dirty shop in a dirty street in a dirty town, where you never see the sky——”

Tush broke into a nervous giggle, but David stared, fascinated, at the little withered face, twitching and mouthing. The old man moved towards him.

“You, my dear—my dear, you must out of it. Don't be starved and smoked—smoked like a herring—young, so young as you are. What's your name?”

“David—David Brockman.”

“Old—how old are you?”

“Seventeen.”

“He! he! And you fought the butcher-boy twice your size. He! he! He's told me—the butcher-boy and Bloody Judas. How I've laughed! Here, let me touch you.”

He came to David, and ran his hands over his arms, squeezing his muscles.

“Thin! Thin! You thin thing! David—fine! Oh! the brave boy! Did you hear what the butcher said? He'd eat the Germans! You!—eat butcher-boys? Eh?”

All this time he was fingering David's person and peering up into his face.

“Yes, yes, it’s there—the fine spirit. Brave boy—bully boy! Be a man—not like the rest of us. Wait—wait!”

He went away into the parlour behind his shop, fumbling at his mouth and muttering to himself. David and Tush eyed each other ruefully. David was a little ashamed of, and a little angry with Tush, who, therefore, when he broke again into his giggle, was sternly rebuked.

“’E was always a bit mad, but I never seed ’im like this before, ’cept once when a young girl came into the shop—pretty as a fairy, she was. . . .”

David blushed. He ran from the shop—ran, and did not stay until he came to the Crosbys’ house. He saw Tush for what he was—little, mean, a barber’s assistant, scented and curled: assistant to an old man strangely mad, babbling of butcher-boys and things already so distant that it was as though they had never been. Butcher-boys—smoked, smoked like a herring. There was a brewery near the Crosbys’ house, the chimney of which was belching smoke, while the sickly smell of the stewing vats came offensively to the boy’s senses. The steam and the smoke of the place made his eyes smart. He turned sick and green, staggered and reeled, but presently was steady enough to pursue his way. He came to the red-brick house, and was admitted. Helen came to him. At once she divined the trouble in him.

“Oh, David! what is it? You look so ill.”

“I do not know.”

“Are you ill?”

“No. I’m shaven and shorn.”

“What, then?”

“I do not know.”

“Why did you come, then, if only it was to stand there so stupidly?”

"I do not know."

"What?"

"Nothing."

"Sit down."

She was so imperious that David sat, and looked utterly woebegone.

"Is it your head again?"

"My head. No; my head is—yes, my head is right enough."

"I never saw you like—like this. Where have you been?"

"To the barber's."

"Why?"

"To be shaven and shorn."

"I shall shake you."

"Do! Anything to escape."

"From what?"

"I do not know."

"Oh! oh! oh! I must call father to you."

"No. Shake me!"

"David! I——"

"Shake me! Shake me!"

"What have you been doing?"

"Nothing; but I hate it all. I hate school, and I hate home. They're not kind to me. They bully me at school, and she never lets me be."

"Who?"

"She."

"Audrey likes her now."

"Audrey!" He waved his hand deprecatingly, weakly. "It is horrible, our house—all the things in it, and my father——"

"You must not talk ill of your father."

"I hate him, too!"

"Oh, David! . . ."

"Well, it's true."

Now Helen was half laughing at him, half crying with him.

“You—you’re away so much, you see, David.”

“You’re such a fine lady now—you and Audrey. . . . I’ll run away. . . .”

He had never contemplated this before, but now he brought it out plump, as though it were long premeditated. He wished somehow to hurt Helen, the sedate girl with her golden hair so ridiculously puffed out, and her skirts so unreasonably long. He failed, and was conscious of failure, retiring from the encounter chafing and angry. He stood confronting her.

“Very well. You will understand some day, and you will be sorry. Good-bye. You will not see me perhaps for years—perhaps never again.”

“Don’t be absurd, David!”

“I mean it.”

Dr. Crosby came in at this moment. He came to David and patted his shoulder. The boy’s mood softened a little, and he began to be sorry for these people, who would be sad when he had gone out into the cold world. Already he saw himself tramping along the bleak roads, seeking adventure and finding it in abundance: consorting with vagabonds and mountebanks, starving—perhaps even stealing—living a free life of outlawry, to emerge in the end more splendid and triumphant than ever before, a very Joseph providing for the welfare of his brethren—Joseph garnering corn for the famine-stricken Egyptians, and waxing more and more great for the hardships he had borne. Towards his stepmother he was, in the first days of his greatness, implacable, but soft later for the sake of his brother John, who played the part of Benjamin in the saga.

“David has been scolding me,” said Helen,

"The shadow of school, eh? Is he to dine with us, Helen?"

"If he will."

"I will not," said David, and left them.

"Have you been teasing him?"

"No. He said he was going to run away."

Crosby chuckled.

"What is it, father?"

"You, my dear, are growing up, and David can't."

Helen busied herself with the making of clothes for sundry infants of the slums whom she had taken under her protection, while her father sat admiring her.

"I always knew there would be bad times for David. The rest of them are well enough, and the woman, she is a good soul—but she makes them all fat and stupid. Even the dog is fat, and has lost all quickness."

"What do you think David will do?"

"David is such an uncertain quantity that I cannot say."

"Is he clever at school?"

"'Intelligent, but grossly inattentive,' was the last report."

"I suppose Mr. Brockman is making money?"

"Piles of it! He and his wife will run the town soon."

"It is all very queer, isn't it?"

"Much—much more queer than you know, my dear."

"I want David to be . . . something."

"You are fond of David?"

"Why, of course. What does his father think?"

"Mr. Brockman never thinks. They will none of them have much help from him."

Helen plied her needle for a space.

"It certainly is interesting. David is like a baby, isn't he?"

"That day when his mother—— Did I ever tell you?"

"What happened?"

Her father told her. Helen kissed him.

"She must have been very beautiful."

"Yes. That is why we must look after David."

"I will," said Helen; and, foolishly, during the remainder of David's holidays, made desperate efforts to mother him. David scented the effort, resented it, and avoided her.

On the eve of his departure for the bleak Yorkshire hill Henry called David into the little room which he called his study. He stood by the fire, rattling money in his pockets, and indulged in little pleasantries at David's expense.

"Well, my boy, where's the wool you've been gathering these days?"

David was mum.

"Been counting the stars in the sky, haven't you? How many are there, eh?"

Mrs. Brockman came quietly into the room and sat knitting. Her lips were tightly compressed; she sat bolt upright, rigid and determined. The ugly ormolu clock on the mantelpiece tick-ticked, and seemed to keep time with the clicking of Mrs. Brockman's needles.

David scanned the woman while his father talked.

"A rolling stone gathers no moss. . . . Grossly inattentive."

"She is wonderfully ugly," thought David. "Why does she screw back her hair like that?"

"A waste of good money if all that is told you goes in at one ear and out at the other."

*"Her bosom is like a platform."*

"Here am I slaving like a nigger to keep you and your brothers and sisters. . . ."

*"She breathes horribly—snorts!"*

"Every penny that I spend on you is made by the sweat of my brow."

*"She drops her aitches."*

"I send you to school to have the nonsense whacked out of you, so that you can carry on the business——"

"Businesses," said Mrs. Brockman, and went on knitting.

"Businesses," said Henry, and rattled exultingly at his money.

"She is common," thought David, and he looked round the room at the antimacassars on the chairs, the stupid prints on the walls—"common!"

"At the end of the term," said Henry, "you will leave school and go into my office. You will begin at the beginning. You will lick stamps and address envelopes, and you will be paid seven shillings and sixpence a week. Are you listening?"

This came so fiercely that David started.

"Yes," he said, though he had not heard a word.

"You will be given a fortnight's holiday in the year, like the other clerks. . . ."

David grasped the truth. He flushed and trembled, but made no sound; only he thought of old Lintott.

"Smoked," said David—"smoked like a herring."

"The boy's mad!" This from Mrs. Brockman.

"May I go?" said David—waited not for an answer, but plunged out of the room, striving to understand the blow which had fallen upon him. He was stifled by it, and the next day said good-bye to his kin and friends in a dream. Dr. Crosby gave him three pounds; his father gave him one.

He sat in blank misery in the train. At one end of the line was the detested school, at the other the



loathed office, the home which was no home, the town of grime and squalor. His thoughts flew to Bardon and the sweet memories of his sojourn there. He corresponded with his aunt, and she sent him presents and good things to eat at school. She had invited him again and again, but Henry, mindful of her offer to adopt the boy, and still smarting under it, and under the sway of his wife, who had never forgotten or forgiven the scorn which she had encountered at Miss Andrew's hands, had always made some such excuse as that, now that David was so much away, his family could not afford to lose him during the few weeks in which they could enjoy his society.

The train drew up at a little station. David remembered the occasion with Helen when he said that he would run away. He glanced round the carriage. It was full, but none of the passengers seemed to take any notice of him. He looked out, up and down the platform. The guard had raised his green flag. David seized his little bag, his overcoat, and straw hat, opened the door, and slipped out. . . . The engine shrieked and the train moved on. . . .

There was a commotion in the Brockman household when there came a telegram from the school asking for news of David. Henry swore, and his wife broke into abuse of everybody and everything—of the school, of her husband for having such a son, of Miss Andrew for stuffing him with romantic nonsense. She had given Henry many bitter hours after she had wormed from him all that he knew of the history of the Andrews. Search was made, and inquiry along the line. David was remembered at the station, for after a disappearance of some hours he had returned and bought a ticket for Liverpool. . . . He was traced to Liverpool, but was there lost on the quay, and it could not be known in what ship he had

made his escape. Advertisements were inserted in the papers in England and in America.

No word reached them for long enough, until Miss Andrew wrote that she had heard from him from Rio de Janeiro, where his ship—he did not say what ship—was for a few days in port. He asked her to let Helen know, but none other. . . . He had apparently intended only to let her know that he was alive and had some thought of her, but the magic of experience had been too strong for him, and he broke out:

“Oh, the world is so wonderful! On the ship it is horrible, for the men are drunken and foul-mouthed; but there is always the sea, so vast it is; and these places, with their hot sun, glaring blues, parched yellows, and blinding light, are glorious. I have been drunk once like the rest, but I am always drunk with the miracle of it all. . . . We carry coals and wood, and we have a fine assortment of animals. They are nicer in their habits than the pigs in the fo’c’sle. But I love England, and Bardon, and you. . . .”

This letter was sent to David’s father, and was given by him to the Crosbys. The doctor was delighted.

“Darling, he’ll be a man.”

“But—but if he should never come again.”

“My dear, you might roll the world on the likes of David, but you could not crush him.”

“It is so hateful to think that that woman has driven him out.”

“I think the honours are with David.”

Indeed, it was so. For his flinging free raised a shadow between Henry and his wife, and there was little peace in their house. Slowly they drew apart, neither confessing it, and Henry was more miserable, his wife more shrewish, than they had ever been. Audrey became her father’s companion, and stood be-

tween her two younger brothers and the fury of the termagant when she lashed herself beyond control.

Business increased exceedingly. New establishments were opened. Henry became a member of the City Council, and a light of the Progressive Party. He introduced all manner of changes in the lighting, the drainage, the water-supply, the tramway-service of the place. One by one pet schemes of Dr. Crosby's were introduced and carried to a successful conclusion.

The Brockmans moved to a yet larger and wholly detached house in the most fashionable suburb of the town.

Nicholas became an unpleasant young man, and swaggered about with various popinjays and nincompoops to whom the habits of the young men of London were the form and pattern of the highest and best. As Audrey came to womanhood, she more and more fell foul of her stepmother, and conflict raged between them. In the end she flung off with a young gentleman engaged in the cotton trade, and their marriage was a pitiable failure.

In John only of the family was David a living memory. His childish hero-worship fell upon this absent brother seeking adventure in the world. All David's possessions became his, and he, in his turn, lived most fully and most truly in the tradition of Brockman and Andrew and Fielding. The portrait of Lord St. Justin was to him as a holy picture, as an eikon to a Russian peasant.



## PART II



## I

IN eight years David had essayed more trades and professions than ever Jewdwine had done. He had wandered through America, Canada, Japan, Australia, India. He had starved in all of them. He began in New York, when he had become weary of the sea, by working in a boot factory. He had pushed a trolley, and pushed it so well that he had been given a larger trolley to push. He had quarrelled with the foreman because he was cruel to his wife, and had been bundled out neck and crop. He was then successively bar-tender, lift-man, clerk, reporter; nothing for long and nothing successfully. His beard grew, as Tush had foretold that it would, and by the time he was twenty he had a chin as blue as a slate, hard and firm, queerly denying the softness in his eyes. He wandered up and down the social scale, and everywhere came into close and sometimes dangerous contact with the women, for shrew, wanton, prude, liar, slut, termagant, baggage, jade, fool, all won from him a gentle chivalry, which roused some to tenderness, while it inflamed others. He did not wish for any of them, and only at his blackest—in the moments when he had lost faith, hope, and courage—did he turn to them for comfort and strength to face the utter misery of his position. He consorted with thieves and conspirators, vagabonds and ruffians, but wherever he might be, he was invariably appealed to as a fount of honour, as a being outside and above the circle in which he found himself. He had some quality which compelled friendship from all types, and with

the growth of his beard there came into him a wide embracing humour and sympathy which enslaved, and procured for him everywhere the means of living. It seemed, however, that he was determined to starve. He was possessed by a demon of restlessness and a horror of being shaped and moulded which made him, so soon as he was settled, surrounded with friends and engaged upon some employment which held out every prospect of advancement and ultimate stability, kick away all that supported him and topple headlong into the morass. His imagination leaped ahead, and he saw himself as others, happy enough, but small, limited, and poor in spirit. In America he had some experience of the rich and governing classes, and found them as small as, and rather more vulgar, certainly more dishonest, and with less sense of fellowship than the people who lived in dark squalor. His happiest months in America were those when he lived with a notorious woman who picked him out of the gutter, drunk, ill, and on the point of collapse. She fed him, nursed him, gave him health, and wept bitterly when he came to her with a sum of money to repay all that she had expended for him. They quarrelled violently, and he left her, and New York.

He drifted south to New Orleans, to Texas, up to San Francisco, and for a year he loafed in Hawaii. He worked his way to Manila, where he distinguished himself in defending two luckless railway platers who had been imported from England, in contravention of the American Imported Labour laws, and were mobbed by an infuriated gang of American workers. With these two men, John Booker and Bill Tidd, the one of Poplar, the other of Battersea, he made his way to Shanghai, where, being without means, they were incarcerated as common vagrants, and only re-



leased on the intervention of the British Consul. Booker and Tidd were lachrymose, and breathing fiery oaths and vengeance against the fool of a secretary who had exported them to Manila. David rather enjoyed the situation, and so won the admiration of the Consul by his humorous narration of the affair that he found work for him in his office. Booker and Tidd were sent back to their beloved London, vowing they would never again leave it. They gave David their address, and prayed that if he ever came to London and were hard pressed, he would come to them. David promised, and left them to pursue their pleasures, and returned to the house of the Consul, dressed himself in the Consul's second-best dress suit, and dined magnificently.

Now, the Consul's lady was a woman restless and ill-content, and David lent a sympathetic ear to the incoherent tale of her woes. She had no children, and the glamour was gone out of her man. She laboured to attract, but having no test to which to bring her efforts, she overshot the mark, and was just overdressed, overpowdered, too much beribboned, too much bedecked with little jewels on her fingers, in her ears, round her neck. Her face was faded, drawn, and strained, her eyes were hard, and there was no light in them. Between her and the Consul was a sort of cold comradeship, no more. He was notoriously enamoured of the fat wife of a German silk merchant, and, if he saw, did not remark the attentions, the little kindnesses, which his lady bestowed upon David, who, for the hard times that he had gone through, rejoiced for a time, cat-like, in the comforts of this house, and pushed aside the promptings of his honesty which bade him go. He rode with the lady, talked with her, walked with her, listened while she played and sang soft love-ditties to

him. He thought these ditties foolish and sickly, and was of opinion that the Consul's lady hit the piano too hard. He gave an ear always to her complaints, and was genuinely sorry for the woman. He gave no thought either to the past or the future, but just enjoyed the comfortable present. The Consul's lady seemed happier, and little by little she shed the preposterous in her outward appearance. There came a softness into her face, and she was young again.

David did his work well, and was given more to do, more money also. He moved in the society of the place, and disliked it, was not happy in it, and came, for this reason, to the Consul's lady for the fellowship which he could not find among the men in the club or in the offices and banks. He took a room in a boarding-house, but dined frequently at the Consul's house in response to the invitations conveyed in the little notes which came daily to his lodging.

The Consul was summoned away, and his lady sought David for her escort to a great ball given by the bachelors. Here David flirted outrageously with a boisterous girl fresh from England. Her home was in Putney, and she had come out on a visit in order that the sea voyage might distract her thoughts from an unfortunate love affair. She confided the matter to David, and was so arch and foolish with him that he bent to her mood and was as frivolous as she.

The Consul's lady was furious, and watched David with the large eyes of jealousy. He escorted her to her house, and she bade him enter.

It was early morning, and the stewing heat was gone. There was a fresh, reviving air, and David broke into a boisterous mood. He talked to her absurdly, and caricatured the queer people who had been at the ball. She gave him to drink and smoke, and he sank into a chair. She stood behind him and

stroked his hair. Suddenly she broke into tears, and, taking his hand, kissed and kissed it.

"My boy, my boy! . . ." she said.

David sprang to his feet and away from her. She stood trembling a little but her hands moved towards him. Her head was bowed.

"I cannot look at you," she said.

"I am sorry," said David. She laughed excitedly. He came to her, took her by the shoulders, and shook her. Still she laughed.

"Is it . . . is it . . . that?" said David. She nodded her head slowly.

"I must go."

"No . . . no . . . it is such a little thing."

"The mightiest thing in the world."

"Oh . . . yes."

David left her standing there, white, trembling, and humble.

Two days later he gathered up his goods and chattels, all that he had saved, and took ship for India.

David wished to see the Buried Temple and the wonders of Ceylon. He roamed on foot through the country, quartering himself on tea-planters in villages, and finally with an old Buddhist priest who dwelt by his temple, remote and almost solitary in the jungle.

David loved the old man, and passed many splendid hours of fruitful silence with him. They talked and contrasted their lives, and laughed over the lives of other men, so foolish here in the jungle did the race and scramble, the feverish production, the unjust distribution of the lives of men under civilization seem to them. One day David described for the old man how a nigger in New Orleans had "got religion." It was in a little mean street, and the man was employed in mending the road with a gang of fourteen others.

"They dug," said David—"they dug and they sweated. I watched. This man was the blackest of them all, fine, big, nude to his waist. Suddenly he seized his mattock, hurled it high in the air, thirty feet up, squared his great chest to it, and let it come down thud, whack. It left a gaping wound, and he dabbled his fingers in the blood. . . . Then he screamed aloud—screamed, yelled, beat his head with clenched fists, thrust out his tongue and bit it . . . his eyes rolled—then up he leaped from the trench, and flew, blood streaming from his wound, down the street, shouting. At the corner he stood in the sun and held out his arms and stretched on tiptoe, rigid, like one crucified, and sobbed and blubbered in agony. 'Christ is de Lord,' he said. 'De glory ob de Lord is a-comin', is a-comin'. Heaven's gates is open wide, open wide. Christ is de Lord!' Then he doubled up and stamped, danced wildly, and flung his arms . . . he darted away, crying aloud, 'De way ob de Lord is froo de wilderness. . . .' The odd thing is that no one seemed to take any notice, and four hours later, when I came down the little street again, there he was, working away as though nothing had happened. . . . Do you understand that?"

There was no shadow of interest in the narrative on the old priest's face. He sat as he always sat, motionless, impassive, with his little eyes under parchment-yellow lids fixed steadfastly on David's face. His hands he always held concealed under the wide sleeves of his garment, and David, when he was irritated by the impassivity of the creature, had an odd feeling that conversation would be so much easier if only the hands would appear and be used in gesticulation.

"You have lived in many lands," said the priest, after a silence of three-quarters of an hour.

“In England, in America, in the Pacific, in Japan, in China, and now here.”

“I have lived in one monastery after another, and now here.”

“Which of us,” said David, “is the wiser?”

“I am a very old man. There is much that I have forgotten. I am content.”

“I also am content . . . here.”

“But a little while, and you will go.”

“Yes, a little while, and I will go.”

“You are not like the other men of your race—so thick and blind.”

“Are they?”

“Self-deceivers.”

There was another silence of an hour, during which David revolved this criticism of his fellow-countrymen. He found it true enough; and for England there stood in his memory, as in imagination he raced back, the figure of the presiding genius of that grey pile on the bleak hill in Yorkshire—a fat, self-contented, swollen, middle-class tyrant, bloated with the little power of his position; fat-faced, small-eyed, round-headed, fresh-complexioned, with a little wife as weary, timid, and humble as her husband was loud and swaggering. David saw himself as the thin, reedy boy just descended from the train, and sick, half with fear, half with the fluttering sense of freedom, as the train moved on without him. . . . The memory of the puny thing he had been brought a smile to his face, and he thrust out both his arms to look at the strong brown hands and wrists. . . . Then and now. . . . Then the horrible little town with its smoke-pall through which the sun could hardly pierce—now in green wilds, in this hot sun, by the temple of a strange god, opposite an old, withered, yellow man. . . . Then a puny boy, almost crazy with revolt, now

a man of strength, with almost no possession in the world, lost kindred, lost friends—to himself enough. . . .

Suddenly came the night. The old man rose.

“You have the sense of the infinite.”

His voice rang in the darkness of the forest.

David ate largely of rice and bananas, and lay for long gazing up at the stars, wondering why the Southern Cross should be so lauded. A great moon hung like a lamp and shed her soft light through the palms. The night was still and oppressive. Night sounds came from the forest, and David became amorous of the world, forgot himself, and was so stirred, so marvellously swayed to the rhythm of the night that he cried out in the delicious agony of it. He crawled from where he lay, snuffing the scents of the earth, touching lovingly trees and stones, clutching great handfuls of reed, until he came to a great rock, and, clenching his fist, beat upon it until his knuckles were raw and bleeding.

“Oh, God!” he said. “Ho! ho! I’ve got religion. Good—good—oh, good!”

Next day he wandered for miles through the jungle, and saw monkeys, parrots, small deer, wild cats, birds, and lovely darting insects. He saw strange trees of twisted shapes—trees ominous and poisonous, fruitful trees, and some strangled by their parasites, or lovely orchids, or rich tangled growth. The damp earthiness of it all, the rich overpowering scents, were good to him—choked and strangled all rebellion, all revolt, all restlessness in him. He was content to move slowly, aimlessly, to wander without questioning, as he had wandered in these years of exile over half the world, seeing strange sights, meeting with small adventures. He returned to the old priest two days later, haggard, weary, tattered, and torn, and

then for many days was fever-stricken, and lay tossing, while in a shrill voice he babbled of Helen—Helen, of Margaret, of Mary, of Tidd: he lived again through fights and passionate scenes; he spoke caressingly and tenderly to this woman and that; he broke into a torrent of weeping because a certain Jean had been beaten by her man. In the end he cried like a child, and proclaimed that the world was good, in a solemn and confidential voice.

With that he came to his senses, saw the priest bending tenderly over him, and in his white hands took the old man's yellow bony fingers and caressed them.

"I knew you could not die," said the priest.

"Bless you!" said David. "I must be going."

"There is a plague and pestilence in Colombo and in many villages."

"How long have I been like this?"

"Thirteen days."

"Heuh! It was three weeks last time."

The old man squatted by his side, and was silent.

"Women," he said at length, "are cows."

"You know nothing at all about it."

"I was born of woman."

"But—but," said David, "my old friend, you have never lived with them. I have lived with the lowest of them, and I know that a man can touch them to saintliness; and I know that a man can leave them as malignant as hell; and I know that all peace and happiness hang from what men choose to make of women. . . ."

The old priest was staring into the distance. To David there was something deliciously comic in prating to such a half man as this of women and the world of women.

"By God, yes!" said David. "What men make

of women is too horrible to think on—brutes, fools, cowards! . . . Oh, the cowardice of them! I knew a woman once, a poor woman and a beautiful, and life had used her hardly. There came a slinking lover, sly and crafty, a man with no back to his head, a flabby fool, and was inflamed with her, swept her off her feet, gave her what, poor wretch! she took for the highest, was ashamed of what he had done, and left her. . . . That is like them all—all. . . . By God! there is no other source of wickedness in the world; a man honest with women is a true man . . . and there is no meanness in him.”

“You talk too much,” said the priest.

David put his thumb to his nose and extended his fingers. The action had no significance for the old man.

A few days more, and David was strong enough to roam about again. He found that he was weary of the perpetual green of the jungle, and that the humidity of the place exhausted him. He bade the old man farewell, and expressed a conventional hope that they might meet again. The old man spoke no word, bowed monkishly, and passed into his temple.

David stayed in several villages on his way down to Colombo, was set upon, attacked, and robbed of all that he possessed. He was left stunned by the wayside, where he was found by a Samaritan woman, who slung him like a sack over her horse and conveyed him to her house.

“Look what I have found,” she said to her husband. “Which bed can I give him?”

David was put to bed and restored to consciousness.

“Good God!” he said, and started up in bed.

“I found you with a lump like a pigeon’s egg on the back of your head, and brought you here.”



"I am obliged to you."

"Not at all."

"I say I am."

"Very well; you are. Where are you from?"

"Shanghai."

"Eh?"

"That is the road from Shanghai to here. I jumped like a grasshopper to Singapore, and from Singapore to—to where you found me. I am going to get up. . . ."

"No."

"I'd be glad if you would lend me some clothes. I have some at Colombo."

"Have you been ill?"

"Yes. Off my head. I am like that sometimes."

"What is your name?"

"David Brockman. And yours?"

"Fielding—Clara Fielding. My husband's name is Anthony. We grow tea, and sell it to a millionaire grocer."

"May I get up?"

"I'll have some clothes sent to you."

A coolie came with a suit of fresh ducks, of a size just too large for David in his wasted state. He wallowed in a bath, shaved himself, and restored his hair to something like order. It was woefully long, and David, who had a wholesome horror of poets—he had had many unpleasant encounters with the tiny breed in various parts of the world—asked the coolie if he would not cut it.

"No can," said the coffee-coloured boy. "Missis can."

While he was at his toilette came Anthony Fielding, a brown healthy man with a lean countenance and a merry eye. He sat on the bed and watched gravely while David wrestled with his hair. Looking

at him in the mirror, David noticed that his nose was familiar.

"Look as if you had had a hard time."

"Fever," said David.

"Ah! My wife says you leaped up to heaven from Shanghai, and dropped senseless in the road."

"Not quite that. I left Shanghai and came ashore at Colombo because I—there was no reason. I don't think I ever have a reason for anything I do. . . ."

"No?"

"There is a sort of fear—I do not know if you have it—a fear of being chained down."

"I have always been a domestic animal."

"I was staying with an old priest up there—such a place, such a man! He was like a part of the forest, and his silence was the most informing thing in the world. Like an old tree, half dead, he was. . . ."

"Yes."

"Have you always lived out here?"

"Fifteen years. . . ." David was almost dressed by now. "Come and see my offspring. . . . Two here, two at home. . . . Old Bertram is clamouring to see the man that his mother found. . . ."

David stood looking at his host. There was no doubt about the nose.

"Do you know," he said, "I have an idea that you are a sort of uncle of mine."

Fielding was leading the way to the door. He spun round.

"Eh?"

"Aren't you a brother of Lord St. Justin?"

"Yes."

"Your father was my grandfather. Queer, isn't it?" David grinned.

They passed out and into Fielding's study. On the wall hung a portrait of old Lord St. Justin.

“Yes,” said David; “I had a portrait drawn by John Fielding, aged twelve. I cannot remember the story very clearly.”

He narrated what he could recollect of it, and also the bare facts of his own history, omitting all that was too disreputable. In return, Fielding produced reminiscences of Miss Andrew as she had been. He spoke of her with great affection, and delighted David with an account of the two visits he had paid to Bardon, where he had seen and admired Margaret, David’s mother.

Clara was called to share the amazing discovery, and together the three of them went to watch Bertram and Nan have their bath. David was so full of delightful games with soap, sponge, and loofah that he was at once adopted and revered as one of the chosen people.

The evening passed delightfully in exchange of anecdote and story. Anthony reproached himself with long neglect of his old governess, and by the next mail both he and David wrote long letters to her.

Both the Fieldings were anxious that David should stay with them, and work either in the counting-house or on the plantations, but he would consent only to stay with them until his health was fully restored. He was happy with them, and they rejoiced in him almost equally with the children, but the society of the neighbouring planters oppressed him, and he knew that here was no abiding-place. He was quite frank about it, and amusing.

“You see,” he said, “I am like that. It is not that I dislike work—I am not that sort of rolling stone; nor is it that I do not like the accretion of money. Nor is it that I am possessed by a devil of curiosity and a desire to see the world; I have seen the kingdoms of the earth and the glory thereof. . . . It is

not that. I think really I am a domesticated animal, and want all—all this sort of thing. . . .”

He waved his hand to indicate the Fieldings' household and its precious atmosphere.

“And I do know that I suffer agonies of desolation and loneliness at times. But if I stay anywhere and allow myself to form any ties, I am happy enough for a little; then I begin to feel them closing in upon me, stifling me. Desperately I break the whole fabric and uproot myself. . . . It is a very painful process, and I go stark, staring mad, drunk with some virgin place in the world, am washed, clean and whole, and seem to begin life all over again. . . . It is a queer way of living—selfish, I suppose . . . but at present I know no other.”

“Wait,” said Clara.

David turned quickly to look at her. There was radiance in her eyes, and pity.

“Ah!” said David, “you think there is something that I do not know. . . . You are not the first . . . to—to hint darkly at some mighty thing beyond my reach. Does Anthony know?”

“No,” said Clara; “Anthony knows nothing at all about it. Anthony is a very skilled planter of tea, but he is altogether a man.”

“And I?” said David.

“You are almost half woman.”

David smiled.

“And yet I have a fine beard, if I wish it.”

“Some day you will be caught up by a big wind, whirled away, and jammed tight down into a little corner from which there will be no escape.”

“Then,” said David—“then I shall surrender up my soul to God.”

“Then,” said Clara—“then you will begin to think life worth living.”

## II

THREE months by the calendar did David stay with his half-uncle, and in that time amassed more wealth than he had ever before had in his possession—an hundred and ten pounds.

He had been happier than ever before, and had revelled in the books which were in every room in the house. His appetite for them was insatiable. Of novels he would read two or three in a day; Darwin he gulped down, while he swallowed Huxley at a mouthful. He made new acquaintance with the Bible, Bunyan, and Don Quixote, and vowed that with these three there was no need for other books. He made Don Quixote his property, and was never without one volume or another in his pocket. Poetry he could not stomach, and vowed the Shakespeare of Falstaff was a finer man than the melancholy author of "Hamlet," with his cry of "vanity of vanities."

The letters to Miss Andrew provoked an answer of the most touching delight at the coming together of her David and her Anthony, and she prayed that David be kept on the plantation, or fettered and deported to England, there to be bound apprentice to a respectable profession, and to take the station in life to which his talents entitled him.

She also had communicated her knowledge of David's whereabouts to his family, for there came a whole budget of letters: from his father, telling of new projects and the success of Nicholas in business; from Audrey, a doleful plaint; and from John, a boyish screed expressing his intention of coming out

to join his brother. There was no word from Helen, nor in the other letters was there mention of her, and for three days David was moody, silent, and unapproachable.

Finally he announced his intention of going.

"Home?" said Clara.

"Never!" said David.

"Where, then?"

"Anywhere. . . ."

"I think you should go home—or, at any rate, to London."

"I've never been to London."

"I will tell my brothers," said Anthony. "Geoffrey is in the House, and directs companies; old Michael is at the Bar—just taken silk."

"Why should I go to London?"

"It is the finest place in the world. We shall be going home next year, and if you are quite determined not to stay here. . . ."

"Quite," said David.

"As to money. . . ."

"No," said David firmly.

"Why not stop playing the fool? . . . Go to your father and say that you are weary of the husks that the swine do eat—you and I, Clara—and that you want money to be a lawyer, or a publisher, or a baby-farmer. . . ."

"I'll not have a penny from my father; and as to doing or being something . . . I—well, I do not see things like that. . . . I am going. . . . I may, or I may not, eventually arrive in London."

They abandoned argument, and saw him safely on board a dirty little tramp steamer bound for Delagoa Bay and any port in which she could pick up cargo. She was a disreputable craft, but not more battered and more villainous than her skipper, Cap'n Blunsdon,

his Chief, Mr. Cocker, and the mixed crew of all colours.

Clara pointed out the superior beauty of the P. and O. steamer lying in the harbour, but David would have none of her.

"I?—I go to the sea with gloved hands?" he said.

"The sea will eat you up, David."

"And then . . .?"

"And then we shall all be sorry. . . . I suppose you had not thought of that."

"You have been very good to me."

"Tut! . . . If you are not in London by the time we arrive there, I shall be very angry with you."

"It is eight years since I left England. I have a curious shyness of going there again."

The *Henry Orchardson* was to set sail in the early morning, and David must be on board overnight. Already his belongings were conveyed to the ship. He had wished only to go with a handbag, and "Don Quixote" in his pocket, but Clara insisted, and he was presented with a trunk of Anthony's, which she filled with garments and everything that a gentleman can need to make his person have the appearance of cleanliness. At the bottom of the trunk she concealed a bag of English gold. They dined royally, and David loaded Clara and Anthony with presents of the most foolish and useless character for themselves and for Bertram and Nan, who had howled dismally the whole day through when the news was broken to them of their hero's departure.

As they stood on the quay David heaved a sigh.

"You are a little sorry, then, David?"

"I was thinking with relief that there will be never a woman for perhaps—months."

In this surmise he was wrong, for old Blunsdon had arranged to take two passengers besides himself, who

were equally desirous of crossing the Indian Ocean, and could not by any of the great ships for sheer lack of means. Delightful company they were—real mop-sies in draggled-tailed and outworn finery, reeking of patchouli. After his three months' sheer comfort the scent of these women was as invigorating as the smell of the sea, and he delighted in them, flattered them outrageously, and treated them with an elaborate courtesy which at first caused them to titter and finally wearied them.

Mamie Bird and Kate Driscoll were their names, and they had been decoyed to the East to tour with a decade-old musical comedy the towns of the China coast. They had come straight from the Caledonian Road and joined the company at Hong-Kong, their passages being paid. For five weeks their salary had been given them. When it became apparent that no more was forthcoming, and that the advertisement of appearing on the boards was considered remuneration enough, they had cast themselves adrift as recklessly as ever David had done, and from port to port had come at length to Colombo, where they touched low water indeed. The chief mate had found them, and, viewing their case from the practical point of view, had suggested Johannesburg as a very El Dorado for ladies in their plight. He had put the case to them with admirable directness, so that they saw the futility of remaining in the East. He introduced them to Blunsdon, and the bargain was sealed.

They were a strange party gathered at the table in the cabin: old Blunsdon, with a short grey beard, swivel-eyed, red-nosed, and with round shining cheeks, red-veined; Cocker, the chief officer, sallow, dark, with broken nose and thin, hard mouth; Tremblett, the second mate, a pallid-faced boy with a large head and sunken, red-rimmed eyes; the engineer, a Scots-



man from Renfrew with an altogether unintelligible accent; the two women, and David, of whom the rest were for the first days more than a little afraid. They were abashed in his presence, and kept guard upon their tongues until, to their immense relief, David produced a story of very doubtful morality. They leaped to this, and abandoned all constraint. Hereafter their relations became so amicable that one and all, with the exception of Cocker, who, having marked the fair Driscoll for his own, was jealous of the soft eyes she cast upon David, unbosomed themselves, and confided all their scandalous history. To escape from nightly persecution, David devised a sort of general meeting in the cool of the evening, when he would continue a sentimental and improper narrative which he had begun originally for the delight of the little second mate, whose cabin he shared. In its origin the story had been begun to win through the nights when the stifling heat made sleep almost impossible, but the characters had so haunted the pallid boy that he had retailed their adventures to the ladies and to old Blunsdon, and when the thread was taken up in the evenings, one by one they had come and joined the circle, until it became a part of the day's routine. Later there was, by the way of prelude, an old song which David taught them.

On the *Henry Orchardson* there was no voice that could rightly be called tuneful, but from the tripping melody of the old catch the party contrived to make some sounds which, if they did not, Orpheus-like, charm the fishes of the sea, gave much satisfaction to the creators of them, and, however they might have quarrelled and wrangled during the day, set them in the right mood for the evening's instalment of the story.

Kate Driscoll worshipped David, and, while he spoke, sat mouse-quiet, open-mouthed, an expression

of the most holy adoration in her eyes. Her sister in misfortune, Mamie Bird, who had been adopted as his property by old Blunsdon, twitted her openly with her strange affection, and often reduced her to tears. Cocker looked black, and, being a little afraid of David, visited his vengeance upon the luckless second mate, who had written a series of execrable verses to the charmer. The more indifferent David was to the woman's worship, the more lamentable did her state become and the more inflamed was Cocker.

David spied the drama, and was amused by and interested in it as though he were no party to it. The guileless second mate was used as a decoy, and in all innocence brought to his hero covertly worded invitations, which, if he had divined their meaning, would have plunged him in an agony of jealousy.

The storm gathered slowly as the ship ploughed her way through oily seas.

One night after the evening's entertainment, there was a scene and a scuffle. David was aft, glorying in the moon and the phosphorescence in the sea. The ship left a wide white track. . . . A sound of running caught his ear. He turned, to see Kate racing along the deck, screaming, Cocker after her. She stopped and was at bay against the bulwark. Cocker seized her in his arms. She screamed again, and beat with her clinched fists on his face. He held her, laughed aloud, and kissed her. . . .

David knocked out his pipe and walked towards the pair. The woman saw him coming, and redoubled her efforts to be free; but for that the man only held her tighter, and kissed her only the more furiously.

In a trice David flung his arm round Cocker's neck, knocked up his chin, and had him flat on the deck. Only for a second, for he bounced up again and came butting. Kate stood, weeping hysterically.

"E-eh!" she cried. "A knife—he's got a knife!"

The knife flashed and David dodged, so that it pierced only the cloth of his coat by the shoulder. He gripped the man's wrist, took him by the throat, and soon he was bellowing.

"Kill him," screamed the woman—"kill him!"

"Go!" said David. But she stood there.

"Go!" said David again. Her hands moved out towards him in appeal. She turned and went slowly away, sobbing.

So soon as she went out of sight David took Cocker's knife and flung it into the sea. Then he allowed him to rise to his feet and shake himself. He spat on the deck at David's feet.

"Well," said David, producing his pipe again and lighting it—"well, is the madness gone out of you?"

"Oh, you go to hell!" said Cocker.

"Have some tobacco?" said David, and held out his pouch.

Cocker fingered his throat and gulped. His face was more than ever sallow—almost grey.

"I believe," said David, "that to making of a drama there are needed three persons and one passion."

"To hell with your smooth talk!"

David looked wistfully back at the moon.

"If I adopted your own dialect to tell you what I think of you, you would not like it."

Cocker growled inarticulately.

"Do have some tobacco," said David persuasively, "so that we can continue our conversation."

Cocker took David's pouch ungraciously and filled his pipe.

"I didn't think you were so strong," he said at length.

"Fortunately for Miss Driscoll."

“Kate? . . . a drab, a common drab, out of the streets.”

“A woman and worth fighting for. . . . Do you know, Mr. Cocker, we are very primitive. . . . We do not change. . . . Have you considered the events of this voyage since we left Colombo? . . . No, you have not. . . . You have had your work to do, and, quite rightly, do not use your mind outside that. . . . There are two women to more than twenty men. . . . I count the Lascars, Chinese, and coolies as men, for indeed they are such. . . . One woman is given to the almighty Blunsdon by divine right. The other is to the best of us—*c'est moi*—and I do not want her. . . . But, Mr. Cocker, I am so peculiarly constituted that I think it my duty to protect her from attentions which she does not desire—not from any dislike for yourself, but from a stern sense of right and wrong. . . . If the lady on any terms accepts your attentions, it is not my affair, but— The whole of my argument is in that ‘but.’ Good-night.”

He turned on his heel and left Mr. Cocker, who paid a visit to the foc's'le and beat an unfortunate Lascar, who took it all in good part as an unpleasant element in the work he was called upon to do in this world of tyrannous white men.

Cocker smouldered inwardly, but to all appearances he forgot his defeat, and was almost slavish in his attentions to David, who, while he watched the Chief Officer carefully, took more trouble than ever before to be kind to the unfortunate Kate. She played the wanton with him, but he dealt with her with a firm hand, never referred to anything that had passed, and laughed with her over the sentimental verses of the second mate. This youth relapsed into a maudlin condition, and his eyes followed the fair Kate with dog-

like devotion. Often of a night David would wake to find him sobbing.

In the end devotion had its reward. The charmer melted, and in melting slaughtered the delicate flower of the youth's devotion.

David found him at the stern, gazing at the water. He laid a hand on his shoulder, and Tremblett started.

"Oh, Mr. Brockman, sir . . ." He sniffed.

"The sea is inspiring."

"I wish I was dead."

"There is the sea."

"Don't laugh at me. . . . I wish I never had joined this 'orrible ship."

"She's a dirty little beast."

Tremblett shuddered, and David broke into a shout of laughter.

"I mean the ship."

Tremblett sniffed again, and screwed at his red-rimmed eyes with his fists, for all the world like a baby.

"May I tell you something, Mr. Brockman?"

David said nothing.

"I . . . when I was at 'ome in Bermondsey. . . I—I arst a girl to marry me. . . . This is 'er."

He fumbled in his pocket and produced a photograph. The action reminded David curiously of something: He cast about in his mind for it, and there leaped to his vision Tush in the barber's shop. While Tremblett was pouring forth a medley of praise of his inamorata, self-reproach, self-question and damnation, David was back in England with Helen, recalling vaguely scenes with her—the scene of her first coming, and the scene when, beside himself, he had bidden her begone. He had a desire to be with her, to know how she fared, to know what manner of woman she had become, though of that he had no doubt, and endowed her with all the graciousness of

Clara Fielding, all the saintliness with which his mother lived in his memory.

Then he chuckled at himself.

"I, too, O Tremblett, am a sentimental ass."

"Such a figure she 'as, Mr. Brockman, as you never saw—an' lively—she said it'd be a bit of all right bein' a sailor's wife, because she'd be 'alf a widow."

This threw such a light on the circle from which Tremblett had issued that David shuddered.

"Ought I to tell—to tell 'er, Mr. Brockman, about . . . about this."

"A ship, Mr. Tremblett, is much like a monastery. . . . The visions that come to men are much more terrible than the reality——"

"She's—she's so pure."

"Then she is the greatest of earth's treasures."

"Oh! Thank you, Mr. Brockman. I'll—I'll tell 'er you said that. . . . just from 'er photograph. She *will* be pleased."

"M-p-p-p-p!" said David.

"I suppose," said Tremblett—"I suppose you been in love yourself, Mr. Brockman?"

"Never out of it, Mr. Tremblett—never out of it."

"She must be very beautiful."

David looked out over the sea to where a school of porpoises were playing.

"I think, Mr. Tremblett, you would be disappointed with her looks. . . . Shall we join the ladies?"

"Ladies? . . . Them?" There was an expression of horror and sheepishness on the foolish face.

"Mr. Tremblett, you have the soul of a very bad poet. . . . We are to be a week more at sea unless Cocker blows the ship and all of us to pieces. . . . You must be polite. . . ."

"Oh, Mr. Brockman, I can't ever speak to 'er again."

David took him by the arm, and led him to where old Blunsdon was sitting exchanging heavy pleasantries with the women. Cocker skulked and scowled at them from the bridge, and every now and then the disreputable old man hurled a taunt at him, while the two women giggled.

Old Blunsdon was either drunk, religious, or obscene. On this day he was the last, but when David appeared the flood of his vile humour was stemmed.

“Fine weather, Mr. Brockman.”

“Shall we make Delagoa Bay in a week?”

“I been tellin’ the ladies Delagoa’s no place for English girls.”

“Oh, go on!” said Miss Bird. “If we can look arter ourselves with you about, we can look arter ourselves anywheres.”

“I been reading the Bible to ’em,” said old Blunsdon. “An’ I been singin’ to ’em the ’ymn for those at sea.”

“Voice like a raven,” said Miss Bird.

Tremblett turned his back on Kate Driscoll. He was quivering.

David sat on the deck by Miss Driscoll’s side.

“Cocker knows,” said Kate.

David looked up at the bridge, and found Cocker scowling down at the little group. Out of sheer mischief he grinned, took Kate’s hand, and fondled it. On the instant he regretted it, for she moved nearer to him.

Old Blunsdon took from his pocket a thumbed and tattered copy of the New Testament, fixed spectacles on his flat nose, and began to read:

“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due: custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear: honour to whom honour.

“ ‘Owe no man anything but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

“ ‘For this. Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

“ ‘Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the——’ ”

“ Oh, chuck it!” said Miss Bird, grabbed the book, and sent it flying along the deck.

Old Blunsdon rose in his wrath, denounced her piously for the thing that she was, quoted chapter and verse, and likened her to all the disreputable women of the Old Testament—Jezebel, Deliah, and the lady of the Philistines whom Samson visited. He spoke of blasphemy, and called down the Divine wrath upon her head. He bade David witness the fearful deed, and strode away puffing and gobbling like an outraged turkey.

“ Well, I’m . . . ” said Miss Bird. “ ‘Im of all men . . . wicked old . . . ”

“ And yet,” said David—“ and yet no doubt there is much virtue in him.”

“ Virtue! . . . I wouldn’t give twopence for ’is chances of ’eaven. . . . Drunken old . . . ”

David succeeded in smoothing her ruffled feathers, and before nightfall she was pardoned.

In the same hour there was trouble with Cocker again. The Lascar whom he had beaten had seized a convenient moment to run amok, and had made a violent attack on the chief officer. He was overpowered, and thrown into durance vile in the *Henry Orchardson’s* foul-smelling hold. Cocker’s temper was disturbed, his blood roused by the episode. He



sought out the unhappy Kate, and in David's sight smacked her twice across the face. Before David could reach the place of assault the woman, roused by pain, had flung herself at her tormentor, and scratched, bit, and tore at him until he was a woeful sight.

He caught her to him.

"Little cat!" cried the man. "Blast my eyes, little hell-cat!"

He overcame her by sheer strength and masterfulness. Sobbing, she yielded, and he carried her away . . .

David encountered Tremblett, attracted by the noise.

"Come away," he said. "That is the very lowest. . . . Come away."

He led the little mate to where the moon shone full, casting a broad pathway over the soft sea.

"She smiles even on that . . ." he said.

"The night is far spent, O Tremblett; the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. . . ."

He patted Tremblett's shoulder.

"We are such silly little things," he said.

Mr. Tremblett was called away for his watch.

A week later they made Delagoa Bay. They had a mighty orgy on shore, and with the two women David took train for Johannesburg.

### III

EVERYBODY in Johannesburg speculates. David set his hundred pounds breeding, and wrote to Clara to return the money and to protest against the mean way in which she had forced it upon him.

“This is surely the most sordid collection of human beings in the world,” he wrote. “And it is for this that we have wasted men and money got by the sweat of our brows. . . . I suppose money *is* got with the sweat of our brows, but those who have most of it seem to do little enough. . . . You have spoiled me, my dear half-aunt. . . . I am being tamed. I am discontented, and if I had any strength of mind I should take Anthony’s advice, and go to my father and say unto him . . . what Anthony suggested. But from my childhood I have only a loathing for the idea of home, and perhaps because other people’s homes seem so perfect. It is surely the only thing worth doing, to create that atmosphere, sane, jolly; and if a man and a woman cannot make it they have failed as man and woman. . . . There was a time when I denounced home unreservedly. . . . Horror of it kept me wandering. . . . I am not sentimental about it. I think I shall go to England in time to meet you there. . . . The voyage was horrible; shook my taste for low company. There was a poor little devil of a second mate; ought to have been an elementary school teacher. Queer how many people drift into the wrong calling. . . . Do not be offended at my returning the money. . . . I do not know where

I shall go next. I cannot bear this for long. . . . Too many Jews. I don't mind your Jew if he is a good Jew, but these are a wretched little mean race. . . . Pure East End, I suppose. . . . I want to see London before the big wind seizes me. . . ."

As always, the image of Clara brought him to thoughts of Helen. He sealed the letter, took another sheet of paper, and wrote to Audrey asking news of her.

"That means," he said aloud, "that I shall stay in this infernal hole for at least another six weeks."

From the other side of the desk at which he sat—he was in the writing-room of the Rand Club—came a chuckle, and, looking up over the screen, David found quizzical eyes peeping over at him.

Both laughed.

Said David: "I'm glad you don't like it either."

"Nothing but money . . . the place stinks of money."

"I believe there is an English church here, and a theatre."

"Polite religion and bad art. . . . Are you here for long?"

"I don't know. . . . Do you live here?"

"At Doornfontein. . . . I am at the Bar. I practiced in England until I had only one lung left. . . . I brought that out here, to preserve it. . . . My name is Mortimer."

"Mine is Brockman."

"Shall we lunch together?"

They passed into the great dining-room, where hundreds of men of all nationalities were feeding and discussing in divers tongues gold mines, tin mines, copper mines, diamonds, antimony, railway, shipping, shares. Waiters black and white flitted hither and thither, conveying food and drink.

“Whiskey and champagne,” said Mortimer. “No business without these two.”

“What a crew!” said David.

“They might be worse.”

“How many English are there in the place?”

“Perhaps one in ten. . . . There are good men here—men who came up from the Cape in early days before the great companies. . . . Some of them stay from a queer loyalty; others because they cannot afford to go. . . . The whole thing is mushroom, only since 1886. . . . The rush to Barberton first, and then the discovery of the Rand in 1887. . . . The Transvaal was moribund until then. . . .”

Mortimer became encyclopædic. David began to think him rather a bore, ceased to listen to the stream of facts concerning local politics, the native question, the Chinese question, the attitude of the Imperial Government, and fell to studying Mortimer’s face.

The amiable disquisition on the history of the Transvaal continued, and words like Bantu, Hottentot, Bechuanas, Griqua, Matabele, sounded strangely in David’s ears. As a final display of his knowledge and accomplishments, Mortimer pronounced some words of Zulu, and explained how the clicks were produced.

“You see,” he said, “I have a brother in Pretoria in one of the Government offices. . . . His work is with the natives.”

“Certainly,” said David, who had not been listening, and was under the impression that a question had been put to him.

“I’d like you to know my brother.”

David expressed willingness.

“The trouble all over Africa is irrigation.”

David was interested in a little group of three men, sitting at a table close by—an old Jew, a Boer, and a

spare, clean-shaven man, thin-lipped, small-eyed, sharp-nosed. It was this man particularly who engaged David's interest. He was of finer stuff than either of his two companions, spoke to them and listened to them with a manner in which contempt and deference were curiously blended. The old Jew treated him with a smooth respect, the Boer with a sort of self-assertiveness. They had some vital matter in common, and it seemed that the thin man had given an ultimatum, and, while he was amused by the effect of it on his companions, was not to be budged.

He called for cigars and liqueurs, and gave to his guests in accordance with their desires.

They smoked in silence for a little. The Jew and the Boer exchanged glances, and the thin man watched the two. He smiled a little, and his smile was not pleasant. . . .

A queer face diverted David's attention for a moment, and he heard Mortimer's smooth tones:

"Of course, it should be established that all rivers and streams in a country like this are national property. . . ."

When he returned to the study of his little group, the old Jew was leaning across the table, talking volubly, and prodding with a stumpy forefinger to emphasize his remarks. The Boer nodded his head to express agreement with each point as it was made.

The Jew ceased. He threw out both hands, then combed his beard with his dirty fingers, lolled back in his chair, and waited, his little eyes winking and watching. The thin man sat imperturbable. He drew long at his cigar, blew out a stream of smoke, shrugged his shoulders, and then, without a word, he rose, walked to the desk, paid the bill, and left

the room. Consternation was in the faces of the two. . . .

"Splendid," said David.

"I'm glad you are interested," said Mortimer. "It is a hobby of mine . . . irrigation."

"Who's the old Jew sitting there?"

Mortimer turned. "Carl Brandt . . . copper and tin."

"And the man with him?"

"Erasmus Kolb . . . one of the big men of Het Volk."

"And the . . . the thin man?"

"Barclay James. . . . No one knows much about him, except that he has a hand in the dirty business of the Companies. . . . Nominally, an engineer."

Another man came to the Jew and the Boer, and David judged that the upshot of the conversation was being imparted to him. He was a little man, with a weather-beaten face, sunken heavy eyes, and a bald head, which he caressed repeatedly with his flat hand.

"That's Wilkinson. . . . He does for Brandt what James does for the other. I wonder what James was doing with old Brandt. Old Brandt is always fighting tooth and nail against the big people. . . . He runs native labour from Portuguese territory. . . . There are few things, pleasant or unpleasant, that he doesn't touch. He started a newspaper against the Imperialist rag, but they squashed him. Just now he's interested in local government, and he has a big drainage scheme. . . . He came out to Africa with the regulation twenty pounds. . . ."

"I suppose," said David, "it is really only a matter of caring enough about money——"

"Everybody here cares about it, but they don't all have it. There is nothing else to care about. The place is not beautiful. The dust-storms are ghastly.

It is no place for women. And yet there is a fascination in it. Just the recklessness of it all. . . . They die young. It's a plague-stricken country. . . . Stock-breeding is no joke when every other fly or tick in the place brings a disease. . . ."

Mortimer became encyclopædic again on the subject of diseases, and David fell to ruminating.

"They say," said Mortimer, "that sleeping sickness is coming south. It is in Rhodesia. . . . Nothing to be done. . . ."

He enlarged upon the tsetse fly, upon beri-beri, upon blackwater fever, upon the prevalence of pneumonia in the Rand, upon the spread of syphilis among the natives."

"That?" said David. "Not among themselves?"

"Oh no! . . . The white man brought it," said Mortimer in his naïve way. "Civilization brings new diseases. . . ."

David laughed.

"Civilization is a pretty thing," he said. "It develops the brain. . . . I wonder if there was ever a time when all men died by violence or of senile decay. . . . And"—he chuckled—"I should like to know what the first man thought of the first disease. I expect he was proud, and made a new religion of it."

"My brother says that the end of it all will be that there will come a new Chaka or Cetewayo to slaughter all the whites and drive civilization from Africa. . . ."

"I doubt it," said David. "The amusing part of civilization is that nothing can stop it. . . . It corrupts and corrodes; it makes the few bloated and starves the many; it brings horrors innumerable, more than are recounted in the Litany; it refines and sharpens the vices and the base instincts of mankind, but also it refines and sharpens the perceptions and the

desire for the best and the highest. . . . It is progress, and progress is an upward movement. . . . I feel the movement, and therefore I am glad."

"I . . ." Mortimer opened his mouth in protest against this flat optimism.

"You don't agree?" said David. "I beg your pardon. I have not known you long enough to air my views."

"I want to know more about you," said Mortimer.

"I arrived here," said David, "with two irreclaimable ladies from the Caledonian Road in London."

Mortimer broke into a shout of laughter.

"They chose my company," said David; "I did not choose theirs. . . . There was a time when I should have taken them under my protection, seeing myself as a sort of knight-errant. There was a time when all my actions were based on that sort of foolish raw imagination . . . theatrical. . . . I loved to see myself as a magnanimous and unselfish gentleman, pursuing the ideas of chastity and poverty. . . . Chastity went by the board first, and I am only just beginning to overcome my sentimental glorification of poverty. . . ."

"But—but—who are you?"

"Nobody in particular. I ran away from home when I was seventeen, and have wandered sentimentally ever since. . . . In Ceylon I found the best thing in the world. . . . Here in Johannesburg I seem to have found the worst . . ."

"Where are you living?"

"Down by the station—with the irreclaimables."

"This is a town of strange people, but you are the strangest thing that ever came into it."

"It has always been my pride," said David, "that I am the only ordinary man of my acquaintance."

"Then the world is mad?"



“Undoubtedly,” said David. . . . “There they go.”

Brandt, Kolb, and the bald Wilkinson had come to the end of their confabulation. They filed out.

“Let us watch them,” said David.

They wrangled amicably as to who should pay the bill, finally spun a coin, and David won.

They found their three hanging round the tape machine in a knot of other men.

“If I stood among those men,” said David, “I should shine as an ordinary being.”

Mortimer was waylaid by a young man, and David was left to his own devices. He strolled from group to group, eavesdropping, while all the time he kept an eye on Brandt and his companions. In everything that he heard not concerned with Randfonteins and Robinson Deeps and Rhodesian Bankets there was the queer note of hard jocularly which is in the air wherever men with men foregather, and seems to be the result of a compromise between many different senses of humour. It was not comradeship, not good fellowship, but something lower, a light bridging of the gulf between man and man. “Truly,” said David within himself, “the gulf between man and man is wider than that between man and beast.”

He approached a group of men gathered round a long-haired creature. This man was talking volubly, excitedly; he ran his hand through his black greasy locks, then waved it gracefully in the air. In his eyes was an expression almost holy, almost of worship. The men round him were hanging upon his words. David drew near to catch the words of wisdom that should come from such a soulful face. There came a titter and a guffaw. The man had finished his narrative, and David sickened, for he knew it for a foul story which he had encountered first in his school-days

in Yorkshire, and subsequently in various forms in different parts of the world. There was no wit in the thing, nor real humour, and yet there was life in it, or how should it have had so long and so august a history as to have been on the lips of so many of the great? For this long-haired man was accounted great in his art.

"Another bridge," thought David. "It is a world of knaves and fools and dirty little cowards."

"Hello!" said a voice. "Watch Wilkinson!"

The group turned and David with them.

At the bottom of the stair the little bald man stood. He was gazing upwards and biting his thumb. His face was twitching, and he shook his right foot impatiently.

Brandt and Kolb, no longer together, were watching him.

Presently James came down slowly and calmly. He stopped for an instant to look down into the hall and survey the position. He saw Wilkinson waiting for him, ran quickly down, and passed the man. On the instant Wilkinson turned, gripped him by the arm, and spoke hurried words.

James shook free. His face was livid and his teeth set, his lips drawn back. He raised a hand, his fist shot out, there was a click like the kissing of billiard balls, and Wilkinson staggered back. . . .

"Gott!" said a voice. "Nicht zum ersten mal."

There was some commotion, and a general movement to the scene of the encounter. . . . David's eyes were fixed on James. . . . The man was all fire. He shook, controlled himself, and, without either looking to the right or to the left, passed through the throng and out into the street.

"Did you see it?" Mortimer was back at David's side. "What's happened?"

“No,” said David. “I don’t know.” He looked round for Brandt and Kolb, but they were both gone.

Wilkinson was being conducted to the lavatory, there to bathe his eye.

The stir was gone, and the little groups of men were dispersing, some going upstairs to the card-rooms, others returning to their offices. The long-haired pianist was wandering disconsolately in search of an admirer, for someone on whom to impress the glow of his personality. . . . Something in David attracted him, for he prowled, and stood now in this attitude, now in that—now Napoleonic, darkly brooding, now angelic and inspiring. David appreciated each manœuvre while he continued to talk to Mortimer, who plunged suddenly into intimate confession, and, after expressing the great pleasure it had been to him to make David’s acquaintance, hoped that they might dine together that night, and go either to a theatre, where a performance of “Zaza” was announced, or to a music-hall.

David promised, the matter was arranged, and Mortimer returned to the Law Courts.

The long-haired pianist fixed David with a heavy eye, and came skirmishing. David dodged and escaped. The pianist followed, and ran him to earth. He began, not very auspiciously:

“I feel sure we have met before. . . . You know that curious elusive feeling . . . a foreknowledge—a friendliness——”

“Of course,” said David, “I know your face.”

The man bowed. “Ah! these posters . . . these posters. . . . I am always in revolt, but my agent, you know, my agent—such a tyrant! . . . He forces me to travel, to come to these God-forgotten places. . . . I am from Brussels. . . . You know Brus-

sels? Yes? . . . The centre of civilization. Everything in it is rotten."

He paused here to mark the effect of this brilliant observation. David smiled politely.

"I must travel, he says—my agent—so that I can begin afresh with London and Paris and Berlin after my phenomenally successful tour in Africa, or in America, or in Australia. I say, 'Well, let me hide away in Italy, when they are sick of me. . . .' But no; I must all the time make money. He is killing me, my agent. What will you drink?"

He rang for a waiter, and ordered two American cocktails.

"You also are an artist? Hein? *À votre santé.*"

David was beginning to be amused, and thought that if he played the piano as whole-heartedly as he drank he must be a very great man indeed.

"Ah! but I can talk to you as to no other man in this whirlpool. . . ."

"Perhaps because I have no business in it."

"You have heard me play? . . . No? Ah! ten years ago I played like a god, with the soul of a god, with the soul of the world and all mankind. . . . Now—awful—shocking! It is because my agent married. He married, and he must have money. . . . Now I am a buffoon for the—for the men-monkeys. It is tragic . . . the struggle . . . between men and nature. . . . Nature, she was jealous of me. . . . She attacked me through my agent. . . . Ah! but the children are angels—adorable. Will you come to—to see them? . . . Yes, I—I will announce you to them as 'Le Roi des Sauvages, des Chasseurs, et des Sportsmen d'Afrique, et L'Empereur des Tueurs d'Éléphants.'"

He shouted with laughter as he rolled forth this portentous title.

“Charmed,” said David. “But remember also that I am betrothed to the Princess of the Baboons.”

“The friend of friends,” said the pianist. “Your name?”

“David Brockman.”

“My name is Jean Blest-Gana.” Then with child-like simplicity, he said: “Oh, King David, I am glad of you.” All his airs and graces were gone. He was like a child, and already his mind was leaping to elaboration of the great games wherein David, only too gladly, was to figure as King of the Savages, Hunters and Sportsmen of Africa, and Emperor of the Slayers of Elephants. They had both forgotten the ugly club in which they were, forgotten the town, the crowd, the Wilkinson-James fracas.

Suddenly there came to David the story which he had heard upon the lips of Jean Blest-Gana, the poet’s poet, and he fell headlong from his height. Blest-Gana was at once conscious of the change, hurt by it, and cried out:

“Oh! . . . you do not then like me . . . King David?”

The cry was so genuine that David in kindness could not but respond to it.

“Allons!” he said. Blest-Gana boomed a rattling march of Brahms, and to that they strode away.

“If,” said the pianist, “we could mount on a winged horse.”

“We do,” said David—“we do.” They crossed the square in front of the post-office, and a rickshaw-boy leaped and clowned to proclaim to them that he was a flying bird.

“Then,” said Blest-Gana, “there is our winged horse.”

They hired the rickshaw, and rolled along to the hotel where Blest-Gana had his apartment. They

passed a hoarding on which was a gigantic picture of the pianist at his most Napoleonic. He shuddered.

"Oh, my friend," he said, "believe me, it is not I, this monster; it is the puppet of my agent."

He reiterated this, so anxious did he seem that David should realize that he, Jean Blest-Gana, was not such as his tyrannical agent would have the world think. Yet undoubtedly he was bloated, he was fat, he was unpleasantly hirsute.

"But," thought David, stealing a glance at him, "Napoleon also was bloated, and Napoleon also was fat. . . . Did Napoleon also have an agent?"

The idea of Napoleon being "run" on modern lines tickled him, and he put the question to Blest-Gana.

"Certainly. . . . He was advertised, was Napoleon. . . . So was King Solomon—to the ends of the earth, so far as he knew it. . . . There are more of us nowadays, that is all. . . ."

They descended at the hotel, and were conveyed in a lift to the fourth floor.

"Stay," said Blest-Gana, his hand on the door, "I will announce you. . . ."

Stealthily he opened the door, and crept in on tip-toe. There were cries and the sound of scurrying feet.

Presently a little Frenchwoman with soft brown eyes came to the door and bade David enter. On the floor, prostrate in obeisance, were Blest-Gana and two children.

"O Majesté . . ." said Blest-Gana.

"O Majesté . . ." said the smaller of the two children.

"Vos sujets si chétifs vous supplient."

Both children repeated:

"Vos sujets si chétifs vous supplient."

"Oh! pardon, Majesté."

“Pardon, Majesté . . .”

“De ce que nous avons, nous méchants et hardis que nous sommes. . . .”

Blest-Gana groaned, and then came shrill emulations of his groans.

“De ce que nous avons tué et mangé un des parents pauvres de votre illustre. . . .”

“De votre illustre. . . .”

“De votre merveilleusement belle.”

“De votre belle. . . .”

“De votre si douce et compâtissante princesse. . . .”

“What!” said David in a fierce voice. “What, O base and treacherous people, O lower than the baboons, O more lying than the jackals, which, then, of the poor relations of my consort, fairer than the moon, have you dared to . . . dared to——”

He caught the eye of the little Frenchwoman, and could not contain himself. He laughed aloud.

Blest-Gana howled, shivered, and shook. The children howled, shivered, and shook.

David laughed and laughed.

Blest-Gana leapt to his feet and danced wildly.

“Le Roi rit! O compatriotes. . . . Nous sommes pardonnés. . . . O Joie, Le Roi rit! C’est le soleil quit parait après la tempête. . . . Majesté, permettez que je vous présente. Let me present to you, most illustrious of kings. . . .”

“I must,” said David—“I must set foot on all your necks.”

One by one they came to him, lay prone, and he set foot on their necks to mark their thralldom.

Said Blest-Gana: “The wife of my agent. . . . Mrs. Higgs.”

Mrs. Higgs bowed.

“My agent,” explained the pianist, “is an American. . . . My friends are Louis and Maurice.”

Louis and Maurice were overcome with bashfulness, and to save the situation Blest-Gana plunged into fresh extravagance. . . . David smiled at Mrs. Higgs.

"My three babies," she said.

"Four," said David, and joined the *mêlée*.

They went hunting, and spent hours pursuing hippopotami on the Limpopo. When they had each a leviathan to his credit David suddenly remembered his appointment with Mortimer. He was allowed to go on condition that he came again the next day. This he promised, and he was conducted down the many stairs by his three new comrades.

In the hall they found commotion, hurrying, scurrying, policemen, and outside the hotel the street was crowded.

"What is it?" said David to a man in the doorway.

"Old Brandt . . . Carl Brandt has been found in his room shot—dead."

David turned to Blest-Gana.

"Get the boys out of this."

"Yes. I knew the old man. It is not a nice story." He turned and led Louis and Maurice away.

"When was it?" said David to his man.

"About half an hour ago—they found him. They will bring in suicide, but it was not that. . . ."

David elbowed his way through the crowd, and returned to his lodging.

"I wonder," he thought—"I wonder where James is . . . or . . . or . . . Wilkinson? . . . But—but it is not my affair. . . . Which is the more real, the Princess of the Baboons or the dead Jew? . . . That is the eternal question."

To his astonishment Kate Driscoll met him with a full and circumstantial narrative of the whole affair,



relating even the distance of the pistol from the body at the moment of discovery. Later Miss Bird came with the news that Wilkinson had been arrested.

"Wilkinson?" said David.

"A little bald man," said Miss Bird.

"But he . . ."

"It was all about that there Mrs. Berriedale that the trouble was. . . ."

"I might have known," said David. "Who is she?"

"A scorcher," said Miss Bird.

From the two women David received such an insight into the underworld of the Rand as to quite confirm his impression that hell is everywhere in the world, and not one step removed from heaven.

He leaned back in his chair.

"Hell and heaven, my dears. I know of no region between the two but that where mean souls shiver from knowing neither good nor evil—and that, I suppose, is the world we live in."

"Oh, do give us a rest," said Miss Bird. "Your sort o' preachin' is worse than old Blunsdon's."

"Mamie," said David, "I adore you."

## IV

NOTHING could be proved against Wilkinson when put upon his trial, and the name of Mrs. Berriedale was not mentioned in court, for she was a powerful lady and high in favour with the great ones of the community.

Talk ran high, and David received many and varied accounts of the lady's history. Kate Driscoll had it all pat, and though she spoke with veneration of this great light of her profession, yet she took exception to certain alleged episodes as beyond the pale.

The identity of Mr. Berriedale did not appear, for nothing was known previous to his wife's conquest of Cape Town during the war. She had come, no man knew from whence, had then bided her time until a transport brought a moon-calf rich enough to be worth the slaying. Straight then she wove garlands for him, and led him to her shrine, at which he worshipped religiously, until an irate General whipped him off, spanked him, and sent him to the front, where he was shot. There were others, and offerings were left at the shrine as numerous as at the shrine of a healing saint. Dark whisperings spread, and Mrs. Berriedale, as a much maligned woman, went up country and did splendid work in a hospital commissariat, with only occasional flights to Cape Town.

On the declaration of peace she sought rest and quiet in Durban, and eventually descended upon Johannesburg, where she was more magnificent than ever before, and began then to weave her web. She

span deftly and busily, and presently the young gentlemen in the Colonial Office in London began to be aware of a political force which they did not understand. They knew to their cost, however, that it was a force which had no respect for the Imperial Government, either Conservative or Liberal, a force which knew not parties. In Johannesburg in every direction it became necessary to reckon with Mrs. Berriedale. She juggled with millionaires, and Government officials were her puppets. There were always men at her beck and call, and it was impossible to say which, if any of them, was her lover. She was splendidly beautiful.

This was the information that David gathered before he saw the lady.

Kate Driscoll's narrative was detailed and scandalous.

From the Brandt mystery she wove such a story of base intrigue and vulgar passion as sickened David of the whole business of sex, and made him desire that human beings should take on the character of fish or worms. The final stroke of Kate's story shocked and startled him:

"And they say now that she has that there pianner-feller at her feet."

Now, David had not heard Blest-Gana so much as mention Mrs. Berriedale; indeed, in all their intercourse—and they had been much together—it had been tacitly agreed that the topic should not be touched upon.

"It is not a nice story," Blest-Gana had said, and for David that had been enough. The two men had become friends, and had come to count upon each other for relief from the atmosphere which so oppressed them both. Blest-Gana had touched in David the pure spring of idealism, and came to him for relief

from the posturing and attitudinizing which his profession thrust upon him.

"It is those posters," he said, "and I must always be trying to look like them."

"Better," said David, "than trying to look like someone else. I knew a young man once, an actor in America, who was ruined by the ceaseless effort to look like Beethoven——"

"Beethoven?" said Blest-Gana. "The poor wretch haunts me. I have tortured him for so many years. . . . oh, cruelly . . . horribly. I am to play him to-morrow night, this giant . . . and I will play him like a giant, like a giant in love. . . ."

He waved his hands.

"It is that. What would you? . . . Men are not alive but when they are in love . . . hein?"

David was haunted with a vision of the "pianner-feller" at the feet of the notorious woman; Blest-Gana, garlanded, fatted, and led to the slaughter; and because he was attached to the man he was angry, and more than angry, that in such an affair he should take a high tone and prate like any young gaby in the early throes.

"What have I done? I am not altogether dead. My agent has not altogether killed me. . . . With Maurice and Louis I have found the heart of the world . . . simplicity, mon cher. When one is simple it is a world of fairies, of giants, of princesses. . . . Eh! bien . . . I have found a princess. Here in this wilderness I have found. . . . You shall see. . . . It is because of her, of her beauty, her purity, that I have found again my soul which was lost. Ah! but—but it is worth while to be a man. . . ."

He was in wild spirits, and nothing would content him but that they should hire a carriage and with the two boys drive out to a place of solitude. They

should take food and remain until they were cleansed of all contamination.

“Where is the sun? We will drive straight towards the sun.”

Mrs. Higgs was alarmed at the prospect of the four driving out into the unknown, unattended by any responsible person. She enlarged upon the dangers of the country, instanced the murder of store-keepers by escaped Chinese, the stories of desperate white men wandering through the country, the roughness of the roads, the possibility of a storm.

Blest-Gana brushed aside all her objections.

“We four,” he said, “are enchanted; there’s a spell over us. It is impossible to kill us.”

In a cart drawn by six mules they drove out along rough veld roads into a great country, wide and silent. They passed the house of one store-keeper, then another and another, until they came to a place from whence they could see no habitation save, far away on the slopes of a round hill, a kraal like a cluster of beehives.

“Tiens, Louis,” said Blest-Gana. “This is the Kingdom of Nowhere.”

“I am not afraid,” said Louis.

David descended, and lifted Maurice down. At once the child ran and stood crowing on a hillock, an odd little figure, with his plump naked legs, and his suit of red and white striped linen.

The mules were unharnessed and tethered.

David ran after Maurice to his eminence, and Blest-Gana came racing with Louis.

“Here,” said Louis, “we must have a fire. Hey!”

He called to one of the Kaffirs tending the mules, and they lit a fire, round which they squatted while the kettle boiled for coffee. This was exciting enough, to drink coffee and eat eggs boiled over a fire

of their own making, but when the Kaffirs produced a mess of mealies, nothing would satisfy but that they also must eat of it. The Kaffirs grinned pleasantly, were glad enough to share, and offered also to drink of their beer. The four drank, and though they vowed that never was such nectar, none accepted a second draught.

They basked in the sun and told stories.

"There was once," said Blest-Gana—"there was once——"

"A man," said Louis.

"A girl," said Maurice.

"There must be for all stories a man *and* a girl," said David.

"Why?" said Louis.

"Because without them there is no poetry."

"There was once a time in the world when there were no priests . . . when man knew the soul of everything, and was not afraid of death. Then the world gave freely to each man in return for his labour. . . ."

"Don't say that there was never unhappiness in the world. That is all nonsense."

"Have patience, David. This is to be the story of the first lie. . . . In this time there was no instinct of possession. There were no rich men, and therefore no poor. All was well in the world until there was born a woman more beautiful than any that there had ever been. Her name was——"

"Marie," said Louis, for that was his mother's name."

"Helen," said David.

"Her name was Nina," said Blest-Gana, "and she was very beautiful. So much more beautiful was she than other women that . . . that . . . oh, there was a man could not rest because of her! . . ."

He paused for so long that Louis said:

“Is that all the story?”

“He hunted, and he arranged the political business of his tribe; he wandered alone in the wild places for many days. He took the trees into his confidence, and the birds, and a dog, but they could not understand him. He sought out the woman, and told her of his plight. He told her that she must wear a veil, and that no other man must ever see her. . . . She obeyed him, and . . . and . . . I am no storyteller.”

David took up the parable.

“The man was called John, and he had no need of any goods until this trouble came upon him. Then, that the most beautiful woman might smile upon him, he took that which was not his. He slaughtered many beasts, he killed many men, to show his strength. . . . He had slaughtered ten beasts, but he told her that he had slain a thousand; he had killed five men, but he told her that he had slain fifty. He possessed by plunder three houses and two acres of land, but he told her that he possessed nine houses and five thousand acres of land. . . . The woman knew that he was lying, but she did not withhold herself from him . . . and since that day that has always been the way of women. . . . He made her wear a veil, and she obeyed him. He bade her keep to the house while he was away, and she obeyed him. . . . This also has always been the way of women since that day. In the end he forgot that she was very beautiful . . . and he killed her.”

“How did he kill her?” said Louis.

“He starved her,” said David.

The story was not a success, and Louis was disappointed.

“Now,” said Blest-Gana, “we will kill a lion. . . .

We men do not understand. We are all children. . . . I am sure this is the track of a lion. . . .”

They followed the track, and presently split up into two parties, David taking Maurice, Blest-Gana Louis. They wandered for long, keeping each other just in sight, moving against the wind.

Maurice's talk was all in praise of Louis. He was quite sure that Louis could kill a lion, or two if need be—even nine. Louis had been to America, and Louis was going to be President of the United States. . . .

There came a shout from Louis.

“Ah! he has killed one,” said Maurice, breaking into a trot.

Louis came to meet them.

“There's a dead man,” he called.

David hastened. He found Blest-Gana kneeling by the body of a man in rags. He lay like one asleep, his face turned to the ground, his knees drawn up. In one hand was a little phial, in the other a scrap of paper. Blest-Gana took this, read it, and handed it to David. On it was written:

*“I have lost my health, and therefore the savour of life, for I had nothing else. If it is possible, I pray that I may remain unknown.”*

“Think,” said Blest-Gana to Louis—“think that he is asleep.”

There was that in his voice which silenced the boy, and stopped the question upon his lips.

David restored the scrap of paper to the dead hand. They left the man, and, without a word, returned to their fire.

High in the air above them a vulture flew. He circled, poised, and swooped. . . .

Blest-Gana broke into a stream of nonsense. The position was difficult, and though the boys had soon



forgotten, to all appearances, neither of the two men could trust themselves to speak.

At length David said:

“I have an odd feeling of having gained a friend.”

“Yes. It is almost intolerable, to have the world so—so stripped.”

David looked towards the kraal.

“I wonder,” he said, “which is the more acceptable to the Lord, that or the town. . . . I wonder, also, if the Lord has a sense of humour.”

“What I am thinking of,” said Blest-Gana—“what I am thinking of is, what are we to say to the mother of these children? . . .”

“It is nothing to them . . . little savages!”

“It has been a failure, our expedition.”

“For us. Not for them. Look at them now.”

The children had made friends with the Kaffirs, and were being shown how to harness a mule. Louis clamoured to mount, and was set astride one of the brutes, a strap through its teeth for reins. He kicked and whacked his animal, not at all disposed for frolic, into a trot, and away he flew, the Kaffir after him. Maurice took the whip and posed as ring-master.

“It is no more than if they had found the jaw-bone of a sheep, or the skull of an ox. . . .”

“All the same, it has shaken me.”

“We must go if we are to be back before night-fall.”

“Yes. Better. . . . For the first time I shall be glad to be back among rotten people.”

“What really is strange,” said David, “is that this man, whom we never knew, should have shaken us more than——”

“Ah! that—shut up in a little room. But think: here in this solitude, with the hills out there . . . in

the burning sun . . . alone. It is too great. But for the other——” He shrugged. “There is not always majesty in death. . . .”

“Shall we go?” said David.

They bade the Kaffirs harness the mules, and presently were rocking and swaying along the way by which they had come.

Louis bragged of his exploits, to the open-mouthed admiration of his brother. He lost count of time, space, and probability, and the tale of his doings was more marvellous than the romance of any paladin. In the middle of a story in which he had slain a crocodile by jabbing his thumbs into its eyes, it was discovered that Maurice had fallen asleep. Louis turned, laid his head against David’s shoulder, and slept also.

The mules pattered along, the long whip flew, and the cart rocked and swayed. Blest-Gana hummed, and then broke into gay little French songs, chuckling rather than singing them.

“Of what are you thinking, my friend?”

“It was our friend out there. . . . Nothing but health. It is not enough. I have seen cities and men, but I have been always outside. . . .”

For the first time in his life David indulged in intimate confession. He rummaged through all his wanderings, through hardships, through dissipation, through danger.

“Looking back on it all, I can find no satisfying moment, save only those of wild ecstasy (he had recounted his experience with the priest in Ceylon), and those are blurred in the memory. . . . Ridiculous things are sharp and vivid. . . . No, there is nothing satisfying. . . . Even of suffering I cannot say, ‘It is enough.’”

He laughed.

"I am like the daughters of the horseleech, crying, 'Give, give!' . . . and I should like to know more of Agur, the son of Jakeh, and what manner of woman it was had so tortured him as to make him cry out, 'Such is the way of the adulterous woman: she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.' . . . She had twisted the world for him, for he begins his writing: 'Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. . . .' She must have been a wonder."

"You shall see her. . . . She is here in Johannesburg—Mrs. Berriedale. I have talked to her of you. It will be droll to see what she makes of you."

"I wonder," said David.

"I am to play there one evening. She is—but you will see what she is. . . . Hard and shallow." He continued to talk of Mrs. Berriedale, but never touched on the Brandt tragedy. "Quite lately," he said, "she has imported from England a daughter. . . . It is a miracle."

They came into the outskirts of the town.

"We are being swallowed," said Blest-Gana. "Don't you feel it? There is no escape. My Higgs is waiting for me, and my ten wonderful fingers; for you there is waiting. . . ."

"All and more than the things that were past the understanding of Agur."

"You will come to Europe with us?"

"When do you go?"

"In a month. . . . Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Maritzburg, Durban, and Cape Town are to be sucked dry by the insatiable Higgs, and then for London."

It was just nightfall when they drew up outside the hotel. Mrs. Higgs was anxious.

"What horrors has she not imagined!"

Already Louis and Maurice had commenced a joint

history of the day's doings, in which David was unable to recognize any single episode as having happened.

"Chanson de geste de l'héros Louis Higgs," said Blest-Gana. He sat at his piano and improvised a musical narrative, flamboyant and defiant.

"Chanson de geste de l'héros Jean Blest-Gana." This was a mock love-motif.

He turned to a doleful plaint in a minor key.

"Chanson de geste de l'héros David Brockman."

David knew nothing of music, but the thing was such a delicious parody of his mood that he was shaken out of it. It ended in a marvellous discord. It pierced David and rent him, so exact and true it was.

"He casts out devils," he said to Mrs. Higgs.

"I do not know what has come to him lately," she said.

Blest-Gana heard this. He turned round on his piano-stool, laid a hand on each knee, tossed his mane back.

"Voilà!" he said—"voilà! What has come to me? This man . . . he has given me back my youth. Your Higgs, he will sell it for much money, my youth. . . . You see, and there is nothing that he will not sell, your Higgs. . . ."

He returned to his playing, and elaborated the "Chanson de geste de l'héros David Brockman."

David was pressed to stay, but would not. Blest-Gana told Mrs. Higgs that David would come to Europe with them.

"I am glad." Blest-Gana wrenching comic discords from the piano, she said: "You have made him so much happier. . . . He had such terrible despair—oh, terrible! . . . I like it so much better that he should be happy."

She just touched David's arm with her hand, and

by the caress she told him more than words could have done. He took her hand and kissed it.

He looked in on Louis and Maurice in their bath. Maurice splashed.

"It was Louis who killed the biggest lion, wasn't it?"

"Ah!" said David, "but you killed two."

Maurice looked to see the effect of this on his brother. Apparently he was fearful of having any virtue which might diminish Louis's glory.

"Two *very* little ones," he said at length. "But—but—Louis killed the man."

It was out. This, then, was what they had made of the tragedy, of the lonely creature out there on the veld.

David saw again the vulture swooping.

"S-sh, Maurice," said his mother. "It is terrible what things children will imagine. . . ."

"Yes," said David, "terrible."

All that night the vision of the dead man haunted him, and over and over again his last testament spelled itself out before his eyes. . . . He could not rest, and walked out under the stars, out of the town towards the mines, with their gaunt white heaps of slag, stark-white under the moon. . . . He had a sensation of standing on the threshold of the unknown. He was in a state of half-knowledge, of feeling that only just through the darkness in front of him was that which should flood with light the place where he stood. He groped, but could get no farther. He saw clearly, in the moonlight now, the long hills in the distance, and on the swelling bosom of the veld the man lying there . . . rags and a body . . . a scrap of paper.

"That is to be a master," he thought—"to ask little, and, when that goes, to make an end; to be un-

known, to have no touch with that which has been, or that which will be; to be free. . . .”

On this there came to his mind Blest-Gana's lugubrious strains and the last discord. David stood still. He could not laugh, he was so filled with wonder at himself.

“Free?” he thought. “To be free—free? Is it possible? . . . I think . . . I think. . . .”

He turned dizzy and icy cold. His thoughts stopped . . . and he went whirling away, up, and up, and up. He shivered and moaned, and his hands went out, groping like the hands of one stricken blind. He was in agony, and he sweated. There were no words. He could see nothing, visualize nothing. He fell forward on to his face. . . .

When he came to himself, blood was streaming. He leaped to his feet and hit out with both fists:

“Will you give in?” he cried—“will you give in?” and there sounded in his ears, thin, as though it came from a great distance, a voice crying: “À Brockman! À Brockman!”

Out of the mouth of the butcher-boy came these fruitful words:

“I tell you there is no freedom but in sharing the common lot!”

“By God!” said David. “You lie—you—you. . . .”

But the butcher-boy had vanished, and David stood there under the stars, mopping with a crumpled handkerchief at his bleeding head.

It was no great matter, and soon ceased, though there was a painful bruise above his left eye.

“Now, how the devil,” he said—“how the devil did the butcher-boy know that?”

He turned his face towards the town again, and gravely pondered this question of the miraculous

knowledge of the butcher-boy. Suddenly he shouted with laughter.

“Oho!” he thought. “It is I—I myself who know it. In my own head was this gem of wisdom born. It is I who was a fool, and am become a wise man in the wilderness. . . . And, oh! my lonely friend, sleeping out there on the veld under the moon, it is more foolish to make of you a master than openly to say that I slew you. . . . What had you in the world, my friend? Things more precious to you than health? You were born of woman. That is fine, to begin with. You were suckled at her breast. That is a mighty thing. You have eaten and drunk, and women have smiled on you. . . . You have been buffeted by the wind, scorched by the sun. . . . Ye gods, you have been a man. That is enough—that is enough: a man, in the world, sharing the common lot. Free! You died that I might be a man. It is well done, my friend. . . . Are you cold out there? It is finished. . . . Soon there will be no trace of you . . . no trace—nothing. We pass.”

He sat by the roadside.

“If I had stayed,” he thought—“if I had stayed there in England, what would there have been for me? Something I wanted then, something that I cried for . . . something to reconcile what I dreamed with what there was. . . . It is here: this man—this dead man whom I never knew. . . . Simple. . . . The common lot: we live and we pass. . . . I had to know. . . . To live honestly. . . . Such liars I have known that passed for honest men. . . . Such light women that passed for virtuous.”

He looked up at the stars.

“Jupiter, they tell me, has eight moons. I wonder if he is eight times as crazy as this world . . . and if in all this world there is another man as crazy

as myself. . . . Truth, honour, virtue, the love of all creatures, and the hatred of all wickedness. . . . And I, while I am here moping and groping, there in the town are men and women making love, men gambling and fighting; there are new men and women brought into the world, there are others passing from it; there are fine things and vile things. . . .”

He looked up at the glare of the town lights, and rose to his feet, craning towards the glare.

“Oh! but we are clever little animals, we men. . . .”

With that he broke into a run, and had almost reached his lodging when down the street there came clattering a carriage, drawn by two horses, scared and galloping at full stretch. The driver was hauling at the reins, throwing his full weight on them; he was shouting and cursing. The carriage shot by him, and David saw seated in it two women, clinging together, huddled and frightened. He turned, raced and caught one of the beasts by the rein, was dragged some distance, but at length, by tugging and throwing up the brutes' heads, he brought them to a standstill, plunging and kicking. The driver slipped down from his box, and David came to the women. He doffed his hat and bowed.

“I wished to make sure that it was well with you.”

“It was brave,” said the elder woman. The younger held out her hand.

“I am afraid,” said David, “that my thought was for the horses. They were so terrified. You are not hurt?”

He wished to make the younger woman speak. She had a natural graciousness which was very sweet to David, and made him linger. She was pale, and most wonderful to see in contrast with the hardness of the powdered face of the elder woman, in whose voice also there was a queer metallic quality. She,



too, was beautiful, but David's eyes were for the younger woman. Hardly more than a girl she was, but she was mysterious and enchanting as the moon. She accepted David's homage.

"Your head," she said, and her voice was full, soft.

"It is nothing . . . to have been of service to you. . . ."

"We are grateful."

"Indeed, yes," said the elder woman. "My man is a fool."

The fool came to say that they might proceed. The younger woman held out her hand again.

"We shall meet."

The carriage was turned. David stood aside, and they clattered away up the street.

"Oh," said David, "she is rare!"

He stood for long gazing after the carriage. Presently there came slouching a ragged man, meagre and wretched. He eyed David hungrily.

"My friend," said David, "would you like to be drunk?"

The man licked his lips and stood hitching his shoulders.

They proceeded to a bar, and there the man drank himself into a maudlin state, and proclaimed aloud to the assembled company that David was a gentleman, and offered to fight any man who should say the contrary.

## V

THE coming of the rare woman produced in David an uneasiness which he had never known before. In all his dealings with women, he had been sure of his understanding, and certain in his handling of them. He could not rid himself of the haunting tones of her voice, and until he saw her again he was rebellious, struggled against the thing that possessed him, but always came back to worship of her image. He was angry; he clutched at the common, the coarse, the depraved; he sought the lowest creatures to be met with in the town; but always he found himself turning to the promise of great things unknown, things incomprehensible, that the few moments in her presence had held out to him. He made no effort to discover her identity, so sure was he that they would meet. Each day was begun with certainty that it would compass the wonder, and each day ended with blank disappointment. He avoided Blest-Gana and the children, and rather sought Mortimer and the sedative of his outpouring of facts concerning South Africa. However, when Mortimer left the subject of the paucity of good harbours, and solemnly asked whether it could be justifiable for a man with one lung to offer himself in matrimony, David felt that he had been betrayed, was sore and unnecessarily impolite. He was at once contrite.

"I am sorry," he said. "I do not know what has come to me. I think the Rand is wrecking my nerves——"

"That does not matter while it fills your pockets. Why do you stay?"

"I wish I knew," said David.

"Have you heard that Mrs. Berriedale has cut Barclay James since the Brandt suicide?"

"No."

"The odd thing is that James and Wilkinson are as thick as thieves now."

"Does it matter what they are? . . . I suppose they will make money whatever happens to them. . . ."

"Yes. But it would be interesting to know what the Berriedale thinks of it all. . . . She is the storm-centre."

"I am beginning to be sick of the name."

Mortimer laughed.

"That is what everybody has been saying these eight years past. . . . I should also like to know what the girl thinks of it."

"The girl?"

"You have not seen her?"

"Blest-Gana told me of her. A miracle."

"She hardly spoke a word to me when I met her, but she overpowered me."

David turned the conversation by taking up a newspaper. He read idly the report of a meeting of the South African National Society, and glanced at a leader abusing the Imperial Government. His eye travelled over the ill-printed sheet.

"What a shame!" he said.

"Eh?"

He read aloud a paragraph headed "Pathetic Suicide." They had found the man on the veld, and efforts were being made to identify him. Mortimer seemed to be unmoved by David's story. He took the newspaper, and read the paragraph without comment.

"You are wanted," he said.

"*What!*" said David.

“ BROCKMAN.—If David Brockman, son of Henry Brockman, of Braydale, in the county of Lancaster, England, now believed to be in South Africa, will communicate with Messrs. Beak, Bird, and Betts, of 7, Joubert Street, Johannesburg, he will hear of something to his advantage.’”

“ M-p-p-p,” said David. “They have tried that before.”

“You may as well go,” said Mortimer. “They are good clients of mine, Beak’s. . . . If you don’t go, I shall tell them that you exist, that I have seen you, and that you are incapable of looking after your own interests.”

David decided to go then and there.

He was received by a Hindu clerk, and passed over to a pasty-faced English boy, who whistled when David gave his name.

“My word!” he said; “you’re in there now, talking to Mr. Beak.”

“The devil I am!” said David, and laughed.

“Yessir. You’re more like yourself than t’other fellow.”

A door opened, and there emerged from it an out-at-elbows gentleman, crestfallen and slinking.

“No go?” said the boy.

“Go to hell!” said the crestfallen gentleman, and flung out of the office.

“Will you come this way, sir?” said the boy. He opened the door and announced, “Mr. David Brockman.”

“Another?” The attorney threw down his pen and broke into expostulation, which was cut short by David’s entry. The boy vanished.

“Take a seat,” said the attorney gruffly. He was a large man, with a husky voice that occasionally rose to a squeak.

"I am afraid," said David, "that I cannot prove my identity."

Mr. Beak threw himself back in his chair.

"Have *you* come here for a joke, sir? . . . I have had twenty liars here over this business. I am not in the mood for more."

"Your advertisement has only just been pointed out to me. I want to know what you have to tell me to my advantage."

"You are the son of Henry Brockman, of Braydale, in the county of Lancaster?"

"The eldest son," said David, "by his first wife. I ran away from home ten years ago."

"Yes—yes."

"I am twenty-seven years of age. I have a sister and two brothers. When I left home my father kept an eating-house. I believe that he has extended his business since then. Do you represent my father?"

"No. . . ."

"What is it that you have for me?"

"There is no one here who can swear to your identity?"

"No."

"One has to be careful. It is a question of money left by a Miss Andrew. . . ."

David said nothing. He could not.

"How long have you been in Africa, Mr.—Mr. Brockman?"

"Not a couple of months. I came from Ceylon."

"Thank you."

"For what?" said David.

"Our London agents had last news of you there."

"I heard from my aunt while I was there."

"Her estate is valued at six thousand pounds, and I am instructed that there is some small house property in Cambridgeshire. . . . We will cable our

agents, Mr. Brockman, and if you should be in need of money——”

“Thank you,” said David. “No; I am much obliged to you, but—but—— Thank you.”

Mr. Beak offered a fat hand, which David took.

“Where are you to be found?” said the attorney.

David gave his address, and the fat man made a note of it.

“The next David Brockman,” he said, “will be ejected with violence.”

David returned to his lodging, and on an impulse of disgust with his mode of living gave notice to his landlady. He began to feel that there was a conspiracy against him. He had come to Johannesburg blithely enough, and irresponsibly, desiring to shake off the longings—sentimental, as he judged them—roused in him by his long sojourn with Anthony and Clara Fielding. An unkind fate had pitched him into a relationship almost as unsettling with Blest-Gana, and had brought him face to face with stark truth. It had arranged the encounter with the rare woman, and now, by this cruel stroke, had insisted that he should be a gentleman of fortune.

He had never in his life given thought to the morrow, or doubted the truth of the saying that one day is like unto another. He had been without possessions, asking no more than that a livelihood, however meagre, should be forthcoming. In all his wanderings he had watched and been absorbed in the tragicomedies everywhere being enacted. He had taken the world as a spectacle for his delight, had often been drunk with the joy of it, had probed and delved for the secret of it. It had been good, and he had evaded his share of the burden. He had seen traps laid for him, but had dodged them, and cried aloud for sheer pleasure in his own cleverness in dodging.

He had given much and asked nothing, because he had seen that the majority of mankind ask much and give nothing. He had been in revolt—at first shrilly, peevishly, even passionately, then gently and humorously—against the ways of the rest of the world. He had begun by setting before himself ideals of asceticism, but experience had soon shattered them, and he had taken unto himself a gospel of kindness, which, through his youthful lack of discrimination, had brought him into the most doleful difficulties, from which, however, he had extricated himself like an eel. This gospel remained with him.

Now for the first time he was obliged to think of the future. One thing he clutched at—his promise, made half in joke, that he would be in London to meet the Fieldings. That was something to do. *Do*—that was the word that bothered him. Looking back on it all, he realized that he had never done anything, that, as he had said to Blest-Gana, he had no business in the world, and did not stand firmly on his legs.

There had been a time when he was content to say to himself that he was not as other men are. That was done with, exploded. Here in Johannesburg he had learned that he was of the same stuff as all the rest.

He lay on his bed and pondered the doings of the past ten years:

“It has taken long to learn it. . . . I wonder, do the others take so long, or . . . or . . . do they never . . .? A gentleman of fortune at twenty-seven. It is too ghastly. . . . And I dreamed once that I would be as Joseph. . . .”

He came to Bardon in his thoughts, and lived again through the happy weeks there by the river and in the yew-grove; to his home, and there came back the last time that he had seen his mother. He wondered

then what she would have thought, and doubted not that she would have believed in him. He remembered clearly enough what she was like, pale and very weary. . . .

John—of course, John. That was something to do. He wondered what they had made of the boy, John Spencer Brockman. He remembered the scrawled letter received in Ceylon, healthy and boyish enough. . . .

David had made up his mind to return to England at once, when he was confronted with the knowledge that he could not go.

This day, like every other, had been begun with the certainty that he should meet the woman with the soft voice. Now, for the first time since the encounter, he remembered Helen, that he had written to Audrey for news of her, and that it was for this alone that he had stayed in the unpleasant town—Helen on the one hand, vague, misty, but still golden, still through all changes real; and on the other the woman seen once, but compelling and unforgettable. . . .

“No, certainly,” he said. “I cannot go. I’ll be a fool like the rest of them. . . .”

With that he abandoned himself to the pleasure of recalling the woman’s voice and the words she had spoken to him:

“We shall meet.”

“I wonder,” thought David, “if her state is as grievous as my own.”

For all that it was so grievous he rejoiced in it, and had reached singing point when there came a knock at his door and his landlady entered with a note. It was from Blest-Gana, to bid him hold himself in readiness to be taken that evening to the house of Mrs. Berriedale, as he had promised.



“ I have so sung the praise of you that Nina has smiled upon me and I am in heaven, but if you fail me to-night I shall be lost. La Berriedale vows it must be you who saved them from disaster five nights ago. Is it so? Nina has said nothing, but then she is so strange.—J. B.-G.”

Nina! O divine name! And to-day was the day of days, this was the day when the earth should stop in her course and the moon stand still in the heavens, when the stars should dance and new worlds be born.

David read the note again.

“ Nina has said nothing, but then she is so strange.”

If she had been proclaimed saint, or had performed some deed that should send her fame ringing through the ages, David could have known no greater delight than came to him from these words. That she had said nothing had in it something miraculous, most wonderful, and of an adorable purity.

The idea of purity brought him to that which knocked him from his perch—the history of her mother, courtesan, cheat, liar—and from his exultation he was brought to the blackest despair. He cursed and cursed the woman that she should have brought stain and the taint of wickedness, the dust and foulness of the market-place, to the most holy. That a thing so lovely should live in such a poisoned air was to David most damnable, and he wept for it, howled his lament to the dingy wall of his room. When the fit was done he lay and laughed at himself, pawed the air with his fists, and gurgled like a baby.

“ Oh, what an ass, what an ass! . . . Long ears, long enough to reach from here to the moon. . . . But in this little body of mine to feel, to feel, to feel so much infinity . . . endless. . . . What have we done, good Lord, that we should have so much? . . . and what have I done, good Lord, that I should have

had to wait so long . . . to wander blindly through the world? And I thought I knew so much. I have known, I have seen, nothing—nothing at all.”

Words failed him. He kicked, and he thumped on his body with all his might.

He lay exhausted.

“Surely,” he said—“surely there is not in all the world another man so crazy as myself.”

With that he rose and collected his belongings, bade his landlady an affectionate farewell, and drove to Blest-Gana’s hotel, where he announced that, as a gentleman of fortune, he had come to stay.

Blest-Gana received him delightedly, and insisted that they should dine as magnificently as possible to celebrate the good chance, and the auspicious moment of the meeting of David and Nina the peerless. David was inclined to resent Blest-Gana’s extravagant praise, and was mum when the pianist asked for an account of the adventure of the runaway horses.

“I have elaborated the ‘Chanson de geste de l’héros David Brockman,’” said the pianist. “It has made Louis weep. I am to play it to-night. And Nina shall weep for the Weltschmerz of the hero.”

“It is my duty,” said David—“it is my duty to return to England immediately, but I shall not go. I shall wait for what this night shall bring forth.”

“Have you been to the mines?” said Blest-Gana.

“To the Simmer and Jack.”

“Did you see the hammers? Stamp, stamp, stamp . . . thud, thud. . . . I imagine sometimes that life is much like that. . . . The ceaseless hammering crushing us, to bring the true gold out of us. . . . You know what it looks like when it comes from the crushing? . . . Thick black ooze. . . . It is an idea. But ideas are not life.”

"I like the idea that the universe was created for the benefit of man," said David.

"I think that the universe was created entirely that you and I might dine together to-night."

"It is as good an explanation as any other."

"They killed Galileo."

The quick leap was too much for David, and it was some moments before he could follow.

"What did he do?"

"He produced the restlessness and self-consciousness of the modern world. They were right to kill him. . . . Before men had lived comfortably, unquestioningly, and mightily pleased with themselves, for it was assumed that this earth was the centre of the universe. . . . Those were the days of darkness and content, the days of swaggering folly."

"There were giants in those days."

"Then came this confounded Galileo with the idea that the earth moves round the sun. . . . The beginning of inductive reasoning and eternal questioning, the everlasting Why? . . . It is tragic, because we still wish to think ourselves lords of creation. . . ."

"It is all so cleverly hidden from us. I am told that it is impossible to measure the velocity of the earth through space. . . ."

"Life is to be lived, and the race is still to the swift. . . . Progress?"—he snapped his fingers—"that for progress. We are richer, some of us are fatter, more of us are discontented. . . . We still make an end of our Galileos. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* I have been a poor man, I am rich, but only when I am a child with Louis and Maurice am I happy. But I tell you this, Art is no trade for a man."

He took his cognac at a gulp.

“And you, with your new fortune, what will you do in the cause of progress?”

“I shall marry a wife,” said David.

“That,” said Blest-Gana, “is all that one can do. Shall we go?”

They walked to the house of Mrs. Berriedale. The night was hot and oppressive, thunderous, and lightning flashed.

“There will be a storm,” said Blest-Gana. “These storms at this height are wonderful.”

The house was a small palace built on an eminence in Park Town. It was brilliantly lighted. Before the gateway were standing carriages, and a throng of men and women was streaming through and up the steep pathway to the house.

“It is a great night.”

As they turned in at the gate two men were standing there. The light of a carriage lamp was cast upon their faces. One of them David recognized as the man to whom he had given drink. The other's face was as lean and hungry, but of a finer cast.

“Two more for the house of Rahab,” said the man. “Anything in a dress-coat.”

The other sniggered.

“I'm a Legh of High Legh I am, and a Master of Arts of the University of Oxford . . . left to rot in this blasted hole while a Piccadilly siren fleeces the Jews who fleece the country. . . .”

He went on talking.

The savage comment on the house seemed ominous to David.

“There are thousands like him,” said Blest-Gana. The house was of a magnificence such as David had never imagined. At the head of a marble staircase—a copy in miniature, it was said, of a famous staircase in a great London house—stood Mrs. Berriedale, gor-

geous in purple. Diamonds and amethysts were her jewels. She was very splendid. She had to perfection the air of the great hostess, just the fine shade of warmth and the subtle distinction between man and man. She greeted Blest-Gana warmly and with the faintest shade of familiarity, and yet with homage to his greatness. Turning to David, she was all dignity, and yet conveyed to him that she was interested, and that for her he stood out of the crowd as markedly as Saul among the young men.

Standing in the gallery, David watched her, and was delighted to find that she was the same to all the young men, and that they left her with a new assurance, a new squaring of the shoulders.

Of women there were many and various, some aggressively modest, and others flaunting, but toned down to the right key of respectability.

"Wonderful," said a voice. "Nothing wanting but a Bishop."

"I bet old Ada would twist the Archbishop of Canterbury to her way if she could be let within a yard of him."

David found it impossible to move from his corner in the gallery. Blest-Gana had been swept away from him, and he was beginning to weary of the pastime of watching his hostess, after he had perceived that the changes in her manner were no more than six, turned on as mechanically as though someone behind her pressed a button for each. Yet the woman was fascinating; she had such skill. She was like some work of rare artifice, and David could not recall her like. Round him he heard the buzz of conversation, and from the rooms came a hum and a clatter.

"Looks well to-night. . . . Younger than ever. . . ."

"Trust old Ada for that. . . . I wonder what she is thinking of. . . ."

"What a lot of fools we all are. . . . I once heard her talk about men: not much she don't know about us."

"I wonder who pays now. . . ."

"Have you seen the girl? . . . They say she sings divinely."

David pricked up his ears.

"That's what we're all here for."

"Is it true about old James? . . ."

"And Brandt? . . . They say so. . . . I suppose it'll die out."

Here the group which hemmed him in broke up, and David made his way into a room opening from the gallery. This was patriotically decorated with festoons of red, white, and blue flowers. At one end of the room in an alcove was a band, and already a few couples were waltzing. Mortimer was there, and came to greet David.

"You also among the prophets?" he said.

"And bored with them," said David.

"My brother is here. . . ."

David was presented to another and a fatter Mortimer. He also was encyclopædic, and enlarged upon polygamy among the natives, with some reference to the effect of missionary activity upon their morals.

"Fusion of the races is impossible. The location system is the only practicable solution if we are to remain here at all; but I say . . ."

What he said further was lost, for there was a general movement, and Mrs. Berriedale appeared with her attendant court.

From the other end of the room Nina came to meet them. She was gowned in white, and was without ornament. Men and women craned to look at

her. David thrust his way through until farther passage was impossible, so close was the circle about her. Blest-Gana had joined them, and was being presented to the two men with Mrs. Berriedale. He bowed, then turned to Nina, and seemed to be making some effort to please her, but she was cold.

At her mother's bidding, they moved towards the piano. Blest-Gana sat and broke into a rippling accompaniment.

The girl turned quite simply to the crowd of men and women. She was grave, still. Words died away, and all stood straining. The music rose and fell. On a soft chord the girl opened her lips, and there came forth sweet sounds, full as the notes of a bird. The song was of love and death, and came to a close on a note deep, thrilling, marvellously true.

She bowed to the applause in conventional fashion, and made some remark to Blest-Gana, who thereon looked round the room, and, seeing David, nodded in his direction. Nina looked, and for the first time she smiled.

David came to her.

"C'est le Roi des Sauvages, des Chasseurs, et des Sportsmen d'Afrique, et l'Empereur des Tueurs Eléphants."

"I am glad," said Nina.

"And I."

"I saw you before I began to sing."

"Your song was wonderful."

"If it pleased you, I am glad."

"It is difficult to say anything. Among all these people I feel so small."

"And yet you are larger than any here. . . . Is your head better?"

"Oh yes! . . . I must confess. . . . I had the bruise before I met you."

She clapped her hands.

"Honest," she said.

"I had to tell you."

Mrs. Berriedale bore down on them, expressed again her great pleasure at seeing her deliverer in her house, and, with admirable dexterity, deprived David of Nina.

Blest-Gana played with fantastic depth of feeling the "Chanson de geste de l'héros David Brockman," which he subsequently described to an earnest admirer as an early work of Schumann.



## VI

DAVID lay dreaming of what things he should do to bring pleasure to Nina, and making wild plans for snatching her from the captivity in which she lay, when it was announced that a lady wished to see him. Being more than half asleep, the strange idea came to him that it must be Nina, and that she had sought him in great need. He was for girding on his armour when Kate Driscoll entered the room, sat plump by his side, and burst into tears.

He was wide awake on the instant, and soothed her. She sobbed only the more for his kindness.

"It's—it's—it's this 'ell of a place," she said at length. "I didn't mind it so much while there was you. . . . But—but them men from the mines. . . . Oh, it's too 'orrible! . . . Mamie, she don't mind. She always was 'arder than what I was. . . ."

"Poor little devil!" said David.

She took his hand and fell to kissing it until he drew it away from her.

"Oh, Mr. Brockman, if you'd only let me stay with you, sir. . . . I'd go anywhere with you, I would. You're not like other men. There's something about you almost 'oly-like. . . . An' I've 'ad such a 'ard time of it. . . . I've got the 'orrors of this place, sir; there's somethink about it so cruel, sir—'ardly 'uman. I've got the 'orrors of it, I 'ave."

She took off her gloves and tugged at them, twisted them up into a ball, and let them fall at her feet. She was not weeping now, but sat with hard, glittering eyes, staring vacantly. . . .

“My word,” she said in a dry, dull voice—“my word, if I ’ad a girl, I’d tell ’er somethin’, I would! I’d tell ’er what it all was. . . . It’s crool not to let ’em know. . . . Jest a bit o’ fun, Mr. Brockman, jest a bit o’ fun, or—or suthink as you can’t ’elp, an’ down an’ down you go to ’ell. . . . I’m not a bad un’, Mr. Brockman—I’m not a bad un’. . . . There’s things that other girls do that I never done—that’s truth. . . . I never been on the drink—that’s one thing. I never stole—that’s another. I never tried to take another girl’s feller—that’s another. An’ there’s lots o’ things I never done what I couldn’t tell y’ about. . . . I got the ’orrors of this place.”

She shuddered.

“I’d go anywheres with you, Mr. Brockman.”

The proposal was so outrageous, and yet so simply and so sincerely put forward, that David could find nothing to say in answer to it. He was for so long silent that she began to fear that she had offended him.

“I ’ope I ’aven’t done wrong. Only—only—when I could bear it no longer, I ’ad nowheres else to go.”

“Will you stay here for a moment while I am gone?”

“What are you goin’ to do with me?” She had risen in alarm.

“I don’t know yet. I feel helpless. It is not—not a man’s business.”

He had bethought him of Mrs. Higgs. Her he now sought, and left the wretched Kate in a state almost of panic, fearful that David also was going to fail her. His fantastic chivalry had bred in her a confidence in him to which in her stricken state she had clung: at first to the idea of it, and then in her frenzy she had sought him out.

He explained matters, so far as he had been able

to grasp them, to Mrs. Higgs, who consented at once to go to the girl, and do what she could for her. David sought Blest-Gana.

"My friend," he said, "truly I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man."

"What now?"

"The hand of God has taken me by the scruff of the neck, shaken me, and sent me sprawling. . . . I have just picked myself up, and I am trembling in every limb. I am stifling. I do not know what has happened."

"Are you ill?"

"No."

"What is it, then?"

"I do not know. . . . I know that I have lost all that I had, that the whole form and colour of the world is changed. I know that I was happy, sure, rejoicing in everything. I know that now I am afraid, that I cannot look forward, that I dare not look back. . . ."

"Il faut avoir ces moments," said Blest-Gana, looking wise.

"It may be that I cannot breath freely the air of this place. . . ."

"Then leave it. . . ."

"I cannot go."

"Weltschmerz again?"

"No, I am not weary. Indeed, I know all, and more than I ever knew of the splendour of it all. . . . I am more sure of the life, and the force of it . . . but . . . but I am . . . I am crusted over. I cannot *feel*. . . ."

He told Blest-Gana then of Kate's visit.

"It was that made me realize to what a pass I have come. There was some barrier, something I could

not break through. . . . I could not find words to say to her. . . .”

“I am sorry. . . . It is so terrible that, in all the crises, in all the turning-points of growth, no other man or woman can help. It is a matter then of going out into the wilderness. . . .”

“This is wilderness enough,” said David. “Like Kate, I’ve got the ’orrors of this place. . . . I have never felt so shrivelled as the other night in that house. . . .”

“It takes very little to dislocate the world for a man, and the finer his temper, the less it takes. . . . It occurs to me once a week, generally on a Friday. I believe it occurs to women every other day.”

“You certainly have the power to drive out devils.”

Mrs. Higgs came to seek David. She had been weeping.

“She says that if she can go back to England, she thinks she will be able to find her friends again. . . . She cannot stay here. It is too horrible what she has suffered, and worst of all is that she does not know how horrible it is.”

David remembered the scene with Cocker on the deck of the *Henry Orchardson*, and the trouble waxed great in him.

They discussed ways and means, and it was decided that the unhappy Kate should be given a passage back to England.

“I think,” said Mrs. Higgs, “that you had better leave it in my hands. It would be wiser for you not to see her. She is like a dog that has been beaten.”

With that she left them, darting at David a glance almost savage.

“I have done nothing,” he said in protest. “It is not I who have brought this girl so low.”

“Mon cher, you are a man. To Mrs. Higgs, in her

indignation and burning sympathy, you are Man, and the author of all evil. . . . If all virtuous women were given the thoughts that are in her head now, they would sweep us from our perch, neck and crop. . . . The revolt of women is the most absorbing phenomenon of the age. . . . But may God deliver me from the commercial woman—for she is mean.”

“The truth is,” said David, not listening to the words of wisdom, but still pondering the problem of himself—“the truth is that I am not a gregarious animal . . . but neither am I a true vagabond.”

Blest-Gana took and shook him until he was breathless.

“Go,” he said—“go! Take a horse, and ride until you come to water. . . . Swim, kick, and splash in it; then lie in the sun.”

“If I go, I shall go for many days. . . .”

“Stay until you are cured and in your right mind again.”

“There is so much to forget.”

“I will tell Nina that you are gone.”

“I beg that you will say nothing.”

“She always asks for you.”

“It is for that that I wish to forget.”

“Tiens! there are not many like her. You are a fool if you pass by on the other side.”

“I told you the hand of God had taken me by the scruff of the neck. . . . I must see clearly before I take a step forward. . . . I am fearful of impulse.”

With that he left, and was not heard of in Johannesburg for many days.

He returned on the eve of Blest-Gana’s departure for Bloemfontein. He was baked brick-red by the sun, and glowed with health.

His first inquiry was for Kate Driscoll. He was told that she had already taken her departure, and had

written from Cape Town, with words of gratitude for the three of them.

His next was to ask if there had come a letter for him from England. There was such a letter. It was from Audrey.

“It was a great surprise to hear from you again, and from Africa of all places. You will be sorry to hear of Aunt Lucy’s death. She only was here once or twice after you went away. She wished to be kind to John, but they would not let her. For some reason, I think she did not like me. I have not been very well lately, and James, my husband, has been doing badly in business. Father is extraordinary: everything he touches seems to turn to money; but he is growing grey, and looks old and tired. She does not improve with years.

“You ask for news of Helen. Poor Helen! She has come back to live with her father. She married most unhappily five—or is it four?—years ago. The man was a brute. I cannot understand it, as she is so pretty. I think she was very pleased that you wrote about her. She will not divorce her husband. I believe that she thinks he cares for her. Personally, I don’t think he ever did. We are all so glad that you are to have Aunt Lucy’s money, and hope that you will come home soon; but how queer of you to leave Ceylon, where you must have been so very comfortable!”

There was more of the letter—inconsequent, foolish, prattling.

“Well?” said Blest-Gana.

“I have been living in a kraal,” said David, as he tore up the letter. “The world has been delivered up to me as a plaything.”

From his pocket he produced a collection of Kaffir bangles, beads, and snuff-boxes, which were passed over to Louis and Maurice.

"I will join you at Cape Town."

"Ten days from now."

"No longer?"

"Not a day. I am hungry for London. It has a stale, hot smell in summer which is incomparably satisfying to the modern man."

David sniffed.

"I shall smell nothing but Kaffir for long enough. Oh, but I have been primitive—a hunter!"

"And David is himself again?"

"I have won my title."

"Did you kill elephants?" said Maurice, who had been staring at the new brown David with round goggling eyes.

"Five, Maurice, and carried them home round my neck. I saw springboks and hartebeest, and elks and ostriches, and jackals and baboons; I saw snakes and carrion crows, and I saw a white man turned savage—that was the only evil thing I saw."

On the pretext of having business to arrange with Mr. Beak, the attorney, David escaped, and made directly for Mrs. Berriedale's house.

He found Nina alone. She came towards him most graciously.

"How fine you look!" she said.

"And you . . ." said David.

"I thought—I hoped you would have come sooner. There was always so much to say to you."

"There were never words for you."

"Where have you been?"

"Out into Nowhere. Now that I am here, what is there to say to me?"

"Nothing."

"I am going with Blest-Gana."

"So soon?"

"We have ten days. What shall we do with them?"

"We?"

"You and I."

Their eyes met, and they became grave. They sat and talked of trivialities until she said:

"I think you must not see me again."

"Nina!"

She looked up at him, a little scared; there was the smallest twitching of her fingers, and her lips trembled. She was pale. She was clad in white, and in her bosom was a deep red rose, all the colour that she had.

"There is an old tale," said David, "of a young chief who visited another tribe, and the Princess was very beautiful. The young chief thirsted, and the Princess was bid to go to the well for water. No sooner was she gone than the young chief crept away and followed her. At the well he stood behind her, and she saw his face mirrored close to hers in the water. She turned to chide him. 'Why, O chief, did you have me sent for water, when you come to the water for which you thirst?' Then said the chief: 'You are the water for which I thirst.' . . ."

David waited, but from the girl there came no sound.

"That night they stole away, the chief and all his henchmen, with the Princess, and they say that in that country the moon is larger than in any other, for the great happiness that they had. . . ."

Again David waited, but still she made no sound.

"Nina."

"O-o-o-h!" A little moaning cry came from her



lips; her hand rose to her breast, and the white fingers closed on the red rose, crushed it, and its petals fell.

"Yes," she said. "Yes . . . I think you must not see me again. You see . . . I am only a girl, and young, and in the end I shall forget that—that there was ever a man like you. . . ."

"Oh, Nina, Nina! I have been to the first things in the world to ask them if it was true . . . what I had dared to dream of you. . . ."

"And what I had dreamed of you is something that is not in the world. . . . Not here."

"It is here. It is everywhere in the world, for every man and woman, only for the brave going out to meet it. . . ."

"It is foolishness."

"Then nothing is wise. . . ."

"If you had not come again. . . ."

"How could I not? . . ."

She seemed not to hear this, or, if she heard, not to feel the protest in his voice. "I should have had then just the memory of you. . . . If you had not said such things as you have said; and yet I longed so for you to say them. . . . Your coming was like the clear air from a mountain, like the sun after rain. . . ."

"When first I saw you, I said, 'She is rare!'"

"I dare not look at you. . . . Let me speak. . . . I must say to you what I could say to no other."

There was a sudden passion in her voice, but all the while she did not stir. David sat gazing at her.

She beat twice on her knee with her hand, she swayed and her eyes were clouded. She wrenched the words out:

"When I was a tiny child I knew . . . I knew what my mother was."

David's heart leaped within him, and he made a

movement, almost imperceptible, towards her. Hastily she spoke again:

"Before I knew anything of the world I knew what my mother was, and I was ashamed. . . . I never knew my father. I have only once seen tears in my mother's eyes. . . . That was when I told her that I knew. . . ."

David began to speak.

"Please, no," she said. "Let me end. . . . That was cruel, but—but it was at the dawn of womanhood, and it was more than I could bear. . . . There were tears in her eyes then, and she has always been generous to me. . . . We have been friends. . . . I have been free until she needed me; then I came. . . . I never dreamed that in her house I should find. . . ."

"What have you found?" said David.

She turned on him, tenderness in her eyes.

"You."

"Dear, my dear, I am not fit to touch the hem of your garment."

He knelt by her and took her hands in his.

"David," she said, and again "David," and on this he looked so puzzled that she laughed at him.

"Why," she said—"why are you so wonderful?"

"I came to tell you that I was going, and to ask if you would ride with me to-morrow. . . . I had an idea that this might happen then. . . ."

"We will ride none the less."

"To-morrow, then. And we will see the aspect of the world in the light of this new truth of ours. . . . Oh, the softness of your dear eyes! . . ."

"Oh, the dear honesty in you. . . ."

"Is it you?"

"Is it you?"

They kissed.

"Nina."

"David."

"What now?"

"I am all song."

"Bless you, dear."

Without knowing why, David told her then the pitiful story of Kate Driscoll, and from that he went back and back through all his wanderings until he came to his home, to Bardon, and all that it had stood for in his childish days, to the gentle lady of the little white house, and to Helen. There he stumbled. . . .

"Helen?"

"She was golden," said David, "and the vision of her was with me for so long. . . ."

"And is she—is she, then, waiting? . . ."

"When I had seen you, that was my fear. She married. . . ."

"Golden Helen?"

"There was no happiness for her."

"Poor Helen!"

"Clara was right."

"Clara?"

"My cousin Clara—our cousin Clara. She foretold that this would come to me, and she said——"

"What did she say?"

"Then, David, you will begin to think life worth living."

"And is it so?"

"It is at the beginning—young and most wonderful. You shall see Clara. You and she will love each other; you will be glad of each other, and, as women do, you will twitter over each other."

"Oh! . . . Am I a twittering woman?"

"You are the most beautiful thing in the world."

Blest-Gana was announced. He was at his most impish. He sat and tossed and ran his fingers through

his mane, and made the soft eyes at Nina. He was so preposterous that presently David flung away, after promising to bring horses for the morrow.

“Already,” said the pianist—“already he is jealous of me. But we artists. . . .” He waved his hands airily. Then his mood changed. “Oh, ma Princesse,” he said, “but you are happy. . . . Come, sing it—sing it.”

He led her to the piano, and together they made music. Tears rolled down Blest-Gana’s cheeks, and he was altogether maudlin. He took Nina’s hands, and pressed them to his bosom; he kissed them, he patted her cheeks, he stroked her hair.

“Oh, ma mie,” he cried, “there is nothing else in the world—nothing, nothing! Art! What is Art? Nothing but the song of it. Life! What is life? C’en est l’instrument. . . . Oh, but it is so precious—youth and love, the love of youth! . . . Come, sing it—sing it!”

He made her sing again.

“The love of youth. . . .” He plunged into an improvisation, brilliant, light, gay, that brought Nina to laughter and tears.

“Oh, my dear!” she said, “but how you understand!”

Blest-Gana rose from the piano and bowed over her hand.

“It is for that that there are poets. They are the evangelists. Oh, ma Princesse, what will you do with David?”

“If I can be to him what he would have me be. . . .”

On this Mrs. Berriedale came into the room. She was followed by Kolb. He and Blest-Gana disliked each other, and bowed distantly.

Mrs. Berriedale was in a high mood, and a little shrill.

"Soon, my dear," she said, "we shall shake the dust of Africa from off our feet, and set about the conquest of London."

"It is I who will conquer London," said Blest-Gana.

"Pooh! there is room for all of us. . . . You they may stand for perhaps a month; me they will have always with them."

"Miss Berriedale is more than ever charming to-day," said Kolb, with lumbering flattery.

"I saw your Mr. Brockman up the road. Nice-looking young man."

"He also is to conquer London," said Blest-Gana.

"Dear me. I think you had better also make the attempt, Mr. Kolb."

Kolb bowed.

"I am content with what we have already achieved," he said.

Tea was brought, and over this Mrs. Berriedale chattered and bandied words with Blest-Gana blithely and cheerfully enough.

Nina sat watching her.

A remark of Blest-Gana's was cut short with the entry of the butler, a Swiss.

"Mr. James, madame."

Mrs. Berriedale sat bolt upright. She looked from Blest-Gana to Kolb and to Nina. She dabbed at her lips with her little handkerchief.

"I am . . . I am . . . not at home."

"Mr. James says that he will wait until you will see him."

"I am . . . I am . . . not at home."

The butler bowed and withdrew.

She turned to Kolb.

"I can't very well . . . I couldn't see him with you here."

Kolb said heavily "No," and he and she eyed each other uneasily.

Blest-Gana signalled to Nina. "Shall I go or shall I stay?"

She nodded her head towards the door. He made his adieux, and expressed the hope that they might meet in London. Mrs. Berriedale replied vaguely, her eyes fixed anxiously on the door. She kept dabbing at her lips, and her eyes were never still. She watched Blest-Gana until he had gone; then she turned to find Nina gazing at her.

"Why do you sit there with your white face . . . staring?"

Nina could make no answer. This, coming so swiftly upon the gladness that David had brought to her, had touched the old wound, and set her throbbing, and yet by the new strength and courage it had brought to her, seen from the height to which David had taken her, all this was so small. As she watched her mother she saw that she was hard, vulgar, overdressed; that Kolb was coarse, heavy, and cunning.

She had never inquired into her mother's affairs. She had been conscious of a gathering storm, and of the clearing of the air which followed on the death of Carl Brandt. She had seen that her mother was happier and more gay, and that Kolb came more and more to the house, and that the old order had changed. James came not at all, and for that she was glad, for the man had forced unwelcome attention upon her.

Then had come the day of the meeting with David, and she had ceased to watch the march of events, thinking only, "Here is a man," and to long and hope that he would come again. He had come, and what he had said was what she had longed that he should say, and now there was this—her mother and

this man sitting there, each watching the door as though they were fearful of what might be on the other side of it. It was so queer to sit there watching these two, while near at hand was David—David who loved her, David who had gone so childishly and so dearly because of crazy Blest-Gana's antics.

"Why do you sit there with your white face . . . staring?"

Nina rose and smiled down at her mother, and moved towards the door. She opened it, and there stood Barclay James, sullen, with set jaws, his eyes blazing. . . . He grinned at her horridly, and lurched past her.

She heard a scream from her mother.

"Oh, my God! . . ."

She half turned, and saw the two men fighting like beasts. . . .

She fled to her room, and lay racked and sobbing. . . .

## VII

THERE is a valley near Johannesburg where the weary spirit may find rest—a valley of pines and gum-trees.

Here is a place for lovers, a place of soft lights and tender colour, of mystic glades and long rides leading into blue mystery. Down from the dust and glare come the lovers into their own land of enchantment, where tree and bird and beast meet them in comradeship. There is music in the place.

Down through the pines came David and Nina riding, their horses pacing together. They spoke no word.

On the summit of a rise they drew rein and came close.

“My Nina, you are pale to-day.”

“My David. . . .”

“Shall we stay?”

“For ever, and for ever be out of the world? . . .  
Oh, if we could! . . .”

“My love, it is not possible.”

“But if the world should hurt you, my David. . . .”

“Then I shall come to you for balm.”

“And I to you.”

David dismounted and tethered his horse. He took Nina and held her in his arms, and above them the trees swayed and birds broke into song.

“Oh, you woman of songs, sweet dew to a famished son of earth! . . .”

“And you—life-giving. . . .”

“My dear . . . my dear.”

He held her close.



"This is a great mountain rising out of life, and we in our temple stand remote and loving, nothing between ourselves and earth. . . . Here in the friendly woods. . . . They are ours, dear, by the right of I and Me. . . ."

She clung to him.

"What are gold and silver, jewels and precious stones, when I can hang upon you the sun, moon, and stars? . . . I give you a handful of stars. . . . Oh, the face of you, eyes of you, and the great spaciousness of you! . . . All the darknesses and deep stains in us from contact with base people are illumined, and so vanish. . . ."

"Oh, it is the beautiful you in me that you love! . . ."

"There is this for you that my mother taught me. You are the most beautiful lady in the world, and stand for truth, honour, virtue, the love of all creatures and the hatred of all wickedness. I am the most unworthy knight, and, strengthened by the great love I bear you, I fight most valiantly for the right."

"Your mother was very dear to you?"

"We lived together in strange dreams," said David. They walked then under the pines hand in hand.

"The dreams were true," said David.

"And I," said Nina, "I never dreamed one-half the truth."

"This day is ours, and all the days."

They wondered, delighting in tiny things, and everything they saw, each sound they heard, was a wonder.

They feasted frugally, and never was there a feast of such delight.

They shrank from the midday sun into a grove of sheer magic.

"Almost," said David—"almost we might encounter Scoones and Henry Andrew and old Martin

Brockman, and all the people of the yew-grove. . . . Stuckey Vyse and Margery. . . . It is such a place. . . .”

He revealed to Nina all his childish lore that had been for so long forgotten and laid aside, but when it came to the island, there was this difficulty, that there Helen had been enthroned and acclaimed, and when to comfort Nina he strove to create another island for her, he found the power of conjuration had left him, and called he never so loudly, the surface of the sea remained untroubled.

“That is all long ago,” he said.

“I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine,” cried Nina. “We have no need of dreams.” For that saying David worshipped her, and while he knelt in homage there came crashing, tearing, cursing, raging through the woods a man, wild, unshaven, foul of clothes and foul of flesh, and most evil-smelling. He reeled and staggered, leaned against a tree, hawked and spat.

Nina gave a little cry. David sprang to her, and flung an arm about her shoulders.

Again the man spat and leered crazily.

“Spill the jade,” he said—“spill the jade. Tumble her, leave her before you know the rottenness of women. Ay, she’ll take your love-words, and your love-tokens, and your love-service, and then she’ll turn and break you. . . . Ay, she’ll smile, and smile, and smile, and then she’ll sell you. . . . Ay, she’ll be honey-sweet, and all the while her rottenness will eat away your heart, and then she’ll pitch you back into the dung. . . .”

He broke off suddenly in his tirade, and came close to David, peered into his face; to Nina, and stretched out his filthy hand to touch her. She shrank from him. He broke into foul abuse, drew himself up with

crazy dignity, took his broken hat from his head, and swept a bow to her; then off he went madder than ever, running, crashing, tearing, and far off they heard him babbling curses of all womankind, breathing mighty oaths, and crying out that he loved the woman, though she might be ten times a whore. . . .

Nina wept for it.

Later, when they sought their horses, they found him prone on the ground, drunk and sleeping.

David laid money by his side, and they left him, riding in silence, for the heart of each was troubled. Turning to Nina, David found tears in her eyes.

"Don't, my dear," he said, touching her arm—"don't. It is nothing. This is a crazy land, a land of fearful passions. . . . We will soon be gone from it. . . ."

"I was thinking . . . if you should come to that."

"You are like the silly girl in the tale who let the beer run to waste while she wondered whether it should come to be that she should have a child and slay it with the hatchet that hung on the wall."

"Did she?" said Nina.

"There is reason to believe that she lived happily ever after, like the rest of the world."

"Does happiness continue?"

"No," said David. "But neither does unhappiness."

"To-day has been so wonderful."

They had breasted the rise, and issued from the woods to the dusty road.

"I am afraid to go back. . . ."

"Dearest, only for these few days."

She told him what had happened in the house, and how, after the first outburst of emotion, she had lain listening to the voices; how they had risen in anger, and how then there had been stillness; then

footsteps ascending the stairs, then a tap at the door of her room. She told him how she had at first lain still and made no sound, and then how she had opened it to find her mother worn out, haggard, almost numbed, standing there and saying over and over again: "Nina, Nina, Nina, Nina. . . . What have I done? . . . What have I done? . . . What have I done? . . . Nina, Nina, Nina."

"I could not tell you down there in the woods. . . . I could forget there. . . . That poor crazy wretch made me remember. . . ."

"What did she say?"

"She went on like that, on and on and on, and her hands were cold. There was a mark on her cheek, and her lip was bleeding; her wrists were bruised and her gown torn. I led her, and made her sit, and I chafed her hands, and all the while her voice went on and on saying, 'What have I done? . . . What have I done?' I was choking, so that I could say nothing. Then something gave way in her, and she clutched me to her, and her tears fell upon my face. She told me nothing of what had happened, nor of any reason for it. I think she could not think coherently; places, times, and persons were confused. . . . It is hurting me to tell you. . . ."

"My dear, my dear. . . ."

"She wanted that I should not think ill of her. She blamed herself for bringing me out here. She said she would not have done that, but that she was starved. . . . She told me what her life had been. . . . My father was cruel, withered her up . . . made her reckless; then one man, then another. Hatred of them all. Her own cleverness, riches and power . . . but chiefly hatred of men, and at last she had lost faith even in her own cleverness. . . . That is all."

"And now?"

"I have promised that I will not leave her."

She stole a glance at David, then looked away, so much had her words hurt him. He said nothing.

"We have had to-day," she said timidly.

"Did you tell her what had come to you?"

"No. . . . How could I, when she was brought so low? . . . Dear David, we have had to-day, and is it too much for you to wait for me?"

"I am not first with you."

She cried out on that.

"Unjust."

David knew that he was unjust, but injured vanity leaped in him, and though he wrestled with it, would not be still. He would rather that his tongue should be torn out than that he should utter the words, but they were out, forced from him. They rapped out.

"I am not first."

"But to-day, David, to-day."

"You should have told me in the beginning."

"But I knew—but I knew. . . . I wished to forget. . . . Is it wrong—is it wrong to be happy, to have wished to make you happy?"

"It is wrong. . . ."

"No—no."

"It is wrong to take such happiness when there is that in your mind must sooner or later destroy it. . . . I am not first with you."

"Indeed, indeed. . . ."

She turned to him between laughter and tears.

"Dear David, what would you have me do?"

"If you had loved me, you must have told me in the beginning."

He knew the unreason of it, he knew that he was cruel, foolish, over-nice, drawing impossibly fine shades, acting entirely in disaccord with all that he

had gleaned from experience and the loves of other men and women; but then this whole business of love was so contrary to all theory, so unlike all that he had expected to find in himself on its coming. He knew himself for an ass, and yet he could not resist the force that drew him on from one wild idea to another. His mind twisted the thing this way and that. He strove to look at the matter, at Nina's position, at her relation with her mother, and her relation with himself, from a detached point of view, only to realize and to chafe at the realization that detachment was impossible. There was a savage pleasure in the wilful doubting of that "if"—a pleasure that made him ashamed and angry with himself. And yet only the more for that did he hug it to himself. He hugged it, and waited for what she should say, turned to her the hard face of the just man such as he was struggling to make of himself, while through it all, in his heart of hearts, he was glad of this fine creature, rejoicing in her warmth and generosity, wishing, longing only to hold her close and keep her from all hurt, and crying out that she was rare and beautiful, and of all things in the world the most to be desired.

She brought her horse to a walk, and David also drew rein.

"It is unlike you," she said.

"Then you do not know me."

"Oh! . . . what would you have me do?"

"Hold nothing from me."

"That I have not done."

"If you had told me. . . ."

"I was afraid. . . . I wished only to have the wonder of it. We have that. . . ."

David was torn; his heart thumped, and the blood beat in his temples.

"It has gone for me. . . ."

“David!” She gave a little bitter cry, flicked with her whip, and galloped ahead, he after her. She was a little the fleeter of the two, and by the time that he had caught her the rushing through the air and the violent action had dissipated his wilfulness, and he came to her ashamed and contrite.

The gallop had brought colour to her pale cheeks; her eyes flashed, and a tress of hair had escaped. This she caught and wound under her veil. In this, as in all her movements, was a grace that made her worshipful.

“What now?”

“I am a fool,” said David, “a vain fool, and I wished that you should think me masterful.”

He was so dismally comic over this that she laughed.

“Is it so much, then, that I should ask you to wait for me?”

David protested, and made great vows of the years of service meet to be done for so much loveliness.

“I cannot leave her.”

With that they came from their realm of wonder to earth again, and planned that nothing should be said until there seemed to be a clear issue from the disasters of the unhappy woman, that no arrangement should be altered, and that David should proceed, as he had promised, to England, there to take up his inheritance, and to enter upon a career worthy for her to share.

“I will not have a do-nothing for my husband.”

“You shall not,” said David.

“In that you shall be as masterful as you please.”

They were happy again, and builded busily. Into the great world of London David was to descend, and there, by the right use of his talents and the adroit application of his masterfulness—Nina insisted on the use of this word—to win an abiding fame.

“ I want all the world to say, ‘ This is a man.’ ”

“ And if they will not say it? ”

“ Then I shall cast shame to the winds, and cry it from the housetops.”

“ And if it is not true? ”

“ Then, like Dido, I shall build me a pyre.”

Nina had even chosen the house in which they were to live, in Swan Walk, by the Apothecaries’ Herb Garden, in Chelsea. She had a great love for London, and laid its beauty before her lover.

“ Some day we shall possess London.”

“ I will give it you for a wedding gift.”

“ You have given me so much.”

“ But the great thing that you have given me. . . .”

They came to the house, and Nina dismounted. David stooped to kiss her.

“ It has been good,” she said, and stood to watch him as he rode away.



## VIII

BLEST-GANA was furious. He had counted on an elopement.

“What!” he said to David—“what! *you* a hero? Why have you done this thing? Wait? Wait? For what?”

David muttered. The only word that reached Blest-Gana’s ears was “. . . common sense.”

The pianist flung his hands wildly into the air, and strode about the room, giving vent to snorts and growls of indignation. He darted at his trunk—David had come upon him packing—and hurled his belongings in all directions.

“Common sense!” he cried. “What will you do—what can you do—with your common sense . . .? Nothing—nothing at all. . . . What are your great men but men who have none of this—this common sense? . . . But she—*mon Dieu*, but I will take her myself! . . . Common sense!—to leave her here, here in this rotten hole, here in that house. . . . Oh, but . . . but . . . but it is not possible. It is not you! You, the *preux chevalier*; you, the hero of whom I have made the ‘Chanson de geste’! . . . You who can be a child with me and Louis and Maurice. . . . You whom I have loved! You have the eyes to see, the ears to hear, and you will do this thing . . .?”

“After all,” said David, “it is our affair.”

Blest-Gana ignored this.

“Wait?” he cried. “Wait in a thing so wonderful as this? Remember Garibaldi?”

"What did he do—Garibaldi?"

"He saw his Anita. 'Tu devi esser mia,' he said, and they two fled to the forests. That is the way of heroes. But you—you are prudent!"

He sat suddenly on his bed, clapped his hands to his thighs, and sat blinking across at the fallen hero.

"They say always that romance is dead. I have denied it most passionately. Oh, David, almost now you make me believe it!"

"In Garibaldi's day," said David, "there were still corsairs and pirates, fair Circassians, and hot patriots. . . ."

He saw that his flippant tone hurt his friend.

"She would not be happy if she came with me now."

"Well, then, it is the end of the world."

Blest-Gana abandoned his protest, and drew David into praise of Nina. Nothing loath, David expounded her virtues, and set forth their adventures of the woods. He explained also his plans for the future.

"It is the first time in my life," he said, "that I have had plans. It is the first time in my life that I have been dependent on another creature. . . . I like it. Also, it makes me feel that all our talk is rather absurd."

"But"—Blest-Gana wagged his head impressively—"do not forget that without the talk and without the thought you could not have this thing."

"The common lot——" said David.

"This is beyond the common lot."

A feeling of exultation came over David. He strove to compose himself to meet the solemnity in his friend, but could not. He smiled, then grinned, then broke into delighted chuckles.

"If you are not a hero," growled Blest-Gana, turning once more to his packing, "you are certainly mad."

“It is the big wind,” said David, and went away without explanation of the remark.

He wrote to Clara, in Ceylon.

“It has happened, and truly I have begun for the first time to see that life is worth living. Her name is Nina. She is pale, and her hair is of honey colour, but wonderful. Her eyes. . . . Do you know that the most remarkable feature of this young woman is that she does not inspire poetic rhapsody, but something deeper, wider, and altogether beyond that? I never thought it possible that a man should change so quickly, and yet here I am groping after my old self, for in that old self was much that delighted me, much that I am reluctant to lose. She has lived in the vilest air, but is undefiled, and I am sensible of inferiority. I have been arrogant: she has whipped that out of me. I have wished to seem masterful, and how she has mocked that word! . . . I have looked back: she has set me with my face to the sun, and bade me look squarely forward. She has revealed to me the future, endless and glorious, because it is without end. She has brought me into fellowship with the four things which are little upon the earth, but are exceedingly wise—ants, conies, locusts, and the spider. I also am exceeding wise. In short, my dear, it is the big wind, and I am in love, but we are curiously bound up with a sordid tragedy, and cannot break free from it. I would, but she will not. The waiting may be indefinite, but I have such faith in her that I am content and of a light heart, until I think of the utter callousness of the gods, who may snatch her from me, and then I am faint and sick at heart. I have this to torture me now that my perturbed spirit is at rest and my wander-years are at an end. . . . Indeed, it is so. I am tamed. I am to

be led to the fair, which is London, put through my paces, and sold by auction to the highest bidder. We are to live in London, and I am to become a respectable citizen of the Empire on which the sun never sets; and I am to enter into it in company with a long-haired musician who is here, and has become my friend—a romantic baby. I am not sure that you can know him, for he will certainly make love to you.

“Anthony will have heard of the death of my aunt. I only knew her as a child, but she has always been the most fragrant memory to me, linked with all the best that I have known.”

He gave the address in London of the firm of solicitors who had placed themselves in his affairs in communication with Messrs. Beak, Bird, and Betts, and expressed a hope for the joy of bringing Clara and Nina together; then he laid down his pen and fell to musing. It was very hot; there was no stir of wind, no sound of man or beast abroad. On the table in front of him stood a little Tanagra figure, which Blest-Gana carried everywhere with him for a talisman. Through half-closed lids he scanned the graceful lady lazily, and fell to wondering why her hands were covered.

“You are very charming,” he said; and was not at all surprised when the Tanagra lady smiled up at him.

“I have been complimented these three thousand years.”

“Dear me! I should not have thought you to be so old.”

“If you looked at me closely, you would see that my robe had once been a beautiful blue.”

David looked more closely, and indeed it was so.

"I expect you are very unhappy in a modern Colonial town."

"It is much nicer than old Greece."

"I beg your pardon."

"It is much nicer than old Greece."

"*Nice* is hardly the word I should use for a modern Colonial town."

"It is certainly not the word to apply to Greece as I knew it. The philosophers discussed seriously the question whether slaves had souls. Most of the men were slaves."

"I remember once in America hearing a monkey talk. He said: 'It is uncanny how like us these men are!'"

The Tanagra lady looked puzzled.

"I beg your pardon," said David. "That was irrelevant."

"Helen is unhappy," said the Tanagra lady.

"Of Troy?"

"No. Your Helen."

"My Helen? I have no Helen. Helen married."

"She does not for that cease to be your Helen."

"There is Nina. I am Nina's."

"Are you so sure of that?"

David began to feel uncomfortable.

"I am quite sure of it. Helen was never more than a boyish vision. Nina is a woman, flesh and blood, and that is more than you are."

"I am of more enduring stuff than flesh and blood. I also am a vision."

"I am troth-*plight*, promised, betrothed—which-ever word you like best—to Nina."

The Tanagra lady was quite undisturbed by his indignant protest.

"Helen is unhappy."

"I warn you, I can wipe you out of existence by just opening my eyes wide."

"You will be sorry, because you are very anxious to know more about Helen."

"I wish to know nothing more. I know that she is married to a brute. I know that he is unfaithful to her. I know that she clings to the hope that he will come back to her. I know that in her heart of hearts she thinks that he cares for her."

"You know also that in your heart of hearts there is only the golden vision of Helen. Have you forgotten the yew-grove?"

"Yes; I have entirely for . . ."

He did not finish the sentence, and the Tanagra lady smiled sadly. David's heart sank within him, for he saw himself again as a boy, all legs and arms, thin and awkward, striding through the yew-grove, through its glades and dells, crying, "Helen, Helen!" and again "Helen! . . ."

"No," he said—"no; it is not true. Nina is mine. I have said it, and it shall come to pass. You are entirely wrong. It is always a mistake to meddle in other people's affairs of the heart. . . . Surely in your three thousand years you have learned that much wisdom. . . . No. . . . No. . . ."

His head nodded, and he brought himself up with a jerk, to find that he had, in saving himself, swept the Tanagra lady from the table and decapitated her.

He laid head and trunk in a secure place.

"That comes," he said—"that comes of meddling in other people's affairs of the heart."

He read again what he had written to Clara, and was so pleased with his description of Nina as a young woman beyond poetic rhapsody that he contrived to dispel the uneasiness roused in him by the interview

with the Tanagra lady by reading it aloud over and over again.

"I am vowed to her service," he said, and was remorseful that even in a somnolent, fanciful state he should have had one thought away from her.

"Helen and the yew-grove, indeed!" he said. "That, when I have Nina and the woods! . . . Nina!"

With that he addressed and sealed the letter to Clara, viciously thumped a stamp on it, and went to a goldsmith's, where he purchased a ring set with sapphires.

With this in his pocket he sought Nina.

"My stones. How did you know?"

"I am he from whom no secrets are hid."

He then told her of Blest-Gana's displeasure.

"He would have liked a serenade, rope-ladders, and a wild gallop to the stars."

They laughed. David, to ease his conscience, told her then of the broken Tanagra lady. Nina was alarmed.

"Helen is still with you, then?"

"Only the boyish vision of her."

"But . . . but . . . if I cannot. . . ."

Her hands moved helplessly in despair. David came to her.

"Nina, Nina, my Nina . . . why should we wait? . . . Why should we wait? . . . Old Jean is right. . . . 'Tu devi esser mia.' . . . That is true, that is right. . . ."

"My dear, my dear . . . you promised."

"Nina. . . ." He took her by the shoulders, and their eyes met. "Nina . . . I love you."

She bowed her head.

"Nina. . . . You love me?"

She trembled.

Behind them the door opened softly. Mrs. Berriedale appeared, was for withdrawing, then stood, eager, stretched to listen. She made no sound. . . . David's hands closed more tightly on Nina's shoulders.

"Nina, my dear, my love. . . . I am a man who has lived strangely: I have been a seeker for this thing which I have found in you. . . . You hear me?"

Nina raised her head, and her eyes were brimming with tears. Her hands came up, and she laid them on his arms.

"Nina . . . I promised, but my promise is broken. . . ."

"I think she knows," said Nina. "Dear, I think she knows what has come to me. . . . She has been strange and so gentle. . . . I think she understands. . . . Dear David, only the more for that I cannot leave her."

From the woman listening came a little cry.

"Nina . . . if it should be that by my going we lost each other. . . ."

She shook her head, and her lips, pressed together, stifled her cry; but David divined the agony within her. It fired him, and he caught her to him, sought her lips, and she yielded. . . .

The woman stole from the room. The latch of the door clicked.

Nina sprang from him, turned. She said nothing, nor he. Her hands were held out towards him; he turned, took them. They were cold.

"If she heard . . . David . . . if she heard. . . ."

"But if she knows. . . ."

"She has been so strange; I must tell her . . . take you to see her. . . . David dear, she has no other creature. . . ."

"It is beyond argument now. . . . My need of you. . . ."



She was for so long silent that he fell to kissing her hands, and the ring that he had placed upon her finger.

"Man and wife," said David.

"The dear words. . . ." She whispered the words, and whispered them again caressingly, as though she sought comfort in them.

"I must go to her. . . ."

"I will wait."

She left him.

He waited; she did not come. He paced up and down the room; he fell to gazing out of the window. The sun was low in the west, and beyond the garden in the street were carriages and rickshas, women gaily dressed, men clad in white. He remembered the man who had stood by the gate gibing bitterly:

"The house of Rahab. . . ."

In David the echo came:

"Rahab, Rahab the harlot."

Still Nina did not come, and the refrain haunted him: "Rahab, Rahab." He remembered the scene that had taken place in this room, the two men fighting like beasts, and old Brandt, and the story of the woman told him by Kate Driscoll, words of Nina's: "Riches and power. . . . Hatred of men. . . . Her own cleverness. . . . Lost faith even in her own cleverness. . . ." The pity of it seized him, and then more mightily the injustice that such an one should deny to Nina the best.

The house was still. He listened. Far away he heard a long cry. He did not connect the sound with Nina.

It came nearer. Still he thought only that Nina was long in coming.

He passed out of the room to see if there were sign of her. . . .

There she stood on the stairs above him. Her face

was drawn and her lips parted. All her body was rigid. She seemed to stare out and beyond him. She did not move.

David waited for her to speak.

She opened her lips, but they could not frame her words. She thrust out her tongue to moisten her lips. She was brave. She forced out the words, and they came hard, dry, dead.

"I was too late. . . ." She swayed, flung up an arm as if to shield herself, and pitched forward at his feet.

David carried her and laid her on the sofa. He hung over her, chafing her hands.

Presently she opened her eyes, smiled up at him, and then closed them again.

She broke into a storm of weeping, and David strove to bring her comfort.

"Let us go away," she said—"let us go where we can forget. . . . Horrible, horrible, horrible. . . . She lies there. . . . Such an end to it all. . . . If I had known . . . if I had only known. . . ."

"Courage, Nina—courage."

"She had clung to me so much in these last days. . . . She watched me, and cried for me if I left her . . . and she seemed always to be wanting to tell me. . . ."

"Let us not talk of it. . . ."

"What, then? . . ."

"Let us have done what is to be done, and go. . . . Let us go. . . ."

"Oh, David, but what she might have been! . . ."

"My dearest, what we all might have been. . . ."

She was grateful to him for those words, and to spare him she broke free from the horror that was upon her, closed her eyes to the vision that haunted her, and ceased to mourn.

In the succeeding days she was possessed with a demon of energy. She was thin, and her eyes were weary, but in the empty house she gathered her possessions, busily preparing for the day when she should be free to go.

David left her for hardly a moment, and in all things did her such acts of service that she cried out against him.

"It is so easy to perform miracles for you," he said, and devised yet more for her pleasure.

They left their affairs in the hands of Beak, Bird, and Betts, and after a month David and Nina, man and wife, took ship at Cape Town.

As they steamed out of Table Bay they stood looking back at the mountain.

"How much I have lost in Africa," said David, "and how much I have gained!"

"What a pity it is that we could not have a deck cabin," said Nina.

David groaned.

"Detestable woman; you are so practical!"

"Nonsense! Je t'adore. And you shall consider what you have gained and lost to your heart's content."

"That absurd Mortimer is popping in and out of my memory: 'My brother says that the end of it all will be that there will come a new Chaka or Cetewayo to slaughter all the whites, and drive civilization from Africa.'"



## PART III



## I

JEAN BLEST-GANA reconquered London, and the Napoleonic poster spread like a disease over its face. He groaned, and protested that Higgs was overdoing it. Higgs was laconic.

“I don’t interfere with your part of the business; keep your fingers out of mine.”

Realizing the futility of his efforts, Blest-Gana relapsed into severe depression of spirits, from which he sought relief in a visit to the rooms over the undertaker’s shop in Berwick Street which had been his earliest home. On this expedition he was accompanied by Louis.

They lunched at a German restaurant in Regent Street, the especial haunt of musicians, writers, and frugal Bohemians. It had this merit for its *clientèle*—that, though expensive for one, it was cheap for two, since the portion of *Wiener Schnitzel* or of *Kalbsbraten* served for one was ample for two persons.

Louis drank his beer like a little man until his face shone.

“Maurice is not old enough to drink beer, is he?” Blest-Gana did not hear the question. He was scowling at a portrait of himself which hung on the wall by the bar.

He called a waiter.

“Take that away,” he said.

“But. . . .”

“Take it away.”

The waiter summoned his superior, and Blest-Gana

explained his objection. The little Italian bowed and scraped. That a man should desire the removal of the signs of his greatness was incomprehensible. He shrugged, and waved his hands, and paid elaborate compliments.

"But, sir," he said, "you see it is good for us. They see the portrait, and they see you, and they say, 'Ah, we drink beer with the great ones!' and they come again, and hope to drink again beer with the. . . ."

Blest-Gana broke into a torrent of abuse.

"*Mon Dieu!* . . . Take it away."

The Italian bowed to his wrath, and the offending picture was removed; but already the pianist had drawn all eyes to himself, and was the topic of conversation in the place to a degree that would have delighted his agent. Blest-Gana perceived this, and became more and more angry.

Louis waited until the storm had subsided, and returned to his question.

"Maurice is not old enough to drink beer, is he?"

"Nor I."

"I like London."

"I hate it."

"But . . ."

"Louis, since we lost David I have hated the whole world. Come."

Louis drained his beer-mug, and they passed into the street, Blest-Gana saluting this and that acquaintance on his way.

They passed through a courtyard and up a dirty little street, so squalid and mean that Berwick Street, itself no Paradise, was wide and luminous by comparison. The names over the shops were for the most part Jewish, and a butcher's window bore the word "Kosher" and certain Hebraic characters. It



was a street of Levys, Cohens, Hermanns, Solomons, Isaacs, Rosenthals, and Rosensteins, and their offspring—dirty little creatures with eyes like boot-buttons and noses too large for their faces—were playing in the gutters.

“Louis,” said Blest-Gana, “it was so that I played when I was a child—I, Jean Blest-Gana. Nothing is changed. The street is narrower, the houses are taller, but it is the same. The men and women loafing in the doorways, the old women with their wigs, the smells, the shop-windows, are the same. . . .” They stopped by the undertaker’s shop. “This, also, is the same—so much the same that I would swear that nobody has needed a coffin since. . . . I come here always when I am in London.”

Louis had lagged behind to watch an absorbing game of marbles played with blood-alleys by a little German and a little Jew. The little Jew was the more skilled of the two, but whenever he claimed the marbles he had won the little German cuffed him and rolled him in the dust. It was this more than the game that delighted Louis.

“But,” said Blest-Gana, “when they are men the Jew will buy the German.”

“Why?” said Louis, wondering that the Jew should wish to buy anything so uncouth.

“Because,” said Blest-Gana, “the Jews are indeed the chosen of the Lord.”

They passed into the shop. There was little light in it, for the window was blocked with a pile of coffins of all sizes, for giants and for babes. There were brass plates on which the virtues of departed ones were set forth briefly and with a suitable text from the Scriptures; there were metal crosses and wreaths of artificial flowers with silver leaves; there were examples of the silk furniture of the inside of the

most expensive coffins, and black-edged cards intimating the demise of various imaginary personages. All these had their effect on Blest-Gana, who, from lugubrious and morose, had become gay and expansive.

"This," he said to Louis, "is the most useful servant of the public."

"I don't like it," said Louis, fidgeting.

"It is here that I was a child. . . ." From the room behind the shop, dimly lit with a single gas-jet, came blinking a little old man, wrinkled, bent. He came forward rubbing his hands together and smiling. He had an air of sympathy, and he moved on tiptoe. Laying his hand on a coffin, he said in a discreet whisper:

"What can I do for you, sir?" He recognized Blest-Gana, and peered up at him. "Ah! I saw in the papers that you were come back. The room is swept, and all in order. . . ."

He groped in a dark corner for a key. In doing so his head was brought into light, and Louis saw to his horror that it bore not a single hair, that the skin of the old man's face hung loose on his bones, and that his neck was stringy. Louis cried out in astonishment.

"Ah!" said the old man, seeing the boy for the first time, "your son? The grandson of my friend?"

"No, no."

Louis shrank from him.

"Come, my little man," croaked the undertaker. "See. Come and see the largest coffin we have ever made—for a man who weighed twenty stone."

"That indeed is glory."

It was insisted that they should visit this marvel.

"With plumes and cloths, the funeral is to cost

forty-five pounds," said the old man, rubbing his hands together.

"Business is business. Come, Louis."

They left the shop, and went up a creaky narrow stair, dark and perilous. After some fumbling with the key, Blest-Gana threw the door open, and they entered a little room, neat, clean, with old Victorian furniture. Over the fireplace was the portrait of a man like Blest-Gana in face, but harder, and thin almost to emaciation, and in his eyes was a smouldering fire.

"It is my father," said Blest-Gana. "He had too much genius."

On the walls of the room were signed portraits of musicians in costumes strange to Louis's eyes, framed programmes of old operas, and drawings. In one corner was an old piano. Blest-Gana opened this, and Louis saw that the keys were yellow.

The instrument was worn, cracked, and out of tune, but Blest-Gana drew from it rare music. He seemed oblivious of Louis, who, accustomed to the man's strange ways, stood at the window and looked out into the street, where he could see the little German and the little Jew at their game.

The musician came to an end of his playing. He bowed his head over his hands.

"Oh, my father!" he said, "you have said that the world is a fine place, and love the pure essence of it. What have I done with my life, with this little life that you have given me? . . ."

"The Jew's nose is bleeding," said Louis ecstatically.

"To be led around and around the world like a performing bear, held as fast as though I wore a nose-ring, what sort of a life is that? Better to be starved, as you were, than to be stifled. . . ."

"The Jew has sold his marbles to the other boy."

"Here in this room, out of all the world, here only can I find peace. . . ."

Louis turned.

"Why are you talking to yourself?"

"Don't you ever talk to yourself, Louis?"

"I tell stories to myself to make myself laugh."

"I was telling stories to myself to make myself cry."

"How funny! Why?"

"It is good for men to cry."

"Maurice has not been here, has he?"

"No."

"What is that lady?" Louis pointed to a portrait of a lady in a crinoline, with her hair oiled, parted in the middle, and gathered into a net.

"That is my mother. She lived here."

"Does she still live here?"

"No. No one lives here now."

Louis had opened his mouth for another question, when a barrel-organ stopped under the window, and crashed into the refrain of a popular melody. Louis clapped his hands and rushed to the window again.

"My father," said Blest-Gana, "that is the music of these days, . . . I am become almost as vulgar."

He caught the refrain, embroidered it to the utmost pitch of its coarseness and inanity, and then, in burlesque of his own mannerisms, stood bowing to the portrait of his father, while Louis shouted to the children who had come to dance round the barrel-organ.

"Do you like that, Louis?"

"Just bully," said Louis, lapsing into American. "Look at them dancing."

Blest-Gana came to the window. The Italian turning the handle caught sight of him. He flashed

a smile and touched his hat. Louis was given some coppers to throw. For these the Italian's wife came, a baby in her arms, a little brown scrap of humanity.

A splash of colour came into the gloomy street with a man pushing a barrow of oranges.

The dirty little children danced the more wildly, and the Italian ground out the refrain in frenzy. Louis clapped his hands.

"That is life," growled Blest-Gana—"that is life; but it is vulgar—life!"

They groped their way downstairs, and restored the key to the old undertaker, who bowed them out of the shop.

The Italian smiled and smiled upon them, and the woman dandled her baby. It crowed and held out its arms. Blest-Gana pressed a piece of silver into its tiny fist.

"I also, madame," he said—"I also am a musician."

"But, sare," said the woman, "my 'usband 'e is a roadmender, but dere is no employment."

"You will observe, Louis," said Blest-Gana, "that he has taken refuge in the arts."

Louis said nothing. He was weaving the afternoon's adventures into such a form as should make Maurice green with envy. Coffins were not enough for Louis's purpose. He filled them with corpses.

He developed his story so much to his satisfaction that presently he was bursting with it, and ran ahead when they came in sight of the hotel at which they were staying. He raced upstairs and into the sitting-room.

"Maurice, I drank. . . ."

He stopped and gave a shout of joy, for there was David. He leaped on him, hugged and pummelled him.

"I've been drinking beer."

Maurice flung himself on the floor, and burst into tears, and would not be consoled with any blandishment or promise of treats in store.

Upon this scene came Blest-Gana, who, when he saw David, was as wild in his joy as either of the boys had been. He patted David as though he were some sort of prize animal, then took him by the shoulders, shook and held him at arms' length.

"But . . . but . . . it is well with you?"

"Splendid."

"And Nina?"

"Wonderful."

"Where is she, and when did you come, and whence?"

"Yesterday, from Paris. Europe has been unfolded before us for our delight. . . . Nina in Italy! . . ."

"You torture me."

"She was hungering all the while for London."

"There is no understanding a woman."

"None. . . . We are to stay in London."

"And then?"

"I am in Nina's hands."

"She has friends?"

"There have already been clucking women, friends of her student days. I have been exhibited as Nina's husband—no small thing. I came to you for escape. What is there in London?"

"I am in London."

"Your presence is shrieked at every corner."

Blest-Gana groaned.

"London is mad," he said. "There is nothing but politics, for the women are politicians in these days. Even I have been made to address a meeting."

He flung his hands deprecatingly into the air.

"It is the old cry that the world is not inhabited altogether with poets. Let us rather give thanks that they feel as much as they do. . . ."

"Man that is born of woman . . ." said David.

"That," said Blest-Gana, "is what I said to the meeting of women. When we have discovered a better way of propagating our species, then, and not till then, can we begin to be ashamed of Nature's."

David was delighted with this.

"Did they swoon away?"

"Oh no! . . . A singularly unprepossessing female thanked me feverishly for my brave advocacy of free love. . . ."

David remembered the crazy barber at Braydale, and he quoted him.

"I say, give us a governing class that don't want to govern, better than a governing class that can't."

"Where did you hear that?"

"At home, when I was a boy. Odd how a word can fling a man back into a past scene in his life."

"The past is never dead."

"I am going back to meet the past."

"I, too, have been to visit ghosts to-day."

"Your ghosts are in London?"

"Those whose society I most desire to cultivate. . . . The dead and the unborn are alone important."

"That may be a charming fancy," said David, "but it is not true."

"No. . . . Why should it be?"

Blest-Gana called to Maurice, sulking in a corner, and bribed him to show a smiling face. Sixpence was offered first, but was not enough; one shilling, one shilling and sixpence, two shillings, and Maurice smiled.

"He will have no morals."

"I hope he will have no conscience." Maurice seemed to take little interest. His sole anxiety was that the florin should be forthcoming.

When he received it, nothing would suffice but that they should all sally forth to spend it.

"What will you buy?" said David.

"Beer."

They were all prepared for the expedition when Mrs. Higgs came upon them, and, scenting mischief, demanded their purpose. She put her foot down, and rated Blest-Gana for his corruption of her family.

The pianist was helpless in her hands. He made no attempt to excuse himself, but looked ruefully across at David.

"My tail is between my legs," he said. "Let us crawl away."

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Brockman," said Mrs. Higgs. "He has been terribly difficult."

"Come, my friend," said Blest-Gana, "let us go out and smell London—the thick air of the streets and the foul air of the stews. . . . Then let us dine more magnificently than ever, and after count the number of men and women starving. . . . It's a brave sight that, to see huddled men and women, wreckage . . . waste . . . men and women down there by the river. . . . That is fine, too, for it is the river that has made this place rich, and richer than any in the world. . . . Come."

He was excited at the prospect of adventure, and clutched David by the arm. He was at his maddest, and David turned to Mrs. Higgs for approval or disapproval. She laid finger on lips and nodded her head; then she led Louis and Maurice away.

"Come, then. I said that you must see London, you that have the eyes to see. You must smell it, hear the beat of it, the stir, and feel the bosom of the



earth rise and fall beneath the weight of it . . . hear the mad music of it. . . . Ssh!"

He held a finger up, and stood on tiptoe. He beat slowly up and down, and under his spell it seemed to David that he could, indeed, hear dimly mighty tones, a volume of sound, majestic and terrible, but distant, faint, and chaotic. . . .

"It is seething. It is like a foul garment. . . ."

The simile was sickening, and David set his teeth and shook away from his friend.

"Fat rich and wretched poor. Gorged shining beasts, and hungry beasts lean and mangy. . . . Oh, but it is fine! . . ."

He clasped his hands together, and gripped them until they shook, and he stood wagging his head from side to side, his eyes dilated, his lips open, his jaw thrust out.

"Come, then."

Together they left the hotel, an old family establishment in Curzon Street, so old and exclusive that it had almost the close, repelling air of a club, and passed along into the Park.

It was an evening of early June, and there was yet freshness in the air. The first green had not left the trees, and by the Row was a blaze of colour of rich and rare flowers. Ladies drove slowly by in their carriages and motor-cars, some with men by their side, others with dogs. There were men and women, boys and girls, sauntering, passing, and re-passing—men of all sorts, women of all classes—and presently through the throng there came an old man bent and bowed. Long grey hair hung to his shoulders, and upon his chin was a ragged beard. With his thin palsied hands he pushed in front of him the ruin of a child's go cart, on which was a placard bearing the inscription:

"Christ has saved me."

Blest-Gana turned and gazed long after this queer figure, and David watched him. His eyes were troubled, and he seemed to be casting this way and that in his mind. His fingers twitched and he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. He watched the faces of those whom the old man passed. A girl behind him broke into a silly giggle.

On the instant he swung round and glared at her. The girl clung to the arm of her swain, a little scared. She giggled again.

Blest-Gana turned to David.

"I suppose to the girl we are both old—he and I. But I expect the old man is more the slave of habit than I. . . ." He resumed his walk.

"He pushes his go-cart . . . I make music. We both wish for the same end. Queer."

For long enough after this he spoke never a word.

They came to the little pool at the end of the Serpentine, where are a cascade, trim lawns, a rockery, waterfowl, and rabbits. Here they leaned upon the railings and gazed at the place.

"How silly it is!" said David.

"Those rabbits, plumped there at the nation's expense; do they breed, I wonder, or does the nation condemn them to sterility?"

The idea of the citizens of the greatest Empire the world has ever seen busying themselves with the domestic relations of a pair of rabbits tickled David so that he laughed.

"My dear Jean," he said, "the girl was right. You certainly are odd."

"Then I thank God for it. I am what I am."

"And yet," said David, "do you know that I like all this? I mean, even suppose that the nation is concerned with your rabbits, it is just as important

as its concern with the natives in Africa, except that there is no money forthcoming from the rabbits."

"In either case, it is no particular concern of ours."

"Are we concerned with anything but our two selves?"

"I push my go-cart."

"Are you, then, saved?"

"Say, rather, damned. I think we are all damned."

"Rags, and a body, and a scrap of paper," said David.

Blest-Gana stole a glance at him. David was looking away into the distance.

"I was thinking of that too. . . . I was bred in the Catholic faith. It was said that the only man of whom it is certain that he is damned is Judas Iscariot. . . . Poor wretch! . . . There have been many who have sold Christ since for more than thirty pieces of silver . . . myself among them. . . . Blessed is the womb of Mary ever Virgin, that bore the Eternal Father's only Son. Blessed are the breasts that gave milk to Christ the Lord. . . ."

He clutched David's arm.

"David, nothing in this world matters but fruitfulness. There is no other source of happiness. The fruitfulness of the Virgin is the symbol of the highest and best—Mother inviolate: Mother undefiled; and the four last things to be remembered are Death, Judgment, Hell, Heaven. The first thing to be remembered is Life. . . . I beg your pardon. We are at the wrong end of the Park for this sort of thing."

"It is all very much what I have been trying to grasp."

"It is what the old man wishes to tell the world with his old go-cart. It is what the priests do not tell their flocks."

“You are no longer Catholic?”

“No. In France a priest offended me by gabbling through Vespers. At intervals he spat on the floor of the church. But—but—it is impossible to express a religion.”

With that he cast off the serious puzzling mood, and stood posturing to catch the eyes of the passers-by. He was delighted when a pretty nurse smiled coyly at him, and David remembered the first moment of his meeting with this man, and the offensive words that had fallen from his lips.

Blest-Gana was gay, and preened himself. Indeed, he was a remarkable object, with his long hair floating out from under his slouch hat, his flowing tie of black satin, his velvet coat and Quartier Latin peg-top trousers. He had rings on his fingers, and carried in his hand an ebony cane, surmounted with a large gold knob. He carried gloves, cinnamon coloured, and dandled them as he walked, swept them through the air to point his jests and witticisms. He talked unceasingly as they passed by the Serpentine westward towards the bridge. On the grass slopes lay ragged men—some face downwards, flattened to the earth, others resting on their elbows and gazing blankly out over the water. Some were smoking.

One of the filthiest and most unkempt of them rose languidly to his feet and slouched to intercept them.

He touched his hat and stood appraising the two men. Eventually he pitched on David as the likelier for his purpose. He snuffled, shifted to draw attention to his boots, through which his feet, swathed in white calico, protruded.

“Beg pardon, gov’nor,” he said in a whining voice. “You don’t ’appen to ’ave a bit ’o bread abaht yer?”

David expressed regret.

“If you could give me a bit o’ bacca . . .”

David produced his pouch, and shook a handful of tobacco into the grimy palm outstretched. The man blinked, and filled a foul clay pipe. David struck a match and gave it him.

The man drew, and breathed the smoke out again.

“Ah!” he said. “Lord love a duck! that’s all I want. . . . Go’ bless ye.”

He shuffled away, fell upon the grass, and lay prone.

David and Blest-Gana crossed the bridge and set their faces east. Blest-Gana was in a state of profound dejection. He plunged his hand into his pocket and brought up a handful of gold.

“‘What shall I render to the Lord for all he hath rendered unto me? I will take the Chalice of Salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. . . .’ Watch!”

He ran down to the water, and sent one sovereign after another skimming over the surface, to disappear in the depths.

## II

THERE was great to-do in the Brockman family when it was known that David, married and apparently—from the hotel at which he was staying in London—opulent, was returned to England, and likely at any moment to descend upon them.

His letter was passed from hand to hand, read and reread.

It reached them at an unhappy moment, for Nicholas had set the crown on a wild youth by taking unto himself as wife a girl engaged to play the part of Singing Fairy in the local pantomime.

Accustomed to conquer by sheer swagger, the hapless youth had been piqued by the girl's adroit evasion of any direct encounter, had pursued, and finally been caught. She played him skilfully for a time, then whipped him up and landed him.

In dread of his stepmother, Nicholas had contrived to keep the marriage secret, and for this his bride set herself to make him wish that he had never been born, played on his jealousy to keep him enslaved, and swallowed all and more than he had. He borrowed right and left, and found himself delivered into the hands of moneylenders. Finally, when hard pressed, having asked his wife to sell some jewel that he had given her in the days of courtship, and she having declined abruptly and with words of violent abuse, he slapped her face and flung away from her, vowing that she might starve before he would ever come to her again. He was gone from the house before she had realized the calamity that she had

brought on herself. Then, in desolation of spirit, she collapsed, and for a day and night she wept tears of repentance. In the gentleness of exhaustion she wrote long letters of self-reproach—four a day—implored his forgiveness, and set out her intention to mend her folly and be to him a worthy wife.

Nicholas, smouldering with the heat of injured vanity, and possibly with the realization of the ass he had made of himself, and the mess he had produced in his affairs, burned the letters unopened. He became haggard and ill, but to all inquiries vouchsafed no reply, save, gruffly, that he was worried and overworked, and that he was beginning to think that the air of Braydale did not suit him.

He sought the old palliative of wild nights with boon companions. Like his father before him, he sought cure in the excitements of London; but his condition for that became only the more lamentable. Like his father, also, he said, "I'm—I'm so rotten!" and strove to grapple with the problem of himself, but floundered deeper and deeper into the mire.

One thing he gained from his agony—the consciousness of being fouled and dirty; but for that, in rank injustice, he blamed the woman, and saw her for more common, mean, and worthless than indeed she was. He developed a sort of conscience, and did penance in torturing himself with it. By the fulness of sham repentance and the bitterness of faked remorse, he contrived to justify his past conduct, and won to some sort of self-approbation. This brought him to the need of confession, and for confessor he pitched upon Helen, for she, if any, would be able to understand the unique character of the trouble which had come upon him.

Helen received him graciously, and expressed regret that her father was not at home. That Nicholas

had come to see herself did not occur to her, for his awkwardness with women was notorious. He sat where his father had sat on the momentous evening of his consultation with Dr. Crosby.

"I came to see you," said Nicholas, drooping, and not daring to look at her.

He looked vacantly at the bust of Napoleon on the bookcase, rubbed his hands together, sighed.

"You may have noticed, Helen," he said—"I don't know if you have noticed that I am not like other men of my age?"

"Indeed, Nicholas, no."

This was ambiguous. The young fool took it to confirm his own view of himself, and, with the confidence it gave him, plunged into his narrative. He glossed over his early acquaintance with the lady, and quite cleverly distorted facts to cast a chivalrous light on his own conduct.

"I have spared nothing, neither myself, nor money, nor—nor anything, to make her happy . . . and, you see, I am ill with it."

"And she . . .?"

Nicholas was taken aback. His thought was only for himself, and that Helen's should be for the woman was so much outside his calculations that he was almost shocked. He looked up at her, but she was gazing down sadly and wistfully. He thrust out his foot, and as she marked the vivid hue of his purple sock a mocking expression crossed her face.

He plunged ahead as though she had said nothing. He described the final scene, and worked himself into such a passion of spite, vindictiveness, and hatred against the woman that he set the whole affair vividly before Helen: the vulgar, garish room in the lodging-house in which she lived; the *déshabille* in which in the late afternoon he had found her; the mocking



words she had flung at him; the words in which he had set forth the bare facts of his plight—request, command, objugation; the quarrel, and the final rupture.

He brought his hand down on his knee.

“I left her,” he said.

Nicholas rose and paced about the room; he folded his arms, and gulped down the indignation and excitement that his narrative had aroused in him.

“You see—you see how terribly easy it is for a man to—to—make a mess of his life? . . . Yes, yes; it is horrible. . . . Cruel. . . . You see, you see. . . .”

“I see only the woman. . . .”

Nicholas turned. His little eyes blazed fury; his hands went up and beat the air.

“I—I—I . . .” he stammered. “You—you—you. . . . What—what am I to do? It’s so—so difficult.”

“Where is she now?”

“I—I don’t know. I don’t know.”

“You must tell me. . . . How long is it? . . .”

“Six—seven weeks.”

“What do you want me to do?”

Nicholas stuttered more on this.

“I—I don’t know. What is there to do? You sit there so calmly. You sit there so——”

“Has she relations . . . friends?”

“None that I know of.”

“No one to whom she can turn? You have been cruel, Nicholas.”

“By God! I. . . .”

He broke into violent protest, and recounted all that he had given, and all the pleasure that he had provided for the woman.

“How old is she?” asked Helen.

“Nineteen.”

“Oh! . . . The poor child! . . . Have you no thought for her?”

The question was lost upon Nicholas, nursing his wrath and battering against the wall that rose in front of him. He saw himself hemmed in by monstrous shapes, leering and menacing, threatening destruction. He was pale and afraid. He turned the eyes of despair upon Helen, then collapsed, and sat crouched and huddled. He was in a pitiable state, and Helen, though she had but small fondness for the man, sought to comfort him, and, in comforting, to bring him to some sort of understanding.

“Nicholas,” she said, coming to stand above him, and to lay a hand on his shoulder, “women are so foolish, and men so blind, and so—and so—there is misery in the world—and, living as we do in this place, where we never see the sun, when sorrow comes it is all the harder to bear. But it is queer how, stifled, starved, cramped, imprisoned as we are, we yet have courage, and almost welcome disaster as bringing to us a scene of greatness and breadth. The—the knowledge that we are men and women. . . . Do you understand?”

“You help a fellow.”

“I am glad. . . . It is only a little time since I had to wrestle and fight, to find some spark of truth by which to live, some light in the darkness of utter misery. My father gave it me . . . and it was not till then that I grasped fully the meaning of what he had told me ever since I was a child—sense of life, and the knowledge that to be a man or to be a woman is glorious, and in itself enough. When I came back to my father, and it seemed that everything was lost to me, I found the true strength of his words. . . . But, Nicholas, we need to be so clever to be human

and to understand, and so often those men who are called clever are the most cruel . . . and oh! that sort of cruelty is so much more shattering than what is only stupidity. . . . There is so much to say, and I do not know how to say it. We women ask for love, and you give us folly, or worse. We ask for tenderness, and you give us only a small place in your lives—even the best of you. We ask that we may help you, and you are fearful that we wish to usurp your place and privilege. . . . Woman is a helpmeet, and we ask no more. That, least of all, will you let us be to you. We accept. . . .”

She shook her head, and with a sad little smile said again:

“Women are so foolish, and men so blind.”

“What am I to do?” said Nicholas; and with that Helen turned from him, knowing that what she had said had fallen upon deaf ears.

“I cannot help you. You still think only of yourself.”

This was denied with indignation and protestation of thought for his family and the good name of all concerned with him. Nicholas further declared the purity of his devotion to his wife until it had been shown that she was unworthy of his so great love. He was so earnest in this, and seemed so genuinely moved by the contemplation of his own magnanimity, that Helen was hard put to it not to laugh outright at him. From this humiliation his woebegone appearance saved him.

“I’ve made a fool of myself,” he said. “It all seemed so easy, and then it all became so difficult. I’m not the first fool in the world. If my father . . . if my father . . . it has been so queer since . . . I don’t know . . . since David went. . . .”

“David?”

"You were fond of David. I don't know; there was no peace in the house ever. Always getting on and getting on, and how they quarrelled! . . . That, and living in this smoky hole. . . . A fellow has to find some sort of life somewhere. . . . But a woman can't understand that. . . ."

This was too much for Helen. She laughed.

Nicholas writhed.

"Yes. It is a thing to laugh at. . . ."

"Oh, Nicholas!"

"All of us in the stew one after another. Audrey's finely placed, isn't she? Heh? And I . . . and—and. . . ."

He remained gasping and looking up at Helen. The laughter died in her.

"And—and—you!" he said.

She caught her breath.

Nicholas seemed to be making an effort to think. He beat with one finger in the air. His lips opened, and worked to speak. At length he pronounced these words:

"We were children, and we are men and women . . . and David's out of it all. Oh, lucky devil, lucky devil!"

Helen covered her face with her hands.

"Nicholas, Nicholas! I want you to go back to her; be kind to her, and make her what you would have her be. If she loves you, there is nothing that she cannot be to you. . . ."

"But . . . but . . . my father. . . ."

"You must tell your father."

"I cannot. I have never been able to tell my father anything. I do not know what manner of man he is. Audrey does not know, and I . . ."

"There is nothing else to be done."

She argued with him, made him see the hopeless-

ness of his position, and that there was no other conceivable issue from it.

In the end he said:

“I’ve been like a man tortured in prison.”

He kissed her hand and left her, tears of gladness in her eyes for that she had been of use to him.

Armed with the new courage she had given him, Nicholas sought his wife, made his peace with her, and announced what it was that he would do. She was humbled, and fed his vanity with an adoration which he had never before won from her. A new light came upon the two of them, and they entered into a region unknown. They were, as they had never been, lovers.

Helen visited them, and rejoiced to see them so happy, but the girl was after a time moody, and, finally, seizing the moment when Nicholas had left them, burst into tears, and confessed that she had betrayed her husband; had in the first wild anguish after the quarrel flung out and away to the house of the Brockmans, and had announced herself as the wife of Nicholas.

She had been received by Mrs. Brockman, who sat, terrifying, plying her needles, stern and unbending as the picture that hung over her head—“Faithful unto Death.”

“What did she say?” asked Helen.

“Nothing. Her lips moved in and out, and she said nothing.”

“And nothing since to Nicholas?”

“He has said nothing to me; and I am so fearful.” The poor creature wailed. “But if—but if . . . if it should be that she is hard, and if it should be that Nicho turned from me again. . . .”

“No—no—no,” said Helen; and though all that she had known and herself had suffered rose to mock

her words, she vowed bravely that such a thing was impossible, unthinkable, past contemplation, and, indeed, a most rare happening.

At the very moment of her saying it Mrs. Brockman had broached the subject to Henry, after turning it over and over in her mind for many days, to find where lay the sharpest sting in it.

She had a manner that Henry knew and dreaded—a certain trick of taking up her needles and jabbing with them fiercely. Then a deep furrow appeared in her brow above her nose, through which she breathed heavily, and her lips worked in and out. Her eyelids blinked, and occasionally with her needle she scratched her head. Her lips worked in and out, and she gobbled. Her eyes flashed, then blinked again.

She was clad in her customary gown of black, adorned with blue facings and beads of brass.

Henry was for stealing away, but she jabbed with her needle in the direction of the red velvet chair opposite her, and said abruptly:

“Sit down.”

Henry blushed, and his neck under his ears reddened and swelled. He rattled the money in his pocket, and played with the watch-chain which adorned his paunch—for in ten years Henry had grown stout, gross almost, and in some subtle fashion he had come to bear in face a vague yet unmistakable resemblance to his wife.

“I . . . I . . .” He stammered, realized that any sort of prevarication were worse than useless, and, on an ominous click from the needles, sat down heavily, and cast about for what it might be that had now roused her displeasure. For some moments she was silent. Henry loathed and feared her silence, for it was more cutting and more sharp than any

words that she might use. She was for so long silent now, clicking, blinking, gobbling, that at length he could endure it no longer, and broke into a discussion of affairs at a new hotel which he had just opened at Blackpool.

"It will draw the five shillings a night people," he said. "Not much competition to face. . . . All the clubs and small shopkeepers . . . the midday dinner, meat-tea, and supper sort of people. . . ."

The thread of his words snapped, for he found a steely eye fixed upon him. He shifted and fidgeted, and yet more furiously rattled the money in his pocket. He gaped up at the ceiling, and then said suddenly:

"It is very hot."

The needles clicked more viciously than ever. He stared blankly in front of him, then returned from the weather to his original topic.

"I did what you suggested about having a bar off the entrance-hall."

Mrs. Brockman gobbled.

"Nicholas," she said—"Nicholas is married."

"Good God!"

"To a dolly-mop kiss-me-quick-and-run."

Mrs. Brockman rolled out this remarkable description of her stepdaughter-in-law with hissing emphasis. Her back stiffened, and her nose wrinkled as though she were suddenly aware of an offensive smell.

Henry had leaped to his feet.

"When?" he said. "When? Where? And where is he?"

"They married for a lark, scratched each other, and he left her . . ."

"Good God!"

"She came here, and was announced—if you please—as Mrs. Nicholas. . . . She tried all her tricks—

giggled, ogled, prattled, sighed, tittered, talked, chattered, wept. . . . Not a bit o' use with me. I said nothing."

"No," said Henry.

"The place reeked after she had gone—reeked."

"Dear me!" said Henry innocently, and rather fatuously.

"You know what of. . . ."

The spite of this remark altogether silenced Henry.

"Is—is that all?" he said, after some hesitation, and shifting about from one foot to the other.

"The man's a fool," said Mrs. Brockman, clicking, and Henry, accustomed to the remark, accepted it without protest.

"Nice lot o' children," she continued—"nice lot o' children. . . . One daft, and roaming loose over the world, doing no good to himself or to anybody else; one married to a reach-me-down; and Nicholas taking up with a walk-the-streets-at-night."

She gobbled furiously.

"And John—John's nearly as daft as ever David was over them there wrong-side-o'-the-blanket lovers of yours. . . ."

Henry resigned himself. Once on this subject, there was no end to his wife's eloquence and power of vituperation. On this night she surpassed herself. She waxed shriller and more shrill, and, heaping abuse upon all the Brockmans living and dead, came at length to Margaret. She flicked Henry on the raw, and flicked again, until her venom became intolerable.

"Will you cease?" he cried. "You never were fit to breathe the same air with her."

"Ay"—the needles clicked—"the dead are always saints."

"It was an ill day that you came to my house."



“Who picked you up, and set you making money? Who gave you this fine house, and made you chairman of this, that and the other thing?”

Henry was livid. He did not object to being called a fool, but any suggestion that he was other than the builder of his own fortunes roused fury in him.

“Will you cease? . . . Hold your clacking tongue!”

She clacked only the more, and dragged up from the past this, that, and the other offence against herself.

Henry stormed.

“Don’t shout!” she said. “The servants will hear you.”

He railed upon her, but might as well have spoken to the wall, so unshakable was she. All that he had from her was a contemptuous sniff.

In the end he said:

“I believe that I am lower now than ever I was then.”

“Ay. You with your women.”

Henry spun round and gaped at her. She was impassive and inscrutable.

“It always was a difficulty with you,” she said, “to make you keep to the business in hand.”

With that she rang for a servant, who, when she came, was sent in search of the luckless Nicholas.

The young man, flushed with his newly-won happiness, came swaggering. He stood by the door, hands in pockets, slouching, and grinned pleasantly.

Without looking at him, his stepmother said:

“I’ve seen your draggie-tail. Why did you marry her? . . . FOOL!”

All the swagger oozed from Nicholas, and he sat plump on the nearest chair, gasping and groping.

Mrs. Brockman screwed up her eyelids, and peered first at him, then at her husband.

"A pair of you," she said; and Henry thanked his gods that the purport of the remark was lost upon his son.

"Well," said Nicholas—"well—are you going to kick me out?"

Mrs. Brockman opened her mouth to speak, Nicholas recognized the expression on her face, and brought his flat hand down on the table in front of him.

"You will speak no ill of her," he said; and, to his surprise, and more to Henry's, Mrs. Brockman was silenced.

Nicholas jumped to the advantage he had gained, and, turning to his father, began a more or less honest and accurate confession—it is doubtful if ever prodigal has given the full tale of his indebtedness—set forth his financial embarrassment, and some, not all, of the follies which had brought him to this pass. Having thus nailed his colours to the mast, he declared his intention of standing by his wife in all circumstances. In short, Nicholas saw himself in a heroic light, and did, in fact, behave rather well. He had mentally rehearsed this scene with his father and stepmother over and over again, and had always seen himself as the hero bearing up against blustering and brow-beating. In truth, the matter was so simple and so entirely without any of the unpleasant complications which he had foreseen that he was disappointed, although at the same time immensely relieved.

None the less, Mrs. Brockman had her sting for him. When it had been arranged that he should be promoted to a more responsible and lucrative position,

he was told that he might bring his wife to supper on the following Sunday.

“After all,” said Mrs. Brockman, taking up her knitting again—she had laid it down while she made a calculation—“after all, she can’t be any worse than Audrey’s reach-me-down.”

Nicholas fumed, but, catching a warning glance from his father, was silenced. Rather awkwardly he expressed gratitude, and declared that, of course, as a married man, he would in future live a blameless life, and be in all things not as other young men.

He was really in earnest, and succeeded in moving his father considerably. Like two honest men who have come through a fearful trial, or like wrestlers after a bout, they shook hands, and in that action each said to the other: “After all, you are not a bad sort of fellow.”

It was at this moment of happy issue from Nicholas’s afflictions that David’s letter arrived.

Once more Henry said, “Good God!”

### III

By some extraordinary process which David never quite understood, Nina obtained the coveted house in Swan Walk. He enjoyed London so much that he postponed time and again his visit to his family.

London with Nina was one thing—entrancing, bewitching, softening, and chastening; London with Blest-Gana was stirring, exciting, exalting, wild; London with neither was food for melancholy. With Nina it seemed that all was right, that the poor no less than the rich were happy, and that great houses, slums, and suburbs were alike the scenes of unending poetic drama. With Blest-Gana the city at night took on a hellish aspect, and though the face of it all was admirable and compelling, yet on all sides was the most damnable cruelty. There were sights to rend the soul of man, and make him say, "This truly is God-forgotten," and yet there was a certain delight in the horrible. Blest-Gana worshipped such things.

"Life at its rottenest, at its most corrupt, at its most debasing and debased, but still life stirring and striving upward, upward, my David—that is magnificent and always worshipful."

In this mood he delighted in the abnormal. He talked for a whole of one evening about the extraordinary beauty of a loathsome, shambling half-wit whom they had found trundling a barrow of bananas in the shadow of the Bethlehem Hospital, and it was his constant lament that the once-foul region of Seven Dials had been opened up and robbed of its villainous

charm. He frequented police-courts and the Old Bailey, not from any morbid love of sensation, but because it seemed to give him a sense, very dear to him, of the depths to which human kind can descend.

“You cannot know the heights unless you know also the depths.”

That a man should be a thief, a perjurer, a liar, a forger, an adulterer, a murderer, covetous, or blasphemous, was to him less dreadful than that he should stand by borrowed virtues and a faked morality, smugly larded with his own satisfaction.

“Such men,” he said to David, as they prowled in the squalor of the Harrow Road—“such men are of all the most cruel; such men will set their own dignity, their own honour—rot the word—their own puffiness and self-esteem before the happiness of any other creature; such men cannot love, cannot be generous. They know not truth, and fudge the facts of life to justify their own cruelty. ‘Not I,’ they say, ‘but the world is cruel,’ and so without scruple, without one thought, they shatter, crush, and numb. It was from such cruelty as this that I found the secret of the world. . . .”

He took David’s arm.

“Love, David. I was in love, and still there is in it the power to torture me. . . . It is pitiful to love like that—never to have peace, never to feel the strength that love should bring, knowing that it is to hand, but out of reach; never to feel the joy in all things that love should bring; never to wake but to the heavy knowledge of long hours to come of twisting, turning, thinking on no thought, but driving, driving into a state of nothing, a stupor, through which the world and all that it has of splendid and true are seen but dimly and remotely, as in a vision; never truly to feel the sun and his warmth; never in

the holiest presence of the beloved to be face to face with love. . . . Oh, David, that there should be such rottenness in men and women, that cowardice should make them lower than the brutes, and they should cling in terror to their brutishness. . . . Better to be damned than to live so, than to cry 'Love,' and plunge into cramping folly. . . ."

David was back in the woods with Nina, seeing the crazy man come crying out upon the rottenness of women.

He could say nothing. What was there to be said? To suffer, and only the more for that to know the goodness of the world, only the more to be alive to the sights and sounds of it, was, indeed, to be a man, and he was glad of his friend. He cast back over his own experience, to find in it nothing comparable with this, and now, more than ever before, he felt, as always he had felt with Blest-Gana, a curious dwarfing, an almost painful sensation of ignorance and inexperience. There was comfort in it, too. He counted himself happy. That Blest-Gana never was, but always seemed to be listening and watching for something outside and beyond the moment. . . .

"Jean," he said, "there is so much that I cannot see."

"All of us are blind, and those of us who peer through the darkness are damned in the beginning, for the veil is impenetrable, and because we dream, common things lose their savour."

He stayed in ecstasy over a frowsy girl staggering, jug in hand, to the pot-house at the corner. As she reached it a man lunged out and dashed the jug from her hand, and after him flew a woman, screaming and spitting. She caught him and clawed his cheek with her nails. They fought, and presently a policeman rounded the corner and took the man into

custody. The woman turned the stream of her abuse upon the constable. . . .

“Fine,” said Blest-Gana.

David had been repelled by the low fury of the scene.

“That,” said Blest-Gana—“that is marriage.”

They pursued their way out into the region of Maida Vale until they came to a little grey house almost hidden behind trees.

“It was here that she lived. I said to you once, David, that there is no other source of happiness than fruitfulness. Sterility breeds tragedies—the sterility of the spirit. Sterile, sterile, sterile. . . . In a woman it is pitiful, but in a man the most devastating force. Evil is born in sterility of spirit, and by their very cruelty such men win power, for kindness is to them only waste of themselves. . . . Waste of themselves, they who are the earth’s waste.”

He plunged then into praise of the woman. Most beautiful she was, soft, tender; but by the waste of herself upon the devastating man, warped, and with her vision of the world clouded and obscured. She was made for warmth, colour, brightness, happiness, the joy of children—a creature of the sun and of the air, bright, gay, bird-like in her grace and lightness. Never was such music as the soft notes in her voice, and the earth cried out against the waste of her.

The woman shone in the passionate words, and again by his friend David felt himself dwarfed. Such a woman, and such a lover! The story was not told to him, neither the beginning nor the end, but that it had been a mighty and a splendid thing was clear, and David was awed, and could not speak in answer to the bitter words:

“These men and their lies, and their worship of the lies in themselves.”

David knew that he was in the presence of the mightiest, of more even than had been revealed to himself, and for some moments he was sick at heart.

Words flew, bitter and more bitter, and Blest-Ganà strode savagely, fists clenched, and at moments lunging out.

For long they walked in silence, David hugging this new great thing to himself, rejoicing in the illumination that it brought. It kindled all his life, and set it glowing, brought to his mind the proud games of chivalry; gave life to the romantic story of Mary Andrew and St. Justin; showed the pure stream of it through his mother taken into the dark places of his childhood in Braydale, then to be lost; set clearly forth the purpose of his flight, and years of wandering through the world, the encounter with Nina; and showed the be-all and end-all of existence, inevitable. He was exalted in the new strength and sureness of footing that the revelation brought to him. Fruitfulness! That word shone, pure gold. Upward from it were the glorious things of the world—love, kindness, generosity, truth, charity, and hope; downward from it meanness, envy, malice, cruelty, uncharitableness, and despair. . . . It shone starry before him. . . .

“I find the world almost intolerably beautiful,” he said.

“If we could make it so for all. . . .”

They passed through mean streets and dreadful places, saw horrors to confirm the most outrageous pessimist in his gloom, and yet by nothing was either shaken in his faith.

David had come by a religion.

The germ of it had been sown in Africa with the discovery of the lonely man on the veld; love had warmed him for it; friendship and the tragedy of his



friend brought full knowledge of its growth, and the towering height to which it might reach.

Something of this he managed to convey to Blest-Gana as they stood by the river watching where the flashing lights smote the swollen tide to gold.

“To the making of a man there is needed most a religion. . . . Without this he is nothing.”

Blest-Gana threw his arm around David's shoulder and hugged him.

“And with it surely he is no great thing.”

Behind them, huddled on a seat, the wreck of a woman stirred, shivered, stirred again, and the life died out of her. Two men also were on the seat—one asleep, one picking crusts from a bag of refuse that he had. Neither gave heed to the woman, and in the friends seeing her there was no thought but that she was asleep.

## IV

FOR some days after he began his religion David was a sore trial to his wife. Accustomed as she was to have him gay, light-hearted, and even at times irritatingly irresponsible, Nina was alarmed that he should be so mood-stricken.

There had never been any shadow between them, and here she found him watching her with strange eyes, silent, puzzling, solemn. He relaxed in none of his attentions to her, but was curiously and sorrowfully aloof. He was turned in upon himself as she had never known him to be, and in her pride and joy in their life in London, in the house which she had made so delightful an abiding place for the two of them, she found this new thing difficult to bear. He did not seem to her unhappy, but rather happier and more content, and she was very properly jealous that he should find a source of goodness in the world outside herself. Often she had resented his long absences with Blest-Gana, and was now thankful, though she loved the man, that the pianist had come to an end of his English engagements, and was returning to the Continent. A true woman, she had come to dislike the idealist in David, to be distrustful of his enthusiasms, and she made little attempt to understand them. She had loved them because by them he was marked out from other men, but, once embarked upon life with him, she set herself to make him a little more like the rest. A husband who could not be fitted into the social machine was not in her scheme. Therefore, she took great pains with his dress, and her first

anxiety upon their arrival in London had been that he should visit a tailor who knew his business, and from the most unpromising material could turn out a man who—for a time, at least—should not offend against fashion.

For herself, she had flown to old friends and demanded of them what she must wear to be in the mode, and there had been such a buying and choosing, such a bargaining and consulting, as for days together had robbed David of his spouse. The result of this had been that he had been driven to seek Blest-Gana and the excitement of crazy wanderings, and moved in even more disreputable circles, while Nina, seeking this and that old friend, was swept into polite and mildly artistic society.

Her friends, to whom her sudden disappearance had been a mystery, a wonder of nine days, and then forgotten, had, on her return, scented romance, and, hearing that she had come from the unknown husbanded, were all agape and thirsty for the history of it all. There was great chatter.

“Who is he?”

“Brockman . . . David Brockman. Never heard of him or any of the name.”

“No? . . . What is he?”

“Nothing, or one of those African people. You know what they are, or, rather, you never know.”

“It is really very queer. She was such a sweet girl. But they say he is quite a nice man. Have they money?”

That was the vital, the absorbing question. Nina's actions, her dress, and her house seemed to satisfy it, and tongues wagged concerning Nina's mother.

“Of course, they say. . . . But then things in the Colonies are so different—I mean so much easier. You may meet a murderer at dinner any day.”

“That may also happen in London. You never know. . . . They seem to have money, and she is very beautiful, and Mr. Brockman has wonderful eyes . . . and they know Jean Blest-Gana.”

Their acquaintance with such a celebrity set the seal on the acceptability of David and Nina with the wives of barristers, journalists, writers, painters, musicians, among whom Nina found her friends. And when it was found that she was prepared to adopt the manners, customs, and prejudices of the little tribe, and to enter with them into the absorbing game of exploitation, all doubts were cast aside, and the whispering of romance gave only an added glamour to the pair. Nina took to the game as a duck to water, and set herself to study and master the methods of her sisters.

They were busied with the blowing out of the glory of their husbands. Well, then, she set her teeth, and vowed that her man should be the most glorious of them all, for among these others she could find none to equal David. This man could be labelled lawyer, this artist, this actor, this journalist, and all were set in grooves, broken in to the various limits of their calling. But for David, what label could there be found? She said of him, as he had said of himself, though she knew it not, that he was not as other men are. David was just a man, and, more wonderful than that, her man, so large and strong that he might take whatever he would just for the holding out of his hand. So he had taken her, and so, she doubted not, he would grip the best in London, in all England, and be that one of whom all should say, “This is a man.” In Africa at the time of their wooing she had vowed that it should come to pass, and when he had teased her, had sworn to cry it from the house-tops, casting modesty to the winds. She had made

so sure that it should be, that almost upon their setting foot upon Dover Pier she had looked to see the great ones of the land come forth to hail him conqueror. None had come, but she had swallowed that disappointment easily enough, and laughed at her inflated dreams.

So in London she had set herself to take the great world—the world of fine people and controlling men—and hold it by the throat until it should gasp the words she longed to hear. She plunged, then watched, and soon she knew what movements were alive and the men of whom there was beginning to be talk; took pains to meet them, and marked the true men from the false, those who had sought and made the talk from those who had risen by the buoyancy of fineness in their nature.

In her own world of music she quickly took up again the threads, won some fame as a singer, and set that as a step for David's climbing. All that she had—beauty, charm, and talent—she builded for his ascent, only to find that he would not climb, but watched quizzically what she was at; allowed himself to be led into polite circles, where it was found that he was charming and altogether worthy of such a wife, but then plunged again into the group of shiftless, heedless men to whom Blest-Gana had introduced him in the first days. They were all scatterbrains, and he loved them: men of talent, most of them, and spendthrift of it—living from hand to mouth here and there, lending when they had, borrowing when they had not; generous and free, almost, even in the matter of wives, communistic. David lent freely to all of them, and had them all quickly at his feet. He asked none of them to his house, but kept them as a life apart, rarely talked of it; but, when he was stifled with the close air of the little drawing-rooms and

the too charming studios to which Nina led him, returned to these men, and came back refreshed. Of this Nina could not complain, for she was glad that he should not be as the other men—"confined between his hat and his boots"—but should find where-soever he might that which should feed his largeness. To her David was so large that it could seem no wonder if he picked all the city up and held it in his hand, or with one noble gesture razed it. Distress came to her because he seemed disposed to accomplish neither of these wonders, and in neither circle to oust any champion from his eminence. That he should be supreme among the little men of the half-world was no food for her desires, for in that world nothing was done—nothing which was marked, nothing which could set tongues babbling, and rouse the buzz of admiration. Chatter might be won from it, but chatter of David was for Nina unthinkable, and not to be endured. David was glorious, and the glory of him must be known and shared; for Nina knew this for true: that what is most dearly loved must be shared, if only to make wider the lover's power of loving.

Things had come to this pass: that she had all prepared, the way cleared for his march to the goal she saw for him, but found that David would not budge. He watched the struggle among Nina's friends—the grabbing and snatching at power, the hustling and bustling for it, the jealousy and the shrill chitter-chatter of the women, as now this, now that, man broke and won fresh ground, and he made sport of it all. When he was wearied of it, he plunged among those friends who had no thought of struggle, or lower still, where was the sterner, finer, and more bitter fight for bread. Everywhere he sought for the human quality, for that which raised men and

women out of and above the machine in which they whirled. As in old days out in the world, men and women worn, cramped, and fighting against the forces that hemmed them in, came to him for comfort. Always in their tales and complaints was proof and confirmation of the thought to which all his experience had driven him, that all peace and happiness hang from what men choose to make of women.

Stories were told to him that brought him almost to despair, so pitiful were they in their revelation of the crassness of men and the foolishness of women—the dear foolishness of women, so soft and gentle in their bolstering of men, in their worship of the lies in themselves.

“These men and their lies, and their worship of the lies in themselves.”

So Blest-Gana had said, and to David now each new experience, each tale of misery, brought fresh proof that herein was touched the heart of the trouble. Men will swagger, and women are so fond to take pride in their crowning; and for the good that issued from the dear pretence, all that could be asked was, How did it weigh with the ill? Further, if there were freedom and no chains in mating, would there be needed such pretence? Would not still each woman think her man more mighty than all others, and would not each man still swell and glow, cluck and grow fat under the pretence? And again, further, would there ever be equal mating? Could it, indeed, be that there should ever be a man the equal of his woman in their love?

To that last question came the ringing “No.” “The power of women,” thought David, watching Nina, “is in their forgetfulness of self, in their full giving of themselves. What man can give himself utterly? And yet—and yet, if men could be made to

see, could be made to surrender as completely and as wholly as women have ever done, would there not then be an end to all this wretched chafing, all the waste, and all the withering of love? If men could be got to give themselves as simply, purely, and with such sweet honesty of purpose as women have ever done, would not then the truth spring forth blazing, good triumph over evil, and light over the powers of darkness? Would not then the world be a very paradise, free once more?"

David had been much exercised with the doctrine of original sin, and the lies that it had spread. He had striven to be done with it, to master it, but to follow the thread of its influence and devastating effect had been too baffling. He could achieve no more than this:

"There is no virtue but it is also a vice. Chastity also is often a hideous and cruel vice."

He reached out to take his pipe and pouch of tobacco from the little table by his chair—it had been one of Nina's first purchases for the house—and, looking up, found Nina sitting staring at him with great eyes. There was that in her face that shocked him, shattered all the complacency of his groping after wisdom. She was puzzled, and her eyes were probing; she seemed to be hurt, and chafing against the hurt. For him it was as though there were a stabbing and a tearing in his heart. The pipe fell from his hand and clattered to the hearth.

So they sat there staring at each other, the mind of each leaping to the other, only to fall back hurt and bruised. Her hand went up to her bosom, and the white fingers tugged at the chain she wore round her neck—the first gift that David had made her after their marriage-day. Down went her hand again and



plucked at the stuff of her gown—man and woman wondering at the mystery of each other.

Absurdly there flashed into David's mind the scene on the veld, Blest-Gana, the two boys and himself sitting round the fire, and the story:

“He bade her wear a veil, and she obeyed him. He bade her keep to the house while he was away, and she obeyed him. . . . In the end he forgot that she was very beautiful . . . and he killed her.”

Gazing at Nina now, he knew that she was very beautiful, that he had not forgotten this, nor anything of all that they had had—not the first meeting, nor the first love-words, nor the moments of wonder, nor the sweet voice of Nina through the first glory of it all saying:

“Before it was so much, but now . . .”

That was nearly a year ago. Nothing could alter that. It remained, and would remain, the topmost leaping of life's flame. . . . There had been that and the thousand moments of tenderness, all the sweets of closest meeting of spirits in union; there had been the dearest comradeship and completest human fellowship; there had been delicious quarrels and the more delightful repairing of the breach; there had been gusty irritations and fond accusations; there had been always the steady meeting of eyes in the most boundless love, asking more and more of the true gold.

And now . . . and now, eyes met steadily enough, but in each was the question, “What are you?” In neither was there fear, in neither was there doubt; but in each was agony from this cutting edge of the inquiring spirit. To David it seemed that he saw Nina for the first time clearly as a thing separate and even remote from himself; to Nina it seemed that she saw David as a thing removed—far removed

—from herself, grown mountainous, too large for her embrace; David, who had been to her as a little child, held in her arms. He was vague, misty, but still David—most wonderfully her David.

She stirred a little and moved towards him; almost imperceptibly her hand moved out towards him. She moved into the sunlight streaming through the window, through the old lime-tree in their garden, and under the golden light for the first time David saw her clearly—saw the beauty of her face, the wide brow, and the clear eyes under the brow, the soft eyes, the tender red mouth, the lips now parted, the teeth so white, and over all the pale hair, honey-coloured, that was so sweet and soft to the fingers. He saw the pure line of her neck, the brave line of her shoulders, her arms, and her hands now held out towards him. Soft she was, and so beautiful: woman, and his! The brute rose in him—the sheer savage desire to hurt. He leaned towards her, to hold her gaze, then, with eyes staring into hers, he stooped, picked up his pipe, filled, lit, and sank back into his chair.

Agony in her would not be controlled. A cry leaped from her:

“David!”

Already the hurt had recoiled upon himself, but for that he was only the more helpless. There was a weight upon him, and he could not move, could not stir even a finger to help her, nor comfort. He could not take back what he had done, nor could he grasp the nature of it, so subtle was it and intangible. His own words, all that he had been thinking and trying to grasp, rose to mock him. Blest-Gana's love, too. There was torment in that. He saw again his friend in his passion of remorse and fury for the waste of the woman and of himself; and the mocking thing in David, the damnable spirit of cruelty that was in

him, cried out: "Ay, but most for the waste of himself." In the saying of it David came to the bitter knowledge that in one moment he had betrayed both his wife and his friend, and his teeth closed on the stem of his pipe and bit through it.

Nina came to him.

"Oh, David, David, my dear—my very dear! What is it? What have I done?"

He held her for a moment, caressed her, and smoothed away the hurt in her; but it was gone, and all thought of it, so soon as she perceived the bitterness in him.

"I don't know, Nina . . . I don't know."

"What is it, then? Not I?"

"No—not you."

"Why, then, it can be nothing. For if I do not hurt you, what other hurt can matter?"

"I don't know . . . I don't know. . . . It is simply that I do not understand. . . ."

"Then no one can understand."

"That is truth."

"David, we have everything . . . everything."

"It is a world of knaves and fools and cowards, and I have shown myself more knavish, foolish, cowardly, than all of them."

"But how, David—but how? I love you." She held to it, and would not let him go until he could laugh at himself, and even then she followed him with the eyes of fear as he strode to the window and looked up into the lime-tree at a fat pigeon drowsing on a branch. He took a nut and shied it at the bird, hitting it on the head. It cocked a red, reproachful eye at him. He whistled up at it, striving to make a note that it could understand. He was unsuccessful, and succeeded only in driving the bird away.

"It is all curiously linked with Mrs. Spencer," he

said. "And I can't drive her from my mind—her nor my father. She stands for something that I don't understand. Worlds removed stands my mother. . . . The upward and downward movement; the vision of the world and the real; the thing seen and the thing done; those who know and those whose chief pride is their ignorance. . . ."

Nina came and clasped her hands about his shoulder. Even at his most ponderous her David was adorable.

"Oh, but . . ." she said—"but, if you would do something," and was then fearful of her audacity. For a moment that seemed an age to her David's face was blank, stern and set, and he looked out, and seemed to see nothing. She watched, and still there was no change in him. The shoulder under her hands trembled.

Then he laughed, she, too, her silver notes chiming through his great shout as he flung his head back.

He swept her from her feet, held and hugged her.

"Woman, woman, wicked, audacious woman! you snuff out man and reason with your finger and thumb."

He kissed finger and thumb, then set her down again.

"Come," he said; "I have yet to give you London for your wedding-gift."

So Nina won her David to her will. She had him by leading-strings. The half-world—the world of borrowers and lenders—knew him no more, and since it is needful for a man to have some label, David, for his much knowledge of the world and the dark places of it, was dubbed "Explorer." And among men and women constitutionally incapable of leaving England behind them in their travels abroad he became an authority on all sorts of foreign and colonial questions. When it was discovered that he had begun life as a common sailor before the mast, he was a figure more

than ever clothed in romance. In time it came to pass that he could hardly open his lips without "Romantic" greeting him, and when in protest he declared that nothing in his experience was one half so romantic as modern London, he was greeted with the still more irritating "Paradox."

"Of course," said an earnest woman to him one night at a dinner-party—"of course, coming new to it from the killing of lions, or was it tigers . . .?"

"Women," said David gruffly; and the earnest woman looked arch, then continued:

"Tigers . . . you cannot see it all. I know that foreigners are at first appalled, then fascinated, by the greyness of it."

"It is so queer to see the sun like a red lamp, hanging."

"Ah! but you cannot see, cannot appreciate, until you have the statistics, the hopeless misery that underlies the glitter and pomp. . . ." She paused to let this phrase sink home, and to look round the table to see how many others were eager to catch her words.

"Fat rich and wretched poor."

"I seem to have heard that before," said David.

"Ah! you hear it on all sides. The country is at last awakening to the awful condition of its affairs. Public penury, private ostentation."

"Is that necessarily worse than public ostentation and private penury?"

"Ah!"—the gloomy lady sighed—"that shows that you have no understanding of the problem, or you could not laugh."

"Organize the Theatre." This came from a yearning woman on the other side of the table placed near Nina.

At once they were plunged into a general discus-

sion of the province of the Theatre in the life of the community. The yearning woman, having drawn attention to herself, took full advantage of it, and aired cranky theories, according to which it seemed that the theatre should be a sort of cathedral, to which only chosen souls were to be admitted. For these plays were to be written and performed which they, and only they, could understand, and thus the country, even the world, was to be reformed. Plays dealing with sex, otherwise than from the point of view of a police-court reporter, were to be taboo, and only urgent sociological problems to be discussed—strikes, labour exchanges, trade unions, religious education, solitary confinement. . . .

“I would suggest,” said David, “that an excellent drama might be written upon the subject of the rinderpest.”

“Of course,” said the yearning lady, “any problem of colonization should be discussed.”

Now, it happened that there was an actor at the table, who, during the harangue and the discussion, had been growing more and more angry, fidgeting and muttering to himself. At length he could endure it no longer.

“I am an actor,” he said. “I say that this discussion business is all very well, but it is not drama. I have acted in your discussion plays, and I know that it is all wrong. What happens? I come on the stage; I have the audience by the throat—because I’m an actor, and know my trade—and the first words I have to say are all wrong, so that I lose grip, and have to spend the rest of my time struggling to regain it. I am left floundering about with a mess of words that have no dramatic significance, because the dramatist imagines the world to be agape to know what he thinks”—he fixed an eyeglass and glared at the

yearning lady—"of the rinderpest, or the true art of toasting cheese, or the establishment of gin-shops on the Embankment, or any of the topics that they froth about in these days of sentimental socialism. . . . I'm a Tory. . . ."

He flung himself back in his chair, and rolled his head from side to side, puffing and muttering, while through his eyeglass he glared fixedly at the yearning woman, as though she were the original enemy and temptress of mankind. She, in her turn, looked scornfully in his direction. In a low though perfectly audible voice, and at her most acid, she said:

"It is curious how unintellectual all actors are. For some actresses there is hope."

The actor swung about in his chair. He was heard to mutter:

"Let them try to manage a theatre—just for a week. That is all I ask. Let them try it."

"Is everything wrong in England?" asked Nina in mischievous innocence.

"Everything," said David's neighbour. "We are hypocrites, Pharisees, sentimentalists, vain-glorious, Sabbatarians, hysterical, money-grubbing, sordid, mean, dishonest, filibustering. . . . We use words that have lost their meaning; we foster old institutions that have lost their efficacy; we permit of a feudal tenure of land without feudal service for it. We have no art, no literature, no music, no culture, no leisure. . . . We are moribund."

This last word came with a ring of ghoulish glee, and the yearning woman yearned the more.

From the head of the table came a quiet voice, saying:

"It is so easy to abuse."

The actor applauded, and the malcontents eyed each other uneasily.

“Nothing is sacred to them,” said the actor—“nothing. They wish to slaughter shams? Very well, then: that is right—that is laudable; but it is necessary first to know the real from the sham, and, in their passion for slaughter, these men—and women—go for the real as though that were a sham. All reformers are blind.”

“Indeed, yes,” came the quiet voice; “for if they were not blind, they would not be reformers. It is a good blindness, that of the intoxication of prejudice. What do you think, Mr. Brockman?”

David, who had been watching his neighbour with delight in her exasperation, startled to find himself addressed by name, looked up, and, under the steady eyes that sought him, could not for some moments speak. The eyes were set under a high brow, round which was clustered soft grey hair. The face was quiet, clever, and bore the marks of brave suffering. In the moments while he was gathering the thread of the discussion, and pursuing it to the point when it should fire his imagination, he thought of all that he knew of this woman, who had shown herself so good a friend to Nina, both in old days and now under the new order—Mrs. Sacret. She was a woman without marked talent, save that for friendship, but she was known as the helper of the weak, and the champion of the romantically distressed. It was said of her that, if she had no children, she had made ample amends to society by the number of happy marriages she had brought about by her skilled handling of elopements. She was also invariably kind to scallywags and ne'er-do-wells.

Now she compelled silence, and, by the turning of her own attention upon David, forced that of all her guests to him.



“What do you think, Mr. Brockman?” Even the actor ceased to think of himself and the number of years that he had been upon the stage.

Nina was anxious. It was right that David should so be the central figure, right that all should wait for the moment when he should speak. She watched him narrowly, anxiously, and it seemed so long before words came. She wondered why he should never take his eyes from Mrs. Sacret. She saw a dancing light come into his eyes, then die again. She looked round at the faces, all turned to watch David; then back she came to him and Mrs. Sacret. His eyes met hers, and smiled.

“Both sides are here. Is there more to be said?”

There was relief expressed in the face of his neighbour, who had brought the argument about their ears. Mrs. Sacret marked it, and only the more urged David to enlarge upon them, and rallied him upon his recalcitrance.

“Your silence is very impressive; but, believe me, Mr. Brockman, it will not last long. I have known a number of reputations built upon a stern and intellectual silence. Many have been shattered at the first word. . . .”

Nina trembled, until David laughed.

“And if the first word shatters? . . .”

“Pooh! you are romantic. No one has yet considered you interesting. Now is your opportunity.”

“The Theatre,” said the yearning woman, “is the pulpit of the world, the voice and the machine of peoples.”

“But,” said David, “the Theatre must remain the Theatre. If you must preach in it, then your sermon must be dramatic.”

“Just what I say!” said the actor. “They deny

art. Just what I say! Dramatic! Breaking away from convention is one thing; breaking away from art is another."

David then borrowed frankly from Blest-Gana and what he had said during their walks abroad.

"As for educating the public, it cannot be accomplished through the intellect, for it has no intellect."

"Good heavens!" The yearning woman threw up her hands in despair, and roused David to warmth.

"It is true," he said; "we share nothing but the universal and the fundamental—the first elemental human things. We must build upon those, or we build in vain. From what I have seen, all your clever people are so anxious to avoid the commonplace that they sweep these very first things into the category, and hardly consider them at all. All that links one man to another they shun in this curious terror, bred of self-consciousness. They must all the while be persuading themselves of their own cleverness, and talk glibly of abolishing institutions, property, marriage, and the family. Am I right?"

He looked towards Mrs. Sacret for confirmation. She nodded.

"They talk of these things without ever considering seriously what they are, how built, and how sprung, and from what original needs. My own view is—I give it for what it may be worth"—the yearning woman folded her arms to convey her estimation of the value of what might be forthcoming—"my own view is that we must go back always to these first things to be able to understand anything at all, and certainly to be able to appreciate another's point of view. There is no going straight from one point to another. It is a matter of going down and up again. It is, to me, a matter of feeling just as much as of thinking—of feeling more than of think-

ing. Well, in the Theatre, that is what you are trying to do—to make points of view intelligible, to reveal the springs of conduct, to win sympathy, and so to breed understanding and the right sort of intelligence. Dogma cannot do that; that is why the Churches have failed. Everybody with the desire for illumination is turning towards the Theatre; everybody in London has his or her pet scheme for reclaiming the Theatre from the grasp of commercialism. . . .”

“I have twenty schemes,” said Mrs. Sacret. —

“Well, then, make it a place for the breeding of sympathy, not a sort of undergraduate discussion society. Show the infinite capacity of human nature, and, above all, that men are men and women women, and that neither can hope to be anything finer than that. Why, what does it help to show the meannesses and selfishnesses? We are all capable of the worst and of the best, but from too many the best is hidden. Here you have a machine to show the finest, to throw light upon dark places, and, from all that I have seen, all that is done is to exhibit the drab, dull, sordid, mean in our life as we must live it; and because the stage must heighten and enlarge, these things are shown as more hopeless, inevitable, and joy-killing than in truth they are. Deliberately to set to work to make people think is to breed misconception, error, and to make confusion worse confounded; but to make them feel and fully to grasp the guiding principles of the world and of life, to make them see the dividing-line between good and evil, between light and darkness, right and wrong, is truly evangelists’ work: it is to breed thought. The poets are the evangelists. . . .”

He had his hearers all attention. He paused and looked round to mark the effect of what he had said;

then, seeing the flush and gladness in Nina, he plunged again :

“ I mean that—that we cannot set back time. We cannot ignore history and all that has been. We cannot decide that the world would be a very splendid place without this, that, and the other element in our nature to which we think we can trace the source of all our evils. We cannot cease to be men and women ; we cannot begin again upon new lines, simply because what makes life worth living are the forces which are greater than ourselves, and of their nature we know nothing at all. We do not know their purpose ; we do not know their origin—neither whence they are sprung nor whither they are tending. We have only the present and the little moment of our lives, splendid only when they are linked with the past which we cannot sound, and with the future which we cannot see. We have that given to us which alone can bring us this fulness of quality and sense of purpose ; and while there remains to us so much that is splendid yet unexplored in this world of ours, it is shameful foolishness to gird at what we have, or, as has been for too long taught, to sacrifice anything that there is in this world for the sake of such a future as we can imagine. . . . If your Theatre, if any art, can teach men and women to be human, it is enough. And—and I do not think I have said anything which was not already said five thousand years ago. Let that be my excuse.”

There was complete silence as he finished. He made the mistake of breaking it with some irrelevant reminiscence. Mrs. Sacret was at once alive to his blunder, and saved the situation by rising to give the ladies the signal to leave the gentlemen to their wine and tobacco.

Success or not, the other women contrived to send

Nina away radiant and rejoicing—the depths in David had been sounded, brave things brought to light—what they had said of him—“Simple,” “Honest,” “No other man could without affectation have said such things.”

The yearning woman, holding fast to her idols, had, indeed, hinted at pose; but Mrs. Sacret had flouted her, and, turning to Nina, asked for the tale of David's life, whence he had sprung, and how he had come by what he had of truth.

“He must have suffered.”

“He has starved,” said Nina.

“It is something to have met him,” said Mrs. Sacret. “But it is difficult to see what place he can take in the world. He should be doing something hopelessly unpractical—be writing impossible, unpublishable works, or conducting clubs for working-men in the slums. If he could write!”

She turned a little vindictively upon her yearning friend.

“But his hair is quite distressingly short!”

With that she took to exhibiting the latest of her treasures, and would say no more; but already Nina had enough, and more than enough. What she most desired had been brought about so suddenly as almost to be beyond belief: just the beginning of it, but, once begun, who could tell where it should end?

Over their port the actor was already suggesting to David that he should write a play, in which the star part should be made to say what David had said. The scenario had been sketched as far as the second act, and delighted David as he perceived how grotesquely all that he had tried to express was distorted to the making of an heroically “fat” part for the actor.

“Then, when Sir Dominick has perceived the in-

fidelity of his wife, in the third act he brings about a dramatic meeting between the lover and the wife. He forgives, and then he might say all that about not knowing much of the past and the future. By Jove, sir, that would get them, that would!"

When David told Nina about it later, he said:

"These actors must be happy, for, like no others, they are convinced that what they are doing is the most worth while of anything in the world."

NICHOLAS was the first of the family to meet David after his return to England. Having won through the difficulty of the announcement of his marriage, his courage failed him, and he left his financial quandary unconfessed.

His father presented him with a house and furniture, and Nicholas was settled with his wife, now tamed, docile, and almost irritating in her excellent intentions. His creditors came about his ears. He dared not turn to his father after his unexpected and unwonted generosity, and, fortunately, though he was sorely tempted to issue a bill of sale on the furniture as the easiest way out, he had the sense to see that this was only to leap from one shaky foothold in the bog to another.

Twisting and turning, he came at length to the idea that David might help, for, though no definite news had reached them of his condition, yet there had filtered to them a vague knowledge that David and Nina were living in some state, and moving in rare company, and certainly, whatever else might be, there was the money of the old lady of Bardon. In any case, there was no prospect of help from any other quarter.

Upon the first announcement that David would come to visit his family, there had been great preparations, and a fatted calf had been slain. The family foregathered—Nicholas and his bride, Audrey and her James. Henry prepared a speech of generous welcome in his best City Council manner, and his

wife added a piece of lace to her usually austere garb. They made valiant efforts to be cheerful, and to create a comfortable atmosphere. Mrs. Brockman quite distressed Mrs. Nicholas with the politeness of her attentions (she had already reduced the young woman to despair by her firm ordering of the new household), and was even gracious with the luckless James, a lean, romantic-looking young man, whom hard times had reduced to extremity and abjectness.

He had never been allowed to forget that he was indebted to his father-in-law for all that he had, and for the bare livelihood of himself, his wife, and their two weakly children. A place had been found for him in the general counting-house of the catering business when, through no fault of his own, other than constitutional incompetence and unfitness, he had been cast out neck and crop from the small position that he held in the cotton trade. It had been necessary for him to understand the causes of the fluctuations in the price of cotton, and this had been altogether beyond his capacity, so that, when some greedy financier in New York had inflated the price and dislocated the machinery of the business in South Lancashire, and economy had become necessary, James had been pitched on as the most obviously dispensable stone in the fabric. He had been met by Mrs. Brockman with stony silence and an infuriated click of the needles, and nothing had induced her to relent until the arrival of the second born, when she melted, and set him on his feet again. The spirit was crushed out of him—he was of true Braydale stock, dried and withered from the earliest hours—and always in his rare visits to the Brockman house slunk and hung aloof in corners, and never ventured upon a remark unless it were forced upon him. Mrs. Brockman had both James and Audrey screwed down



to the right pitch of submissiveness, so that they dared conceal nothing from her, or, if they dared, so persistently avoided her that presently, scenting defiance, she would don her most formidable bonnet—that wherein jet spangled feathers swung and bobbed—descend upon them, and, by adroit cross-examination, extort what thing it was concealed, and leave them more completely abased than before.

With Nicholas, as a bachelor, she was indulgent. It was part of her theory that men are beasts, and therefore there was no call to interfere with anything that he might do, so only that it were not so flagrant as to cause open scandal or the throwing of mud at the name of Brockman. When, however, he was married, and to such a wife, she set herself to scotching all that there had been in her view of wanton in the relation of the pair of them by keying them down also to the true note of respectability. There had been terrible scenes when his pretty fool had come crying to Nicholas, declaring that the tyranny was no longer to be endured, and that in her own house she must be allowed to have some things arranged after her own fashion. Nicholas had at first sided with her, and with a wretched little swagger had hinted as boldly as he dared that his stepmother's attentions were not altogether welcome. This had been met with a glare and a sniff, and the indomitable woman had passed over him and his objections like a great wave rolling over and engulfing a castle of sand. Without the support of Nicholas, the poor child had been unable to resist, and she, too, and all her life were delivered up to the controlling presence.

Mrs. Brockman's boots were symbolical to this little fluffy mind of all that was most hard and crushing. They were of kid, thin-soled, so as to be worn indoors and out. They were elastic-sided, and before

and behind a tag stuck out. They were square-toed. This species of boot, so she learned, was known to the world as the "Jemima." They exercised a horrible fascination upon Mrs. Nicholas, and the creaking of them as their owner walked haunted her ears.

There was not much happiness for the pair of them, but then happiness was not in the philosophy of Mrs. Henry Brockman. She was convinced of the rectitude of her own mode of living—that which she adopted when she had come to know her husband through and through and to love him not at all—and also of the iniquity of all others. Almost in a missionary spirit she set about the regeneration of her immediate world by bringing all the lives within her reach under her control. For peace she let Henry go his way, but thought only the more, and, whenever possible, had him writhing under the contempt which she let him see that she had for him. She would not bend to new influences, but moulded all that came to conformity with the rigid and inexorable principles which she had evolved in the long years of musing over her knitting. By what process she arrived at these it is impossible to divine, for she was incapable of clear thought. She was blind to every point of view not her own, and if she realized qualities in others not in her own nature, set them down for wickedness, light and vain things.

Knowing the weakness of her husband, and his absolute reliance upon herself, she had come in time to confuse that refinement which had once brought her to fondness with the weakness in him, and hated it, as she hated everything that she imagined to have come to him from his old life. What she knew of the Andrew story she had dismissed as rotten, corrupt, and immoral, and the source of all the wicked-

ness and folly in her stepchildren, and it was in part to whip these offending qualities from them that she imposed so severe a discipline upon them.

Upon one occasion, coming upon the boy John in his rites of worship of the shades of St. Justin and Andrew, and reading of the old books that had bred such madness in the erring David, she had taken and burned all the treasures that had been brought from Bardon. She had found the boy poring over an old letter. This she had snatched from him and read, and as she read her lips came tighter together and her face grew more livid.

“Poisonous,” she said, but kept the letter until an evening came when Henry was at home. Then she brought the offending document from her pocket, and without prelude or forewarning read aloud:

“MY VERY DEAR,

“There is wonder in it still, and what we have is all the goodness in the world. The herons and all the birds in mating-time will know, and all that countryside will always be for me Mary-country, from the pinewoods to the sea. . . . Oh, if I could find words for it all, only to make you glad again as you were in the beginning, and help you to forget the foolish hours of misery and torture that I have brought to you; to make you remember always the best, the shining truth of the world, joy, and all good things! To see so clearly—there must be happiness in that, and strength for you and for me. You have said to me in the last written words I had from you, “Hold me close to you.” That I will do. Always, always I am at your call, ready to come hotfoot. Mary, all that she has, and has made—these should be sung with no piping voice, but gloriously and with a great shout.

I only pray that I may be large enough to sing your praise. . . .’”

She read in a dull, dead voice, so that the words sounded grotesque. Henry gaped at her, wondering what she might be at. He was puzzled, and his memory was touched. He was straining after something that he had forgotten, and yet because he could not grasp what thing it was, he listened as though in a dream while she droned on, nothing to lend colour to the sounds she made but spite, and to that she gave full play.

“‘In praise of Mary. Why, there is ringing music in those words, calling up sights, scents, sounds, colour, hills and valleys, trees and rare water. . . . Gallant. That’s the word, and there are more and more crowding in, all eager, little words and great words tumbling over each other, pell-mell, helter-skelter, rushing, running, crying out, “I am here to serve in praise of Mary.” . . . I am glad of you—glad, glad, glad, glad of you whom I must not love. Why, that is neither here nor there. What is there can stay it, or ever come between, save only weakness in our two selves? There are you and here am I—great people, towering over the pigmy race . . .’”

Mrs. Brockman snorted, then continued:

“‘. . . Pigmy race, hands clasped high in the air above them. They come, prick us, and sting. It is nothing. Brush the flies away. . . . Is this madness? Then show me one sane who has half this treasure. Show me a sane man. He is craven, shaking in his shoes, dried, withered, cramped, starved, cold, shrill, peevish, blinking with night-clouded eyes that know not the sun, watching always his neighbour to

see that he advances no foot farther forward than himself, and, for upward movement, leaping sunward—why, he turns sick and dizzy at the thought of it. Give me a world of glorious madmen. Mary, there is courage in me again. Glorious sun, a glade in woods, woods on a hill, our hill, and on the summit stand you, dazzling. . . . By God, I can laugh! Laugh, too, Mary. So, then, nothing is lost, and the world wags busily for our delight. The words come trippingly again, and the melody and the music from which they come—Mary-music, more pure, more sweet, more all-possessing and expressing than ever before. . . .”

Mrs. Brockman folded the letter and held it far in front of her with delicate finger and thumb; then she dropped it into the fire.

“That,” she said—“that is what your son has been reading. . . . Disgusting. . . .”

The blasphemy and sacrilege of this performance revolted Henry, who astonished her by leaving her without a word. All the same, she was well satisfied with herself, and watched the paper curl up, glow, burst into flame, and, charred, float up the chimney, with an intense complacency, as though in the burning she had destroyed all the evil in the world.

The reading of the letter acted curiously and unexpectedly upon Henry in making him less sensitive and more impervious to his wife’s barbs, and thereafter she must lash herself to vixenish fury if she were to rouse him at all.

In John, the burning of it and the confiscation of his treasures bred an unutterable hatred and detestation of the woman. Whenever he was from school, she set herself to the task of redeeming his wretched little tainted soul.

In spite of all these difficulties, and of the rousing of so much irritation against herself, she yet contrived to maintain her position as the hub and centre of the little group which surrounded her. Her operations were extended through the chapel, which she devoutly attended, outside the family, but these excursions only affected them in so far as they afforded momentary relief.

Henry knew that without her the fabric they had built must topple and fall, and therefore never made show of open revolt. Neither son nor daughter dared to move against her. John showed defiance upon occasion, but, being inarticulate, she could squash him flat, and bring him to angry tears by telling him the most awful tales of the wickedness of David. In his rebellious mood the boy was encouraged by his brother and sister, who afforded counteraction against the woman's tales of David by showing the hero in most splendid light—all the story of the robber-bands, the butcher-boy, and the other mighty deeds, was set before him.

So they were gathered for the coming of David in the ugly and uncomfortable drawing-room which was Mrs. Brockman's chief delight. She called it parlour, and for the working days of the week the furniture in it was shrouded in dust-sheets. On Sundays and great days such as the present, or for the reception of any distinguished visitor, such as the minister, it was unveiled, and revealed in all its wonderful ugliness of mahogany and cretonne, of antimacassars and wax fruit, of glass gaseliers, mirrors, and everlasting grasses, of innumerable china ornaments, of crude oil-paintings, whose merit in Mrs. Brockman's eyes lay in the fact that they were hand-painted. The room was unerringly arranged to suit the taste that demanded such things. Everything in

it was right, though everything in it was cryingly wrong. In this it exactly reflected its mistress, and as she was completely and unshakably satisfied with herself, so she was fully and immutably content with her parlour, and blind to any jarring effect that it might have upon her visitors.

James, on his entry, made directly for the most obscure corner of the room, and would not budge. Mrs. Brockman sat by the fire with her knitting. Henry stood toasting his coat-tails, while Nicholas and Audrey and Mrs. Nicholas sat funereally mute.

"I wonder," said Audrey, "if he will bring his wife."

"I wonder," said Nicholas, by way of airing his humour, "if she is black."

Henry cleared his throat.

"Of course," he said, "we let bygones be bygones."

Mrs. Brockman grunted.

"I mean," he explained, "that we make no reference to his long neglect of us all. After all, it is not as though he had come back to ask anything of us."

"It is queer," said Nicholas, "how like John is to David sometimes."

"What is his wife's name?" This was from Audrey.

"Nina; and beyond that he says nothing."

Nicholas again became jocular.

"Perhaps she was someone else's wife."

Mrs. Brockman glared at him until he was confused and blushing.

"Will you kindly remember where you are?"

"I beg your pardon," he said; and they were silent again, all looking at the clock with the exception of Mrs. Nicholas, who never for a moment had taken her eyes from Mrs. Brockman's boots.

Henry took out his watch, and compared its showing with that of the clock.

"He should be here by now," he said, "if he is coming."

"Shall you take him into the business, father?" said Audrey.

"No." This came like the popping of a cork from Mrs. Brockman, and effectively stopped that line of communication.

"But . . ." said Henry.

"What was not good enough for him then will certainly not be good enough for him now."

"No—o—o——" said Henry.

"Do you suppose he will come to live in Braydale?" asked Mrs. Nicholas, more from a desire to make some remark than from any wish for information. Nicholas turned on her.

"Now do you suppose any man in his senses would come to live in such a place without some obligation?"

"What is wrong with it?" said Mrs. Brockman, putting away her knitting. "I have lived here all my life, and I see nothing wrong with the place."

This time Nicholas refused to be squashed.

"Wrong? Everything. It is dirty, it is dark, it is squalid, its climate is foul, its streets are a disgrace to any self-respecting town; the air is thick and poisonous; some people will make money in it, and the rest starve. Will David come to live in it? . . . My goodness! . . ."

His harangue was cut short by the arrival of a telegram from David to say that an indisposition of Nina's made it impossible for him to come. This was read aloud, and they all faced each other blankly.

Mrs. Brockman took up her knitting again, and almost without a word the party broke up.



This fiasco bore fruit in Nicholas by filling his mind with thoughts of David, which in the upshot sent him upon some flimsy excuse to London, while he recommended his wife to the care of Helen, who throughout had shown herself a staunch friend. To her, after the capitulation of her husband, Mrs. Nicholas had turned for courage to face the tyranny of the Jemimas; and, grateful for this seeking of fellowship in herself, Helen had brought the child to a greater realization of wifely privilege and power.

In London, Nicholas first succumbed to the temptation to indulge in the light and easily procured pleasures of the place, but found, rather to his dismay, that his young delight in them was gone, and that, in truth, they were not a little mean, and unworthy of a man. In this new spirit he took a savage joy in passing by the lawless acquaintance of earlier days.

He sought his brother at the hotel named in his first letter, and was there given the address in Swan Walk. Thither he repaired, clad as he was in tweeds, and, to his horror, was shown into a room full of wonderful and fashionable women, all more beautiful than anything he had ever conceived or dared to imagine. He was announced:

“Mr. Nicholas Brockman”; and the most beautiful of them all, clad dazzlingly in white and mauve, came to greet him. Nicholas stood rooted, confused and blushing; he bowed and stammered.

Nina led him, and introduced him, to this and that great lady. He wished to escape, but longed also to stay, and to be able freely to breathe this fine air. The scent of the women intoxicated him, and the scent of the lime-tree coming through the open window, filling all the room.

“Braydale and—this: smoke and sun——”

To have in a town a green tree so close to your

window—a green tree with cheeping birds—this was to Nicholas nothing short of a miracle; and that it should be linked up with David altogether incredible, for, after all, David was his brother. Bred together they had been, and here was a house more delightful than any he had ever known, a room more charming than any he had ever seen, filled with bright silver, charming things, old things, sunlight and fragrant scents; bewildering women and men, whose smoothness and well-groomed ease roused him to envious anger. That all this should belong to David, his brother, was beyond belief.

He stood there gaping, and not hearing the comfortable words that Nina spoke to him. She had him soon sitting by her, gave him to eat and to drink, and leaving that guest who had most engrossed her attention, gave herself to the task of setting him at his ease.

He asked news of David. She gave a glowing account, and declared her sorrow that he should not have fulfilled his promise to visit them.

“It was my foolish fault at first,” she said, “and then David became lazy, and, also, there was so much to do.”

Nicholas could not take his eyes from her face, and in the end she smiled at him, and so set him in a flutter that he dropped his teaspoon, then, bending to reach it, toppled cup and saucer, and stained Nina’s gown with tea.

Nicholas was for instant flight, but she comforted him, and the mishap had this of good for him, that it broke up the party, and one lady having gone, another followed, and so all.

Alone with Nina, when she had changed her gown, Nicholas gleaned further news of David, and more and more devoutly worshipped at Nina’s shrine.

Without one word of questioning from her, he plunged into confession, and revealed the woeful state of his affairs, each word, though he was little aware of it, casting light for Nina upon that from which David had escaped.

When he had come to the end of his narrative, and won from her the sympathy for which he craved, she asked for news of Helen, and in her praise Nicholas waxed warm.

"But she has been unhappy, too," he said, "and is not half so beautiful as she promised to be. Where did David find you?"

"We met in Africa."

"And what will he do?"

"We are waiting. You will stay with us?"

"I . . . I . . . I am here for only so short a time."

She persuaded him that David's brother could only stay in David's house, and then showed him all the rooms, the treasures they had brought from Africa, and those that had come from Bardonia, whither they had lately been to take possession of the little white house with the green door.

In the bedchamber hung the portrait of Margaret, David's mother, which had been so great a joy to him when he had stayed in the little house for the first time.

"We are so glad to have it," said Nina. Nicholas stood gazing at the girlish face.

"I had forgotten," he said, "what she was like. I do not remember that she was ever like that."

"But David knew," said Nina. "This and the portrait of your grandmother. You know the story?"

Nicholas confessed ignorance, and Nina perceived in this the gulf that lay between the brothers.

"There were old things at home," he said. "John had them, but my stepmother destroyed them all."

"She . . .?"

"Yes. She hates all that. She says it is all so soft and weak."

"It is the strength in David."

To Nicholas, unaccustomed to seek the cause and origin of things, Nina was unintelligible. However, he contrived to show an intelligent interest, and, passing from one thing to another, he managed to bring her back to that which was of paramount importance to him—his own sorry plight. Almost in spite of himself, he plumped out his need for money and the object of his visit.

"But, surely," said Nina, "your father——"

"You don't know my stepmother." He said this without bitterness, but entirely in dreary acceptance of the inevitable.

Nina had all the details of his case set out before her when David came rushing, calling out, boyish and wild with joy:

"Nina," he said—"Nina, they've come—Anthony and Clara, Bertram and Nan!"

He stopped as he saw the strange man sitting there, and then shouted again:

"Nicholas!"

Nicholas rose shamefacedly, and stood facing his brother. David took him by the shoulders, shook him, and scanned his face.

Nina, watching them, wondered that David should be so much the younger of the two—a boy, while Nicholas was tired, jaded, a man. David was from the sun, while Nicholas came groping from the murk and the dim light of the industrial North; David was a man of full stature, while Nicholas was dwarfed and stunted.

“He is to stay with us,” said Nina.

“Of course,” said David, and, clapping Nicholas on the shoulder, had him telling news of all the family. And during the telling Nicholas was gazing at his brother, amazed, astonished, shaken with little gusts of jealousy that all should be so well with him; angry that what was here so rare and beautiful should show with such blasting clarity the otherness of what himself had made of life.

He hovered and came near to expression of his purpose, but ever drew back on the point of its declaration. Finally he came to it, and said:

“I want two thousand pounds.”

This was by three hundred pounds in excess of his needs, but, having to make the humiliating request at all, he had reasoned it out with himself that he might as well profit by it; and now, when the words were out, and what he asked immediately acceded to, he wished that he had set the figure higher, and sat imagining what he might do with so much wealth. One thing was certain: that his wife should know nothing of it, and should not directly profit by his cleverness; for now that he saw success crown his expedient, he took it to himself for a source of pride, and planned what he might do to extend the advantage he had gained. That there was any meanness in his exaggeration did not occur to him; rather, he saw it as an act of justice that David, who had so much, should be despoiled. He saw himself laying up store for the future, and power to break free from that which bound him to his present slavery. He thought his brother also not a little of a fool so easily to part with money, without security, and—this to him was the most inconceivable folly—without demand for interest or any sort of note of hand.

With the cheque safely laid in his pocket-book, he

rejoiced in his new feeling of security, and at dinner that night drank overmuch wine, and let his tongue wag. He swaggered about his father's position in Braydale, and declared his own intention of coming as soon as possible to London, either to extend the operations of the parental concern or to make a beginning on his own account. Restored after so long a period of humiliation to his normal condition of self-satisfaction, he preened himself, and revelled in it, and though both David and Nina strove to head him off to that which they really desired to know, he plunged ahead in his revelation of what he took to be his own astuteness, and, at first amusing, finally came to irritating them. His song was in praise of industrialism, and himself was the hero of it.

David succeeded at length in bringing him to John and the boy's future. As to this Nicholas was hazy. He had not considered the question, nor had ever thought of the possibility of his younger brother's growing to man's estate. Nina repeated what he had already told her of the confiscation of the Bardon treasures, and David looked black.

"Is it so?"

"Why, yes," said Nicholas. "All those things of yours, you know, she took and burned, and what she did not burn she sold. John's a little like what you used to be—not so crazy, though. Always writing tales and stuff of that sort, and wild about the theatre. Talks like a book, and has his head full of romatical notions. They say he's clever at school, and want him to go to the University. He and Helen are tremendous pals."

"And Helen?"

"It was Helen pulled me through——"

"Yes."

"She seems awfully alone. Of course, she never

says much, but Audrey says it has never been the same between her and her father since—since— She's the last person in the world one would have thought would go and make a mess of it."

David made no response to this. Nicholas drank yet more port, and waxed yet more egoistic and warm in enlarging upon what he should do.

They sat for long afterwards, while Nina played and sang to them, and when she was gone Nicholas stretched his legs and said:

"It's a rum go."

"What is a rum go?" said David.

"Your coming back like this. Such luck, such blazing luck! Money and a house like this, and a wife like that. And you need never do a stroke of work for it, by Jove! . . ."

David's face took on an expression of profound gloom.

"It ain't right," said Nicholas.

"No," said David; "it is all wrong."

Nicholas whistled and rubbed his knees.

"Good Lord!" he said. "What have you to complain of?"

"Sometimes," said David, "I'd give anything to be down and struggling. Life is a poor game without fighting."

Nicholas scouted this idea, and David gave him something of his experience.

"It is the worst thing to befall a man that he should come by everything that he can desire to make him comfortable. It makes him fat, and eats away his brain. Each new possession that he has not directly by the sweat of his brow is a new barrier between himself and other men, and so the rich man is often poorer in the good things of this world than the meanest wretch in the streets, who among his

kind can find always comradeship. I do not believe in any social regeneration which views only poverty. . . .”

Nicholas yawned; but David was not paying attention to him.

“They say this age is vulgar. Why, it is the most splendid, romantic, glorious period since the world began, with all its rising against old lies and rotten tyrannies. False religions are crumbling right and left, and only that faith is true which shall give to each man and each woman the right to live most vividly, to wrest from the world what is best and most satisfying—a faith in which there is no element of fear. . . .”

He expounded further, and became so vehement that Nicholas went to bed vowing that his brother's mind was certainly unhinged, and filled with an emotion that was almost pity for a man who could have so much and set so little store by it.

David remained brooding by the fire, and occasionally throwing out a remark to the lime-tree, always a sympathetic auditor. He came back and back to the dissatisfaction in himself, the unrest, the uneasiness, the anxiety, and the craving.

The unhappiness had grown in him since the moment of his first deliberate cruelty to Nina. She seemed to have forgotten, to have brushed it aside, and with the healing of the wound to have left all thought of it. She was even more tender, watchful for his good and adroit in the procuring of it, than ever before; but still the unhappiness had grown in him, the vague desire. He had hated himself for it, had for weeks at a time succeeded in persuading himself that it was no longer in him; he had contrived also to conceal it from Nina, and then had only found new torture in the idea that perhaps she had divined



it in him, and only for that was the more gentle with him. So the whole thing came back upon him more than ever bitterly, and, for any cure that he had devised for it, though there might be temporary relief, only the more surely did the ghostly thing loom and cloud his existence. He knew that if he could but touch the cause of it, it would be instantly dispelled. And so without end he was groping, reaching out, but never finding that which he sought.

To-night, with the coming of Nicholas, he had been troubled with it more than ever before, and the more because, upon the encounter with Anthony and Clara, he had felt gladness and freedom again, and had been for them the old David of the months on the plantation in Ceylon. They had written to warn him of their arrival in London, and for days he had been excited, and, as rarely happens, had found the actual pleasure of meeting them greater than the anticipation of it. For a time, then, his devil had left him, and he had come back happy and freely light-hearted, only to be dashed by the encounter with his brother to a worse state than ever before. The memory of Braydale in all his experience had always had the power to depress him, and it had come over him now as he had perceived its effect in the development of Nicholas, who reminded him oddly of the grimy elderberry-tree in the patch of the garden of the house where there had been such stirring events so many years ago.

Those years of his childhood, and especially that night when he had been sent out into the raw cold to summon the physician, remained with David more clearly than any more recent event. The childish horror of the place that had overtaken him on the visit to Bardon, and after the revelation of past glo-

ries, grew never less, and was almost overwhelmingly brought home to him now with the advent of Nicholas and the telling of his sordid little story, which had grown all the more small and mean in the telling from the man's ridiculous pride in his unworthy achievements. David was ashamed that there should be such rottenness in his kin. Why, even Tush—old Tush Williams—had been a better thing than that, and had made a braver show in his sentimental adoration of the foolish-faced young woman whose portrait he had exhibited with such fond pride.

Sitting there, pondering all the circumstances, the condition of his family, the queer tangled history of them all, his own odd tale of unprofitable years, he came in the end to this: that if the relation of man and woman be not rightly ordered, then nothing is right; that on this only is it possible to build; that there had never been any other truth than this; that it had been the teaching of all religions since the beginning; that, indeed, all religious feeling had its roots in sex; that it was all so simple. . . . But then . . . but then, was not that explanation too easy? If that were true, why, then, was there misery in the world? and why, if the key to it all lay so near at hand, was not the gaze of all men and women fixed steadfastly on it from the first moment to the last? Why was the thing hidden and smothered up, and why was there so much of cowardly and base in the approaching of it? Again, was it the fault of men or women? . . .

He sought relief in tobacco, but still he was tortured with reflections and questionings.

The wind rustled in the lime-tree. Outside the air was thick and heavy, and the wind seemed to be the forewarning of the brewing of a storm. David's mood answered to the storm. Thoughts were stirring

lazily in him, clashing with each other, striking sparks, rolling this way and that, but bringing no illumination. The unhappiness stirred in him again, and to avoid facing it, for he knew it for an ugly thing, he turned again to his vague musing. . . .

He remembered that geologists had said that the world was two hundred thousand years old, and that a chemist had declared that man first appeared in the world twenty-six thousand years ago. The first man and the first woman, what had they made of it? Back he flew to the story that he had made out on the veld in Africa, sitting round the fire with Blest-Gana, Louis, and Maurice. . . . From whom had come the lie, from the man or the woman? No doubt the man had despised the woman. . . . And the woman? No doubt she had loved the man. . . . That was devilish amusing—oh, very funny! . . . The woman had lied because she loved the man. The woman must have lied, because it is quite certain that no man has ever known the truth. . . . But Blest-Gana knew it, the sly dog! . . . Oh yes! he knew it. . . . These men and their lies, and their worship of the lies in themselves. They lie because they think their own little affairs so much more important than the purpose of the world. . . . Comradeship between men and women? . . . Not possible, because . . . oh! because women will never consent to let men know how much the cleverer of the two they are. . . .

The storm broke, lightning flashed, and the lime-tree groaned and creaked under the gusty wind. The rain came rushing. . . .

The lime-tree was a healthy tree, the elderberry choked. . . . So Nicholas was choked. . . . So all of them were choked—the life strangled out of them. . . .

The frenzied rush for wealth had made that place

unspeakably ugly. . . . Johannesburg, too—that had been ugly. And yet in the one Helen had grown, in the other Nina. . . . The loveliness of the world shone through all that men do to choke it. . . . Bless 'em! Clever little beasts! There had been a gracious England once—an England which could produce the atmosphere of Bardon and Fielding. . . . Anthony and Clara, these belonged to the old time before the money-fever came. . . . In London there were still old corners, nooks and crannies, old squares, about which the old sweetness lingered. The fragrance of old England: the fragrance of Bardon—these were precious things, but they must pass like everything else. . . . Romance was not dead with them. Romance was never dead. That man was blind who, walking from Temple Bar to Charing Cross, can declare that Romance is dead. . . . Blest-Gana had said that nationalism is dying. . . . What was coming? . . .

There was stir and life in the air, and beyond the wild effort, through all the confusion of ideas, through the tangle of the new with the old, the new struggling to break free from the old, there lay a new nobility, a new order: not the millennium, indeed—please God, never that, for how shall good be measured without evil, or truth without dishonesty?—but an opening up of the way for truth, a making of it accessible to all sorts and conditions of men; a new order wherein the strong shall still triumph, but the weak shall not be utterly destroyed. . . . So David thought. All very interesting, no doubt, but the immediate concern was sleep. . . .

He stretched himself, yawned, said good-night to the lime-tree, and went upstairs.

Nina lay with her hair loose over her pillow, her cheek resting in her hand. David leaned over her,

marvelling at her. He took a tress of her hair and kissed it.

She stirred uneasily. Her eyes opened, and she smiled up at him.

“Dear love!” she said.

“My dear, my very dear!” said David.

She had that to tell him which made the two of them glad, and swept them upward to a great height, where they stood sure-footed.

Thereafter there were glorious days, and the lime-tree was not again burdened with David’s speculations on the past, present, and future; nor was he ever again reduced to that abject and futile state which comes from too much pondering of those great things that must remain for ever hid.

## VI

THAT which had come to them was so great that neither dared to speak of it. Each sought always the other's eyes to sound and know the depth of gladness. In Nina there was a new softness that made David almost fearful, and marvel that ever he had been allowed to come near to her. She soared above him and beyond, almost out of reach, and yet they were closer than they had ever been. She shed her imaginings, and seemed to lose interest in the circle which had first absorbed her. There was in her no urging of David to that which she would have him do; she seemed to be content to share to the utmost all that they had of this most rare joy.

David told the lime-tree of it, and for Nina invented what it had said in answer. It had rustled, and there had been a song in it, and some mockery:

"I knew," it had said—"I knew! I have looked in on you both these many months. I knew that this must be before either you or the beautiful pale woman was aware of it. . . . You are not the first——"

Nina protested: "We are. We are the very first."

It chanced then that a gusty wind caught in the branches of the lime-tree, so that he tapped at the window.

"You see," said David. "He protests. Listen further to what he says."

Nina sat at his feet.

"You are not the first. I am very old, though I am very young . . . old and young: what do you

little creatures know of old and young? You are better than others that have lived under my shade, for you see, and wish to see, the full wonder of it. . . . You are brave, and go out to seize it with both hands. . . . You little things, men and women, are the most foolish of all creatures; but we are envious, for more is given to you than to any of us—trees, birds, beasts . . . and how you waste and spoil it! . . .”

“No tree,” said Nina—“no tree ever knew all that . . . and oh, David, I am sorry! . . .”

“Sorry, my Nina?”

“There is so much that you do not know, so much that I cannot tell you. . . . My dear, my dear, there is everything, everything, everything that I cannot share with you, and therefore I am sorry.”

She took his hand, and kissed it until he drew it from her.

That Nicholas was present in the house during these first days of a happiness almost beyond endurance lent a certain strangeness to it, and a certain fearful joy, for he was altogether blind to it. He was to them like some monster, strayed into their land of enchantment—a monster not malevolent. Indeed, he was monstrous only in his complete unconcern with all the brave happenings that were there, in his complacent absorption in himself, while under his nose were miracles. His insensible blundering was comic, and for David and Nina on their height there was a certain sport in watching him, and wondering what in his heart of hearts he made of them.

David was gleeful when it transpired that all Nicholas's close watching of Nina meant only that he considered her attire perfect, and wished that his own wife might come more nearly to that ideal. Especially he admired the mauve and white in which he

had first seen her, and he told them that, in writing home, he had been careful to describe each garment that she wore.

He had shown himself curious as to their history, but came up against a blank wall whenever he tried to probe either of them. He displayed considerable ingenuity in bringing them from the discussion of Africa in general to their meeting, courtship, and wooing, and amused them vastly as soon as they divined what he was at. He made no headway, and sometimes, when merriment would not be controlled, he was sore and injured, thinking that they were laughing at himself.

When Anthony and Clara arrived for the few days that he stayed before his return to the North, he was magnificent, playing the part of the home-bred Englishman condescending to the benighted Colonial. They met him in this mood, and were delighted that he should show them the inner glories of London, and all that was new in it since their last retreat into exile.

For David the meeting between Nina and Clara had been at first disappointing, and then a greater thing than he had ever dreamed that it should be. As he had foretold, they twittered over each other, and so much were the two women drawn together that he was in part robbed of Nina. They were mysterious, perpetually in confabulation and engaged in the exchange of such weighty secrets as Anthony and David were made to feel were altogether past their comprehension. They took their humiliation in good part, and Anthony, disapproving of David's present acquaintance among persons whom he considered new and rather vulgar, took him among men of inherited privilege, and presented him to the actual Lord St. Justin, his eldest brother, an ornament of the House



of Lords, and a champion, on paper, of innumerable lost or hopeless causes.

He was a gentleman of much dignity, and when it was explained to him who David was, extended to him two fingers. To his brother he gave his whole hand, and for a flash was quite human, and even ventured upon a joke, carefully chosen to meet the occasion from his small store of five. It was a poor thing, but it sufficed, for among his own kind this peer with five jokes was counted something of a wit. In his own estimation he stood for all that was of the finest in the Island Race (this was one of his phrases: he had seven such). The occasion of being presented with the son of his half-sister was difficult, for there was no pigeon-holed method of treating it, but with some assistance from jovial Anthony, he came through it creditably enough, and maintained his dignity.

With his Countess it was otherwise. She was a good-tempered and good-natured body, notoriously easy, and notoriously unfaithful to her lord, though she was clever enough never to let her position with regard to him become sufficiently defined to offend against his dignity, which, as she knew, was to him the dearest of his possessions. Hers had been the remark which had brought the great man low upon the one and only occasion of his life. It had been wrenched from her by his perpetual thrusting at her of the sanctity of all that pertained to their loftiness. "When a man begins to think of his dignity, he loses it." In time the noble lord had contrived to flounder back to his serenity, but his condition had for long been pitiable, and though the Countess wished to repair the havoc she had wrought, at first from thoughtlessness and then from malice, she had been unable to stir a finger. So they went their ways. He climbed

to his perch, and she sought in that wherein she saw no wrong warmth to drive away the chill that came upon her at Riggs and in the great house in Carlton House Terrace.

It was to this house that Anthony took David, and in the study that my lord received his relative. The three men had come to an awkward pass, and Anthony's jocularities were becoming forced when the Countess swept in on them. She had come hot-foot and boiling with indignation upon the discovery that St. Justin had been making secret inquiry into her household finance, and had made a résumé of the items and amount by which she had exceeded the stipulated sum. The words bubbled from her lips as she thrust under his nose the offending slip of paper.

"Look here, St. Justin, either you trust me or. . . ."

St. Justin's back stiffened, and his nose was cocked into the air. Down came his eyelids, and he looked away from her at his brother and David. She became aware, then, of their presence, and, mightily glad to see Anthony, she forgot her purpose, bounced at him, and kissed him on either cheek.

"My word!" she said; then, turning to David: "Good heavens, don't say this is the Snodger grown into a man! Not that, or I shall dye my hair grey in order to feel old enough. . . ." (The Snodger was Anthony's first-born.)

Anthony guffawed.

"Betty, my love, of a mad family this is the maddest—David Brockman."

The Countess wrinkled her pretty forehead as she gave David her hand.

"My father's grandson," said Anthony, The Countess, though ignorant of the story, quickly grasped the relationship.

"A cousin," she said. "Then he will certainly stay to lunch. Are you to be in, St. Justin?"

"I am not," said the noble lord, who never for a moment allowed himself to relax from the rigidity which he had assumed upon her first entry.

Very soon he left them. The Countess doffed much of her boisterous mood, and devoted herself to the task of setting David at his ease.

"My dear," said Anthony, "he is worse than ever. Why do you let him be so?"

"He would not be happy otherwise."

"He might almost as well be a piece of furniture."

"Why, so he is—a piece of furniture. Fine to put at the head of a table when men are to talk Imperially. We are shocking our little cousin."

"Yes," said David. His frankness delighted her, and then and ever she avoided word or mood which might prove distasteful to him. Not that she adopted any pretence with him. She was honest, and concealed nothing in the first months of their friendship; for they became firm friends, and she snatched him from all the others who wished to make use of him or to feed upon his freshness. David saw in her only the capacity for good fellowship and true friendship, and was blind to any design that she might have upon him, as he always was with the women who sought him out. There were many such in the days after he was caught up into the society of his relatives. Some were clumsy, and made their thoughts so patent that even he, approaching them with all the openness of his idealism, could not be blind to it, and drew back, not blinking the distasteful fact of obliquity in them, but finding a thousand reasons for it in their circumstances and the twisted course of their lives. They pursued him into his retirement, but, finding him

stubborn, turned to the pursuit of easier, if less stimulating, quarry among their own kind.

For the tame men of this class Anthony was wont to bubble over in wrathful contempt. The pretty silky creatures who were to be met with at Carlton House Terrace should, he said, be soused in a horse-pond daily until the scent had left their bodies and the sticky grease their hair. He protested with Betty, the Countess, against the circle of her friends, and against one man in particular—a pink and cream little gentleman, who was sparrow-minded as any woman in a harem.

“Good Lord,” said Anthony, “I’ve seen them! . . . Nothing to do but to eat sweets; nothing to talk of but the one——”

“The poor dear is quite ill with work,” said the Countess.

“What does he do?”

“Once a fortnight he attends a board-meeting, and he pays the bills at the Stores.”

None the less, David and Anthony found the house an amusing place of call, and if the Countess collected round her all that was most foolish and vapid among the secure class, she had also the trick of gathering in the great men of the professions and the arts. Genius invariably found its way to her salon, and to be invited to her dinners was the mark of success in London.

These were remarkable functions. St. Justin sat at the head of the table, ornamental, automatically ringing the changes on his five jokes and seven phrases. At the other end sat Betty, radiant, alive, flashing to meet now this, now that mind, striking sparks, watching always to see where there might be flatness and ill-assortment of persons, weaving talk, and sending the shuttle of it bobbing and darting this way and that

round the table, in the fullest sense presiding. What pleasure she could have from it all was not apparent. She gained nothing from it; she had nothing to gain. There was no hope that St. Justin would ever be more than he was. His own ambition was satisfied; indeed, he oozed satisfaction. Her own ambition for him was dead, if it had ever been keenly alive, and that way was nothing to be won.

The labour of it all, even with such smooth-running machinery as she had at her disposal, must have been enormous, and a tax even upon her so great vitality. Whether she ever thought upon the worth while of it all was never known to David for long enough. That she was weary was often patent, but, battling with it bravely, there was never any sign that she sighed for the less rigorous life of a smaller condition.

She called upon Nina, but the intimacy of the young wife and Clara repulsed her, and while David became ever more her friend, serving her in all that was possible to him, Nina never reached out a hand to her. In this rejection of the Countess Nina fortified the barrier between herself and David, though neither she nor he were conscious of it. In the new ordering of their lives since the coming of Anthony and Clara their days had been so full that, with the great gift that bound them together, it seemed to them that they were impregnable secure from attack. They had been floundering, finding their feet in the society of London. Now David shot upwards, and Nina, busied with her wonder, remained rooted.

Through the Countess, St. Justin was made to occupy David, and at Riggs factor's work was given to him. He was gloriously happy prowling over the estate, exploring the house, and finding in it those possessions which had become magnified and hallowed in his mother's legends.

The life suited him also, with its days in the country, balanced by its weeks in London, when he took on secretarial work, and was fired chivalrously by many of those hopeless causes of which St. Justin was the august paper-champion.

He flung himself into them with an energy which they had never had brought to them, and by his efforts in these various interests won for himself a certain reputation as an administrator. There was talk of him sufficient to satisfy even Nina, but that her attitude towards him was so changed. Where before she would have been proud and able hardly to contain her gladness, now she seemed to be no more than pleased that he should have so much to engross him; and when Mrs. Sacret came to her lamenting the dissipation of the energies of so fine a man, she smiled almost pityingly, and said that David must best know his own business.

"But," said Mrs. Sacret, "he might do so much, and here he is doing no more than tame cat's work—fetching and carrying for that pouting baby of a Countess."

"He is happy," said Nina.

Mrs. Sacret threw up her hands in despair.

"Oh, my dear!" she said, "where is he now?"

"I don't know," said Nina.

"What has come to you?"

Nina seemed not to hear, and Mrs. Sacret let loose her indignation.

"Why, I did think that here, with you two, if ever in the world, was the perfection, the best and finest, the undying, the imperishable. Such a man and such a wife. Forgive me, my dear—forgive me, but such things as they are saying of him. . . ."

"I trust him," said Nina.

"I know—I know, but . . ."

The more impossible it seemed to shake Nina's serenity, the more heated and indignant did Mrs. Sacret become.

"He must be free," said Nina. "I have asked too much of him, held him too close, and he was unhappy."

"Was?"

"We have everything now," said Nina, "and I trust him. What more is there?"

Mrs. Sacret clung to her task of reclaiming David from what she held to be the unworthy confinement and taming of him, but could make no impression at all upon Nina, who, though she made every effort to understand, could not grasp wherein lay the horror of David's case. All the idea that she had of Mrs. Sacret's objection was that David was so peculiar and rare a man that he must for ever remain outside, pin-nacled above the rest of men, and to this she could bring no sort of sympathy. She knew—none better—the rarity of the man, but that he should remain for ever aloof was to her wrong, and in itself a waste. For Mrs. Sacret, the waste lay in his going into the world, and finding common ground with it, and there seemed to be no bridging of the divergence.

More than ever, then, was Nina turned to Clara and the all-absorbing business that she had. She turned her face thitherward, and met only those who would follow her in the great glory of it. She became self-sufficient, and found it difficult to be interested in the small things which so much engaged David.

Neither knew nor thought whither they were tending. Clara guarded Nina so jealously that David could never approach her nearly enough for her to perceive the new things growing in him, nor could she tell him of the infinity of new capacities for joy

that had come to her; for as she became more primitive and simple, he, under the taming influences, grew more complex, and was shedding the fresh frankness which had carried him so lightly and easily through all vicissitudes down to the uttermost and up to the highest. She had fed upon this source of strength in him until there came to her the new strength in herself. He did not become less dear to her for it, but his place in her idea was changed. For so long she had seen David, and only David, and she had had no other purpose. Now that she was purposeful, he had become smaller, and in a way curiously merged with the rest of the world. He had come, the greatest thing in her life, and had remained so until there came the greater thing. The change came so slowly, so almost imperceptibly, as to bring pain to neither. It was impossible for either of them to be dishonest with the other, to conceal anything, or to fob the other off with sham or any sort of faked tenderness. Nina, giving all that she had to give, suspected not that what she gave was less than what she had before given.

David was nearer to suspicion of the truth and of the change, but, while there was such gladness in her, he could not but be happy, and all the more blithely for it he applied himself to the tasks set him, and all the more vigorously did he join with the Countess in her business.

The arrangement was very well for Nina, very well for David, both delighting to find themselves on the threshold of new and seemingly infinite experience. David was rejoiced to find himself in a position wherein he felt himself to be a part of some greater thing than himself, driving to some certain end. In the first days, when he had been floundering to find his feet, he had often been weary of London, feeling



it a cage, and a weight upon his spirit, and he had often found himself sick for the world and the old free days. In this mood he would haunt that row of shops in Cockspur Street where are models of great ships, maps, charts, and plans of the lands he had known and loved, where the sun does truly shine, and men and women, if wild and rude, are at least more honest in their dealings one with another than in London, where, as had been written, each man watches his neighbour to see that he advance no foot farther forward than himself. Very well for Nina, very well for David, each at the beginning, the future most gloriously open and free before them, but for Countess Betty it was far otherwise.

She had clutched at David's friendship so soon as it was offered to her. She held it close, and found in it a warmth and satisfying quality that she had never in her life possessed.

She had been denied and had denied herself nothing, so that she was in truth, as Mrs. Sacret had divined her, a pouting baby, chafing always against the discontent and unhappiness that possessed her, but utterly incapable of perceiving or divining the cause of it, incapable also of arresting or changing anything in her circumstances. She had seen other women of her class, placed very much as herself, cast aside honour and virtue, and come, so far as could be seen, to no hurt. Therefore, when it had become clear to her that St. Justin was for giving nothing, she had, when occasion served, plunged without asking the truth of what was offered to her, glad to have even so small and wretchedly mean a thing as it was. Whether St. Justin ever knew she did not know, though she had been troubled when upon the bureau in her boudoir she had found an open book wherein this passage was marked:

“Take heed of the pretences of men, and their affections, for they last not but in honest and worthy men, and no greater misery can befall you in this life than to become a prey and afterwards to be despised.”

She had been uneasy, and had watched St. Justin with frightened eyes, but never was there any sign in him that he had known. The words had little meaning for her, for she had pretended that what she had done was no less than pure and honest, and never doubted but there had been love, nor would she ever face the rottenness in the man who had indeed despised as he had left her.

There had been another and another, and though the words at moments haunted her, yet could she not grasp their significance. Of misery she had enough, and more, but accounted it to the cruelty of circumstances, and never to inherent falsity in what she gave and what was given to her.

Her third and worst experience had ended just six months before David's coming. She had thought herself at first utterly broken, had been ill, and brought to weariness. Slowly then she had begun to pick up the threads of her life again, and to figure as the great hostess and to devise gaieties more wild and reckless than before. Still, she never would admit wrong in herself, but clung fiercely and resentfully to her conception of herself as a woman never fallen from the state of grace. So life was colder than ever before until there came David, a man utterly unlike any that she had ever known. The difference was so great between the one and the other that she could never discover wherein it lay. She was fearful of contemplating it, for instinctively she felt that there was danger in it for herself, and the pouting baby's instinct was ever for self-preservation by the nearest

and most obvious means. She could not escape from it. The more she sought David's company the more glaringly was the difference seen, and slowly there dawned on her the words, "Honest and worthy."

The revelation was startling and devastating. She closed her eyes to it, but still it shone before her, and would not be denied. She fought always against it, and would not come to contempt for herself, would not see herself as she had been, but must continue the pretence and sham by and with which she had lived so long.

She had not the spiritual courage by which men and women are enabled to face the discovery of fraud in themselves, but must be for ever claiming honour for the virtues that she had not rather than for those that she had.

There was a pretty battle in her between the new happiness that she had and the unhappiness caused by this dishonesty in herself. Often she was on the point of telling David all that she had been, but from a sick fear that he should turn from her, and, from his loftiness, condemn, withheld what she would say. She clung to him, wringing from each moment with him full happiness, successfully deluding herself to the belief that the past was dead, and that here she was at a new beginning with a bold and fearless champion. For long there was between them no hint of a nearer relation than cousinship and comradeship. David, confident in Nina and all that she stood for, took from Countess Betty guidance and the opening up of the new world, the gracious and fine life, of which he had had in childhood a glimpse, and always had hugged the vision.

Through his great joy in all that she had, in Riggs, in all that related to Fielding and St. Justin, in the tale of heroes, scholars, and blackguards of the line,

in the splendour with which she was surrounded, she was able to find new and unsuspected wonders. He had much to tell her of the romances of old days, and she had won from him his own story from its beginning in the tragedy of Mary Andrew. Upon everything he shed new light for her, and made vivid things that her eyes had scarcely seen. He took her to mean streets, and made her see life as it was lived at the point in society most removed from that where she was born, nurtured, and had existed without thought. He made her see that even in squalor there is not evil unredeemed, and what in these same places Blest-Gana had revealed to him he now set before her.

Now for the first time dimly perceiving, and beginning to grasp the splendour of the world, she took it all for virtue in David, and set him so high that she could hardly see wherein he could claim kinship with the common run of men. The tender chivalry with which he approached her made her almost afraid, gave her a dizzy sense of unreality, and yet made her cling to him only the more desperately.

She never asked anything that he might not give, and was so circumspect that he did not conceive her desire for more than she asked. She furthered rather than hindered him in his movement towards the group of controlling men, and, indeed, first directed him towards the theatre as a field for his energies.

He had dabbled with it through the actor whom he had met at Mrs. Sacret's. The man had sought him out upon learning that besides ideas he had also money, and came to him almost each week with a fresh scheme for making a fabulous sum; but always the plays that he brought as a foundation for this fabric were so incompetent, so dull, or so foolish, that David, with mind not yet ossified by contact with

the theatre and its world, could not perceive any reason why time and money should be wasted on them, and, indeed, thought that, if they should succeed, it were almost dishonest so to gull the public in the name of drama. The actor had been obstinate and persevering, but David would not budge, and could never understand what point of view was in the man's head. He seemed to have perfectly rigid ideas: this was funny, this tragic, this pathetic, and this heroic: above all, his mind was ever centred on the laugh, and the dullest play, however tragic in intention it might be, so only it contained one line or situation certain to produce its laugh, seemed to him worthy of the expenditure of a fortune. He spoke always of the public as "They"; declared that there was never any knowing what "They" wanted; but in another and more sanguine mood was quite positive that This (whatever it might be) was what "They" wanted. He was constantly urging David to write the great play for him on the lines suggested. Finally he became such a nuisance that David made a titanic effort in the direction of rudeness (no ordinary snub could reach him), succeeded in getting rid of him, and made a lifelong enemy.

In Carlton House Terrace he met Peter Davies and Stephen Clough, who had made a little stir with their little theatre in Soho. Davies had written plays which, though too rawly reactionary from the conventional school, yet had a certain quality of life, and had been taken up by Clough, then out at elbows, hungry and chafing against an unseeing and unthinking world, which would not let him find his feet, and reveal the treasure that he had for its delight. Long sojourn in the wilderness had made him crazy and a little morbid, but the force pent up in him had fed upon itself and grown.

Davies had found him sitting under a flowering chestnut by the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens reading, brooding, and mapping out scenes for the theatre which was his darling vision. Davies was also sore, for his first play had been rejected on all sides. They plunged into talk, each thinking only of himself and the injurious treatment put upon him, but each contriving to fire the imagination of the other. They met again and yet again. Davies read his play. Clough was rude. Another play was written, and, without thought of consequences or of what further they should do, the young visionaries took their theatre, gathered a loyal company of players, all accustomed to starvation, and prepared to endure more rather than turn to any other trade. They dragged wearily through one season, and half-way through the next, when they found that they had become a cult. They had their devotees, but were not yet able to bear the brunt of complete failure, and it was upon such a crisis that they came in contact with David.

Davies he was inclined to dislike—thought him something of a poseur—but Clough was arresting, so completely absorbed did he seem to be in his ideas, and so fiercely prepared to sacrifice everything and everybody, even himself, to the furtherance of them. He was furious when Davies confessed their plight to David, taking it as a reflection upon his ideas; but when an offer was made to him of reconstruction upon admittance of this new man to their concern, he grasped at it.

“I’ve tasted blood,” he said. “By God, I want more!”

As it proved, the intervention saved them from utter wreck, and David served as a check upon their wildness. They were little, if anything, younger than

himself, but in business they were callow and innocent as babes. Success had gone to the head of Peter Davies, while it had made Clough, with his larger vision, more savagely resentful against the public than ever. David was able to make the two of them have some glimmering of the unreason of expecting the public to be more interested in art than in the question of bread and butter. They became, therefore, more good-humoured about their work, and proportionately more successful. The two young men were grateful, though they were completely baffled by David's tolerance even of bad art, and neither could ever understand why he who had seen so much should have no desire to express it.

Both adored the Countess, and they both vied with each other as to who should be the more attentive to Nina when they met her, though she never could be brought to take any vivid interest in the doings at the little theatre.

With the Countess it was otherwise. She saw in it the occasion of being more with David, and worked unceasingly to procure success, and to extend the cult from the pseudo-artistic circle to the fashionable world. St. Justin was induced to countenance the endeavor, and the "Little Theatre," as it was called, was docketed in his mind with the various Imperialistic and philanthropic societies of which he was chairman.

They were in the first flush of new success, and David was up to his eyes in work, when Nina took it into her head that she must no longer stay in London, and, with Clara, betook herself to Bardonia, there to find peace and quiet.

It was impossible for David to go also, and though he said nothing, he was a little hurt that she should contemplate leaving him, until Clara explained that indeed she was not well, and must above all things

be careful. David was made to feel that he was small and lacking in consideration. He journeyed down to Cambridgeshire, and saw them comfortably installed. He stayed for two nights, and on the third day there came a letter from the Countess. It held a sprig of rosemary, which fell to the ground as he opened it. He let it lie as he read:

“David, David, I can no more look into your dear eyes. You see now to what this foolishness has brought me.”

It was as though a great light had been flashed upon him. He crumpled the letter in his hand, and let it fall.

He sat watching Nina where she plied her needle, but she paid no heed to him.

He stooped, picked up the letter again and thrust it into his pocket.



## VII

WHEN he returned to town again he made no attempt to see Countess Betty. She wrote to him almost daily, but he burned her letters unopened.

All the same, he could not drive her from his thoughts. He cursed himself for a fool not to have seen, not to have marked the great difference between what she had been when he had first met her and what she was now. The old unhappiness came upon him.

He was glad of the work that he had to do, though it could not altogether relieve him from the torment that he was in.

He surprised Nina by rushing down to see her by train or motor-car without giving her word of warning. She had no thought of trouble in him, but took his visits as solicitude for herself, and was glad. There was some comfort in that for him, but not enough. With only the slightest sign from her that she had thought for him he must have told her all that was troubling him, but as it was, so intangible was it, and so absurd did it seem upon translation into words, that he could not out with it.

In Bardon, indeed, the thing almost disappeared, so full was the place of tender and dear memories. He took Nina to the yew-grove, and peopled it with all the figures of boyish romance for her. He visited Robert and Susan Pollard, proud, indeed, to show him their apparently innumerable apple-cheeked children. They made him feel that the whole folly was visionary and unreal, and brought him to a decision

to ignore the Countess's letters, and to treat her as though there had been no open change in her attitude towards him. But no sooner did he approach London than it came upon him with more stifling force than ever, making him choke and long only to be free.

He thought queerly of the Consul's lady, but knew that himself then was far different from himself now: that the light, free, wandering, careless David was no more: that what that David had done was impossible for the man as he had grown, and was shaped by the narrower yet more satisfying life in London.

He had given so much to the Countess in these days when Nina had ceased to ask, that not to give, not to be able to give, was an actual hurt.

Then he met her. Outwardly they met on the old footing. He made no mention of what she had done, nor did she. He was not for a moment alone with her. Yet in the crowded brilliant room in which they were she made him know that she saw nothing, and was conscious of nothing, in all the throng but himself.

Such a thing he had never known in his life, and he was afraid, and hating the softness that had come over him with the knowledge.

Thereafter she made no attempt to see him, nor did she write again. He was left with nothing but his torture, and the softness that seemed to eat away his strength. He strode for long hours through the night, wrestling with himself, to arrive back in Swan Walk spent and too weary to sleep.

All that he had ever thought came back and mocked him. The easy solutions of great problems, the words he had spoken to other women, what in his masterfulness he had said to Nina—all ranged themselves before him and mocked. They seemed to take shape as little gnomic things crying out:

“You begat us to shape the world, to give it form for yourself. Why? Here we are. It will have none of us—none of us—none of us. . . . You must take us back again—take us back again.”

Then Cocker came to haunt him—Cocker and Kate Driscoll: the thing that he had called the lowest.

He shunned loneliness; caught desperately at any sort of companion to cloak the misery that he was in, but ended always in gusty irritation. Davies was intolerable, and only in Clough for a time could he find that which could bring him ease—things of the intellect, without more; and yet even here he was brought to desperation by the man's absorption in himself and complete disregard of all the great things—of all that makes for warmth and generosity in this world.

There had been many letters asking him to visit Braydale, but he had still postponed, from an ineradicable distaste for the memories that it had, and because he never could forget that last occasion upon which he had seen his father, jingling the money in his pockets, and his stepmother sitting there, knitting. Nicholas had reminded him of that with dreadful force, and he could not bring himself to go. His vision of his childhood in that place had taken a blacker and blacker complexion the more he came into contact with the brightness and fairness of life. The ugliness of industrialism and its products came home to him the more he saw of what had been at Riggs and in the countryside, where the disease had not left its mark. Nowhere in the world could he remember to have found anything comparable to the dingy, depressed, and depressing squalor of South Lancashire. What came nearest to it was South London, Lambeth, Southwark, Camberwell. But, black as these were, they had not for him the inky and

impenetrable hue that coated his memory of those streets wherein he had commanded his battalion of brigades and waged battle with the butcher-boy, or that where old Lintott's shop reared its striped and dirty pole. The thought of that stirred memory in him, and he came back, groped his way through the mists that covered it, until he saw clearly the barber's shop, Lintott, Tush, the lawyer's clerk, and the butcher, and smelled the smell of it—soap and cheese. Out of the scene came words, pell-mell, indistinguishable, a torrent of them, until these reached his ears:

“Brave boy—bully boy! Be a man: not like the rest of us. . . . Smoked like a herring. . . .”

The words died away, and the scene was hidden from him. “Not like the rest of us. . . .”

He had fled from it all, and for what? . . . a sort of freedom, flavourless after a time, and barren. . . . Men and cities he had seen, but had never been more than a sojourner. . . . So much there was that he must have missed; so much that his eyes could not see, nor his ears hear. . . . These days of wonder, days of delight, when it had seemed that there was nothing hidden, no sound, scent, sight, or colour that did not find its answer in himself. . . . Revelation, and each moment, therefore, seized and lived to its fullest. . . . Then London and captivity: near at hand the revealing light, near at hand the beautiful presence that illumined all dark places. . . . Slowly, then, the drifting away from it, the veiling of the vision: the glimpses seen of things greater than any yet; then the slow power drawing him in to the ways of common tread, rubbing shoulders with men pursuing blindfold the business of the moment; the sucking down and down, changing the whole form and texture of his life; the growth of unsuspected powers

and capacities; the hemming in, the fixing, the shaping and whittling of himself. . . .

The sense of being held captive while all around him twisted and whirled a crazy thing called London, whirling fast and ever faster until he was giddy, sickened and tortured him. . . . In himself, that which was in the world around him: movement on and upward, from the old peace and contentment, through crazy, ill-directed activity to a new and nobler peace beyond. . . . He saw that ahead for himself and for the world, but the present held him; he was encompassed, bound, fettered, gripped by a choking, stifling present—by a thing called London, a patch of ground, seething, seething like a foul garment . . . of Life—glorious, abounding Life. . . . This held him. . . . Where he sat he shook, and something snapped in his brain. His vision of it all changed; he lost the forward cast, and no longer saw himself in the pool, but was actually in it, fighting, longing, tearing, jostling, seeing no issue, but hurting because he was hurt, gasping for breath, and handing off the creatures that crowded in upon him. . . . This state was worse than the first, and he cried out in agony, for the helplessness of it and of all creatures. . . . There came to him then the vision of Nina. He cried out to her in a loud voice that she should aid him, but she heard him not. He cried again, and she looked down at him from her height with serene eyes, then slowly turned and busied herself with the white bundle that lay upon her knee. . . .

He staggered, and, reaching, clutched a tree, and in the clutching came to his senses.

Where he might be he did not know. Where, in his agony, he had wandered, by what strange and devious ways, he never knew, nor for how long. He was cold and utterly alone under the stars on a height

above London. The sky was warm and wondrous blue, and through the black mass of the city wound the river like a silver snake, bearing on his bosom the secrets of men who have lived and loved upon his banks, bearing them down to the sea—bearing their souls down to the sea to be washed and made whole. A cloud of smoke hung over the city, and upon this cloud the lights of the streets smote their glare. . . .

It was very wonderful, that great city: most wonderful to David standing there—cold, utterly alone, all ties for the moment broken. To be in it and to find it so vast: to be out of and above it, and to find it so tiny that a man might almost hold it in the cup of his hand for scrutiny. . . . A man free and of great stature: such a man as he had been, such a man as he was not, and never could be again. . . . There lived the rich folk: there the poor: there the mean souls that were neither one nor the other; foolish most of them, selfish all of them; turning all aside from the road to growth, love, and the fullest life—the rich to gain power, the poor to gain bread. . . . One way or the other, the end must be always the same.

David held out his arms towards it, and plunged back again. He confessed not to himself what thing it was that had driven him out, nor did he see or know that he was hastening back to it. Every fibre of him cried out to be back again in the throng, and that he should stand no more outside and above. . . .

This night was the strangest of his life, the death of all that he had been; and out of the turmoil in him sprang new things to light: new seeds were planted in this madness and desperate struggle in his soul. . . .

During a week he applied himself busily to his work

at the theatre, and astonished both his associates with the new energy that he brought to bear, and the new fertility that he showed in suggestions.

"He makes me feel such a child," said Davies.

"M-p-p-p-p-p," said Clough.

For five days there were no letters from Countess Betty. David wrote to Nina words that puzzled her, and yet brought her no uneasiness; but when he did not go to Bardon, she wrote reproachfully, and said that he must come soon, very soon. . . . The same post brought also a letter from Braydale, to which his new celebrity seemed to have penetrated. There was a fawning note in his father's letter which amused him, and on a sudden freak he took train to Braydale, and telegraphed to Nina what he was about.

This time there was no preparation for his advent, and no slaying of a fatted calf.

He arrived early of an afternoon, and found his stepmother sitting there almost exactly as she had been when last he had seen her—a little stouter, a little redder in the face, a little harder in the lines of the mouth, a little more bristling and prickly.

She evinced no surprise upon his announcement and entry, gave him her hand, and bade him sit. She handled him firmly, and treated him as though he was still the boy she had known, and, according to her lights, had striven to bring to reason.

"Well," she said, "as you are here, you may as well give an account of yourself."

"Nearly twelve years," said David.

"Nicholas has married a fool, Audrey a reach-me-down, and you——?"

"How is John?" said David, reverting to his old habit of parrying her questions with others not at all pertinent.

She glared at him.

"I've been having trouble with my knee," she said, flying off at a tangent.

David drummed with his fingers, and surveyed the room. He found the air of it curiously stifling, though the windows were thrown open. The Roman soldier, "Faithful unto Death," still grimly and stolidly guarded Mrs. Brockman from the powers of darkness.

"You'll be staying a few days now you are here?" she said.

She pronounced the aitch without any sort of difficulty, and David marked that for a change in her.

"Not for long," said David. "And my father?"

"Hm-m-m-m." She took her knitting and jabbed savagely. "There's no end to a fool's folly."

With that she became dumb, and would hold no further converse with him.

When he was wearied of looking from her to her Roman soldier and back again, he asked where Nicholas might be found, and set out on his visit to that household.

He passed, according to the directions given him, through a region of terraces of little red-brick houses newly built, each street of them like unto another, until he came to a pair of stucco semi-detached villas, ugly in themselves, but remaining to protest against the greatest ugliness of the handiwork of the jerry-builder.

Here he found Nicholas and his wife. The little woman treated him at first with exaggerated respect, but gradually thawed, and ventured timidly to ask after Nina, of whom it appeared Nicholas had so sung the praises as to bring her to jealousy.

They were so queer in their habits, so oddly restricted, that David wondered what he was doing in that galley. His stepmother he could understand and



meet more or less on terms of equality, or, at any rate, of frank and flat antagonism. These little people would not admit of equality, but insisted on looking up, while at the same time they were filled with resentment at having so to approach their distinguished relative. For that he was distinguished was never a doubt in them; for had not his portrait appeared in the illustrated papers, and was there not Nicholas's own testimony to the magnificence of his living?

It was a trying experience for David. He could not meet them with sympathy, and was angry with himself that he could not do so. Nicholas in London had been not a little comic, but here he was pathetic, even tragic, and the pretty fool seemed to be so admirably his mate. In that, too, there was tragedy.

He was relieved when Helen came, though this, too, made him sorrow, for the golden vision of her that still lingered with him was on the instant dispelled. It seemed that she had divined his presence in the house, for she stood on the threshold of the room peering through the dim light, unable to move. David came to her:

"Why, Helen . . ." he said.

"David!" This came not above a whisper, and she hung her head. "I never dreamed that you would come like this . . . and I thought after so long that you would never come."

David could find no words to say to her. He drew her into the room.

At once she asked for Nina, and was she wonderful as Nicholas had said? but of course she must be; and was she well, and in London?

David told her, and for what he told she asked always more. When she came to the end of this she

asked for the fine people who were his friends, and made so much of him.

Then for long she was silent, and gazed out up at the threatening sky.

"I think it will rain," she said. She moved to go, and David offered, then asked, then begged to be allowed to accompany her.

The rain came just as they turned out of the street. David held an umbrella over her, and bade her take his arm to be the more secure under it.

"I am glad you are here," she said.

"I am glad to be of service to you again," said David.

So they walked in silence under the beating rain, until they came to the house with its plain red front and its row of gleaming brass bell-handles. About it there was still the smell of brewing.

"Nothing is changed," said David.

"So much and yet so little. Will you come in out of the rain? I know my father will be rejoiced to see you—such a man as you have become."

She took him to the study, which David found hardly at all changed from the day when he had last sat there with her. There were more books, and the colour of the walls was changed.

Far otherwise was it with Helen. She was changed almost out of recognition. Her hair was still golden, and still the masses of it clustered and shone about her head, but she was worn, and her eyelids were weary, and under all her graciousness and tenderness was the curious hardness of terror, as though suffering had overwhelmed her, broken her spirit and courage to face more. It seemed that she was fearful always of that lurking in the depths which might spring out and crush.

Even now with David, glad though she was to have

him again, she was timid, and seemed to avoid direct contact with him, and he, sensitive and high-strung as he was still from his dreadful days, felt this in her, but dared not reach out a hand to help her, or to break through what bound her. He saw that her shoulders were bowed as though with the weight of a great burden, and that her hands were very thin. That she had been brought to this from the radiant creature that he remembered was to him more pitiful than anything he had ever known.

She told him nothing of her story, nor could she tell him, but from the bald facts given him he was able to divine much, and the more clearly the pity of it was seen the more impossible it became to offer her aid.

They talked lightly of old days, she reminding him of his oddities, and he her of her scorn of him.

"Yes," she said; "we were children, and we are men and women. Nicholas said that."

"Nicholas?"

"He was in great trouble; and when we are most in anguish I think even the least of us catches at truth. There is no other source of comfort. . . . He is happy enough now. He revolted against this place. I have seen so much of that. They beat against it until they are bruised and sore, and then they are resigned to it. . . . Not many can break free as you did."

She told him then how his family had fared: of their continued prosperity; of the iron rule of his step-mother; of her excursion into religion, and appearance as a patroness of Gospel teaching; of her fashioning of Henry into a civic magnate and a philanthropist.

"The odd thing is," she said, "that only since then has my father refused to know Mr. Brockman. He will not talk of him nor see him."

David remembered then that Nicholas had always been a little shy in talking of his father; he remembered also the grimness which had come upon his stepmother at the mention of him. He had a curious uneasiness, and in tacit agreement they left the subject and came to John.

"Such a dear boy!" said Helen. "Much what you were, David, only—only more normal."

"At school?"

"At your school. He is quite happy there—happier, he tells me, than he ever is at home. Indeed, it is a grim place for a child. He is clever, too, and they say would certainly do well at the University if they could be got to let him go."

"Why, then, he shall."

"It is not so easy done as said."

She asked then for more of Nina, and seemed to find comfort in the thought of so much happiness.

"You must come to stay with us," said David.

"I? Oh no, David—no!"

"But you will come. . . ."

He saw then that tears were in her eyes, and so he left her, promising that he would come again before his return to London.

Though he knew not half the grief and sorrow that were hers, David was humbled by this meeting with her, ashamed of the almost baseless conflict that had been in himself, and keenly alive as he had never been to the injustice of the ordering of the world. That he should have so much while this so much finer, gentler, and more generous spirit should be starved and wasting in such mean environment brought him to railing, helpless anger, and again to that vision of the furious blind energy which had fouled the air and defaced the countryside to enrich the few and starve and blight one generation after another. He

did not know that already the first fury had spent itself, and that even here, under the smoke-pall, men were beginning to cast rueful eyes upon what they had done, upon the lives they had wasted, and to discover remedies for the most patent evils that they had brought. He did not know that his foolish father, coming at the tail of the effort towards the creation of wealth, and profiting by it, was already an instrument in the movement towards regeneration and repair. Still less did he know that he himself, in aiding Davies and Clough, was for the first time giving expression to the new spirit of humanity that had sprung in England, and not alone in England, but everywhere in the civilized world.

The industrial fever had brought money; the new spirit, groping after social justice, was moving towards the right use of it.

The old wandering David might have perceived it, but this, with his new pride of work and pride of place in the world, was a man less apt to perceive fine shades, but, by the very blunting, an instrument the more effective for the power that moved them all towards the same goal—the creation of that ordering of the world under which the strong should still triumph, yet the weak be not wholly destroyed. It is not given to any man to know the purpose of his work, nor rightly what place it holds in the great purpose of the world.

In the face of such wicked waste as this of Helen, it was difficult to perceive the new spirit, or to break free from the sense that there never had been, and never would be, any movement save that from chaos to chaos to the end of all things.

In such a mood David was able to see only the grimest and most dismal aspect of the position of his family. The dull and deadly monotony of their ex-

istence, their wilful blindness to all things gracious and fair, their acceptance of an almost negative state, resenting any unusual event, and seeing in any unwonted happening a catastrophe.

Mrs. Brockman had no faith in human nature, no eye for its possibilities, and, being the strongest creature in her little group, she drew a hard-and-fast line beyond which none of them might step, and if she ever allowed herself to contemplate the existence of a region beyond that line, scorned and despised it as a place of light and vain things. In this spirit she contemplated all that had to do with Fielding and St. Justin. The romance was to her a dirty scandal, and a taint in the family which must be eradicated.

The result of this treatment for Audrey and Nicholas had been disaster. David was resolved that at all costs John must be saved from it. He dropped the broadest hints of his will and intention in the matter during the three dull days that he spent at Braydale—days remarkable only for their lack of incident—but met only with the stern silence of disapproval from Mrs. Brockman.

David had found it impossible to deal with his father; the man had become so fat, foolish, and vulgar. He had a sort of confidence, but cringed to his son, and seemed to entertain a sort of envious dislike of him. He exhibited his offices and restaurants—there were now three—with some pride, but out of sheer swagger bullied certain of his employees, and therein showed his meanness.

An effort was made to discover Tush Williams, but he was not to be found, and the barber's shop had, through innumerable vicissitudes, come into the hands of a small stationer and news vendor. . . .

It was with relief that David set his face homeward, pondering the strangeness of the tie of blood which

should bind him to these people for whom he had small affection and no real sympathy. This much his visit had done for him, that during the days of his sojourn he was altogether free from the uneasiness and the disquieting obsession which had before brought him to so strange a pass.

No sooner, however, did he set foot in London than it came upon him with greater force than ever.

He found much arrears of work to be cleared, and for two days was successful in keeping clear.

On the third day he walked back to Chelsea, making a long *détour* over Vauxhall Bridge, down Nine Elms Lane, and up again through Battersea Park.

In Swan Park his man met him with the announcement that Lady St. Justin was waiting to see him.

She met him frankly, and at once came to what it was she had to say.

"I am sorry," she said—"I am sorry. It was foolishness—nothing more. I have written it again and again. You would not come. I must have you for my friend—I must. . . ."

"After the first," said David, "I did not read them."

"That was unjust."

"Yes," he said, "that was unjust."

"I am honest," she said. "I must have you for my friend—I must, I must. I must . . . oh, you don't know what it means to me! . . ."

She would not leave him until he had promised that he would come again to see her.

This done, she seemed content, but could not keep the note of triumph from her voice.

David took her to the gate of the little garden, and watched her march away down towards the river. She was very beautiful to see.

## VIII

CLARA wrote to David to say that she thought he ought to be at Bardon, but he was so embroiled with theatrical politics that he could not go for more than a day or half a day—just enough to see that all was well.

Anthony had taken a house in the neighbourhood, and installed himself with his family, while Clara stayed at the little white house with Nina. Susan Pollard was drawn into the conspiracy, and her Robert was added to the number of husbands deserted in the cause of this miracle that was to happen behind the little green door.

He met David wandering disconsolate by the river, and glancing up at the sycamore, where still was to be seen the little seat he had made on the top-most branch, and the initials D.B. cut deep into the bark.

Robert Pollard was of the opinion that it would be all right, that these things had to be, and that David must cheer up. "Gawd bless yer, Mr. David! The first time wi' Susie I bit through my thumb to the bone. 'Ere's the mark of it. She got used to it, and so did I. Power of 'abit, Mr. David—power of 'abit. . . . There was a man over 'ere in Bardon, never to the last could keep away, an' 'e 'ad thirteen. A little chubby, pinkie-faced and pinkie-eyed chap, 'e was. Well, when there was the fifth, up 'e crep', an' stood outside the door a-shiverin' an' a-shakin'. Out comes doctor, an' 'Run away, my little man,'



'e says, thinkin' 'e was quite a lad. Then up 'e squeaks, an' says: 'Father o' the child, sir—father o' the child.'"

Robert paused in his narrative, and was delighted to find David chuckling.

"My word, Mr. David, there's nothen like it to fill a man out an' ripen 'im, and set 'im squarely on 'is feet."

Such blunt wisdom, coming from this purblind friend of his, set David wondering. Truly the world had run smoothly for this man, who had taken simply all that he had come by, and, according to his nature, had tasted of all things in their fulness.

He was envious. What he had travelled half the world to seek this man, living as his fathers had lived, in the house of his fathers, and plying the same honest trade, had found near at hand, to be had only for the reaching out for it. And yet there must be treasures that were not, and could not be, in his vision, else all the stir and movement of the world, the grasping after fresh wonders beyond and ever beyond what already had been seen, were illusion and a vain blinding of strife and misery. . . . Robert had brought comfort by his droll story, but by his wisdom had shattered it, and let loose again the flood of torturing inquiry. There was no coming at Nina, for Clara and Susan were stern in their guard of the precious woman, and, if they had been allowed, would have banished all mankind from the holy place.

More than ever disposed to despair of it all, and of the power even to understand (most troubling of all was the memory of the youthful days, not so very far distant, when he had seemed to himself in his cocksureness to understand and possess the secret of all things), David returned to London prepared to win through the three weeks that remained as best

he could. He was caught up by Countess Betty, and in his leisure whirled into a round of gaieties.

She was circumspect with him, and never gave him a moment of uneasiness, lulled all his senses, and smoothed away the ruffled memory that he had of her. He toiled unceasingly, and grew pale and weary. She was ever ready with some new plan for his delight and refreshment. In her motor-car they dashed to Kew, and lounged about the green lawns of the place, and drank eagerly the brave colours of the flowers. David, in his thoughts, was ever away in Bardon, though in some curious way he was glad of this beautiful creature who was ever at his side. He gave never a thought to her needs, and never guessed that she was, or could be, less content with what they had than himself. She watched him, met every mood in him, was gay when he was gay, mum when he was sad, eager and ready to listen while he talked of what should be done in the future. She was with him every day, but never let it appear that they were together more than intermittently. She was singularly adroit in making it seem that what they had was to her, as to him, just a thing of odd moments.

He talked often of his family and Braydale, especially of John, and how the boy must be taken out of all that dinginess and narrowness, and how the step-mother must not, must never, be allowed to count another wasted life to her credit. He talked of Helen, and the pity of her story, so mean and sordid as it was. She listened, and, though she had neither sympathy nor imagination to understand the small tragedies of such lives as he set before her, she managed subtly to convey that she was moved and distressed by it all.

He never once spoke to her of Nina, and she so

bemused the power of self-criticism in him that he never accounted this strange, never even came to the idea of it, though never for a moment did he lose consciousness of Nina, and the thing that was to come down there. He budged never an inch from his attitude towards the rare woman, and never doubted of his strength. He forgot that Betty had ever thought foolishly of him, and took her warm fellowship gladly, as the thing that he most needed. She gave as gladly, but watched unceasingly, losing never a moment in the snaring of him to a false security.

For her part, she had no thought of evil. She only knew that she was wakened to a tenderness and a lovely joy that she had never known, and on she went, giving no thought to the future, nor to the warning voice that sounded in her ears that she must be hurt in the end, and hurt as she had never been. That she brushed aside, and, hugging her happiness, missed never a moment for the feeding of it. Right, Wrong, Good, Evil, Honour, Dishonour—these mattered not at all. Here in herself was the treasure that all her life had been withheld from her, that in her blindness she had asked of base and foolish men, who had given her nothing at all, and she hugged it, cried over it, laughed aloud and sang, and every day grew more beautiful for it. . . .

Blind David met her in her whims, and light-heartedly they sought odd pleasure in all sorts of queer nooks and crannies of the city. Their greatest delight came when, in the early morning of a fine July day, they met, and wandered through empty streets to Covent Garden Market, where they bought flowers—arms full of them—and a basket of strawberries. With their prizes, after they had drunk coffee in the dingy parlour of a small hotel by the

market, rousing sleepy wonder in the bleary-eyed waiter who attended to their wants, they passed down to the Embankment, and there devoured the fruit, sharing it with a group of ragged men and women who gathered about them and stared. When the basket was empty, they gave the frowsy crew money enough to keep them all happily drunk for a week, and set off back to Carlton House Terrace.

Here they breakfasted under the stern eye of the butler, and after, utterly worn out, the Countess fell asleep.

David stole away.

They had more days of foolishness, and then it came that she had business to be done at Riggs, and must go by road late in the evening, and stay the night, and return next morning. She won from David a promise that he would go with her—indeed, the prospect of speed under the high July moon was not to be resisted, and together towards midnight they set out.

The car, with the great lamps gleaming, lighting all the road, set out northward, shot through the thin edge of London into the country, and roared and rattled, eating up the road, on into the night under the great hanging moon. There was a soft warm air, and even at their great speed they were hardly at all cold. David gave himself up to the sheer pleasure of the swift rushing, and when a little hand touched his, his closed on it, and so for each the pleasure was the keener.

Neither spoke until the car turned into the long avenue leading up to the great house. Then David said:

“I love this place.”

“And I.”

In the sheer pleasure of this wild dash each had

cast off all that held them to the world. Betty was triumphant. She had a brave colour, and her eyes flashed.

She cast off her cloak and veil, and she was very beautiful, clad lightly in brown silk.

“Such a night,” she said, “and ours!”

“It is dawn,” said David.

“Let us watch the dawn.”

She took him to her chamber in the east wing, with its window hanging low over the little river that washed the very walls of the old house. The river sang and murmured.

They sat in the window and looked out. The sky was pearl and silver, and the trees were still dark and looming.

David gazed out, and Betty watched his face. He listened for the sounds of the world stirring after the night. Night-sounds were dead, and there was a rustling and a faint chirping—the new birth of the world. He thought not at all, but was given up to the emotion of the moment. The woman moved towards him, so that her knee touched his. She held his hand again, and her bosom rose and fell.

Still the sky was pearl and silver, and still the trees were dark and looming. The little river sang and murmured.

The woman opened her lips and spoke. She began to tell of her first disastrous love, and in the telling made it seem a beautiful and a glorious thing, such as it had never been in truth. She wove deftly, and, watching the man's face, saw that she had roused pity, followed this, and fed it, and to the soft sadness of the waking hour brought her tale of woe, of love, and loss of love, the coldness and chill of life. . . .

Then, when pity could go no farther, and the sky was become faintly overcast with the rosy first beams

of the sun, when the black mass of the trees took form and life, and banks of glowing flowers shone under the dew, when the rustling and faint chirping grew and swelled into a mighty song from a thousand throats, she came then to the dawning of the new love in herself, and, drawing nearer and nearer to the man who still gazed out and drank the wonder of the new-born day, laid first her hands on him, drew nearer, ever nearer, so that her breathing came upon his face, and never ceased to watch him. So close she was, and still he gazed out at the changing sky. Closer still she came, until the sun cast forth his first full light, and then he turned, met eyes seeking his, lips seeking his, and took.

## IX

DAVID never was of those who seek to justify the evil that they have done.

Right was to him still right, wrong still wrong, judged by no law but that of his own nature and instinct for the truth.

This that he had done was damnable—an offence against this woman whose love he had taken without having love to give; an offence against that other whom he had chosen for his mate; an offence against himself, but most an offence against Love, against Truth, Honour, Justice—all the virtues that are comprised in that most sacred and all-embracing word. But until the offending he had never known the fullness of it and the so much that it stood for.

He thought no shame of the woman, and never even at the lowest to which he was brought in the after-days of that sudden and swift descent did he think of her otherwise than with anger against himself for his blindness and fool's security.

There never was in him any doubt of what he should do.

They had driven back in silence—she happy, radiant; he numbed, chilled, almost no longer sentient.

He had left her without a word, and gone about his business tranquilly and capably enough, having no thought beyond it. So for two days he lived. Then had come a letter from Nina, and the full horror of what he had done came upon him.

He sought out Betty, instinctively knowing that there could be nothing done, nothing to repair, noth-

ing to make good. He stood abased and humbled before her, and told her as clearly as he could what thing it was that he had done, and how great was his offence against her, that therefore he must break, that they two could and must have nothing, since what they had was worse, far worse, than nothing. She could not understand, sadly shook her head.

“The joy of it!” she said.

Then David left her, and, poor wretch! brought himself almost to madness in the vain effort to understand the wherefore and purpose of this thing. He cast back and back through all his life to find the springs of it, the source of weakness in himself, but vainly. There was no moment at which he could catch to bring it into relation with this so sudden devastation and laying low of all that he had thought, believed, and known of himself.

He knew that he had never wavered in allegiance to the image of Nina, that in spirit he had never for the tiniest moment turned from her; but this knowledge magnified only the more and cast in the most dreadful light his offence against the other wretched woman. She had thought—she must have thought—that he had much to give her, and what he had given was so mean and despicable a thing that he was brought to sheer contempt of himself, and was left helplessly groping, blind, dumb, and insensible to all that was going on about him, alive only to his anguish. Life seemed to stop, and he was left looking backwards at himself, at all that he had been, from this vantage-ground by the nothing that he was.

He seemed to himself to have been a man stumbling always by a stony way, but never falling, and, as he saw now with hideous clarity, despising those who fell and lay by the wayside and gave up the quest.



Now himself had fallen, but the way ran on. He was not fallen so low but that he could see that the way ran endlessly on towards the goal; but he was so broken, so worn, so weak by the heavy knowledge that had come to him, and by the crushing realization that he could not budge, but must look back upon the way by which he had come.

He saw marching up behind him tottering some, falling others, and far, far back the very young striding bravely, head in air, drunk with the wonder of sure striding. . . . They were all there, on the road, behind or ahead of him, all the creatures with whom he had sojourned or had come in contact; and so many of them came blindly on for a little way, then wandered from the path, choked with lies, wasted, rotten and dead, eaten away with their lies. Old men ahead, the young behind, and himself lying there stricken, but no longer blind. That, at least, he had, that he had not lied, nor sought the false comfort of lies, and the drawing of veils over the truth that must be faced unflinchingly or not at all. . . . As he lay there, it seemed that some he had left behind came up, and, gazing at him, did not know him lying there for the man they had known . . . and this was the worst of all to bear.

Slowly he came out of his madness, and ceased to be haunted by this vision of the endless way. The memory of old deeds of kindness done to him came to bring him comfort, faith, and hope—and especially he remembered that strange woman who in America had picked him from the gutter and set him on his feet again. From America he passed in rapid survey all his wanderings, and was with the old priest again in Ceylon. So vividly did this scene come before him again that he said, as he had said then:

“I know that a man can touch them to saintliness; and I know that a man can leave them as malignant as hell; and I know that all peace and happiness hang from what men choose to make of women. . . . Brutes, fools, cowards. Oh, the cowardice of them! . . .”

He broke off, for there was such bitter and intolerable mockery in the words and in the idea of that young raw David so setting down the truth, and surely taking it unto himself for righteousness, claiming honour for it. . . . So it was with all that he had been, with every relationship into which he had entered. . . .

And yet, and yet, he knew now that all that he had known so instinctively was true—more true, more glorious, and more shining than ever before; for now it was known in all humility, by the shedding of every shred of honour that he had ever taken unto himself. . . . True it is that only selfishness, arrogance, and insistence upon self can lead love astray. He came also to what Helen had discovered in her sorrow. Women are so foolish and men so blind. . . .

Just as hope sprang newly to life in him there came grave news of Nina, and off at once he must go to Bardon.

The same night that he returned to Nina his son was born, heir to this strangely begotten line.

He was met at the station by Clara, who seemed to find comfort in the sight of him; for, as the train drew up, her eyes were anxiously watching for him, and, lighting on him, became happier.

“If you could have come earlier,” she said.

“I came at once on your news. How is she?”

“So ill . . . suddenly. It must be right: it must, it must.”

She clutched David's arm and clung to him. "Susan is with her. She is so good."

It was late as they drove to Bardon, and already the people of the little town were abed. Only here and there was a light in the window, and only in one window of the little house was there a dim light.

At once, as they entered, Susan appeared at the top of the stair, whispered greeting, and asked that he would come.

He came softly into the room, and stood by the bedside. Then he knelt, took Nina's hand, and kissed it, and this, in his great need for prayer, was all the prayer vouchsafed to him. He could no more, and still he knelt until her soft voice sounded:

"Mine, my love, and ours."

Then, "Ours," he said, and in agony stole away and out into the night to the yew-grove, where, in its blackest corner, he stood in hiding, seeing nothing, feeling nothing, utterly helpless, utterly weak, utterly ashamed in the knowledge that he came to the greatest wonder of the world stained and unworthy.

To the wonder of mating he had come not free from stain. In the miracle of it he had become clean and whiter than snow, but before love had run its full course with him there had been the swift descent, the sudden leaping to bring him down.

So the strength in him was sapped, and in this hour of need, that most appalling and yet most glorious hour of a man's life, when he knows the much that has been vouchsafed to woman, the little that has been given to man, he was weak, and knew only the suffering of the weak, devastating, destructive, not that of the strong, purifying, ennobling, crushing the pure gold out of man and woman. And yet vaguely, through all the blackness that was upon him, he was conscious of being not altogether without

comfort, of being close to new and greater things than he had ever known.

The sources of his misery lay in the knowledge that what he had done rose like a wall between himself and what was to hand, and that, however much he might hurl himself against it, it must be only to fall back bruised, injured, faint, and weak.

As if to woo him from his torment, the yew-grove had taken on its loveliest aspect under the moon. The yews were black, velvety, soft, and beech, and oak by contrast were fanciful things, fairy-fashioned, things of light and air. Owls were abroad, moths flitted, bats hovered; far down the valley sheep cried; a fox barked. The peace and magic of the night brought no balm to the wretched man there in the yew-grove, for whom the world had ever been so fair; now, though in his soul he cried that the world was fair, he had lost his lordship of it, lost the lovely knowledge of its truth, because, in this hour of greatest need for sharing, there was this thing that hemmed him in, bound him down, and was a drag upon the power to give himself. . . .

So in the blackest corner of the grove he stood in helpless misery, until tears came and sweet grief. Then the night was beautiful to him, and he climbed to the summit of the long ride through the grove, and gazed out over the long valley, tender now under the moon and her shroud of fleecy mists.

More than ever before he was alive to sounds and sights and all the wonders of the night, and, gathering strength from them, could give out and out. . . .

In the early dawn he came again to the little house, to find Clara sitting in lonely vigil, waiting, listening to every stir and sound in the house. . . .

She was glad when he came again, and gave him to eat and drink.

They sat, not speaking, each waiting. . . .

There came a great cry. David leaped to his feet and stood with hands clenched, until words were wrung from him.

“That . . . that . . . that . . .” he said. “Is it well? . . . Is it well? . . .”

Clara stole to the door, to listen. . . . Then she crept away, and David stood alone, waiting, all the hideous possibilities rushing through his mind. . . . There had been the cry: that was well. . . . But after silence, and in that what might there not be? . . . Terrifying as the moment was, yet there was greatness in it from the very humility to which it brought him, for in it all was lost or gained, himself helpless, and by no reaching out of the hand able to bring the issue one way or the other. . . .

In his nakedness is man most great.

Clara came again and bade him come, for it was well with Nina, well with the boy.

“By God!” said David—“by God!” and stood reiterating the two words, babbling foolishly, unable to move for the great gladness that was in him. Then he clapped his hands together, laughed aloud, ran from the room, and left Clara weeping. Susan met him with a little white bundle in her arms, and David took the little thing, warm with its new life, wrinkled and bald, sleeping with its eyes screwed up, and again he laughed. Then he laid it by Nina, where she lay white and weary. . . . To see her again was so wonderful.

He took her hand and kissed it. Her lips moved. . . .

“Ours,” she said—“ours, my David.” Then her eyes closed again, and through the night David sat with her hand clutching his. . . .

The little white house with its green door was three hundred years old, and many and great were the wonders that it had known, but never surely under its roof had there been such a marvellous night as this.

In the succeeding days there was no thought in David but of Nina and the great gift that was theirs. He spared nothing to bring her pleasure, and everything not immediately concerned with her was remote and strange. The life that he had had in London was so remote as to seem almost as though it had never been. Every moment of his life was brought to this, and in the fire of it purged and new strength wrung from it. In all those hours when he had gone from the turmoil of men and their affairs to virgin places, there had never been for him so full a newness and rebirth as in this. He tried to tell Nina of it, and what it had wrought in him. . . .

"If there is that for you," she said, "for me there is . . . oh, if you could understand. The life of a woman is so great a thing. . . ."

"Greater than the life of a man?"

"It must be, David, for, since the beginning, we have suffered most."

David was for so long silent that she became afraid almost. . . .

"Since you came you have never kissed me."

"My dear, my dear!" said David. And up went his hand to his eyes. Then quickly without word of excuse or plea for forgiveness, he told her of the thing that he had done. He told her how ill and twisted had been the life of poor Betty, of its coldness and poverty, and how in every seeking she had failed to find, with himself, perhaps, the most disastrously of all. He told her what he had said to the

unhappy woman, and how he had left her with those words on her lips:

“The joy of it!”

Then he was silent again for long, and Nina turned her face from him and wept. . . .

“Nina,” he said, but no word came from her. He knelt by her side and took her hand. . . .

“If this has spoiled it all,” he said.

“No, no,” she cried.

“What, then? What, then?”

“It is the bitter knowledge. . . .” She could say no more.

“Of what?”

“The . . . the bitter knowledge that if I had not so turned from you to live in this, and for this, it never would have been. . . . It could not. . . .”

“Oh, Nina. . . .”

“I think I never loved you until now . . . never, never. There was so much that I did not know. . . . I love you. . . . Kiss me.”

So they came together, and set their faces to march sunwards in the strength of the greatest happiness that is in the world. They had found their heaven, by such devious ways as are ever appointed by that whimsical power that begat the world, and made men and all living things to spring from it.

The new lord of the world was baptized in the names of John and David. His godfathers were Jean Blest-Gana and Anthony Fielding, and Helen was his godmother.

Already, when he was a fortnight old, there were pretty quarrels as to whether he was more fitted to be a soldier or an explorer.

“Of course,” said Clara, “he will be a hero.”

“That,” said David, “is hardly a profession.”

“I mean,” replied Clara, “that he should be a man——”

“That,” said David, “it is very difficult to be. But already he has shown a healthy dislike for being clothed. . . . There is every reason to hope.”

THE END















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Devious ways.



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