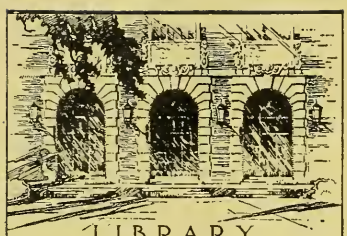

BORN IN EXILE

VOL. II

BORN IN EXILE

A Novel

BY

GEORGE GISSING

AUTHOR OF

'NEW GRUB STREET,' 'DENZIL QUARRIER,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II

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PART THE THIRD

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I

'WHY are you obstinately silent?' wrote Earwaker, in a letter addressed to Godwin at his Peckham lodgings. 'I take it for granted that you must by this time be back from your holiday. Why haven't you replied to my letter of a fortnight ago? Nothing yet from *The Critical*. If you are really at work as usual, come and see me to-morrow evening, any time after eight. The posture of my affairs grows dubious; the shadow of Kenyon thickens about me. In all seriousness I think I shall be driven from *The Weekly Post* before long. My quarrels with Runcorn are too frequent, and his blackguardism keeps more than pace with the times.

Come or write, for I want to know how things go with you. *Tuissimus*, J. E. E.'

Peak read this at breakfast on a Saturday morning. It was early in September, and three weeks had elapsed since his return from the west of England. Upon the autumn had fallen a blight of cold and rainy weather, which did not enhance the cheerfulness of daily journeying between Peckham Rye and Rotherhithe. When it was necessary for him to set forth to the train, he muttered imprecations, for a mood of inactivity possessed him; he would gladly have stayed in his comfortable sitting-room, idling over books or only occupied with languid thought.

In the afternoon he was at liberty to follow his impulse, and this directed him to the British Museum, whither of late he had several times resorted as a reader. Among the half-dozen books for which he applied was one in German, Reusch's *Bibel und Natur*. After a little dallying, he became absorbed in this work, and two or three hours passed before its hold on his attention slackened. He seldom changed his position; the volume was propped against others, and he sat bending forward, his arms folded upon the desk. When he was thus

deeply engaged, his face had a hard, stern aspect; if by chance his eye wandered for a moment, its look seemed to express resentment of interruption.

At length he threw himself back with a sudden yielding to weariness, crossed his legs, sank together in the chair, and for half-an-hour brooded darkly. A fit of yawning admonished him that it was time to quit the atmosphere of study. He betook himself to a restaurant in the Strand, and thence about eight o'clock made his way to Staple Inn, where the journalist gave him cheerful welcome.

'Day after day I have meant to write,' thus he excused himself. 'But I had really nothing to say.'

'You don't look any better for your holiday,' Earwaker remarked.

'Holiday? Oh, I had forgotten all about it. When do *you* go?'

'The situation is comical. I feel sure that if I leave town, my connection with the *Post* will come to an end. I shall have a note from Runcorn saying that we had better take this opportunity of terminating my engagement. On the whole I should be glad, yet I can't make up my mind to be ousted by Kenyon—that's what it means. They want to get me away, but I stick on,

postponing holiday from week to week. Runcorn can't decide to send me about my business, yet every leader I write enrages him. But for Kenyon, I should gain my point; I feel sure of it. It's one of those cases in which homicide would be justified by public interest. If Kenyon gets my place, the paper becomes at once an organ of ruffiandom, the delight of the blackguardry.'

'How's the circulation?' inquired Peak.

'Pretty sound; that adds to the joke. This series of stories by Doubleday has helped us a good deal, and my contention is, if we can keep financially right by help of this kind, why not make a little sacrifice for the sake of raising our political tone? Runcorn won't see it; he listens eagerly to Kenyon's assurance that we might sell several thousand more by striking the true pot-house note.'

'Then pitch the thing over! Wash your hands, and go to cleaner work.'

'The work I am doing is clean enough,' replied Earwaker. 'Let me have my way, and I can make the paper a decent one and a useful one. I shan't easily find another such chance.'

'Your idealism has a strong root,' said Godwin, rather contemptuously. 'I half envy you. There must be a

distinct pleasure in believing that any intellectual influence will exalt the English democracy.'

'I'm not sure that I do believe it, but I enjoy the experiment. The chief pleasure, I suppose, is in fighting Runcorn and Kenyon.'

'They are too strong for you, Earwaker. They have the spirit of the age to back them up.'

The journalist became silent; he smiled, but the harassment of conflict marked his features.

'I hear nothing about "The New Sophistry,"' he remarked, when Godwin had begun to examine some books that lay on the table. 'Dolby has the trick of keeping manuscripts a long time. Everything that seems at the first glance tolerable, he sends to the printer, then muses over it at his leisure. Probably your paper is in type.'

'I don't care a rap whether it is or not. What do you think of this book of Oldwinkle's?'

He was holding a volume of humorous stories, which had greatly taken the fancy of the public.

'It's uncommonly good,' replied the journalist, laughing. 'I had a prejudice against the fellow, but he has overcome me. It's more than good farce,—something like really strong humour here and there.'

'I quite believe it,' said Peak, 'yet I couldn't read a page. Whatever the mob enjoys is at once spoilt for me, however good I should otherwise think it. I am sick of seeing and hearing the man's name.'

Earwaker shook his head in deprecation.

'Narrow, my boy. One must be able to judge and enjoy impartially.'

'I know it, but I shall never improve. This book seems to me to have a bad smell; it looks mauled with dirty fingers. I despise Oldwinkle for his popularity. To make them laugh, and to laugh *with* them —pah!'

They debated this point for some time, Peak growing more violent, though his friend preserved a smiling equanimity. A tirade of virulent contempt, in which Godwin exhibited all his powers of savage eloquence, was broken by a visitor's summons at the door.

'Here's Malkin,' said the journalist; 'you'll see each other at last.'

Peak could not at once command himself to the look and tone desirable in meeting a stranger; leaning against the mantelpiece, he gazed with a scowl of curiosity at the man who presented himself, and when he shook hands, it was in silence. But Malkin made speech from

the others unnecessary for several minutes. With animated voice and gesture, he poured forth apologies for his failure to keep the appointment of six or seven weeks ago.

'Only the gravest call of duty could have kept me away, I do assure you! No doubt Earwaker has informed you of the circumstances. I telegraphed—I think I telegraphed; didn't I, Earwaker?'

'I have some recollection of a word or two of scant excuse,' replied the journalist.

'But I implore you to consider the haste I was in,' cried Malkin; 'not five minutes, Mr. Peak, to book, to register luggage, to do everything; not five minutes, I protest! But here we are at last. Let us talk! Let us talk!'

He seated himself with an air of supreme enjoyment, and began to cram the bowl of a large pipe from a bulky pouch.

'How stands the fight with Kenyon and Co.?' he cried, as soon as the tobacco was glowing.

Earwaker briefly repeated what he had told Peak.

'Hold out! No surrender and no compromise! What's your opinion, Mr. Peak, on the abstract question? Is a popular paper likely, or not, to be damaged in its circu-

lation by improvement of style and tone—within the limits of discretion?'

'I shouldn't be surprised if it were,' Peak answered, drily.

'I'm afraid you're right. There's no use in blinking truths, however disagreeable. But, for Earwaker, that isn't the main issue. What he has to do is to assert himself. Every man's first duty is to assert himself. At all events, this is how I regard the matter. I am all for individualism, for the development of one's personality at whatever cost. No compromise on points of faith! Earwaker has his ideal of journalistic duty, and in a fight with fellows like Runcorn and Kenyon he must stand firm as a rock.'

'I can't see that he's called upon to fight at all,' said Peak. 'He's in a false position; let him get out of it.'

'A false position? I can't see that. No man better fitted than Earwaker to raise the tone of Radical journalism. Here's a big Sunday newspaper practically in his hands; it seems to me that the circumstances give him a grand opportunity of making his force felt. What are we all seeking but an opportunity for striking out with effect?'

Godwin listened with a sceptical smile, and made answer in slow, careless tones.

'Earwaker happens to be employed and paid by certain capitalists to increase the sale of their paper.'

'My dear sir!' cried the other, bouncing upon his seat. 'How can you take such a view? A great newspaper surely cannot be regarded as a mere source of income. These capitalists declare that they have at heart the interests of the working classes; so has Earwaker, and he is far better able than they to promote those interests. His duty is to apply their money to the best use, morally speaking. If he were lukewarm in the matter, I should be the first to advise his retirement; but this fight is entirely congenial to him. I trust he will hold his own to the last possible moment.'

'You must remember,' put in the journalist, with a look of amusement, 'that Peak has no sympathy with Radicalism.'

'I lament it, but that does not affect my argument. If you were a high Tory, I should urge you just as strongly to assert yourself. Surely you agree with this point of mine, Mr. Peak? You admit that a man must develop whatever strength is in him.'

'I'm not at all sure of that.'

Malkin fixed himself sideways in the chair, and examined his collocutor's face earnestly. He endeavoured to subdue his excitement to the tone of courteous debate, but the words that at length escaped him were humorously blunt.

'Then of what *are* you sure?'

'Of nothing.'

'Now we touch bottom!' cried Malkin. 'Philosophically speaking, I agree with you. But we have to live our lives, and I suppose we must direct ourselves by some conscious principle.'

'I don't see the necessity,' Peak replied, still in an impassive tone. 'We may very well be guided by circumstances as they arise. To be sure, there's a principle in that, but I take it you mean something different.'

'Yes I do. I hold that the will must direct circumstances, not receive its impulse from them. How, then, are we to be guided? What do you set before yourself?'

'To get through life with as much satisfaction and as little pain as possible.'

'You are a hedonist, then. Well and good! Then that is your conscious principle'——

'No, it isn't.'

'How am I to understand you?'

'By recognising that a man's intellectual and moral principles as likely as not tend to anything but his happiness.'

'I can't admit it!' exclaimed Malkin, leaping from his chair. 'What *is* happiness?'

'I don't know.'

'Earwaker, *what* is happiness? What *is* happiness?'

'I really don't know,' answered the journalist, mirthfully.

'This is trifling with a grave question. We all know perfectly well that happiness is the conscious exertion of individual powers. Why is there so much suffering under our present social system? Because the majority of men are crushed to a dead level of mechanical toil, with no opportunity of developing their special faculties. Give a man scope, and happiness is put within his reach.'

'What do you mean by scope?' inquired Godwin.

'Scope? Scope? Why, room to expand. The vice of our society is hypocrisy; it comes of over-crowding. When a man isn't allowed to be himself, he takes refuge in a mean imitation of those other men who appear to be

better off. That was what sent me off to South America. I got into politics, and found that I was in danger of growing dishonest, of compromising, and toadying. In the wilderness, I found myself again.—Do you seriously believe that happiness can be obtained by ignoring one's convictions?'

He addressed the question to both, snuffing the air with head thrown back.

'What if you have no convictions?' asked Peak.

'Then you are incapable of happiness in any worthy sense! You may graze, but you will never feast.'

The listeners joined in laughter, and Malkin, after a moment's hesitation, allowed his face to relax in good-humoured sympathy.

'Now look here!' he cried. 'You—Earwaker; suppose you sent conscience to the devil, and set yourself to please Runcorn by increasing the circulation of your paper by whatever means. You would flourish, undoubtedly. In a short time you would be chief editor, and your pockets would burst with money. But what about your peace of mind? What about happiness?'

'Why, I'm disposed to agree with Peak,' answered the journalist. 'If I *could* take that line, I should be

a happier man than conscientiousness will ever make me.'

Malkin swelled with indignation.

'You don't mean it! You are turning a grave argument into jest!—Where's my hat? Where the devil is my hat? Send for me again when you are disposed to talk seriously.'

He strode towards the door, but Earwaker arrested him with a shout.

'You're leaving your pipe!'

'So I am. Where is it?—Did I tell you where I bought this pipe?'

'No. What's the wood?'

On the instant Malkin fell into a cheerful vein of reminiscence. In five minutes he was giving a rapturous description of tropical scenes, laughing joyously as he addressed now one now the other of his companions.

'I hear you have a mind to see those countries, Mr. Peak,' he said at length. 'If you care for a travelling-companion—rather short-tempered, but you'll pardon that—pray give me the preference. I should enjoy above all things to travel with a man of science.'

'It's very doubtful whether I shall ever get so far,' Godwin replied, musingly.

And, as he spoke, he rose to take leave. Earwaker's protest that it was not yet ten o'clock did not influence him.

'I want to reflect on the meaning of happiness,' he said, extending his hand to Malkin; and, in spite of the smile, his face had a sombre cast.

The two who were left of course discussed him.

'You won't care much for Peak,' said Earwaker. 'He and I suit each other, because there's a good deal of indifferentism in both of us. Moral earnestness always goes against the grain with him; I've noticed it frequently.'

'I'm sorry I spoke so dogmatically. It wasn't altogether good manners. Suppose I write him a short letter, just expressing my regret for having been led away'——

'Needless, needless,' laughed the journalist. 'He thinks all the better of you for your zeal. But happiness is a sore point with him; few men, I should think, have known less of it. I can't imagine any circumstances which would make him thoroughly at peace with himself and the world.'

'Poor fellow! You can see something of that in his face. Why doesn't he get married?'

'A remarkable suggestion!—By the way, why don't *you?*'

'My dear boy, there's nothing I wish more, but it's a business of such fearful precariousness. I'm one of those men whom marriage will either make or ruin. You know my characteristics; the slightest check upon my independence, and all's up with me. The woman I marry must be perfectly reasonable, perfectly good-tempered; she must have excellent education, and every delicacy of breeding. Where am I to find this paragon?'

'Society is open to you.'

'True, but I am not open to society. I don't take kindly to the people of my own class. No, I tell you what—my only chance of getting a suitable wife is to train some very young girl for the purpose. Don't misunderstand me, for heaven's sake! I mean that I must make a friendship with some schoolgirl in whose education I can have a voice, whose relatives will permit me to influence her mind and develop her character. What do you think of this idea?'

'Not bad, but it demands patience.'

'And who more patient than I? But let us talk of that poor Mrs. Jacox and her girls. You feel that you

know them pretty well from my letters, don't you? Nothing more monstrous can be imagined than the treatment to which this poor woman has been subjected! I couldn't have believed that such dishonesty and brutality were possible in English families of decent position. Her husband deserted her, her brother robbed her, her sister-in-law libelled her,—the whole story is nauseating!'

'You're quite sure that she tells you the truth?'

Malkin glared with sudden resentment.

'The truth? What! you also desire to calumniate her? For shame, Earwaker! A poor widow toiling to support herself in a foreign country, with two children dependent on her.'

'Yes, yes, yes; but you seem to know very little of her.'

'I know her perfectly, and all her circumstances!'

Mrs. Jacox was the mother of the two girls whom Malkin had escorted to Rouen, after an hour or so of all but casual acquaintance. She and her history had come in a very slight degree under the notice of certain good-natured people with whom Malkin was on friendly terms, and hearing that the children, Bella and Lily, aged fourteen and twelve respectively, were about to undertake

alone a journey to the Continent, the erratic hero felt it incumbent upon him to see them safe at their mother's side. Instead of returning forthwith, he lingered in Normandy for several weeks, striking off at length, on the summons of a friend, to Orleans, whence he was only to-day returned. Two or three letters had kept Earwaker informed of his movements. Of Mrs. Jacox he wrote as he now spoke, with compassionate respect, and the girls, according to him, were exquisite models of budding maidenhood.

'You haven't told me,' said Earwaker, calmly fronting the indignant outburst, 'what her circumstances are—at present.'

'She assists an English lady in the management of a boarding-house,' Malkin replied, with an air which forbade trivial comment. 'Bella and Lily will of course continue their studies. I daresay I shall run over now and then to see them.'

'May I, without offence, inquire if either of these young ladies seems suitable for the ideal training of which you spoke?'

Malkin smiled thoughtfully. He stood with his legs apart and stroked his blond beard.

'The surmise is not unnatural. Well, I confess that

Bella has inspired me with no little interest. She is rather mature, unfortunately; I wish she had been Lily's age. We shall see; we shall see.'

Musing, he refilled his pipe, and gossip was prolonged till something after one o'clock. Malkin was never known to retire willingly from an evening's congenial talk until the small hours were in progress.

Peak, on reaching home about eleven, was surprised to see a light in his sitting-room window. As he entered, his landlady informed him that Mr. Moxey had been waiting upstairs for an hour or two. Christian was reading. He laid down the book and rose languidly. His face was flushed, and he spoke with a laugh which suggested that a fit of despondency (as occasionally happened) had tempted him to excess in cordials. Godwin understood these signs. He knew that his friend's intellect was rather brightened than impaired by such stimulus, and he affected not to be conscious of any peculiarity.

'As you wouldn't come to me,' Christian began, 'I had no choice but to come to you. My visit isn't unwelcome, I hope?'

'Certainly not. But how are you going to get home? You know the time?'

'Don't trouble. I shan't go to bed to-night. Let me sit here and read, will you? If I feel tired I can lie down on the sofa. What a delightful book this is! I must get it.'

It was a history of the Italian Renaissance, recently published.

'Where does this phrase come from?' he continued, pointing to a scrap of paper, used as a book-mark, on which Godwin had pencilled a note. The words were: '*Foris ut moris, intus ut libet.*'

'It's mentioned there,' Peak replied, 'as the motto of those humanists who outwardly conformed to the common faith.'

'I see. All very well when the Inquisition was flourishing, but sounds ignoble nowadays.'

'Do you think so? In a half-civilised age, whether the sixteenth or the nineteenth century, a wise man may do worse than adopt it.'

'Better be honest, surely?'

Peak stood for a moment as if in doubt, then exclaimed irritably:

'Honest? Honest? Who is or can be honest? Who truly declares himself? When a man has learnt that truth is indeterminable, how is it more moral to go about

crying that you don't believe a certain dogma than to concede that the dogma may possibly be true? This new morality of the agnostics is mere paltry conceit. Why must I make solemn declaration that I don't believe in absolute knowledge? I might as well be called upon to inform all my acquaintances how I stand with regard to the theories of chemical affinity. One's philosophy has nothing to do with the business of life. If I chose to become a Church of England clergyman, what moral objection could be made?'

This illustration was so amusing to Moxey, that his surprise at what preceded gave way to laughter.

'I wonder,' he exclaimed, 'that you never seriously thought of a profession for which you are so evidently cut out.'

Godwin kept silence; his face had darkened, and he seated himself with sullen weariness.

'Tell me what you've been doing,' resumed Moxey. 'Why haven't I heard from you?'

'I should have come in a day or two. I thought you were probably out of town.'

'Her husband is ill,' said the other, by way of reply. He leaned forward with his arms upon the table, and gazed at Godwin with eyes of peculiar brightness.

'Ill, is he?' returned Godwin with slow interest. 'In the same way as before?'

'Yes, but much worse.'

Christian paused; and when he again spoke it was hurriedly, confusedly.

'How can I help getting excited about it? How can I behave decently? You're the only man I ever speak to on the subject, and no doubt I both weary and disgust you; but I *must* speak to some one. My nerves are strung beyond endurance; it's only by speaking that I can ease myself from the intolerable strain.'

'Have you seen her lately?'

'Yesterday, for a moment, in the street. It's ten months since the last meeting.'

'Well,' remarked Godwin, abruptly, 'it's probable the man will die one of these days, then your trials will have a happy end. I see no harm in hoping that his life may be short—that's a conventional feeling. If two people can be benefited by the death of a single person, why shouldn't we be glad in the prospect of his dying? Not of his suffering—that's quite another thing. But die he must; and to curtail the life of a being who at length wholly ceases to exist is no injury. You can't injure a nonentity. Do you think I should take it ill if I knew that

some persons were wishing my death? Why, look, if ever I crush a little green fly that crawls upon me in the fields, at once I am filled with envy of its fate—sincerest envy. To have passed so suddenly from being into nothingness—how blessed an extinction! To feel in that way, instinctively, in the very depths of your soul, is to be a true pessimist. If I had ever doubted my sincerity in pessimism, this experience, several times repeated, would have reassured me.'

Christian covered his face, and brooded for a long time, whilst Godwin sat with his eyes on vacancy.

'Come and see us to-morrow,' said the former, at length.

'Perhaps.'

'Why do you keep away?'

'I'm in no mood for society.'

'We'll have no one. Only Marcella and I.'

Again a long silence.

'Marcella is going in for comparative philology,' Christian resumed, with the gentle tone in which he invariably spoke of his sister. 'What a mind that girl has! I never knew any woman of half her powers.'

Godwin said nothing.

'No,' continued the other fervently, 'nor of half her goodness. I sometimes think that no mortal could come nearer to our ideal of moral justice and purity. If it were not for her, I should long ago have gone to perdition, in one way or another. It's her strength, not my own, that has saved me. I daresay you know this?'

'There's some truth in it, I believe,' Peak answered, his eye wandering.

'See how circumstances can affect one's judgment. If, just about the time I first knew you, I had abandoned myself to a life of sottish despair, of course I should have charged Constance with the blame of it. Now that I have struggled on, I can see that she has been a blessing to me instead of a curse. If Marcella has given me strength, I have to thank Constance for the spiritual joy which otherwise I should never have known.'

Peak uttered a short laugh.

'That is only saying that she *might* have been ruinous, but in the course of circumstances has proved helpful. I envy your power of deriving comfort from such reflections.'

'Well, we view things differently. I have the habit of looking to the consolatory facts of life, you to the

depressing. There's an unfortunate lack in you, Peak; you seem insensible to female influence, and I believe that is closely connected with your desperate pessimism.'

Godwin laughed again, this time with mocking length of note.

'Come now, isn't it true?' urged the other. 'Sincerely, do you care for women at all?'

'Perhaps not.'

'A grave misfortune, depend upon it! It accounts for nearly everything that is unsatisfactory in your life. If you had ever been sincerely devoted to a woman, be assured your powers would have developed in a way of which you have no conception. It's no answer to tell me that *I* am still a mere trifler, never likely to do anything of account; I haven't it in me to be anything better, and I might easily have become much worse. But you might have made yourself a great position—I mean, you *might* do so; you are still very young. If only you knew the desire of a woman's help.'

'You really think so?' said Godwin, with grave irony.

'I am sure of it! There's no harm in repeating what

you have often told me—your egoism oppresses you. A woman's influence takes one out of oneself. No man can be a better authority on this than I. For more than eleven years I have worshipped one woman with absolute faithfulness '——

'Absolute?' interrupted Godwin, bluntly.

'What exception occurs to you?'

'As you challenge inquiry, forgive me for asking what your interest was in one of your cousins at Twybridge?'

Christian started, and averted his face with a look of embarrassment.

'Do you mean to say that you knew anything about that?'

'I was always an observer,' Peak replied, smiling. 'You don't remember, perhaps, that I happened to be present when a letter had just arrived for you at your uncle's house—a letter which evidently disturbed you?'

'This is astonishing! Peak, you're a terrible fellow! Heaven forbid that I should ever be at your mercy! Yes, you are quite right,' he continued, despondently. 'But that was no real unfaithfulness. I don't quite know how to explain it. I *did* make love to poor Janet, and with the result that I have never since seen any of the family. My uncle, when he found I had drawn

back, was very savage—naturally enough. Marcella and I never again went to Twybridge. I liked Janet; she was a good, kind girl. I believed just then that my love for Constance was hopeless; my mood impelled me to the conviction that the best thing I could do was to marry Janet and settle down to a peaceful domestic life. Then came that letter—it was from Constance herself. It meant nothing, yet it was enough to revive all my hopes. I rushed off——! How brutally I had behaved! Poor little Janet!'

He let his face fall upon his hands.

'Allow me an indiscreet question,' said Peak, after a silence. 'Have you any founded hope of marrying Constance if she becomes a widow?'

Christian started and looked up with wide eyes.

'Hope? Every hope! I have the absolute assurance of her love.'

'I see.'

'But I mustn't mislead you,' pursued the other, hurriedly. 'Our relations are absolutely pure. I have only allowed myself to see her at very long intervals. Why shouldn't I tell you? It was less than a year after her marriage; I found her alone in a room in a friend's house; her eyes were red with weeping. I couldn't help

holding my hand to her. She took it, and held it for a moment, and looked at me steadily, and whispered my name—that was all. I knew then that she repented of her marriage—who can say what led her into it? I was poor, you know; perhaps—but in spite of all, she *did* love me. There has never since been anything like a scene of emotion between us—*that* her conscience couldn't allow. She is a noble-minded woman, and has done her duty. But if she is free'——

He quivered with passionate feeling.

'And you are content,' said Godwin, drily, 'to have wasted ten years of your life for such a possibility?'

'Wasted!' Christian exclaimed. 'Come, come, Peak; why *will* you affect this wretched cynicism? Is it waste of years to have lived with the highest and purest ideal perpetually before one's mind? What can a man do better than, having found an admirable woman, to worship her thenceforth, and defy every temptation that could lead him astray? I don't like to seem boastful, but I *have* lived purely and devotedly. And if the test endured to the end of my life, I could sustain it. Is the consciousness of my love nothing to Constance? Has it not helped her?'

Such profound sincerity was astonishing to Peak.

He did not admire it, for it seemed to him, in this case at all events, the fatal weakness of a character it was impossible not to love. Though he could not declare his doubts, he thought it more than probable that this Laura of the voiceless Petrarch was unworthy of such constancy, and that she had no intention whatever of rewarding it, even if the opportunity arrived. But this was the mere speculation of a pessimist; he might be altogether wrong, for he had never denied the existence of high virtue, in man or woman.

'There goes midnight!' he remarked, turning from the subject. 'You can't sleep, neither can I. Why shouldn't we walk into town?'

'By all means; on condition that you will come home with me, and spend tomorrow there.'

'Very well.'

They set forth, and with varied talk, often broken by long silences, made their way through sleeping suburbs to the dark valley of Thames.

There passed another month, during which Peak was neither seen nor heard of by his friends. One evening in October, as he sat studying at the British Museum, a friendly voice claimed his attention. He rose nervously and met the searching eye of Buckland Warricombe.

'I had it in mind to write to you,' said the latter. 'Since we parted down yonder I have been running about a good deal, with few days in town. Do you often read here?'

'Generally on Saturday afternoon.'

Buckland glanced at the open volume and caught a heading, 'Apologetic Theology.'

'Still at the works?'

'Yes; I shall be there till Christmas—no longer.'

'Are you by chance disengaged tomorrow? Could you dine with me? I shall be alone; perhaps you don't mind that? We could exchange views on "fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute."'

Godwin accepted the invitation, and Warricombe, unable to linger, took leave of him.

They met the next evening in Buckland's rooms, not far from the Houses of Parliament. Commonplace comfort was the note of these quarters. Peak wondered that a man who had it in his power to surround himself with evidences of taste should be content to dwell thus. His host seemed to detect this thought in the glances Godwin cast about him.

'Nothing but a *pied-à-terre*. I have been here three or four years, but I don't think of it as a home. I

suppose I shall settle somewhere before long: yet, on the whole, what does it matter where one lives? There's something in the atmosphere of our time that makes one indisposed to strike roots in the old way. Who knows how long there'll be such a thing as real property? We are getting to think of ourselves as lodgers; it's as well to be indifferent about a notice to quit.'

'Many people would still make a good fight for the old homes,' replied Peak.

'Yes; I daresay I should myself, if I were a family man. A wife and children are strong persuasions to conservatism. In those who have anything, that's to say. Let the families who have nothing learn how they stand in point of numbers, and we shall see what we shall see.'

'And you are doing your best to teach them that.'

Buckland smiled.

'A few other things at the same time. One isn't necessarily an anarchist, you know.'

'What enormous faith you must have in the metaphysical powers of the multitude!'

'Trenchant! But say, rather, in the universal self-interest. That's the trait of human nature which we have in mind when we speak of enlightenment. The

aim of practical Radicalism is to instruct men's selfishness. Astonishing how capable it is of being instructed! The mistake of the Socialist lies in his crediting men with far too much self-esteem, far too little perception of their own limits. The characteristic of mankind at large is humility.'

Peak began to understand his old acquaintance; he had imagined him less acute. Gratified by the smile of interest, Warricombe added:

'There are forces of madness; I have shown you that I make allowance for them. But they are only dangerous so long as privilege allies itself with hypocrisy. The task of the modern civiliser is to sweep away sham idealisms.'

'I agree with you,' Godwin replied.

With sudden change of mood, Buckland began to speak of an indifferent topic of the day, and in a few minutes they sat down to dinner.

Not till the welcome tobacco blended its aroma with that of coffee did a frankly personal note sound in their conversation.

'So at Christmas you are free,' said Warricombe. 'You still think of leaving London?'

'I have decided to go down into Devonshire.'

'The seaside?'

'I shall stay first of all in Exeter,' Godwin replied, with deliberation; 'one can get hold of books there.'

'Yes, especially of the ecclesiastical colour.'

'You are still unable to regard my position with anything but contempt?' Peak asked, looking steadily at the critical face.

'Come now; what does it all mean? Of course I quite understand how tolerant the Church is becoming: I know what latitude it permits in its servants. But what do you propose to yourself?'

'Precisely what you call the work of the civiliser—to attack sham ideals.'

'As for instance——?'

'The authority of the mob,' answered Peak, suavely.

'Your clericalism is political, then?'

'To a great extent.'

'I discern a vague sort of consistency in this. You regard the Church formulas as merely symbolical—useful for the purposes of the day?'

'Rather for the purposes of eternity.'

'In the human sense.'

'In every sense.'

Warricombe perceived that no directness of questioning would elicit literal response, and on the whole this relieved him. To hear Godwin Peak using the language of a fervent curate would have excited in him something more than disgust. It did not seem impossible that a nature like Peak's—intellectually arrogant, vehemently anti-popular—should have been attracted by the traditions, the social prestige, of the Anglican Church; nor at all unlikely that a mind so constituted should justify a seeming acceptance of dogmas, which in the strict sense it despised. But he was made uneasy by his ignorance of Peak's private life during the years since their parting at College. He did not like to think of the possible establishment of intimacy between this man of low origin, uncertain career, boundless ambition, and the household of Martin Warricombe. There could be no doubt that Peak had decided to go to Exeter because of the social prospects recently opened to him. In the vulgar phrase, he had probably 'taken stock' of Mr. Warricombe's idiosyncrasy, and saw therein a valuable opportunity for a theological student, who at the same time was a devotee of natural science. To be sure, the people at Exeter could be put on their guard. On the other hand, Peak had plainly avowed his desire to form social connections

of the useful kind; in his position such an aim was essential, a mere matter of course.

Godwin's voice interrupted this train of thought.

'Let me ask you a plain question. You have twice been kind enough to introduce me to your home as a friend of yours. Am I guilty of presumption in hoping that your parents will continue to regard me as an acquaintance? I trust there's no need to assure you that I know the meaning of discretion.'

An appeal to Buckland's generosity seldom failed. Yes, it was true that he had more than once encouraged the hope now frankly expressed. Indulging a correspondent frankness, he might explain that Peak's position was so distasteful to him that it disturbed the future with many kinds of uncertainty. But this would be churlish. He must treat his guest as a gentleman, so long as nothing compelled him to take the less agreeable view.

'My dear Peak, let us have none of these formalities. My parents have distinctly invited you to go and see them whenever you are in the neighbourhood. I am quite sure they will help to make your stay in Exeter a pleasant one.'

Therewith closed the hazardous dialogue. Warricombe

turned at once to a safe topic—that of contemporary fiction, and they chatted pleasantly enough for the rest of the evening.

Not many days after this, Godwin received by post an envelope which contained certain proof sheets, and therewith a note in which the editor of *The Critical Review* signified his acceptance of a paper entitled 'The New Sophistry.' The communication was originally addressed to Earwaker, who had scribbled at the foot, 'Correct, if you are alive, and send back to Dolby.'

The next morning he did not set out as usual for Rotherhithe. Through the night he had not closed his eyes; he was in a state of nervousness which bordered on fever. A dozen times he had read over the proofs, with throbbing pulse, with exultant self-admiration: but the printer's errors which had caught his eye, and a few faults of phrase, were still uncorrected. What a capital piece of writing it was! What a flagellation of M'Naughten and all his tribe! If this did not rouse echoes in the literary world——

Through the long day he sat in languor or paced his room like one made restless by pain. Only when the gloom of nightfall obliged him to light his lamp did he at length sit down to the table and carefully revise the

proofs, pen in hand. When he had made up the packet for post, he wrote to Earwaker.

'I had forgotten all about this thing. Proofs have gone to Dolby. I have not signed; probably he would object to my doing so. As it is, the paper can be ascribed to anyone, and attention thus excited. We shall see paragraphs attributing it to men of mark—perhaps scandal will fix it on a bishop. In any case, don't let out the secret. I beg this seriously, and for a solid reason. Not a word to anyone, however intimate. If Dolby betrays *your* name, grin and bear it. I depend upon your friendship.'

II

In a by-way which declines from the main thoroughfare of Exeter, and bears the name of Longbrook Street, is a row of small houses placed above long strips of sloping garden. They are old and plain, with no architectural feature calling for mention, unless it be the latticed porch which gives the doors an awkward quaintness. Just beyond, the road crosses a hollow, and begins the ascent of a hill here interposed between the city and the inland-winding valley of Exe. The little terrace may be regarded as urban or rural, according to the tastes and occasions of those who dwell there. In one direction, a walk of five minutes will conduct to the middle of High Street, and in the other it takes scarcely longer to reach the open country.

On the upper floor of one of these cottages, Godwin Peak had made his abode. Sitting-room and bedchamber,

furnished with homely comfort, answered to his bachelor needs, and would allow of his receiving without embarrassment any visitor whom fortune might send him. Of quietness he was assured, for a widow and her son, alike remarkable for sobriety of demeanour, were the only persons who shared the house with him. Mrs. Roots could not compare in grace and skill with the little Frenchwoman who had sweetened his existence at Peckham Rye, but her zeal made amends for natural deficiency, and the timorous respect with which she waited upon him was by no means disagreeable to Godwin. Her reply to a request or suggestion was always, 'If you please, sir.' Throughout the day she went so tranquilly about her domestic duties, that Godwin seldom heard anything except the voice of the cuckoo-clock, a pleasant sound to him. Her son, employed at a nurseryman's, was a great sinewy fellow with a face of such ruddiness that it seemed to diffuse warmth; on Sunday afternoon, whatever the state of the sky, he sat behind the house in his shirt-sleeves, and smoked a pipe as he contemplated the hart's-tongue which grew there upon a rockery.

'The gentleman from London'—so Mrs. Roots was wont to style her lodger in speaking with neighbours—

had brought his books with him; they found place on a few shelves. His microscope had its stand by the window, and one or two other scientific implements lay about the room. The cabinets bequeathed to him by Mr. Gunnery he had sent to Twybridge, to remain in his mother's care. In taking the lodgings, he described himself merely as a student, and gave his landlady to understand that he hoped to remain under her roof for at least a year. Of his extreme respectability, the widow could entertain no doubt, for he dressed with aristocratic finish, attended services at the Cathedral and elsewhere very frequently, and made the most punctual payments. Moreover, a casual remark had informed her that he was on friendly terms with Mr. Martin Warricombe, whom her son knew as a gentleman of distinction. He often sat up very late at night, but, doubtless, that was the practice of Londoners. No lodger could have given less trouble, or have acknowledged with more courtesy all that was done for his convenience.

No one ever called upon Mr. Peak, but he was often from home for many hours together, probably on visits to great people in city or country. It seemed rather strange, however, that the postman so seldom brought anything for him. Though he had now been more than

two months in the house, he had received only three letters, and those at long intervals.

Noticeable was the improvement in his health since his arrival here. The pallor of his cheeks was giving place to a wholesome tinge; his eye was brighter; he showed more disposition to converse, and was readier with pleasant smiles. Mrs. Roots even heard him singing in his bedroom—though, oddly enough, it was a secular song on Sunday morning. The weekly bills for food, which at first had been very modest, grew richer in items. Godwin had, in fact, never felt so well. He extended his walks in every direction, sometimes rambling up the valley to sleepy little towns where he could rest in the parlours of old inns, sometimes striking across country to this or that point of the sea-coast, or making his way to the nearer summits of Dartmoor, noble in their wintry desolation. He marked with delight every promise of returning spring. When he could only grant himself a walk of an hour or two in the sunny afternoon, there was many a deep lane within easy reach, where the gorse gleamed in masses of gold, and the little oak-trees in the hedges were ruddy with last year's clinging leafage, and catkins hung from the hazels, and the fresh green of sprouting ivy crept over bank and wall. Had he now

been in London, the morning would have awakened him to fog and slush and misery. As it was, when he looked out upon the glow of sunrise, he felt the sweet air breathing health into his frame and vigour into his mind. There were moments when he could all but say of himself that he was at peace with the world.

As on a morning towards the end of March, when a wind from the Atlantic swept spaces of brightest blue amid the speeding clouds, and sang joyously as it rushed over hill and dale. It was the very day for an upland walk, for a putting forth of one's strength in conflict with boisterous gusts and sudden showers, that give a taste of earth's nourishment. But Godwin had something else in view. After breakfast, he sat down to finish a piece of work which had occupied him for two or three days, a translation from a German periodical. His mind wrought easily, and he often hummed an air as his pen moved over the paper. When the task was completed, he rolled his papers and the pamphlet together, put them into the pocket of his overcoat, and presently went forth.

Twenty minutes' walk brought him to the Warricombes' house. It was his second call within the present week, but such assiduity had not hitherto been his wont. Though already summoned twice or thrice by express

invitation, he was sparing of voluntary visits. Having asked for Mr. Warricombe, he was forthwith conducted to the study. In the welcome which greeted his appearance, he could detect no suspicion of simulated warmth, though his ear had unsurpassable discrimination.

'Have you looked through it?' Martin exclaimed, as he saw the foreign periodical in his visitor's hand.

'I have written a rough translation'——

'Oh, how could you think of taking such trouble! These things are sent to me by the dozen—I might say, by the cartload. My curiosity would have been amply satisfied if you had just told me the drift of the thing.'

'It seemed to me,' said Peak, modestly, 'that the paper was worth a little careful thought. I read it rapidly at first, but found myself drawn to it again. It states the point of view of the average scientific mind with such remarkable clearness, that I wished to think it over, and the best way was to do so pen in hand.'

'Well, if you really did it on your own account'——

Mr. Warricombe took the offered sheets and glanced at the first of them.

'My only purpose,' said Godwin, 'in calling again so soon was to leave this with you.'

He made as though he would take his departure.

'You want to get home again? Wait at least till this shower is over. I enjoy that pelting of spring rain against the window. In a minute or two we shall have the laurels flashing in the sunshine, as if they were hung with diamonds.'

They stood together looking out on to the garden. Presently their talk returned to the German disquisition, which was directed against the class of quasi-scientific authors attacked by Peak himself in his *Critical* article. In the end Godwin sat down and began to read the translation he had made, Mr. Warricombe listening with a thoughtful smile. From time to time the reader paused and offered a comment, endeavouring to show that the arguments were merely plausible; his air was that of placid security, and he seemed to enjoy the irony which often fell from his lips. Martin frequently scrutinised him, and always with a look of interest which betokened grave reflection.

'Here,' said Godwin at one point, 'he has a note citing a passage from Reusch's book on *The Bible and Nature*. If I am not mistaken, he misrepresents his author, though perhaps not intentionally.'

'You know the book?'

'I have studied it carefully, but I don't possess it. I thought I remembered this particular passage very well.'

'Is it a work of authority?'

'Yes; it is very important. Unfortunately, it hasn't yet been translated. Rather bulky, but I shouldn't mind doing it myself if I were sure of finding a publisher.'

'*The Bible and Nature*,' said Martin, musingly. 'What is his scheme? How does he go to work?'

Godwin gave a brief but lucid description of the book, and Mr. Warricombe listened gravely. When there had been silence for some moments, the latter spoke in a tone he had never yet used when conversing with Peak. He allowed himself, for the first time, to betray a troubled doubt on the subject under discussion.

'So he makes a stand at Darwinism as it affects man?'

Peak had yet no means of knowing at what point Martin himself 'made a stand.' Modes of reconcilement between scientific discovery and religious tradition are so very numerous, and the geologist was only now beginning to touch upon these topics with his young acquaintance. That his mind was not perfectly at ease

amid the conflicts of the day, Godwin soon perceived, and by this time he had clear assurance that Martin would willingly thrash out the whole debate with anyone who seemed capable of supporting orthodox tenets by reasoning not unacceptable to a man of broad views. The negativist of course assumed from the first that Martin, however respectable his knowledge, was far from possessing the scientific mind, and each conversation had supplied him with proofs of this defect; it was not at all in the modern spirit that the man of threescore years pursued his geological and kindred researches, but with the calm curiosity of a liberal intellect which has somehow taken this direction instead of devoting itself to literary study. At bottom, Godwin had no little sympathy with Mr. Warricombe; he too, in spite of his militant instincts, dwelt by preference amid purely human interests. He grasped with firm intelligence the modes of thought which distinguish scientific men, but his nature did not prompt him to a consistent application of them. Personal liking enabled him to subdue the impulses of disrespect which, under other circumstances, would have made it difficult for him to act with perfection his present part. None the less, his task was one of infinite delicacy. Martin Warricombe was not the man to unbosom himself

on trivial instigation. It must be a powerful influence which would persuade him to reveal whatever self-questionings lay beneath his genial good breeding and long-established acquiescence in a practical philosophy. Godwin guarded himself against his eager emotions; one false note, one syllable of indiscretion, and his aims might be hopelessly defeated.

'Yes,' was his reply to the hesitating question. 'He argues strenuously against the descent of man. If I understand him, he regards the concession of this point as impossible.'

Martin was deep in thought. He held a paper-knife bent upon his knee, and his smooth, delicate features wore an unquiet smile.

'Do you know Hebrew, Mr. Peak?'

The question came unexpectedly, and Godwin could not help a momentary confusion, but he covered it with the tone of self-reproach.

'I am ashamed to say that I am only now taking it up seriously.'

'I don't think you need be ashamed,' said Martin, good-naturedly. 'Even a mind as active as yours must postpone some studies. Reusch, I suppose, is sound on that head?'

The inquiry struck Godwin as significant. So Mr. Warricombe attached importance to the verbal interpretation of the Old Testament.

'Distinctly an authority,' he replied. 'He devotes whole chapters to a minute examination of the text.'

'If you had more leisure,' Martin began, deliberately, when he had again reflected, 'I should be disposed to urge you to undertake that translation.'

Peak appeared to meditate.

'Has the book been used by English writers?' the other inquired.

'A good deal.—It was published in the sixties, but I read it in a new edition dated a few years ago. Reusch has kept pace with the men of science. It would be very interesting to compare the first form of the book with the latest.'

'It would, very.'

Raising his head from the contemplative posture, Godwin exclaimed, with a laugh of zeal:

'I think I must find time to translate him. At all events, I might address a proposal to some likely publisher. Yet I don't know how I should assure him of my competency.'

'Probably a specimen would be the surest testimony.'

'Yes. I might do a few chapters.'

Mr. Warricombe's lapse into silence and brevities intimated to Godwin that it was time to take leave. He always quitted this room with reluctance. Its air of luxurious culture affected his senses deliciously, and he hoped that he might some day be permitted to linger among the cabinets and the library shelves. There were so many books he would have liked to take down, some with titles familiar to him, others which kindled his curiosity when he chanced to observe them. The library abounded in such works as only a wealthy man can purchase, and Godwin, who had examined some of them at the British Museum, was filled with the humaner kind of envy on seeing them in Mr. Warricombe's possession. Those publications of the Palæontological Society, one volume of which (a part of Davidson's superb work on the *Brachiopoda*) even now lay open within sight—his hand trembled with a desire to touch them! And those maps of the Geological Surveys, British and foreign, how he would have enjoyed a day's poring over them!

He rose, but Martin seemed in no haste to bring the conversation to an end.

'Have you read M'Naughten's much-discussed book?'

'Yes.'

'Did you see the savage attack in the *Critical* not long ago?'

Godwin smiled, and made quiet answer:

'I should think it was the last word of scientific bitterness and intolerance.'

'Scientific?' repeated Martin, doubtfully. 'I don't think the writer was a man of science. I saw it somewhere attributed to Huxley, but that was preposterous. To begin with, Huxley would have signed his name; and, again, his English is better. The article seemed to me to be stamped with literary rancour; it was written by some man who envies M'Naughten's success.'

Peak kept silence. Martin's censure of the anonymous author's style stung him to the quick, and he had much ado to command his countenance.

'Still,' pursued the other, 'I felt that much of his satire was only too well pointed. M'Naughten is suggestive, very suggestive; but one comes across books of the same purpose which can have no result but to injure their cause with all thinking people.'

'I have seen many such,' remarked Godwin.

Mr. Warricombe stepped to a bookcase and took down a small volume.

'I wonder whether you know this book of Ampère's, *La Grèce, Rome, et Dante*? Delightful for odd moments! —There came into my mind a passage here at the beginning, apropos of what we were saying: "Il faut souvent un vrai courage pour persister dans un opinion juste en dépit de ses défenseurs." — Isn't that capital?'

Peak received it with genuine appreciation; for once he was able to laugh unfeignedly. The aphorism had so many applications from his own point of view.

'Excellent! — I don't remember to have seen the book.'

'Take it, if you care to.'

This offer seemed a distinct advance in Mr. Warricombe's friendliness. Godwin felt a thrill of encouragement.

'Then you will let me keep this translation for a day or two?' Martin added, indicating the sheets of manuscript. 'I am greatly obliged to you for enabling me to read the thing.'

They shook hands. Godwin had entertained a slight hope that he might be asked to stay to luncheon; but it

could not be much past twelve o'clock, and on the whole there was every reason for feeling satisfied with the results of his visit. Before long he would probably receive another invitation to dine. So with light step he went out into the hall, where Martin again shook hands with him.

The sky had darkened over, and a shrilling of the wind sounded through the garden foliage—fir, and cypress, and laurel. Just as Godwin reached the gate, he was met by Miss Warricombe and Fanny, who were returning from a walk. They wore the costume appropriate to March weather in the country, close-fitting, defiant of gusts; and their cheeks glowed with health. As he exchanged greetings with them, Peak received a new impression of the sisters. He admired the physical vigour which enabled them to take delight in such a day as this, when girls of poorer blood and ignoble nurture would shrink from the sky's showery tumult, and protect their surface elegance by the fireside. Impossible for Sidwell and Fanny to be anything but graceful, for at all times they were perfectly unaffected.

'There'll be another storm in a minute,' said the younger of them, looking with interest to the quarter whence the wind came. 'How suddenly they burst!

What a rush! And then in five minutes the sky is clear again.'

Her eyes shone as she turned laughingly to Peak.

'You're not afraid of getting wet? Hadn't you better come under cover?'

'Here it is!' exclaimed Sidwell, with quieter enjoyment. 'Take shelter for a minute or two, Mr. Peak.'

They led the way to the portico, where Godwin stood with them and watched the squall. A moment's downpour of furious rain was followed by heavy hailstones, which drove horizontally before the shrieking wind. The prospect had wrapped itself in grey gloom. At a hundred yards' distance, scarcely an object could be distinguished; the storm-cloud swooped so low that its skirts touched the branches of tall elms, a streaming, rushing raggedness.

'Don't you enjoy that?' Fanny asked of Godwin.

'Indeed I do.'

'You should be on Dartmoor in such weather,' said Sidwell. 'Father and I were once caught in storms far worse than this—far better, I ought to say, for I never knew anything so terrifically grand.'

Already it was over. The gusts diminished in frequency and force, the hail ceased, the core of blackness

was passing over to the eastern sky. Fanny ran out into the garden, and pointed upward.

'Look where the sunlight is coming!'

An uncloaked patch of heaven shone with colour like that of the girl's eyes—faint, limpid blue. Reminding himself that to tarry longer in this company would be imprudent, Godwin bade the sisters good-morning. The frank heartiness with which Fanny pressed his hand, sent him on his way exultant. Not too strong a word; for, independently of his wider ambitions, he was moved and gratified by the thought that kindly feeling towards him had sprung up in such a heart as this. Nor did conscience so much as whisper a reproach. With unreflecting ingenuousness he tasted the joy as if it were his right. Thus long he had waited, through years of hungry manhood, for the look, the tone, which were in harmony with his native sensibilities. Fanny Warricombe was but an undeveloped girl, yet he valued her friendship above the passionate attachment of any woman bred on a lower social plane. Had it been possible, he would have kissed her fingers with purest reverence.

When out of sight of the house, he paused to regard the sky again. Its noontide splendour was dazzling; masses of rosy cloud sailed swiftly from horizon to

horizon, the azure deepening about them. Yet before long the west would again send forth its turbulent spirits, and so the girls might perhaps be led to think of him.

By night the weather grew more tranquil. There was a full moon, and its radiance illumined the ever-changing face of heaven with rare grandeur. Godwin could not shut himself up over his books; he wandered far away into the country, and let his thoughts have freedom.

He was learning to review with calmness the course by which he had reached his now steadfast resolve. A revulsion such as he had experienced after his first day of simulated orthodoxy, half a year ago, could not be of lasting effect, for it was opposed to the whole tenor of his mature thought. It spoilt his holiday, but had no chance of persisting after his return to the atmosphere of Rotherhithe. That he should have been capable of such emotion was, he said to himself, in the just order of things; callousness in the first stages of an undertaking which demanded gross hypocrisy would signify an ignoble nature—a nature, indeed, which could never have been submitted to trial of so strange a kind. But he had overcome himself; that phase of difficulty was outlived,

and henceforth he saw only the material obstacles to be defied by his vindicated will.

What he proposed to himself was a life of deliberate baseness. Godwin Peak never tried to play the sophist with this fact. But he succeeded in justifying himself by a consideration of the circumstances which had compelled him to a vile expedient. Had his project involved conscious wrong to other persons, he would scarcely even have speculated on its possibilities. He was convinced that no mortal could suffer harm, even if he accomplished the uttermost of his desires. Whom was he in danger of wronging? The conventional moralist would cry: Everyone with whom he came in slightest contact! But a mind such as Peak's has very little to do with conventional morality. Injury to himself he foresaw and accepted; he could never be the man nature designed in him; and he must frequently submit to a self-contempt which would be very hard to bear. Those whom he consistently deceived, how would they suffer? Martin Warricombe to begin with. Martin was a man who had lived his life, and whose chief care would now be to keep his mind at rest in the faiths which had served him from youth onwards. In that very purpose, Godwin believed he could assist him. To see a young man, of strong and

trained intellect, championing the old beliefs, must doubtless be a source of reassurance to one in Martin's position. Reassurance derived from a lie?—And what matter, if the outcome were genuine, if it lasted until the man himself was no more? Did not every form of content result from illusion? What was truth without the mind of the believer?

Society, then—at all events that part of it likely to be affected by his activity? Suppose him an ordained priest, performing all the functions implied in that office. Why, to think only of examples recognised by the public at large, how would he differ for the worse from this, that, and the other clergyman who taught Christianity, all but with blunt avowal, as a scheme of human ethics? No wolf in sheep's clothing he! He plotted against no man's pocket, no woman's honour; he had no sinister design of sapping the faith of congregations—a scheme, by-the-bye, which fanatic liberators might undertake with vast self-approval. If by a word he could have banished religious dogma from the minds of the multitude, he would not have cared to utter it. Wherein lay, indeed, a scruple to be surmounted. The Christian priest must be a man of humble temper; he must be willing, even eager, to sit down among the poor in spirit as well as in estate, and

impart to them his unworldly solaces. Yes, but it had always been recognised that some men who could do the Church good service were personally unfitted for those meek ministrations. His place was in the hierarchy of intellect; if he were to be active at all, it must be with the brain. In his conversation with Buckland Warricombe, last October, he had spoken not altogether insincerely. Let him once be a member of the Church militant, and his heart would go with many a stroke against that democratic movement which desired, among other things, the Church's abolition. He had power of utterance. Roused to combat by the proletarian challenge, he could make his voice ring in the ears of men, even though he used a symbolism which he would not by choice have adopted.

For it was natural that he should anticipate distinction. Whatever his lot in life, he would not be able to rest among an inglorious brotherhood. If he allied himself with the Church, the Church must assign him leadership, whether titular or not was of small moment. In days to come, let people, if they would, debate his history, canvass his convictions. His scornful pride invited any degree of publicity, when once his position was secure.

But in the meantime he was leaving aside the most

powerful of all his motives, and one which demanded closest scrutiny. Not ambition, in any ordinary sense; not desire of material luxury; no incentive recognised by unprincipled schemers first suggested his dishonour. This edifice of subtle untruth, had for its foundation a mere ideal of sexual love. For the winning of some chosen woman, men have wrought vehemently, have ruined themselves and others, have achieved triumphs noble or degrading. But Godwin Peak had for years contemplated the possibility of baseness at the impulse of a craving for love capable only of a social (one might say, of a political) definition. The woman throned in his imagination was no individual, but the type of an order. So strangely had circumstances moulded him, that he could not brood on a desire of spiritual affinities, could not, as is natural to most cultivated men, inflame himself with the ardour of soul reaching to soul; he was pre-occupied with the contemplation of qualities which characterise a class. The sense of social distinctions was so burnt into him, that he could not be affected by any pictured charm of mind or person in a woman who had not the stamp of gentle birth and breeding. If once he were admitted to the intimacy of such women, then, indeed, the canons of selection would have weight with

him; no man more capable of disinterested choice. Till then, the ideal which possessed him was merely such an assemblage of qualities as would excite the democrat to disdain or fury.

In Sidwell Warricombe this ideal found an embodiment; but Godwin did not thereupon come to the conclusion that Sidwell was the wife he desired. Her influence had the effect of deciding his career, but he neither imagined himself in love with her, nor tried to believe that he might win her love if he set himself to the endeavour. For the first time he was admitted to familiar intercourse with a woman whom he *could* make the object of his worship. He thought much of her; day and night her figure stood before him; and this had continued now for half a year. Still he neither was, nor dreamt himself, in love with her. Before long his acquaintance would include many of her like, and at any moment Sidwell might pale in the splendour of another's loveliness.

But what reasoning could defend the winning of a wife by false pretences? This, his final aim, could hardly be achieved without grave wrong to the person whose welfare must in the nature of things be a prime motive with him. The deception he had practised must sooner or later be

discovered; lifelong hypocrisy was incompatible with perfect marriage; some day he must either involve his wife in a system of dishonour, or with her consent relinquish the false career, and find his happiness in the obscurity to which he would then be relegated. Admit the wrong. Grant that some woman whom he loved supremely must, on his account, pass through a harsh trial—would it not be in his power to compensate her amply? The wife whom he imagined (his idealism in this matter was of a crudity which made the strangest contrast with his habits of thought on every other subject) would be ruled by her emotions, and that part of her nature would be wholly under his governance. Religious fanaticism could not exist in her, for in that case she would never have attracted him. Little by little she would learn to think as he did, and her devotedness must lead her to pardon his deliberate insincerities. Godwin had absolute faith in his power of dominating the woman whom he should inspire with tenderness. This was a feature of his egoism, the explanation of those manifold inconsistencies inseparable from his tortuous design. He regarded his love as something so rare, so vehement, so exalting, that its bestowal must seem an abundant recompense for any pain of which he was the cause.

Thus, with perfect sincerity of argument, did Godwin Peak face the undertaking to which he was committed. Incidents might perturb him, but his position was no longer a cause of uneasiness — save, indeed, at those moments when he feared lest any of his old acquaintances might hear of him before time was ripe. This was a source of anxiety, but inevitable; one of the risks he dared.

Had it seemed possible, he would have kept even from his mother the secret of his residence at Exeter; but this would have necessitated the establishment of some indirect means of communication with her, a troublesome and uncertain expedient. He shrank from leaving her in ignorance of his whereabouts, and from passing a year or two without knowledge of her condition. And, on the whole, there could not be much danger in this correspondence. The Moxeys, who alone of his friends had ever been connected with Twybridge, were now absolutely without interests in that quarter. From them he had stolen away, only acquainting Christian at the last moment, in a short letter, with his departure from London. 'It will be a long time before we again see each other — at least, I think so. Don't trouble your head about me. I can't promise to write, and shall be

sorry not to hear how things go with you; but may all happen as you wish!' In the same way he had dealt with Earwaker, except that his letter to Staple Inn was much longer, and contained hints which the philosophic journalist might perchance truly interpret. '"He either fears his fate too much"—you know the old song. I have set out on my life's adventure. I have gone to seek that without which life is no longer worth having. Forgive my shabby treatment of you, old friend. You cannot help me, and your displeasure would be a hindrance in my path. A last piece of counsel: throw overboard the weekly rag, and write for people capable of understanding you.' Earwaker was not at all likely to institute a search; he would accept the situation, and wait with quiet curiosity for its upshot. No doubt he and Moxey would discuss the affair together, and any desire Christian might have to hunt for his vanished comrade would yield before the journalist's surmises. No one else had any serious reason for making inquiries. Probably he might dwell in Devonshire, as long as he chose, without fear of encountering anyone from his old world.

Occasionally—as to-night, under the full moon—he was able to cast off every form of trouble, and rejoice in his

seeming liberty. Though every step in the life before him was an uncertainty, an appeal to fortune, his faith in himself grasped strongly at assurance of success. Once more he felt himself a young man, with unwearied energies; he had shaken off the burden of those ten frustrate years, and kept only their harvest of experience. Old in one sense, in another youthful, he had vast advantages over such men as would henceforth be his competitors—the complex brain, the fiery heart, passion to desire, and skill in attempting. If with such endowment he could not win the prize which most men claim as a mere matter of course, a wife of social instincts correspondent with his own, he must indeed be luckless. But he was not doomed to defeat! Foretaste of triumph urged the current of his blood and inflamed him with exquisite ardour. He sang aloud in the still lanes the hymns of youth and of love; and, when weariness brought him back to his lonely dwelling, he laid his head on the pillow, and slept in dreamless calm.

As for the details of his advance towards the clerical state, he had decided to resume his career at the point where it was interrupted by Andrew Peak. Twice had his education received a check from hostile circumstances: when domestic poverty compelled him to leave school for

Mr. Moxey's service, and when shame drove him from Whitelaw College. In reflecting upon his own character and his lot he gave much weight to these irregularities, no doubt with justice. In both cases he was turned aside from the way of natural development and opportunity. He would now complete his academic course by taking the London degree at which he had long ago aimed; the preliminary examination might without difficulty be passed this summer, and next year he might write himself Bachelor of Arts. A return to the studies of boyhood probably accounted in some measure for the frequent gaiety which he attributed to improving health and revived hopes. Everything he undertook was easy to him, and by a pleasant self-deception he made the passing of a school task his augury of success in greater things.

During the spring he was indebted to the Warricombes' friendship for several new acquaintances. A clergyman named Lilywhite, often at the Warricombes' house, made friendly overtures to him; the connection might be a useful one, and Godwin made the most of it. Mr. Lilywhite was a man of forty — well-read, of scientific tastes, an active pedestrian. Peak had no difficulty in associating with him on amicable terms. With Mrs. Lily-

white, the mother of six children and possessed of many virtues, he presently became a favourite,—she saw in him 'a great deal of quiet moral force.' One or two families of good standing made him welcome at their houses; society is very kind to those who seek its benefits with recognised credentials. The more he saw of these wealthy and tranquil middle-class people, the more fervently did he admire the gracefulness of their existence. He had not set before himself an imaginary ideal; the girls and women were sweet, gentle, perfect in manner, and, within limits, of bright intelligence. He was conscious of benefiting greatly, and not alone in things extrinsic, by the atmosphere of such homes.

Nature's progress towards summer kept him in a mood of healthful enjoyment. From the window of his sitting-room he looked over the opposite houses to Northernhay, the hill where once stood Rougemont Castle, its wooded declivities now fashioned into a public garden. He watched the rooks at their building in the great elms, and was gladdened when the naked branches began to deck themselves, day by day the fresh verdure swelling into soft, graceful outline. In his walks he pried eagerly for the first violet, welcomed the earliest blackthorn blossom; every common flower of field and hedgerow gave him a

new, keen pleasure. As was to be expected he found the same impulses strong in Sidwell Warricombe and her sister. Sidwell could tell him of secret spots where the wood-sorrel made haste to flower, or where the white violet breathed its fragrance in security from common pilferers. Here was the safest and pleasantest matter for conversation. He knew that on such topics he could talk agreeably enough, revealing without stress or importunity his tastes, his powers, his attainments. And it seemed to him that Sidwell listened with growing interest. Most certainly her father encouraged his visits to the house, and Mrs. Warricombe behaved to him with increase of suavity.

In the meantime he had purchased a copy of Reusch's *Bibel und Natur*, and had made a translation of some fifty pages. This experiment he submitted to a London publishing house, with proposals for the completion of the work; without much delay there came a civil letter of excuse, and with it the sample returned. Another attempt again met with rejection. This failure did not trouble him. What he really desired was to read through his version of Reusch with Martin Warricombe, and before long he had brought it to pass that Martin requested a perusal of the manuscript as it advanced,

which it did but slowly. Godwin durst not endanger his success in the examination by encroaching upon hours of necessary study; his leisure was largely sacrificed to *Bibel und Natur*, and many an evening of calm golden loveliness, when he longed to be amid the fields, passed in vexatious imprisonment. The name of Reusch grew odious to him, and he revenged himself for the hypocrisy of other hours by fierce scorn, cast audibly at this laborious exegetist.

III

It occasionally happens that a woman whose early life has been directed by native silliness and social bias, will submit to a tardy education at the hands of her own children. Thus was it with Mrs. Warricombe.

She came of a race long established in squirearchic dignity amid heaths and woodlands. Her breeding was pure through many generations of the paternal and maternal lines, representative of a physical type, fortified in the males by much companionship with horse and hound, and by the corresponding country pursuits of dowered daughters. At the time of her marriage she had no charms of person more remarkable than rosy comeliness and the symmetry of supple limb. As for the nurture of her mind, it had been intrusted to home-governesses of respectable incapacity. Martin Warricombe married her because she was one of a little circle

of girls, much alike as to birth and fortune, with whom he had grown up in familiar communication. Timidity imposed restraints upon him which made his choice almost a matter of accident. As befalls often enough, the betrothal became an accomplished fact whilst he was still doubting whether he desired it or not. When the fervour of early wedlock was outlived, he had no difficulty in accepting as a matter of course that his life's companion should be hopelessly illogical and at heart indifferent to everything but the small graces and substantial comforts of provincial existence. One of the advantages of wealth is that it allows husband and wife to keep a great deal apart without any show of mutual unkindness, a condition essential to happiness in marriage. Time fostered in them a calm attachment, independent of spiritual sympathy, satisfied with a common regard for domestic honour.

Not that Mrs. Warricombe remained in complete ignorance of her husband's pursuits; social forms would scarcely have allowed this, seeing that she was in constant intercourse, as hostess or guest, with Martin's scientific friends. Of fossils she necessarily knew something. Up to a certain point they amused her; she could talk of

ammonites, of brachiopods, and would point a friend's attention to the *Calceola sandalina* which Martin prized so much. The significance of palæontology she dimly apprehended, for in the early days of their union her husband had felt it desirable to explain to her what was meant by geologic time, and how he reconciled his views on that subject with the demands of religious faith. Among the books which he induced her to read were Buckland's Bridgewater Treatise and the works of Hugh Miller. The intellectual result was chaotic, and Mrs. Warricombe settled at last into a comfortable private opinion that though the record of geology might be trustworthy that of the Bible was more so. She would admit that there was no impiety in accepting the evidence of nature, but held to a secret conviction that it was safer to believe in Genesis. For anything beyond a quasi-permissible variance from Biblical authority as to the age of the world she was quite unprepared, and Martin, in his discretion, imparted to her nothing of the graver doubts which were wont to trouble him.

But as her children grew up, Mrs. Warricombe's mind and temper were insensibly modified by influences which operated through her maternal affections, influences no

doubt aided by the progressive spirit of the time. The three boys—Buckland, Maurice, and Louis—were distinctly of a new generation. It needed some ingenuity to discover their points of kindred with paternal and maternal grandparents; nor even with father and mother had they much in common which observation could readily detect. Sidwell, up to at least her fifteenth year, seemed to present far less change of type. In her Mrs. Warricombe recognised a daughter, and not without solace. But Fanny again was a problematical nature, almost from the cradle. Latest born, she appeared to revive many characteristics of the youthful Buckland, so far as a girl could resemble her brother. It was a strange brood to cluster around Mrs. Warricombe. For many years the mother was kept in alternation between hopes and fears, pride and disapproval, the old hereditary habits of mind, and a new order of ideas which could only be admitted with the utmost slowness. Buckland's Radicalism deeply offended her; she marvelled how such depravity could display itself in a child of hers. Yet in the end her ancestral prejudices so far yielded as to allow of her smiling at sentiments which she once heard with horror. Maurice, whom she loved more tenderly, all but taught her to see the cogency of a

syllogism—amiably set forth. And Louis, with his indolent good-nature, laughed her into a tolerance of many things which had moved her indignation. But it was to Sidwell that in the end she owed most. Beneath the surface of ordinary and rather backward girlhood, which discouraged her father's hopes, Sidwell was quietly developing a personality distinguished by the refinement of its ethical motives. Her orthodoxy seemed as unimpeachable as Mrs. Warricombe could desire, yet as she grew into womanhood, a curiosity, which in no way disturbed the tenor of her quietly contented life, led her to examine various forms of religion, ancient and modern, and even systems of philosophy which professed to establish a moral code, independent of supernatural faith. She was not of studious disposition—that is to say, she had never cared as a schoolgirl to do more mental work than was required of her, and even now it was seldom that she read for more than an hour or two in the day. Her habit was to dip into books, and meditate long on the first points which arrested her thoughts. Of continuous application she seemed incapable. She could read French, but did not attempt to pursue the other languages of which her teachers had given her a smattering. It pleased her best when she

could learn from conversation. In this way she obtained some insight into her father's favourite sciences, occasionally making suggestions or inquiries which revealed a subtle if not an acute intelligence.

Little by little Mrs. Warricombe found herself changing places with the daughter whom she had regarded as wholly subject to her direction. Sidwell began to exercise an indeterminate control, the proofs of which were at length manifest in details of her mother's speech and demeanour. An exquisite social tact, an unfailing sincerity of moral judgment, a gentle force which operated as insensibly as the qualities of pure air: these were the points of character to which Mrs. Warricombe owed the humanisation observable when one compared her in 1885 with what she was, say, in 1874, when the sight of Professor Walsh moved her to acrimony, and when she conceived a pique against Professor Gale because the letter P has alphabetical precedence of W. Her limitations were of course the same as ever, and from her sons she had only learnt to be ashamed of announcing them too vehemently. Sidwell it was who had led her to that degree of genuine humility, which is not satisfied with hiding a fault but strives to amend it.

Martin Warricombe himself was not unaffected by the growth about him of young men and maidens who looked upon the world with new eyes, whose world, indeed, was another than that in which he had spent the better part of his life. In his case contact with the young generation tended to unsettlement, to a troublesome persistency of speculations which he would have preferred to dismiss altogether. At the time of his marriage, and for some years after, he was content to make a broad distinction between those intellectual pursuits which afforded him rather a liberal amusement than the pleasures of earnest study and the questions of metaphysical faith which concerned his heart and conscience. His native prejudices were almost as strong, and much the same, as those of his wife; but with the vagueness of emotional logic natural to his constitution, he satisfied himself that, by conceding a few inessential points, he left himself at liberty to follow the scientific movements of the day without damage to his religious convictions. The tolerant smile so frequently on his countenance was directed as often in the one quarter as in the other. Now it signified a gentle reproof of those men of science who, like Professor Walsh, 'went too far,' whose zeal for knowledge led them 'to forget the source of all true

enlightenment;' now it expressed a forbearing sympathy with such as erred in the opposite direction, who were 'too literal in their interpretation of the sacred volume.' Amiable as the smile was, it betrayed weakness, and at moments Martin became unpleasantly conscious of indisposition to examine his own mind on certain points. His life, indeed, was one of debate postponed. As the realm of science extended, as his intercourse with men who frankly avowed their 'infidelity' grew more frequent, he ever and again said to himself that, one of these days, he must sit down and 'have it out' in a solemn self-searching. But for the most part he got on very well amid his inconsistencies. Religious faith has rarely any connection with reasoning. Martin believed because he believed, and avoided the impact of disagreeable arguments because he wished to do so.

The bent of his mind was anything but polemical; he cared not to spend time even over those authors whose attacks on the outposts of science, or whose elaborate reconcilements of old and new, might have afforded him some support. On the other hand, he altogether lacked that breadth of intellect which seeks to comprehend all the results of speculation, to discern their tendency, to

derive from them a consistent theory of the nature of things. Though a man be well versed in a science such as palæontology it does not follow that he will view it in its philosophical relations. Martin had kept himself informed of all the facts appertaining to his study which the age brought forth, but without developing the new modes of mental life requisite for the recognition of all that such facts involved. The theories of evolution he did not venture openly to resist, but his acceptance of them was so half-hearted that practically he made no use of their teaching. He was no man of science, but an idler among the wonders which science uses for her own purposes.

He regarded with surprise and anxiety the tendencies early manifested in his son Buckland. Could he have had his way the lad would have grown up with an impossible combination of qualities, blending the enthusiasm of modern research with a spirit of expansive teleology. Whilst Buckland was still of boyish years, the father treated with bantering good-humour such outbreaks of irreverence as came immediately under his notice, weakly abstaining from any attempt at direct argument or influence. But, at a later time, there took place serious and painful discussions, and only

when the young man had rubbed off his edges in the world's highways could Martin forget that stage of most unwelcome conflict.

At the death of his younger boy, Maurice, he suffered a blow which had results more abiding than the melancholy wherewith for a year or two his genial nature was overshadowed. From that day onwards he was never wholly at ease among the pursuits which had been wont to afford him an unfailing resource against whatever troubles. He could no longer accept and disregard, in a spirit of cheerful faith, those difficulties science was perpetually throwing in his way. The old smile of kindly tolerance had still its twofold meaning, but it was more evidently a disguise of indecision, and not seldom touched with sadness. Martin's life was still one of postponed debate, but he could not regard the day when conclusions would be demanded of him as indefinitely remote. Desiring to dwell in the familiar temporary abode, his structure of incongruities and facile reconcilements, he found it no longer weather-proof. The times were shaking his position with earth quake after earthquake. His sons (for he suspected that Louis was hardly less emancipated than Buckland) stood far aloof from him, and must in private feel

contemptuous of his old-fashioned beliefs. In Sidwell, however, he had a companion more and more indispensable, and he could not imagine that *her* faith would ever give way before the invading spirit of agnosticism. Happily she was no mere pietist. Though he did not quite understand her attitude towards Christianity, he felt assured that Sidwell had thought deeply and earnestly of religion in all its aspects, and it was a solace to know that she found no difficulty in recognising the large claims of science. For all this, he could not deliberately seek her confidence, or invite her to a discussion of religious subjects. Some day, no doubt, a talk of that kind would begin naturally between them, and so strong was his instinctive faith in Sidwell that he looked forward to this future communing as to a certain hope of peace.

That a figure such as Godwin Peak, a young man of vigorous intellect, preparing to devote his life to the old religion, should excite Mr. Warricombe's interest was of course to be anticipated; and it seemed probable enough that Peak, exerting all the force of his character and aided by circumstances, might before long convert this advantage to a means of ascendency over the less self-reliant nature. But here was no instance of a dotard

becoming the easy prey of a scientific Tartufe. Martin's intellect had suffered no decay. His hale features and dignified bearing expressed the mind which was ripened by sixty years of pleasurable activity, and which was learning to regard with steadier view the problems it had hitherto shirked. He could not change the direction nature had given to his thoughts, and prepossession would in some degree obscure his judgment where the merits and trustworthiness of a man in Peak's circumstances called for scrutiny; but self-respect guarded him against vulgar artifices, and a fine sensibility made it improbable that he would become the victim of any man in whom base motives predominated.

Left to his own impulses, he would still have proceeded with all caution in his offers of friendly services to Peak. A letter of carefully-worded admonition, which he received from his son, apprising him of Peak's resolve to transfer himself to Exeter, scarcely affected his behaviour when the young man appeared. It was but natural—he argued—that Buckland should look askance on a case of 'conversion'; for his own part, he understood that such a step might be prompted by interest, but he found it difficult to believe that to a man in

Peak's position, the Church would offer temptation thus coercive. Nor could he discern in the candidate for a curacy any mark of dishonourable purpose. Faults, no doubt, were observable, among them a tendency to spiritual pride—which seemed (Martin could admit) an argument for, rather than against, his sincerity. The progress of acquaintance decidedly confirmed his favourable impressions; they were supported by the remarks of those among his friends to whom Peak presently became known.

It was not until Whitsuntide of the next year, when the student had been living nearly five months at Exeter, that Buckland again came down to visit his relatives. On the evening of his arrival, chancing to be alone with Sidwell, he asked her if Peak had been to the house lately.

'Not many days ago,' replied his sister, 'he lunched with us, and then sat with father for some time.'

'Does he come often?'

'Not very often. He is translating a German book which interests father very much.'

'Oh, what book?'

'I don't know. Father has only mentioned it in that way.'

They were in a little room sacred to the two girls, very daintily furnished and fragrant of sweet-brier, which Sidwell loved so much that, when the season allowed it, she often wore a little spray of it at her girdle. Buckland opened a book on the table, and, on seeing the title, exclaimed with a disparaging laugh :

'I can't get out of the way of this fellow M'Naughten! Wherever I go, there he lies about on the tables and chairs. I should have thought he was thoroughly smashed by an article that came out in the *Critical* last year.'

Sidwell smiled, evidently in no way offended.

'That article could "smash" nobody,' she made answer. 'It was too violent ; it overshot the mark.'

'Not a bit of it!—So you read it, eh? You're beginning to read, are you?'

'In my humble way, Buckland.'

'M'Naughten, among other things. Humble enough, that, I admit.'

'I am not a great admirer of M'Naughten,' returned his sister, with a look of amusement.

'No? I congratulate you. — I wonder what Peak thinks of the book?'

'I really don't know.'

'Then let me ask another question. What do you think of Peak?'

Sidwell regarded him with quiet reflectiveness.

'I feel,' she said, 'that I don't know him very well yet. He is certainly interesting.'

'Yes, he is. Does he impress you as the kind of man likely to make a good clergyman?'

'I don't see any reason why he should not.'

Her brother mused, with wrinkles of dissatisfaction on his brow.

'Father gets to like him, you say?'

'Yes, I think father likes him.'

'Well, I suppose it's all right.'

'All right?'

'It's the most astounding thing that ever came under my observation,' exclaimed Buckland, walking away and then returning.

'That Mr. Peak should be studying for the Church?'

'Yes.'

'But do reflect more modestly!' urged Sidwell, with something that was not quite archness, though as near it as her habits of tone and feature would allow. 'Why should you refuse to admit an error in your own way

of looking at things? Wouldn't it be better to take this as a proof that intellect isn't necessarily at war with Christianity?'

'I never stated it so broadly as that,' returned her brother, with impatience. 'But I should certainly have maintained that *Peak's* intellect was necessarily in that position.'

'And you see how wrong you would have been,' remarked the girl, softly.

'Well—I don't know.'

'You don't know?'

'I mean that I can't acknowledge what I can't understand.'

'Then do try to understand, Buckland!—Have you ever put aside your prejudice for a moment to inquire what our religion really means? Not once, I think—at all events, not since you reached years of discretion.'

'Allow me to inform you that I studied the question thoroughly at Cambridge.'

'Yes, yes; but that was in your boyhood.'

'And when does manhood begin?'

'At different times in different persons. In your case it was late.'

Buckland laughed. He was considering a rejoinder, when they were interrupted by the appearance of Fanny, who asked at once:

'Shall you go to see Mr. Peak this evening, Buckland?'

'I'm in no hurry,' was the abrupt reply.

The girl hesitated.

'Let us all have a drive together—with Mr. Peak, I mean—like when you were here last.'

'We'll see about it.'

Buckland went slowly from the room.

Late the same evening he sat with his father in the study. Mr. Warricombe knew not the solace of tobacco, and his son, though never quite at ease without pipe or cigar, denied himself in this room, with the result that he shifted frequently upon his chair and fell into many awkward postures.

'And how does Peak impress you?' he inquired, when the subject he most wished to converse upon had been postponed to many others. It was clear that Martin would not himself broach it.

'Not disagreeably,' was the reply, with a look of frankness, perhaps over-emphasised.

'What is he doing? I have only heard from him once

since he came down, and he had very little to say about himself.'

'I understand that he proposes to take the London B.A.'

'Oh, then, he never did that? Has he unbosomed himself to you about his affairs of old time?'

'No. Such confidences are hardly called for.'

'Speaking plainly, father, you don't feel any uneasiness?'

Martin deliberated, fingering the while an engraved stone which hung upon his watch-guard. He was at a disadvantage in this conversation. Aware that Buckland regarded the circumstances of Peak's sojourn in the neighbourhood with feelings allied to contempt, he could neither adopt the tone of easy confidence natural to him on other occasions of difference in opinion, nor express himself with the coldness which would have obliged his son to quit the subject.

'Perhaps you had better tell me,' he replied, 'whether *you* are really uneasy.'

It was impossible for Buckland to answer as his mind prompted. He could not without offence declare that no young man of brains now adopted a clerical career with pure intentions, yet such was his sincere belief. Made

tolerant in many directions by the cultivation of his shrewdness, he was hopelessly biassed in judgment as soon as his anti-religious prejudice came into play—a point of strong resemblance between him and Peak. After fidgeting for a moment, he exclaimed:

'Yes, I am; but I can't be sure that there's any cause for it.'

'Let us come to matters of fact,' said Mr. Warricombe, showing that he was not sorry to discuss this side of the affair. 'I suppose there is no doubt that Peak had a position till lately at the place he speaks of?'

'No doubt, whatever. I have taken pains to ascertain that. His account of himself, so far, is strictly true.'

Martin smiled, with satisfaction he did not care to disguise.

'Have you met some acquaintance of his?'

'Well,' answered Buckland, changing his position, 'I went to work in rather an underhand way, perhaps,—but the results are satisfactory. No, I haven't come across any of his friends, but I happened to hear not long ago that he was on intimate terms with some journalists.'

His father laughed.

'Anything compromising in that association, Buckland?'

'I don't say that—though the fellows I speak of are hot Radicals.'

'Though?'

'I mean,' replied the young man, with his shrewder smile, 'that they are not exactly the companions a theological student would select.'

'I understand. Possibly he has journalised a little himself?'

'That I can't say, though I should have thought it likely enough. I might, of course, find out much more about him, but it seemed to me that to have assurance of his truthfulness in that one respect was enough for the present.'

'Do you mean, Buckland,' asked his father, gravely, 'that you have been setting secret police at work?'

'Well, yes. I thought it the least objectionable way of getting information.'

Martin compressed his lips and looked disapproval.

'I really can't see that such extreme measures were demanded. Come, come; what is all this about? Do you suspect him of planning burglaries? That was an ill-judged step, Buckland; decidedly ill-judged. I said

just now that Peak impressed me by no means disagreeably. Now I will add that I am convinced of his good faith—as sure of it as I am of his remarkable talents and aptitude for the profession he aims at. In spite of your extraordinary distrust, I can't feel a moment's doubt of his honour. Why, I could have told you myself that he has known Radical journalists. He mentioned it the other day, and explained how far his sympathy went with that kind of thing. No, no; that was hardly permissible, Buckland.'

The young man had no difficulty in bowing to his father's reproof when the point at issue was one of gentlemanly behaviour.

'I admit it,' he replied. 'I wish I had gone to Rotherhithe and made simple inquiries in my own name. That, all things considered, I might have allowed myself; at all events, I shouldn't have been at ease without getting that assurance. If Peak had heard, and had said to me, "What the deuce do you mean?" I should have told him plainly, what I have strongly hinted to him already, that I don't understand what he is doing in this galley.'

'And have placed yourself in a position not easy to define.'

'No doubt.'

'All this arises, my boy,' resumed Martin, in a tone of grave kindness, 'from your strange inability to grant that on certain matters you may be wholly misled.'

'It does.'

'Well, well; that is forbidden ground. But do try to be less narrow. Are you unable then to meet Peak in a friendly way?'

'Oh, by no means! It seems more than likely that I have wronged him.'

'Well said! Keep your mind open. I marvel at the dogmatism of men who are set on overthrowing dogma. Such a position is so strangely unphilosophic that I don't know how a fellow of your brains can hold it for a moment. If I were not afraid of angering you,' Martin added, in his pleasantest tone, 'I would quote the Master of Trinity.'

'A capital epigram, but it is repeated too often.'

Mr. Warricombe shook his head, and with a laugh rose to say good-night.

'It's a great pity,' he remarked next day to Sidwell, who had been saying that her brother seemed less vivacious than usual, 'that Buckland is defective on the

side of humour. For a man who claims to be philosophical he takes things with a rather obtuse seriousness. I know nothing better than humour as a protection against the kind of mistake he is always committing.'

The application of this was not clear to Sidwell.

'Has something happened to depress him?' she asked.

'Not that I know of. I spoke only of his general tendency to intemperate zeal. That is enough to account for intervals of reaction. And how much sounder his judgment of men would be if he could only see through a medium of humour now and then!—You know he is going over to Budleigh Salterton this afternoon?'

Sidwell smiled, and said quietly:

'I thought it likely he would.'

At Budleigh Salterton, a nook on the coast some fifteen miles away, Sylvia Moorhouse was now dwelling. Her mother, a widow of substantial means, had recently established herself there, in the proximity of friends, and the mathematical brother made his home with them. That Buckland took every opportunity of enjoying Sylvia's conversation was no secret; whether the pre-

dilection was mutual, none of his relatives could say, for in a matter such as this Buckland was by nature disposed to reticence. Sidwell's intimacy with Miss Moorhouse put her in no better position than the others for forming an opinion; she could only suspect that the irony which flavoured Sylvia's talk with and concerning the Radical, intimated a lurking kindness. Buckland's preference was easily understood, and its growth for five or six years seemed to promise stability.

Immediately after luncheon the young man set forth, and did not reappear until the evening of the next day. His spirits had not benefited by the excursion; at dinner he was noticeably silent, and instead of going to the drawing-room afterwards he betook himself to the studio up on the roof, and smoked in solitude. There, towards ten o'clock, Sidwell sought him. Heavy rain was beating upon the glass, and a high wind blended its bluster with the cheerless sound.

'Don't you find it rather cold here?' she asked, after observing her brother's countenance of gloom.

'Yes; I'm coming down.—Why don't you keep up your painting?'

'I have lost interest in it, I'm afraid.'

'That's very weak, you know. It seems to me that nothing interests you permanently.'

Sidwell thought it better to make no reply.

'The characteristic of women,' Buckland pursued, with some asperity, throwing away the stump of his cigar. 'It comes, I suppose, of their ridiculous education—their minds are never trained to fixity of purpose. They never understand themselves, and scarcely ever make an effort to understand any one else. Their life is a succession of inconsistencies.'

'This generalising is so easy,' said Sidwell, with a laugh, 'and so worthless. I wonder you should be so far behind the times.'

'What light have the times thrown on the subject?'

'There's no longer such a thing as *woman* in the abstract. We are individuals.'

'Don't imagine it! That may come to pass three or four generations hence, but as yet the best of you can only vary the type in unimportant particulars. By the way, what is Peak's address?'

'Longbrook Street; but I don't know the number. Father can give it you, I think.'

'I shall have to drop him a note. I must get back to town early in the morning.'

'Really? We hoped to have you for a week.'

'Longer next time.'

They descended together. Now that Louis no longer abode here (he had decided at length for medicine, and was at work in London), the family as a rule spent very quiet evenings. By ten o'clock Mrs. Warricombe and Fanny had retired, and Sidwell was left either to talk with her father, or to pursue the calm meditations which seemed to make her independent of companionship as often as she chose.

'Are they all gone?' Buckland asked, finding a vacant room.

'Father is no doubt in the study.'

'It occurs to me——. Do you feel satisfied with this dead-alive existence?'

'Satisfied? No life could suit me better.'

'You really think of living here indefinitely?'

'As far as I am concerned, I hope nothing may ever disturb us.'

'And to the end of your life you will scent yourself with sweet-brier? Do try a bit of mint for a change.'

'Certainly, if it will please you.'

'Seriously, I think you might all come to town for

next winter. You are rusting, all of you. Father was never so dull, and mother doesn't seem to know how to pass the days. It wouldn't be bad for Louis to be living with you instead of in lodgings. Do just think of it. It's ages since you heard a concert, or saw a picture.'

Sidwell mused, and her brother watched her askance.

'I don't know whether the others would care for it,' she said, 'but I am not tempted by a winter of fog.'

'Fog? Pooh! Well, there *is* an occasional fog, just now and then, but it's much exaggerated. Who ever thinks of the weather in England? Fanny might have a time at Bedford College or some such place—she learns nothing here. Think it over. Father would be delighted to get among the societies, and so on.'

He repeated his arguments in many forms, and Sidwell listened patiently, until they were joined by Mr. Warricombe, whereupon the subject dropped; to be resumed, however, in correspondence, with a persistency which Buckland seldom exhibited in anything which affected the interests of his relatives. As the summer drew on, Mrs. Warricombe began to lend serious ear to this suggestion of change, and Martin was at all events

moved to discuss the pros and cons of half a year in London. Sidwell preserved neutrality, seldom making an allusion to the project; but Fanny supported her brother's proposal with sprightly zeal, declaring on one occasion that she began distinctly to feel the need of 'a higher culture,' such as London only could supply.

In the meantime there had been occasional interchange of visits between the family and their friends at Budleigh Salterton. One evening, when Mrs. Moorhouse and Sylvia were at the Warricombes', three or four Exeter people came to dine, and among the guests was Godwin Peak —his invitation being due in this instance to Sylvia's express wish to meet him again.

'I am studying men,' she had said to Sidwell not long before, when the latter was at the seaside with her. 'In our day this is the proper study of womankind. Hitherto we have given serious attention only to one another. Mr. Peak remains in my memory as a type worth observing; let me have a chance of talking to him when I come next.'

She did not neglect her opportunity, and Mrs. Moorhouse, who also conversed with the theologian and found him interesting, was so good as to hope that he would

call upon her if ever his steps turned towards Budleigh Salterton.

After breakfast next morning, Sidwell found her friend sitting with a book beneath one of the great trees of the garden. At that moment Sylvia was overcome with laughter, evidently occasioned by her reading.

'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'if this man isn't a great humorist! I don't think I ever read anything more irresistible.'

The book was Hugh Miller's *Testimony of the Rocks*, a richly bound copy belonging to Mrs. Warricombe.

'I daresay you know it very well; it's the chapter in which he discusses, with perfect gravity, whether it would have been possible for Noah to collect examples of all living creatures in the ark. He decides that it wouldn't—that the deluge *must* have spared a portion of the earth; but the details of his argument are delicious, especially this place where he says that all the insects could have been brought together only "at enormous expense of miracle"! I suspected a secret smile; but no—that's out of the question. "At enormous expense of miracle"!'

Sylvia's eyes winked as she laughed, a peculiarity which enhanced the charm of her frank mirth. Her dark,

pure complexion, strongly-marked eyebrows, subtle lips, were shadowed beneath a great garden hat, and a loose white gown, with no oppressive moulding at the waist, made her a refreshing picture in the glare of mid-summer.

'The phrase is ridiculous enough,' assented Sidwell. 'Miracle can be but miracle, however great or small its extent.'

'Isn't it strange, reading a book of this kind nowadays? What a leap we have made! I should think there's hardly a country curate who would be capable of bringing this argument into a sermon.'

'I don't know,' returned Sidwell, smiling. 'One still hears remarkable sermons.'

'What will Mr. Peak's be like?'

They exchanged glances. Sylvia wore a look of reflective curiosity, and her friend answered with some hesitation, as if the thought were knew to her:

'They won't deal with Noah, we may take that for granted.'

'Most likely not with miracles, however little expensive.'

'Perhaps not. I suppose he will deal chiefly with the moral teaching of Christianity.'

'Do you think him strong as a moralist?' inquired Sylvia.

'He has very decided opinions about the present state of our civilisation.'

'So I find. But is there any distinctly moral force in him?'

'Father thinks so,' Sidwell replied, 'and so do our friends the Lilywhites.'

Miss Moorhouse pondered awhile.

'He is a great problem to me,' she declared at length, knitting her brows with a hint of humorous exaggeration. 'I wonder whether he believes in the dogmas of Christianity.'

Sidwell was startled.

'Would he think of becoming a clergyman?'

'Oh, why not? Don't they recognise nowadays that the spirit is enough?'

There was silence. Sidwell let her eyes wander over the sunny grass to the red-flowering creeper on the nearest side of the house.

'That would involve a great deal of dissimulation,' she said at length. 'I can't reconcile it with what I know of Mr. Peak.'

'And I can't reconcile anything else,' rejoined the other.

'He impresses you as a rationalist?'

'You not?'

'I confess I have taken his belief for granted. Oh, think! He couldn't keep up such a pretence. However you justify it, it implies conscious deception. It would be dishonourable. I am sure *he* would think it so.'

'How does your brother regard him?' Sylvia asked, smiling very slightly, but with direct eyes.

'Buckland can't credit any one with sincerity except an aggressive agnostic.'

'But I think he allows honest credulity.'

Sidwell had no answer to this. After musing a little, she put a question which indicated how her thoughts had travelled.

'Have you met many women who declared themselves agnostics?'

'Several.'

Sylvia removed her hat, and began to fan herself gently with the brim. Here, in the shade, bees were humming; from the house came faint notes of a piano—Fanny practising a mazurka of Chopin.

'But never, I suppose, one who found a pleasure in attacking Christianity?'

'A girl who was at school with me in London,' Sylvia

replied, with an air of amused reminiscence. 'Marcella Moxey. Didn't I ever speak to you of her?'

'I think not.'

'She was bitter against religion of every kind.'

'Because her mother made her learn collects, I dare say?' suggested Sidwell, in a tone of gentle satire.

'No, no. Marcella was about eighteen then, and had neither father nor mother.'—(How Fanny's touch improves!)—'She was a born atheist, in the fullest sense of the word.'

'And detestable?'

'Not to me—I rather liked her. She was remarkably honest, and I have sometimes thought that in morals, on the whole, she stood far above most women. She hated falsehood—hated it with all her heart, and a story of injustice maddened her. When I think of Marcella it helps me to picture the Russian girls who propagate Nihilism.'

'You have lost sight of her?'

'She went abroad, I think. I should like to have known her fate. I rather think there will have to be many like her before women are civilised.'

'How I should like to ask her,' said Sidwell, 'on what she supported her morality?'

'Put the problem to Mr. Peak,' suggested the other, gaily. 'I fancy he wouldn't find it insoluble.'

Mrs. Warricombe and Mrs. Moorhouse appeared in the distance, walking hither under parasols. The girls rose to meet them, and were presently engaged in less interesting colloquy.

IV

This summer Peak became a semi-graduate of London University. To avoid the risk of a casual meeting with acquaintances, he did not go to London, but sat for his examination at the nearest provincial centre. The revival of boyish tremors at the successive stages of this business was anything but agreeable; it reminded him, with humiliating force, how far he had strayed from the path indicated to his self-respecting manhood. Defeat would have strengthened in overwhelming revolt all the impulses which from time to time urged him to abandon his servile course. But there was no chance of his failing to satisfy the examiners. With 'Honours' he had now nothing to do; enough for his purpose that in another year's time he would write himself Bachelor of Arts, and thus simplify the clerical preliminaries. In what quarter he was to look for

a curacy remained uncertain. Meanwhile his enterprise seemed to prosper, and success emboldened his hopes.

Hopes which were no longer vague, but had defined themselves in a way which circumstances made inevitable. Though he had consistently guarded himself against the obvious suggestions arising out of his intercourse with the Warricombe family, though he still emphasised every discouraging fact, and strove to regard it as axiomatic that nothing could be more perilous to his future than a hint of presumption or self-interest in word or deed beneath that friendly roof, it was coming to pass that he thought of Sidwell not only as the type of woman pursued by his imagination, but as herself the object of his converging desires. Comparison of her with others had no result but the deepening of that impression she had at first made upon him. Sidwell exhibited all the qualities which most appealed to him in her class; in addition, she had the charms of a personality which he could not think of common occurrence. He was yet far from understanding her; she exercised his powers of observation, analysis, conjecture, as no other person had ever done; each time he saw her (were it but for a moment) he came away with some new perception of her excel-

lence, some hitherto unmarked grace of person or mind whereon to meditate. He had never approached a woman who possessed this power at once of fascinating his senses and controlling his intellect to a glad reverence. Whether in her presence or musing upon her in solitude, he found that the unsparing naturalism of his scrutiny was powerless to degrade that sweet, pure being.

Rare, under any circumstances, is the passionate love which controls every motive of heart and mind; rarer still that form of it which, with no assurance of reciprocation, devotes exclusive ardour to an object only approachable through declared obstacles. Godwin Peak was not framed for romantic languishment. In general, the more complex a man's mechanism, and the more pronounced his habit of introspection, the less capable is he of loving with vehemence and constancy. Heroes of passion are for the most part primitive natures, nobly tempered; in our time they tend to extinction. Growing vulgarism on the one hand, and on the other a development of the psychological conscience, are unfavourable to any relation between the sexes, save those which originate in pure animalism, or in reasoning less or more generous. Never having experienced any feeling which he could

dignify with the name of love, Godwin had no criterion in himself whereby to test the emotions now besetting him. In a man of his age this was an unusual state of things, for when the ardour which will bear analysis has at length declared itself, it is wont to be moderated by the regretful memory of that fugacious essence which gave to the first frenzy of youth its irrecoverable delight. He could not say in reply to his impulses: If that was love which overmastered me, this must be something either more or less exalted. What he *did* say was something of this kind: If desire and tenderness, if frequency of dreaming rapture, if the calmest approval of the mind and the heart's most exquisite, most painful throbbing, constitute love,—then assuredly I love Sidwell. But if to love is to be possessed with madness, to lose all taste of life when hope refuses itself, to meditate frantic follies, to deem it inconceivable that this woman should ever lose her dominion over me, or another reign in her stead,—then my passion falls short of the true œstrum, and I am only dallying with fancies which might spring up as often as I encountered a charming girl.

All things considered, to encourage this amorous preoccupation was probably the height of unwisdom. The

lover is ready at deluding himself, but Peak never lost sight of the extreme unlikelihood that he should ever become Martin Warricombe's son-in-law, of the thousand respects which forbade his hoping that Sidwell would ever lay her hand in his. That deep-rooted sense of class which had so much influence on his speculative and practical life asserted itself, with rigid consistency, even against his own aspirations; he attributed to the Warricombes more prejudice on this subject than really existed in them. He, it was true, belonged to no class whatever, acknowledged no subordination save that of the hierarchy of intelligence; but this could not obscure the fact that his brother sold seeds across a counter, that his sister had married a haberdasher, that his uncle (notoriously) was somewhere or other supplying the public with cheap repasts. Girls of Sidwell's delicacy do not misally themselves, for they take into account the fact that such misalliance is fraught with elements of unhappiness, affecting husband as much as wife. No need to dwell upon the scruples suggested by his moral attitude; he would never be called upon to combat them with reference to Sidwell's future.

What, then, was he about? For what advantage was he playing the hypocrite? Would he, after all, be

satisfied with some such wife as the average curate may hope to marry ?

A hundred times he reviewed the broad question, by the light of his six months' experience. Was Sidwell Warricombe his ideal woman, absolutely speaking ? Why, no; not with all his glow of feeling could he persuade himself to declare her that. Satisfied up to a certain point, admitted to the sphere of wealthy refinement, he now had leisure to think of yet higher grades, of the women who are not only exquisite creatures by social comparison but rank by divine right among the foremost of their race. Sidwell was far from intolerant, and held her faiths in a sincerely ethical spirit. She judged nobly, she often saw with clear vision. But must not something of kindly condescension always blend with his admiring devotedness ? Were it but possible to win the love of a woman who looked forth with eyes thoroughly purged from all mist of tradition and conventionalism, who was at home among arts and sciences, who, like himself, acknowledged no class and bowed to no authority but that of the supreme human mind !

Such women are to be found in every age, but how many of them shine with the distinctive ray of womanhood ? These are so rare that they have a place in the

pages of history. The truly emancipated woman—it was Godwin's conviction—is almost always asexual; to him, therefore, utterly repugnant. If, then, he were not content to waste his life in a vain search for the priceless jewel, which is won and worn only by fortune's supreme favourites, he must acquiesce in the imperfect marriage commonly the lot of men whose intellect allows them but little companionship even among their own sex: for that matter, the lot of most men, and necessarily so until the new efforts in female education shall have overcome the vice of wedlock as hitherto sanctioned. Nature provides the hallucination which flings a lover at his mistress's feet. For the chill which follows upon attainment she cares nothing—let society and individuals make their account with that as best they may. Even with a wife such as Sidwell the process of disillusion would doubtless have to be faced, however liberal one's allowances in the forecast.

Reflections of this colour were useful; they helped to keep within limits the growth of agitating desire. But there were seasons when Godwin surrendered himself to luxurious reverie, hours of summer twilight which forbade analysis and listened only to the harmonies of passion. Then was Sidwell's image glorified, and all the delights

promised by such love as hers fired his imagination to intolerable ecstasy. O heaven! to see the smile softened by rosy warmth which would confess that she had given her heart—to feel her supple fingers intertwined with his that clasped them—to hear the words in which a mind so admirable, instincts so delicate, would make expression of their tenderness! To live with Sidwell—to breathe the fragrance of that flower of womanhood in wedded intimacy—to prove the devotion of a nature so profoundly chaste! The visionary transport was too poignant; in the end it drove him to a fierce outbreak of despairing wrath. How could he dream that such bliss would be the reward of despicable artifice, of calculated dishonour? Born a rebel, how could his be the fate of those happy men who are at one with the order of things? The prophecy of a heart wrung with anguish foretold too surely that for him was no rapturous love, no joy of noble wedlock. Solitude, now and for ever, or perchance some base alliance of the flesh, which would involve his later days in sordid misery.

In moods of discouragement he thought with envy of his old self, his life in London lodgings, his freedom in obscurity. It belongs to the pathos of human nature that only in looking back can one appreciate the true

value of those long tracts of monotonous ease which, when we are living through them, seem of no account save in relation to past or future; only at a distance do we perceive that the exemption from painful shock was in itself a happiness, to be rated highly in comparison with most of those disturbances known as moments of joy. A wise man would have entertained no wish but that he might grow old in that same succession of days and weeks and years. Without anxiety concerning his material needs (certainly the most substantial of earthly blessings), his leisure not inadequate to the gratification of a moderate studiousness, with friends who offered him an ever-ready welcome,—was it not much? If he were condemned to bachelorhood, his philosophy was surely capable of teaching him that the sorrows and anxieties he thus escaped made more than an offset against the satisfactions he must forego. Reason had no part in the fantastic change to which his life had submitted, nor was he ever supported by a hope which would bear his cooler investigation.

And yet hope had her periods of control, for there are times when the mind wearies of rationality, and, as it were in self-defence, in obedience to the instinct of progressive life, craves a specious comfort. It seemed

undeniable that Mr. Warricombe regarded him with growth of interest, invited his conversation more unreservedly. He began to understand Martin's position with regard to religion and science, and thus could utter himself more securely. At length he ventured to discourse with some amplitude on his own convictions—the views, that is to say, which he thought fit to adopt in his character of a liberal Christian. It was on an afternoon of early August that this opportunity presented itself. They sat together in the study, and Martin was in a graver mood than usual, not much disposed to talk, but a willing listener. There had been mention of a sermon at the Cathedral, in which the preacher declared his faith that the maturity of science would dispel all antagonisms between it and revelation.

'The difficulties of the unbeliever,' said Peak, endeavouring to avoid a sermonising formality, though with indifferent success, 'are, of course, of two kinds; there's the theory of evolution, and there's modern biblical criticism. The more I study these objections, the less able I am to see how they come in conflict with belief in Christianity as a revealed religion.'

'Yet you probably had your time of doubt?' remarked

the other, touching for the first time on this personal matter.

'Oh, yes; that was inevitable. It only means that one's development is imperfect. Most men who confirm themselves in agnosticism are kept at that point by arrested moral activity. They give up the intellectual question as wearisome, and accept the point of view which flatters their prejudices: thereupon follows a blunting of the sensibilities on the religious side.'

'There are men constitutionally unfitted for the reception of spiritual truth,' said Martin, in a troubled tone. He was playing with a piece of string, and did not raise his eyes.

'I quite believe that. There's our difficulty when we come to evidences. The evidences of science are wholly different in *kind* from those of religion. Faith cannot spring from any observation of phenomena, or scrutiny of authorities, but from the declaration made to us by the spiritual faculty. The man of science can only become a Christian by the way of humility—and that a kind of humility he finds it difficult even to conceive. One wishes to impress upon him the harmony of this faith with the spiritual voice that is in every man. He replies: I know nothing of that spiritual

voice. And if that be true, one can't help him by argument.'

Peak had constructed for himself, out of his reading, a plausible system which on demand he could set forth with fluency. The tone of current apologetics taught him that, by men even of cultivated intellect, such a position as he was now sketching was deemed tenable; yet to himself it sounded so futile, so nugatory, that he had to harden his forehead as he spoke. Trial more severe to his conscience lay in the perceptible solicitude with which Mr. Warricombe weighed these disingenuous arguments. It was a hateful thing to practise such deception on one who probably yearned for spiritual support. But he had committed himself to this course, and must brave it out.

'Christianity,' he was saying presently—appropriating a passage of which he had once made careful note —'is an organism of such vital energy that it perforce assimilates whatever is good and true in the culture of each successive age. To understand this is to learn that we must depend rather on *constructive,* than on *defensive,* apology. That is to say, we must draw evidence of our faith from its latent capacities, its unsuspected affinities, its previsions, its adaptability,

comprehensiveness, sympathy, adequacy to human needs.'

'That puts very well what I have always felt,' replied Mr. Warricombe. 'Yet there will remain the objection that such a faith may be of purely human origin. If evolution and biblical criticism seem to overthrow all the historic evidences of Christianity, how convince the objectors that the faith itself was divinely given?'

'But I cannot hold for a moment,' exclaimed Peak, in the words which he knew his interlocutor desired to hear, 'that all the historic evidences have been destroyed. That indeed would shake our position.'

He enlarged on the point, with display of learning, yet studiously avoiding the tone of pedantry.

'Evolution,' he remarked, when the dialogue had again extended its scope, 'does not touch the evidence of design in the universe; at most it can correct our imperfect views (handed down from an age which had no scientific teaching because it was not ripe for it) of the mode in which that design was executed, or rather is still being executed. Evolutionists have not succeeded in explaining life; they have merely discovered a new law relating to life. If we must have an explanation, there is noth-

ing for it but to accept the notion of a Deity. Indeed, how can there be religion without a divine author? Religion is based on the idea of a divine mind which reveals itself to us for moral ends. The Christian revelation, we hold, has been developed gradually, much of it in connection with secondary causes and human events. It has come down to us in anything but absolute purity—like a stream which has been made turbid by its earthly channel. The lower serves its purpose as a stage to the higher, then it falls away, the higher surviving. Hitherto, the final outcome of evolution is the soul in a bodily tenement. May it not be that the perfected soul alone survives in the last step of the struggle for existence?'——

Peak had been talking for more than a quarter of an hour. Under stress of shame and intellectual self-criticism (for he could not help confuting every position as he stated it) his mind often wandered. When he ceased speaking there came upon him an uncomfortable dreaminess which he had already once or twice experienced when in colloquy with Mr. Warricombe; a tormenting metaphysical doubt of his own identity strangely beset him. With involuntary attempt to recover the familiar self he grasped his own wrist, and then, before

he was aware, a laugh escaped him, an all but mocking laugh, unsuitable enough to the spirit of the moment. Mr. Warricombe was startled, but looked up with a friendly smile.

'You fear,' he said, 'that this last speculation may seem rather fanciful to me?'

Godwin was biting his lip fiercely, and could not command himself to utterance of a word.

'By no means, I assure you,' added the other. 'It appeals to me very strongly.'

Peak rose from his chair.

'It struck me,' he said, 'that I had been preaching a sermon rather than taking part in a conversation. I'm afraid it is the habit of men who live a good deal alone to indulge in monologues.'

On his return home, the sight of *Bibel und Natur* and his sheets of laborious manuscript filled him with disgust. It was two or three days before he could again apply himself to the translation. Yet this expedient had undoubtedly been of great service to him in the matter of his relations with Mr. Warricombe. Without the aid of Reusch he would have found it difficult to speak naturally on the theme which drew Martin into confidences and established an intimacy between them.

Already they had discussed in detail the first half of the book. How a man of Mr. Warricombe's intelligence could take grave interest in an arid exegesis of the first chapter of Genesis, Godwin strove in vain to comprehend. Often enough the debates were perilously suggestive of burlesque, and, when alone, he relieved himself of the laughter he had scarce restrained. For instance, there was that terrible *thohu wabohu* of the second verse, a phrase preserved from the original, and tossed into all the corners of controversy. Was *thohu wabohu* the first condition of the earth, or was it merely a period of division between a previous state of things and creation as established by the Hexæmeron? Did light exist or not, previous to the *thohu wabohu?* Then, again, what kind of 'days' were the three which passed before the birth of the sun? Special interest, of course, attached to the successive theories of theology on the origin of geologic strata. First came the 'theory of restitution,' which explained unbiblical antiquity by declaring that the strata belonged to a world before the Hexæmeron, a world which had been destroyed, and succeeded by the new creation. Less objectionable was the 'concordistic theory,' which interprets the 'six days' as so many vast periods of creative activity. But Reusch himself gave

preference to the 'ideal theory,' the supporters whereof (diligently adapting themselves to the progress of science) hold that the six days are not to be understood as consecutive periods at all, but merely as six phases of the Creator's work.

By the exercise of watchfulness and dexterity, Peak managed for the most part to avoid expression of definite opinions. His attitude was that of a reverent (not yet reverend) student. Mr. Warricombe was less guarded, and sometimes allowed himself to profess that he saw nothing but vain ingenuity in Reusch's argument: as for example, where the theologian, convinced that the patriarchs did really live to an abnormal age, suggests that man's life was subsequently shortened in order that 'sin might not flourish with such exuberance.' This passage caused Martin to smile.

'It won't do, it won't do,' he said, quietly. 'Far better apply his rationalism here as elsewhere. These are wonderful old stories, not to be understood literally. Nothing depends upon them—nothing essential.'

Thereupon Peak mused anxiously. Not for the first time there occurred to him a thought which suited only too well with his ironic habits of mind. What if this

hypocritic comedy were altogether superfluous? What if Mr. Warricombe would have received him no less cordially had he avowed his sincere position, and contented himself with guarding against offensiveness? Buckland, it was true, had suffered in his father's esteem on account of his unorthodoxy, but that young man had been too aggressive, too scornful. With prudence, would it not have been possible to win Martin's regard by fortifying the scientific rather than the dogmatic side of his intellect? If so, what a hopeless error had he committed!—But Sidwell? Was *she* liberal enough to take a personal interest in one who had renounced faith in revelation? He could not decide this question, for of Sidwell he knew much less than of her father. And it was idle to torment himself with such debate of the irreversible.

And, indeed, there seemed much reason for believing that Martin, whatever the extent of his secret doubts, was by temperament armed against agnosticism. Distinctly it comforted him to hear the unbelievers assailed —the friends of whom he spoke most heartily were all on the orthodox side; if ever a hint of gentle malice occurred in his conversation, it was when he spoke of a fallacy, a precipitate conclusion, detected in works

of science. Probably he was too old to overcome this bias.

His view of the Bible appeared to harmonise with that which Peak put forth in one of their dialogues. 'The Scriptures were meant to be literally understood in primitive ages, and spiritually when the growth of science made it possible. Genesis was never intended to teach the facts of natural history; it takes phenomena as they appear to uninstructed people, and uses them only for the inculcation of moral lessons; it presents to the childhood of the world a few great elementary truths. And the way in which phenomena are spoken of in the Old Testament is never really incompatible with the facts as we know them nowadays. Take the miracle of the sun standing still, which is supposed to be a safe subject of ridicule. Why, it merely means that light was miraculously prolonged; the words used are those which common people would at all times understand.'

(Was it necessary to have admitted the miracle? Godwin asked himself. At all events Mr. Warricombe nodded approvingly.)

'Then the narrative of the creation of man; that's not at all incompatible with his slow development through

ages. To teach the scientific fact—if we yet really know it—would have been worse than useless. The story is meant to express that spirit, and not matter, is the source of all existence. Indeed, our knowledge of the true meaning of the Bible has increased with the growth of science, and naturally that must have been intended from the first. Things which do not concern man's relation to the spiritual have no place in this book; they are not within its province. Such things were discoverable by human reason, and the knowledge which achieves has nothing to do with a divine revelation.'

To Godwin it was a grinding of the air, but the listener appeared to think it profitable.

With his clerical friend, Mr. Lilywhite, he rarely touched on matters of religion. The vicar of St. Ethelreda's was a man well suited to support the social dignity of his Church. A gentleman before everything, he seemed incapable of prying into the state of a parishioner's soul; you saw in him the official representative of a Divinity characterised by well-bred tolerance. He had written a pleasant little book on the by-ways of Devon and Cornwall, which brought about his intimacy with the Warricombe household. Peak liked him more the better he knew him, and in the course of the summer

they had one or two long walks together, conversing exclusively of the things of earth. Mr. Lilywhite troubled himself little about evolution; he spoke of trees and plants, of birds and animals, in a loving spirit, like the old simple naturalists. Geology did not come within his sphere.

'I'm very sorry,' he said, 'that I could never care much for it. Don't think I'm afraid of it—not I! I feel the grandeur of its scope, just as I do in the case of astronomy; but I have never brought myself to study either science. A narrowness of mind, no doubt. I can't go into such remote times and regions. I love the sunlight and the green fields of this little corner of the world—too well, perhaps: yes, perhaps too well.'

After one of these walks, he remarked to Mrs. Lilywhite:

'It's my impression that Mr. Peak has somehow been misled in his choice of a vocation. I don't think he'll do as a churchman.'

'Why not, Henry?' asked his wife, with gentle concern, for she still spoke of Peak's 'quiet moral force.'

'There's something too restless about him. I doubt

whether he has really made up his mind on any subject whatever. Well, it's not easy to explain what I feel, but I don't think he will take Orders.'

Calling at the vicarage one afternoon in September, Godwin found Mrs. Lilywhite alone. She startled him by saying at once:

'An old acquaintance of yours was with us yesterday, Mr. Peak.'

'Who could that be, I wonder?'

He smiled softly, controlling his impulse to show quite another expression.

'You remember Mr. Bruno Chilvers?'

'Oh, yes!'

There was a constriction in his throat. Struggling to overcome it, he added:

'But I should have thought he had no recollection of me.'

'Quite the contrary, I assure you. He is to succeed Mr. Bell of St. Margaret's, at Christmas; he was down here only for a day or two, and called upon my husband with a message from an old friend of ours. It appears he used to know the Warricombes, when they lived at Kingsmill, and he had been to see them before visiting us; it was there your name was mentioned to him.'

Godwin had seated himself, and leaned forward, his hands grasping the glove he had drawn off.

'We were contemporaries at Whitelaw College,' he observed.

'So we learnt from him. He spoke of you with the greatest interest; he was delighted to hear that you contemplated taking Orders. Of course we knew Mr. Chilvers by reputation, but my husband had no idea that he was coming to Exeter. What an energetic man he is! In a few hours he seemed to have met everyone, and to have learnt everything. My husband says he felt quite rebuked by such a display of vigour!'

Even in his discomposure, graver than any that had affected him since his talks with Buckland Warricombe, Peak was able to notice that the Rev. Bruno had not made a wholly favourable impression upon the Lilywhites. There was an amiable causticity in that mention of his 'display of vigour,' such as did not often characterise Mrs. Lilywhite's comments. Finding that the vicar would be away till evening, Godwin stayed for only a quarter of an hour, and when he had escaped it irritated and alarmed him to reflect how unusual his behaviour must have appeared to the good lady.

The blow was aimed at his self-possession from such an unlikely quarter. In Church papers he had frequently come across Chilvers' name, and the sight of it caused him a twofold disturbance: it was hateful to have memories of humiliation revived, and perhaps still more harassing to be forced upon acknowledgment of the fact that he stood as an obscure aspirant at the foot of the ladder which his old rival was triumphantly ascending. Bad enough to be classed in any way with such a man as Chilvers; but to be regarded as at one with him in religious faith, to be forbidden the utterance of scorn when Chilvers was extolled, stung him so keenly that he rushed into any distraction to elude the thought. When he was suffering shame under the gaze of Buckland Warricombe he remembered Chilvers, and shrank as before a merited scoff. But the sensation had not been abiding enough to affect his conduct. He had said to himself that he should never come in contact with the fellow, and that, after all, community of religious profession meant no more, under their respective circumstances, than if both were following law or physic.

But the unforeseen had happened. In a few months, the Rev. Bruno Chilvers would be a prominent figure about the streets of Exeter; would be frequently seen

at the Warricombes', at the Lilywhites', at the houses of their friends. His sermons at St. Margaret's would doubtless attract, and form a staple topic of conversation. Worse than all, his expressions of 'interest' and 'delight,' made it probable that he would seek out his College competitor and offer the hand of brotherhood. These things were not to be avoided—save by abandonment of hopes, save by retreat, by yielding to a hostile destiny.

That Chilvers might talk here and there of Whitelaw stories was comparatively unimportant. The Warricombes must already know all that could be told, and what other people heard did not much matter. It was the man himself that Peak could not endure. Dissembling had hitherto been no light task. The burden had more than once pressed so gallingly that its permanent support seemed impossible; but to stand before Bruno Chilvers in the attitude of humble emulation, to give respectful ear whilst the popular cleric advised or encouraged, or bestowed pontifical praise, was comparable only to a searing of the flesh with red irons. Even with assured prospect of recompense in the shape of Sidwell Warricombe's heart and hand, he could hardly submit to such an ordeal. As it was, reason having so

often convinced him that he clung to a visionary hope, the torture became gratuitous, and its mere suggestion inspired him with a fierce resentment destructive of all his purposes.

For several days he scarcely left the house. To wrath and dread had succeeded a wretched torpor, during which his mind kept revolving the thoughts prompted by his situation, turbidly and to no issue. He tasted all the bitterness of the solitude to which he had condemned himself; there was not a living soul with whom he could commune. At moments he was possessed with the desire of going straightway to London, and making Earwaker the confidant of all his folly. But that demanded an exertion of which he was physically incapable. He thought of the old home at Twybridge, and was tempted also in that direction. His mother would welcome him with human kindness; beneath her roof he could lie dormant until fate should again point his course. He even wrote a letter saying that in all probability he should pay a visit to Twybridge before long. But the impulse was only of an hour's duration, for he remembered that to talk with his mother would necessitate all manner of new falsehoods, a thickening of the atmosphere of lies which already oppressed him. No; if

he quitted Exeter, it must be on a longer journey. He must resume his purpose of seeking some distant country, where new conditions of life would allow him to try his fortune at least as an honest adventurer. In many parts of colonial England his technical knowledge would have a value, and were there not women to be won beneath other skies—women perhaps of subtler charm than the old hidebound civilisation produced? Reminiscences of scenes and figures in novels he had read nourished the illusion. He pictured some thriving little town at the ends of the earth, where a young Englishman of good manners and unusual culture would easily be admitted to the intimacy of the richest families; he saw the ideal colonist (a man of good birth, but a sower of wild oats in his youth) with two or three daughters about him—beautiful girls, wondrously self-instructed—living amid romantic dreams of the old world, and of the lover who would some day carry them off (with a substantial share of papa's wealth) to Europe and the scenes of their imagination.

The mind has marvellous methods of self-defence against creeping lethargy of despair. At the point to which he had been reduced by several days of blank despondency, Peak was able to find genuine encourage-

ment in visions such as this. He indulged his fancy until the vital force began to stir once more within him, and then, with one angry sweep, all his theological books and manuscripts were flung out of sight. Away with this detestable mummery! Now let Bruno Chilvers pour his eloquence from the pulpit of St. Margaret's, and rear to what heights he could the edifice of his social glory; men of that stamp were alone fitted to thrive in England. Was not *he* almost certainly a hypocrite, masking his brains (for brains he had) under a show of broadest Anglicanism? But his career was throughout consistent. He trod in the footsteps of his father, and with inherited aptitude moulded antique traditions into harmony with the taste of the times. Compared with such a man, Peak felt himself a bungler. The wonder was that his clumsy lying had escaped detection.

Another day, and he had done nothing whatever, but was still buoyed up by the reaction of visionary hope. His need now was of communicating his change of purpose to some friendly hearer. A week had passed since he had exchanged a word with anyone but Mrs. Roots, and converse he must. Why not with Mr. Warricombe? That was plainly the next step: to see Martin and make known to him that after all he could not

become a clergyman. No need of hinting a conscientious reason. At all events, nothing more definite than a sense of personal unfitness, a growing perception of difficulties inherent in his character. It would be very interesting to hear Mr. Warricombe's replies.

A few minutes after this decision was taken, he set off towards the Old Tiverton Road, walking at great speed, flourishing his stick—symptoms of the nervous cramp (so to speak) which he was dispelling. He reached the house, and his hand was on the bell, when an unexpected opening of the door presented Louis Warricombe just coming forth for a walk. They exchanged amiabilities, and Louis made known that his father and mother were away on a visit to friends in Cornwall.

'But pray come in,' he added, offering to re-enter.

Peak excused himself, for it was evident that Louis made a sacrifice to courtesy. But at that moment there approached from the garden Fanny Warricombe and her friend Bertha Lilywhite, eldest daughter of the genial vicar; they shook hands with Godwin, Fanny exclaiming:

'Don't go away, Mr. Peak. Have a cup of tea with us—Sidwell is at home. I want to show you a strange sort of spleenwort that I gathered this morning.'

'In that case,' said her brother smiling, 'I may confess that I have an appointment. Pray forgive me for hurrying off, Mr. Peak.'

Godwin was embarrassed, but the sprightly girl repeated her summons, and he followed into the house.

V

HAVING led the way to the drawing-room, Fanny retired again for a few moments, to fetch the fern of which she had spoken, leaving Peak in conversation with little Miss Lilywhite. Bertha was a rather shy girl of fifteen, not easily induced, under circumstances such as these, to utter more than monosyllables, and Godwin, occupied with the unforeseen results of his call, talked about the weather. With half-conscious absurdity he had begun to sketch a theory of his own regarding rain-clouds and estuaries (Bertha listening with an air of the gravest attention) when Fanny reappeared, followed by Sidwell. Peak searched the latter's face for indications of her mood, but could discover nothing save a spirit of gracious welcome. Such aspect was a matter of course, and he knew it. None the less, his nervousness and the state of mind engendered by a week's miserable solitude, tempted

him to believe that Sidwell did not always wear that smile in greeting a casual caller. This was the first time that she had received him without the countenance of Mrs. Warricombe. Observing her perfect manner, as she sat down and began to talk, he asked himself what her age really was. The question had never engaged his thoughts. Eleven years ago, when he saw her at the house near Kingsmill and again at Whitelaw College, she looked a very young girl, but whether of thirteen or sixteen he could not at the time have determined, and such a margin of possibility allowed her now to have reached — it might be — her twenty-seventh summer. But twenty-seven drew perilously near to thirty; no, no, Sidwell could not be more than twenty-five. Her eyes still had the dewy freshness of flowering maidenhood; her cheek, her throat, were so exquisitely young——

In how divine a calm must this girl have lived to show, even at five-and-twenty, features as little marked by inward perturbation as those of an infant! Her position in the world considered, one could forgive her for having borne so lightly the inevitable sorrows of life, for having dismissed so readily the spiritual doubts which were the heritage of her time; but was she a total

stranger to passion? Did not the fact of her still remaining unmarried make probable such a deficiency in her nature? Had she a place among the women whom coldness of temperament preserves in a bloom like that of youth, until fading hair and sinking cheek betray them——?

Whilst he thought thus, Godwin was in appearance busy with the fern Fanny had brought for his inspection. He talked about it, but in snatches, with intervals of abstractedness.

Yet might he not be altogether wrong? Last year, when he observed Sidwell in the Cathedral and subsequently at home, his impression had been that her face was of rather pallid and dreamy cast; he recollected that distinctly. Had she changed, or did familiarity make him less sensible of her finer traits? Possibly she enjoyed better health nowadays, and, if so, it might result from influences other than physical. Her air of quiet happiness seemed to him especially noticeable this afternoon, and as he brooded there came upon him a dread which, under the circumstances, was quite irrational, but for all that troubled his views. Perhaps Sidwell was betrothed to some one? He knew of but one likely person — Miss Moorhouse's

brother. About a month ago the Warricombes had been on a visit at Budleigh Salterton, and something might then have happened. Pangs of jealousy smote him, nor could he assuage them by reminding himself that he had no concern whatever in Sidwell's future.

'Will Mr. Warricombe be long away?' he asked, coldly.

'A day or two. I hope you didn't wish particularly to see him to-day?'

'Oh, no.'

'Do you know, Mr. Peak,' put in Fanny, 'that we are all going to London next month, to live there for half a year?'

Godwin exhibited surprise. He looked from the speaker to her sister, and Sidwell, as she smiled confirmation, bent very slightly towards him.

'We have made up our minds, after much uncertainty,' she said. 'My brother Buckland seems to think that we are falling behind in civilisation.'

'So we are,' affirmed Fanny, 'as Mr. Peak would admit if only he could be sincere.'

'Am I never sincere then, Miss Fanny?' Godwin asked.

'I only meant to say that nobody can be when the rules of politeness interfere. Don't you think it's a pity? We might tell one another the truth in a pleasant way.'

'I agree with you. But then we must be civilised indeed. How do you think of London, Miss Warricombe? Which of its aspects most impresses you?'

Sidwell answered rather indefinitely, and ended by mentioning that in *Villette*, which she had just re-read, Charlotte Brontë makes a contrast between the City and the West End, and greatly prefers the former.

'Do you agree with her, Mr. Peak?'

'No, I can't. One understands the mood in which she wrote that; but a little more experience would have led her to see the contrast in a different light. That term, the West End, includes much that is despicable, but it means also the best results of civilisation. The City is hateful to me, and for a reason which I only understood after many an hour of depression in walking about its streets. It represents the ascendency of the average man.'

Sidwell waited for fuller explanation.

'A liberal mind,' Peak continued, 'is revolted by the triumphal procession that roars perpetually through the

City highways. With myriad voices the City bellows its brutal scorn of everything but material advantage. There every humanising influence is contemptuously disregarded. I know, of course, that the trader may have his quiet home, where art and science and humanity are the first considerations; but the *mass* of traders, corporate and victorious, crush all such things beneath their heels. Take your stand (or try to do so) anywhere near the Exchange; the hustling and jolting to which you are exposed represents the very spirit of the life about you. Whatever is gentle and kindly and meditative must here go to the wall — trampled, spattered, ridiculed. Here the average man has it all his own way —a gross, utilitarian power.'

'Yes, I can see that,' Sidwell replied, thoughtfully. 'And perhaps it also represents the triumphant forces of our time.'

He looked keenly at her, with a smile of delight.

'That also! The power which centres in the world's money-markets—plutocracy.'

In conversing with Sidwell, he had never before found an opportunity of uttering his vehement prejudices. The gentler side of his character had sometimes expressed itself, but those impulses which were vastly

more significant lay hidden beneath the dissimulation he consistently practised. For the first time he was able to look into Sidwell's face with honest directness, and what he saw there strengthened his determination to talk on with the same freedom.

'You don't believe, then,' said Sidwell, 'that democracy is the proper name for the state into which we are passing?'

'Only if one can understand democracy as the opening of social privileges to free competition amongst men of trade. And social privilege is everything; home politics refer to nothing else.'

Fanny, true to the ingenuous principle of her years, put a direct question:

'Do you approve of real democracy, Mr. Peak?'

He answered with another question:

'Have you read the "Life of Phokion" in Plutarch?'

'No, I'm sorry to say.'

'There's a story about him which I have enjoyed since I was your age. Phokion was once delivering a public speech, and at a certain point the majority of his hearers broke into applause; whereupon he turned to certain of his friends who stood near and asked, "What have I said amiss?"'

Fanny laughed.

'Then you despise public opinion?'

'With heart and soul!'

It was to Sidwell that he directed the reply. Though overcome by the joy of such an utterance, he felt that, considering the opinions and position of Buckland Warricombe, he was perhaps guilty of ill manners. But Sidwell manifested no disapproval.

'Did you know that story?' Fanny asked of her.

'It's quite new to me.'

'Then I'm sure you'll read the "Life of Phokion" as soon as possible. He will just suit you, Sidwell.'

Peak heard this with a shock of surprise which thrilled in him deliciously. He had the strongest desire to look again at Sidwell but refrained. As no one spoke, he turned to Bertha Lilywhite and put a commonplace question.

A servant entered with the tea-tray, and placed it on a small table near Fanny. Godwin looked at the younger girl; it seemed to him that there was an excess of colour in her cheeks. Had a glance from Sidwell rebuked her? With his usual rapidity of observation and inference he made much of this trifle.

Contrary to what he expected, Sidwell's next remark was in a tone of cheerfulness, almost of gaiety.

'One advantage of our stay in London will be that home will seem more delightful than ever when we return.'

'I suppose you won't be back till next summer?'

'I am afraid not.'

'Shall you be living here, then?' Fanny inquired.

'It's very doubtful.'

He wished to answer with a decided negative, but his tongue refused. Sidwell was regarding him with calm but earnest eyes, and he knew, without caring to reflect, that his latest projects were crumbling.

'Have you been to see our friends at Budleigh Salterton yet?' she asked.

'Not yet. I hope to in a few days.'

Pursuing the subject, he was able to examine her face as she spoke of Mr. Moorhouse. His conjecture was assuredly baseless.

Fanny and Bertha began to talk together of domestic affairs, and presently, when tea-cups were laid aside, the two girls went to another part of the room; then they withdrew altogether. Peak was monologising on English art as represented at the Academy, but find-

ing himself alone with Sidwell (it had never before happened) he became silent. Ought he to take his leave? He must already have been sitting here more than half-an-hour. But the temptation of *tête-à-tête* was irresistible.

'You had a visit from Mr. Chilvers the other day?' he remarked, abruptly.

'Yes; did he call to see you?'

Her tone gave evidence that she would not have introduced this topic.

'No; I heard from Mrs. Lilywhite. He had been to the vicarage. Has he changed much since he was at Whitelaw?'

'So many years must make a difference at that time of life,' Sidwell answered, smiling.

'But does he show the same peculiarities of manner?'

He tried to put the question without insistency, in a tone quite compatible with friendliness. Her answer, given with a look of amusement, satisfied him that there was no fear of her taking Mr. Chilvers too seriously.

'Yes. I think he speaks in much the same way.'

'Have you read any of his publications?'

'One or two. We have his lecture on *Altruism*.'

'I happen to know it. There are good things in it, I think. But I dislike his modern interpretation of old principles.'

'You think it dangerous?'

He no longer regarded her frankly, and in the consciousness of her look upon him he knit his brows.

'I think it both dangerous and offensive. Not a few clergymen nowadays, who imagine themselves free from the letter and wholly devoted to spirit, are doing their best in the cause of materialism. They surrender the very points at issue between religion and worldliness. They are so blinded by a vague humanitarian impulse as to make the New Testament an oracle of popular Radicalism.'

Sidwell looked up.

'I never quite understood, Mr. Peak, how you regard Radicalism. You think it opposed to all true progress?'

'Utterly, as concerns any reasonable limit of time.'

'Buckland, as you know, maintains that spiritual progress is only possible by this way.'

'I can't venture to contradict him,' said Godwin;

'for it may be that advance is destined only to come after long retrogression and anarchy. Perhaps the way *does* lie through such miseries. But we can't foresee that with certainty, and those of us who hate the present tendency of things must needs assert their hatred as strongly as possible, seeing that we *may* have a more hopeful part to play than seems likely.'

'I like that view,' replied Sidwell, in an undertone.

'My belief,' pursued Godwin, with an earnestness very agreeable to himself, for he had reached the subject on which he could speak honestly, 'is that an instructed man can only hold views such as your brother's — hopeful views of the immediate future — if he has never been brought into close contact with the lower classes. Buckland doesn't know the people for whom he pleads.'

'You think them so degraded?'

'It is impossible, without seeming inhumanly scornful, to give a just account of their ignorance and baseness. The two things, speaking generally, go together. Of the ignorant, there are very few indeed who can think purely or aspiringly. You, of course, object the teaching of Christianity; but the lowly and the humble of

whom it speaks scarcely exist, scarcely can exist, in our day and country. A ludicrous pretence of education is banishing every form of native simplicity. In the large towns, the populace sink deeper and deeper into a vicious vulgarity, and every rural district is being affected by the spread of contagion. To flatter the proletariat is to fight against all the good that still characterises educated England — against reverence for the beautiful, against magnanimity, against enthusiasm of mind, heart, and soul.'

He quivered with vehemence of feeling, and the flush which rose to his hearer's cheek, the swimming brightness of her eye, proved that a strong sympathy stirred within her.

'I know nothing of the uneducated in towns,' she said, 'but the little I have seen of them in country places certainly supports your opinion. I could point to two or three families who have suffered distinct degradation owing to what most people call an improvement in their circumstances. Father often speaks of such instances, comparing the state of things now with what he can remember.'

'My own experience,' pursued Godwin, 'has been among the lower classes in London. I don't mean the

very poorest, of whom one hears so much nowadays; I never went among them because I had no power of helping them, and the sight of their vileness would only have moved me to unjust hatred. But the people who earn enough for their needs, and whose spiritual guide is the Sunday newspaper—I know them, because for a long time I was obliged to lodge in their houses. Only a consuming fire could purify the places where they dwell. Don't misunderstand me; I am not charging them with what are commonly held vices and crimes, but with the consistent love of everything that is ignoble, with utter deadness to generous impulse, with the fatal habit of low mockery. And *these* are the people who really direct the democratic movement. They set the tone in politics; they are debasing art and literature; even the homes of wealthy people begin to show the effects of their influence. One hears men and women of gentle birth using phrases which originate with shopboys; one sees them reading print which is addressed to the coarsest million. They crowd to entertainments which are deliberately adapted to the lowest order of mind. When commercial interest is supreme, how can the tastes of the majority fail to lead and control?'

Though he spoke from the depths of his conviction, and was so moved that his voice rose and fell in tones such as a drawing-room seldom hears, he yet kept anxious watch upon Sidwell's countenance. That hint afforded him by Fanny was invaluable; it had enabled him to appeal to Sidwell's nature by the ardent expression of what was sincerest in his own. She too, he at length understood, had the aristocratic temperament. This explained her to him, supplied the key of doubts and difficulties which had troubled him in her presence. It justified, moreover, the feelings with which she had inspired him—feelings which this hour of intimate converse had exalted to passion. His heart thrilled with hope. Where sympathies so profound existed, what did it matter that there was variance on a few points between his intellect and hers? He felt the power to win her, and to defy every passing humiliation that lay in his course.

Sidwell raised her eyes with a look which signified that she was shaping a question diffidently.

'Have you always thought so hopelessly of our times?'

'Oh, I had my stage of optimism,' he answered, smiling. 'Though I never put faith in the masses, I once believed

that the conversion of the educated to a purely human religion would set things moving in the right way. It was ignorance of the world.'

He paused a moment, then added:

'In youth one marvels that men remain at so low a stage of civilisation. Later in life, one is astonished that they have advanced so far.'

Sidwell met his look with appreciative intelligence and murmured:

'In spite of myself, I believe that expresses a truth.'

Peak was about to reply, when Fanny and her friend reappeared. Bertha approached for the purpose of taking leave, and for a minute or two Sidwell talked with her. The young girls withdrew again together.

By the clock on the mantelpiece it was nearly six. Godwin did not resume his seat, though Sidwell had done so. He looked towards the window, and was all but lost in abstraction, when the soft voice again addressed him:

'But you have not chosen your life's work without some hope of doing good?'

'Do you think,' he asked gently, 'that I shall be out of place in the Christian Church?'

'No—no, I certainly don't think that. But will you tell me what you have set before yourself?'

He drew nearer and leaned upon the back of a chair.

'I hope for what I shall perhaps never attain. Whatever my first steps may be—I am not independent; I must take the work that offers—it is my ambition to become the teacher of some rural parish which is still unpolluted by the influences of which we have been speaking—or, at all events, is still capable of being rescued. For work in crowded centres, I am altogether unfit; my prejudices are too strong; I should do far more harm than good. But among a few simple people I think my efforts mightn't be useless. I can't pretend to care for anything but individuals. The few whom I know and love are of more importance to me than all the blind multitude rushing to destruction. I hate the word *majority;* it is the few, the very few, that have always kept alive whatever of effectual good we see in the human race. There are individuals who outweigh, in every kind of value, generations of ordinary people. To some remote little community I hope to give the best energies of my life. My teaching will avoid doctrine and controversy. I shall take the spirit of the Gospels, and labour to make

it a practical guide. No doubt you find inconsistencies in me; but remember that I shall not declare myself to those I instruct as I have done to you. I have been laying stress on my antipathies. In the future it will be a duty and a pleasure to forget these and foster my sympathies, which also are strong when opportunity is given them.'

Sidwell listened, her face bent downwards but not hidden from the speaker.

'My nature is intolerant,' he went on, 'and I am easily roused to an antagonism which destroys my peace. It is only by living apart, amid friendly circumstances, that I can cultivate the qualities useful to myself and others. The sense that my life was being wasted determined me a year ago to escape the world's uproar and prepare myself in quietness for this task. The resolve was taken here, in your house.'

'Are you quite sure,' asked Sidwell, 'that such simple duties and satisfactions'——

The sentence remained incomplete, or rather was finished in the timid glance she gave him.

'Such a life wouldn't be possible to me,' he replied, with unsteady voice, 'if I were condemned to intellectual

solitude. But I have dared to hope that I shall not always be alone.'

A parched throat would have stayed his utterance, even if words had offered themselves. But sudden confusion beset his mind—a sense of having been guilty of monstrous presumption—a panic which threw darkness about him and made him grasp the chair convulsively. When he recovered himself and looked at Sidwell there was a faint smile on her lips, inexpressibly gentle.

'That's the rough outline of my projects,' he said, in his ordinary voice, moving a few steps away. 'You see that I count much on fortune; at the best, it may be years before I can get my country living.'

With a laugh, he came towards her and offered his hand for good-bye. Sidwell rose.

'You have interested me very much. Whatever assistance it may be in my father's power to offer you, I am sure you may count upon.'

'I am already much indebted to Mr. Warricombe's kindness.'

They shook hands without further speech, and Peak went his way.

. . . . . .

For an hour or two he was powerless to collect his thoughts. All he had said repeated itself again and again, mixed up with turbid comments, with deadly fears and frantic bursts of confidence, with tumult of passion and merciless logic of self-criticism. Did Sidwell understand that sentence: 'I have dared to hope that I shall not always be alone'? Was it not possible that she might interpret it as referring to some unknown woman whom he loved? If not, if his voice and features had betrayed him, what could her behaviour mean, except distinct encouragement? 'You have interested me very much.' But could she have used such words if his meaning had been plain to her? Far more likely that her frank kindness came of misconception. She imagined him the lover of some girl of his own 'station'—a toiling governess, or some such person; it could not enter into her mind that he 'dared' so recklessly as the truth implied.

But the glow of sympathy with which she heard his immeasurable scorn: there was the spirit that defies artificial distances. Why had he not been bolder? At this rate he must spend a lifetime in preparing for the decisive moment. When would another such occasion offer itself?

Women are won by audacity; the poets have repeated it from age to age, and some truth there must be in the saying. Suspicion of self-interest could not but attach to him; that was inherent in the circumstances. He must rely upon the sincerity of his passion, which indeed was beginning to rack and rend him. A woman is sensitive to that, especially a woman of Sidwell's refinement. In matters of the intellect she may be misled, but she cannot mistake quivering ardour for design simulating love. If it were impossible to see her again in private before she left Exeter, then he must write to her. Half a year of complete uncertainty, and of counterfeiting face to face with Bruno Chilvers, would overtax his resolution.

The evening went by he knew not how. Long after nightfall he was returning from an aimless ramble by way of the Old Tiverton Road. At least he would pass the house, and soothe or inflame his emotions by resting for a moment thus near to Sidwell.

What? He had believed himself incapable of erotic madness? And he pressed his forehead against the stones of the wall to relieve his sick dizziness.

It was Sidwell or death. Into what a void of hideous futility would his life be cast, if this desire proved vain, and he were left to combat alone with the memory of his

dishonour! With Sidwell the reproach could be outlived. She would understand him, pardon him—and thereafter a glorified existence, rivalling that of whosoever has been most exultant among the sons of men!

PART THE FOURTH

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I

EARWAKER'S struggle with the editor-in-chief of *The Weekly Post* and the journalist Kenyon came to its natural close about a month after Godwin Peak's disappearance. Only a vein of obstinacy in his character had kept him so long in a position he knew to be untenable. From the first his sympathy with Mr. Runcorn's politics had been doubtful, and experience of the working of a Sunday newspaper, which appealed to the ignobly restive, could not encourage his adhesion to this form of Radicalism. He anticipated dismissal by retirement, and Kenyon, a man of coarsely vigorous fibre, at once stepped into his place.

Now that he had leisure to review the conflict, Earwaker understood that circumstances had but hastened his transition from a moderate ardour in the parliamentary cause of the people, to a regretful neutrality regarding

all political movements. Birth allied him with the proletarian class, and his sentiment in favour of democracy was unendangered by the disillusions which must come upon every intellectual man brought into close contact with public affairs. The course of an education essentially aristocratic (Greek and Latin can have no other tendency so long as they are the privilege of the few) had not affected his natural bent, nor was he the man to be driven into reaction because of obstacles to his faith inseparable from human weakness. He had learnt that the emancipation of the poor and untaught must proceed more slowly than he once hoped—that was all. Restored to generous calm, he could admit that such men as Runcorn and Kenyon — the one with his polyarchic commercialism, the other with his demagogic violence— had possibly a useful part to play at the present stage of things. He, however, could have no place in that camp. Too indiscreetly he had hoisted his standard of idealism, and by stubborn resistance of insuperable forces he had merely brought forward the least satisfactory elements of his own character. 'Hold on! cried Malkin. 'Fight the grovellers to the end!' But Earwaker had begun to see himself in a light of ridicule. There was just time to save his self-respect.

He was in no concern for his daily bread. With narrower resources in the world of print, he might have been compelled, like many another journalist, to swallow his objections and write as Runcorn dictated; for the humble folks at home could not starve to allow him the luxury of conscientiousness, whatever he might have been disposed to do on his own account. Happily, his pen had a scope beyond politics, and by working steadily for reviews, with which he was already connected, he would be able to keep his finances in reasonable order until, perchance, some hopeful appointment offered itself. In a mood of much cheerfulness he turned for ever from party uproar, and focussed his mind upon those interests of humanity which so rarely coincide with the aims of any league among men.

Half a year went by, and at length he granted himself a short holiday, the first in a twelvemonth. It took the form of a voyage to Marseilles, and thence of a leisurely ramble up the Rhone. Before returning, he spent a day or two in Paris, for the most part beneath café awnings, or on garden seats—an indulgence of contented laziness.

On the day of his departure, he climbed the towers of Notre Dame, and lingered for half-an-hour in pleasant

solitude among the stone monsters. His reverie was broken by an English voice, loud and animated:

'Come and look at this old demon of a bird; he has always been a favourite of mine.—Sure you're not tired, Miss Bella? When you want to rest, Miss Lily, mind you say so at once. What a day!—What a sky!—When I was last up here I had my hat blown away. I watched it as far as Montmartre. A fact! Never knew such a wind in my life—unless it was that tornado I told you about——Hollo! By the powers, if that isn't Earwaker! Confound you, old fellow! How the deuce do you do? What a glorious meeting! Hadn't the least idea where you were!—Let me have the pleasure of introducing you to Mrs. Jacox—and to Miss Jacox—and to Miss Lily. They all know you thoroughly well. Now who would have thought of our meeting up here! Glorious!'

It was with some curiosity that Earwaker regarded the companions of his friend Malkin—whose proximity was the last thing he could have imagined, as only a few weeks ago he had heard of the restless fellow's departing, on business unknown, for Boston, U.S. Mrs. Jacox, the widow whose wrongs had made such an impression on Malkin, announced herself, in a thin, mealy

face and rag-doll figure, as not less than forty, though her irresponsible look made it evident that years profited her nothing, and suggested an explanation of the success with which she had been victimised. She was stylishly dressed, and had the air of enjoying an unusual treat. Her children were of more promising type, though Earwaker would hardly have supposed them so old as he knew them to be. Bella, just beyond her fourteenth year, had an intelligent prettiness, but was excessively shy; in giving her hand to the stranger she flushed over face and neck, and her bosom palpitated visibly. Her sister, two years younger, was a mere child, rather self-conscious, but of laughing temper. Their toilet suited ill with that of their mother; its plainness and negligence might have passed muster in London, but here, under the lucent sky, it seemed a wrong to their budding maidenhood.

'Mrs. Jacox is on the point of returning to England,' Malkin explained. 'I happened to meet her, by chance —I'm always meeting my friends by chance; you, for instance, Earwaker. She is so good as to allow me to guide her and the young ladies to a few of the sights of Paris.'

'O Mr. Malkin!' exclaimed the widow, with a

stress on the exclamation peculiar to herself—two notes of deprecating falsetto. 'How can you say it is good of me, when I'm sure there are no words for your kindness to us all! If only you knew our debt to your friend, Mr. Earwaker! To our dying day we must all remember it. It is entirely through Mr. Malkin that we are able to leave that most disagreeable Rouen—a place I shall never cease to think of with horror. O Mr. Earwaker! you have only to think of that wretched railway station, stuck between two black tunnels! O Mr. Malkin!'

'What are you doing?' Malkin inquired of the journalist. 'How long shall you be here? Why haven't I heard from you?'

'I go to London to-night.'

'And we to-morrow. On Friday I'll look you up. Stay, can't you dine with me this evening? Anywhere you like. These ladies will be glad to be rid of me, and to dine in peace at their hotel.'

'O Mr. Malkin!' piped the widow, 'you know how very far that is from the truth. But we shall be very glad indeed to know that you are enjoying yourself with Mr. Earwaker.'

The friends made an appointment to meet near the

Madeleine, and Earwaker hastened to escape the sound of Mrs. Jacox's voice.

Punctual at the rendezvous, Malkin talked with his wonted effusiveness as he led towards the Café Anglais.

'I've managed it, my boy! The most complete success! I had to run over to Boston to get hold of a scoundrelly relative of that poor woman. You should have seen how I came over him—partly dignified sternness, partly justifiable cajolery. The affair only wanted some one to take it up in earnest. I have secured her about a couple of hundred a year—withheld on the most paltry and transparent pretences. They're going to live at Wrotham, in Kent, where Mrs. Jacox has friends. I never thought myself so much of a man of business. Of course old Haliburton, the lawyer, had a hand in it, but without my personal energy it would have taken him a year longer. What do you think of the girls? How do you like Bella?'

'A pretty child.'

'Child? Well, yes, yes—immature of course; but I'm rather in the habit of thinking of her as a young lady. In three years she'll be seventeen, you know. Of course you couldn't form a judgment of her character.

She's quite remarkably mature for her age; and, what delights me most of all, a sturdy Radical! She takes the most intelligent interest in all political and social movements, I assure you! There's a great deal of democratic fire in her.'

'You're sure it isn't reflected from your own fervour?'

'Not a bit of it! You should have seen her excitement when we were at the Bastille Column yesterday. She'll make a splendid woman, I assure you. Lily's very interesting, too—profoundly interesting. But then she is certainly very young, so I can't feel so sure of her on the great questions. She hasn't her sister's earnestness, I fancy.'

In the after-glow of dinner, Malkin became still more confidential.

'You remember what I said to you long since? My mind is made up—practically made up. I shall devote myself to Bella's education, in the hope—you understand me? Impossible to have found a girl who suited better with my aspirations. She has known the hardships of poverty, poor thing, and that will keep her for ever in sympathy with the downtrodden classes. She has a splendid intelligence, and it shall be cultivated to the utmost.'

'One word,' said Earwaker, soberly. 'We have heard before of men who waited for girls to grow up. Be cautious, my dear fellow, both on your own account and hers.'

'My dear Earwaker! Don't imagine for a moment that I take it for granted she will get to be fond of me. My attitude is one of the most absolute discretion. You must have observed how I behaved to them all —scrupulous courtesy, I trust; no more familiarity than any friend might be permitted. I should never dream of addressing the girls without ceremonious prefix—never! I talk of Bella's education, but be assured that I regard my own as a matter of quite as much importance. I mean, that I shall strive incessantly to make myself worthy of her. No laxity! For these next three years I shall live as becomes a man who has his eyes constantly on a high ideal—the pure and beautiful girl whom he humbly hopes to win for a wife.'

The listener was moved. He raised his wine-glass to conceal the smile which might have been misunderstood. In his heart he felt more admiration than had yet mingled with his liking for this strange fellow.

'And Mrs. Jacox herself,' pursued Malkin; 'she has her weaknesses, as we all have. I don't think her a

very strong-minded woman, to tell the truth. But there's a great deal of goodness in her. If there's one thing I desire in people, it is the virtue of gratitude, and Mrs. Jacox is grateful almost to excess for the paltry exertions I have made on her behalf. You know that kind of thing costs me nothing; you know I like running about and getting things done. But the poor woman imagines that I have laid her under an eternal obligation. Of course I shall show her in time that it was nothing at all; that she might have done just as much for herself if she had known how to go about it.'

Earwaker was musing, a wrinkle of uneasiness at the corner of his eye.

'She isn't the kind of woman, you know, one can regard as a mother. But we are the best possible friends. She *may*, perhaps, think of me as a possible son-in-law. Poor thing; I hope she does. Perhaps it will help to put her mind at rest about the girls.'

'Then shall you often be down at Wrotham?' inquired the journalist, abstractedly.

'Oh, not often—that is to say, only once a month or so, just to look in. I wanted to ask you: do you

think I might venture to begin a correspondence with Bella?'

'M—m—m! I can't say.'

'It would be so valuable, you know. I could suggest books for her reading; I could help her in her study of politics, and so on.'

'Well, think about it. But be cautious, I beg of you. Now I must be off. Only just time enough to get my traps to the station.'

'I'll come with you. Gare du Nord? Oh, plenty of time, plenty of time! Nothing so abominable as waiting for trains. I make a point of never getting to the station more than three minutes before time. Astonishing what one can do in three minutes! I want to tell you about an adventure I had in Boston. Met a fellow so devilish like Peak that I *couldn't* believe it wasn't he himself. I spoke to him, but he swore that he knew not the man. Never saw such a likeness!'

'Curious. It may have been Peak.'

'By all that's suspicious, I can't help thinking the same! He had an English accent, too.'

'Queer business, this of Peak's. I hope I may live to hear the end of the story.'

They left the restaurant, and in a few hours Earwaker was again on English soil.

At Staple Inn a pile of letters awaited him, among them a note from Christian Moxey, asking for an appointment as soon as possible after the journalist's return. Earwaker at once sent an invitation, and on the next evening Moxey came. An intimacy had grown up between the two, since the mysterious retreat of their common friend. Christian was at first lost without the companionship of Godwin Peak; he forsook his studies, and fell into a state of complete idleness which naturally fostered his tendency to find solace in the decanter. With Earwaker, he could not talk as unreservedly as with Peak, but on the other hand there was a tonic influence in the journalist's personality which he recognised as beneficial. Earwaker was steadily making his way in the world, lived a life of dignified independence. What was the secret of these strong, calm natures? Might it not be learnt by studious inspection?

'How well you look!' Christian exclaimed, on entering. 'We enjoyed your Provençal letter enormously. That's a ramble I have always meant to do. Next year perhaps.'

'Why not this? Haven't you got into a dangerous habit of postponement?'

'Yes, I'm afraid I have. But, by-the-bye, no news of Peak, I suppose?'

Earwaker related the story he had heard from Malkin, adding:

'You must remember that they met only once in London; Malkin might very well mistake another man for Peak.'

'Yes,' replied the other musingly. 'Yet it isn't impossible that Peak has gone over there. If so, what on earth can he be up to? Why *should* he hide from his friends?'

'*Cherchez la femme*,' said the journalist, with a smile. 'I can devise no other explanation.'

'But I can't see that it would be an explanation at all. Grant even—something unavowable, you know—are we Puritans? How could it harm him, at all events, to let us know his whereabouts? No such mystery ever came into my experience. It is too bad of Peak; it's confoundedly unkind.'

'Suppose he has found it necessary to assume a character wholly fictitious—or, let us say, quite inconsistent with his life and opinions as known to us?'

This was a fruitful suggestion, long in Earwaker's mind,

but not hitherto communicated. Christian did not at once grasp its significance.

'How could that be necessary? Peak is no swindler. You don't imply that he is engaged in some fraud?'

'Not in the ordinary sense, decidedly. But picture some girl or woman of conventional opinions and surroundings. What if he resolved to win such a wife, at the expense of disguising his true self?'

'But what an extraordinary idea!' cried Moxey. 'Why Peak is all but a woman-hater!'

The journalist uttered croaking laughter.

'Have I totally misunderstood him?' asked Christian, confused and abashed.

'I think it not impossible.'

'You amaze me!—But no, no; you are wrong, Earwaker. Wrong in your suggestion, I mean. Peak could never sink to that. He is too uncompromising'——

'Well, it will be explained some day, I suppose.'

And with a shrug of impatience, the journalist turned to another subject. He, too, regretted his old friend's disappearance, and in a measure resented it. Godwin Peak was not a man to slip out of one's life and leave no appreciable vacancy. Neither of these men

admired him, in the true sense of the word, yet had his voice sounded at the door both would have sprung up with eager welcome. He was a force—and how many such beings does one encounter in a lifetime?

II

In different ways, Christian and Marcella Moxey had both been lonely since their childhood. As a schoolgirl, Marcella seemed to her companions conceited and repellent; only as the result of reflection in after years did Sylvia Moorhouse express so favourable an opinion of her. In all things she affected singularity; especially it was her delight to utter democratic and revolutionary sentiments among hearers who, belonging to a rigidly conservative order, held such opinions impious. Arrived at womanhood, she affected scorn of the beliefs and habits cherished by her own sex, and shrank from association with the other. Godwin Peak was the first man with whom she conversed in the tone of friendship, and it took a year or more before that point was reached. As her intimacy with him established itself, she was observed to undergo changes which seemed very significant in the

eyes of her few acquaintances. Disregard of costume had been one of her characteristics, but now she moved gradually towards the opposite extreme, till her dresses were occasionally more noticeable for richness than for good taste.

Christian, for kindred reasons, was equally debarred from the pleasures and profits of society. At school, his teachers considered him clever, his fellows for the most part looked down upon him as a sentimental weakling. The death of his parents, when he was still a lad, left him to the indifferent care of a guardian nothing akin to him. He began life in an uncongenial position, and had not courage to oppose the drift of circumstances. The romantic attachment which absorbed his best years naturally had a debilitating effect, for love was never yet a supporter of the strenuous virtues, save when it has survived fruition and been blessed by reason. In most men a fit of amorous mooning works its own cure; energetic rebound is soon inevitable. But Christian was so constituted that a decade of years could not exhause his capacity for sentimental languishment. He made it a point of honour to seek no female companionship which could imperil his faith. Unfortunately, this avoidance of the society which would soon have made him a happy

renegade, was but too easy. Marcella and he practically encouraged each other in a life of isolation, though to both of them such an existence was anything but congenial. Their difficulties were of the same nature as those which had always beset Godwin Peak; they had no relatives with whom they cared to associate, and none of the domestic friends who, in the progress of time, establish and extend a sphere of genuine intimacy.

Most people who are capable of independent thought rapidly outgrow the stage when compromise is abhorred; they accept, at first reluctantly but ere long with satisfaction, that code of polite intercourse which, as Steele says, is 'an expedient to make fools and wise men equal.' It was Marcella's ill-fate that she could neither learn tolerance nor persuade herself to affect it. The emancipated woman has fewer opportunities of relieving her mind than a man in corresponding position; if her temper be aggressive she must renounce general society, and, if not content to live alone, ally herself with some group of declared militants. By correspondence, or otherwise, Marcella might have brought herself into connection with women of a sympathetic type, but this effort she had never made. And chiefly because of her acquaintance with Godwin Peak. In him she concen-

trated her interests; he was the man to whom her heart went forth with every kind of fervour. So long as there remained a hope of moving him to reciprocal feeling she did not care to go in search of female companions. Year after year she sustained herself in solitude by this faint hope. She had lost sight of the two or three school-fellows who, though not so zealous as herself, would have welcomed her as an interesting acquaintance; and the only woman who assiduously sought her was Mrs. Morton, the wife of one of Christian's friends, a good-natured but silly person bent on making known that she followed the 'higher law.'

Godwin's disappearance sank her in profound melancholy. Through the black weeks of January and February she scarcely left the house, and on the plea of illness refused to see any one but her brother. Between Christian and her there was no avowed confidence, but each knew the other's secret; their mutual affection never spoke itself in words, yet none the less it was indispensable to their lives. Deprived of his sister's company, Christian must have yielded to the vice which had already too strong a hold upon him, and have become a maudlin drunkard. Left to herself, Marcella had but slender support against a grim temptation already beckoning her

in nights of sleeplessness. Of the two, her nature was the more tragic. Circumstances aiding, Christian might still forget his melancholy, abandon the whisky bottle, and pass a lifetime of amiable uxoriousness, varied with scientific enthusiasm. But for Marcella, frustrate in the desire with which every impulse of her being had identified itself, what future could be imagined ?

When a day or two of sunlight (the rays through a semi-opaque atmosphere which London has to accept with gratitude) had announced that the seven-months' winter was overcome, and when the newspapers began to speak, after their fashion, of pictures awaiting scrutiny, Christian exerted himself to rouse his sister from her growing indolence. He succeeded in taking her to the Academy. Among the works of sculpture, set apart for the indifference of the public, was a female head, catalogued as 'A Nihilist'—in itself interesting, and specially so to Marcella, because it was executed by an artist whose name she recognised as that of a schoolmate, Agatha Walworth. She spoke of the circumstance to Christian, and added:

'I should like to have that. Let us go and see the price.'

The work was already sold. Christian, happy that his

sister could be aroused to this interest, suggested that a cast might be obtainable.

'Write to Miss Walworth,' he urged. 'Bring yourself to her recollection.—I should think she must be the right kind of woman.'

Though at the time she shook her head, Marcella was presently tempted to address a letter to the artist, who responded with friendly invitation. In this way a new house was opened to her; but, simultaneously, one more illusion was destroyed. Knowing little of life, and much of literature, she pictured Miss Walworth as inhabiting a delightful Bohemian world, where the rules of conventionalism had no existence, and everything was judged by the brain-standard. Modern French biographies supplied all her ideas of studio society. She prepared herself for the first visit with a joyous tremor, wondering whether she would be deemed worthy to associate with the men and women who lived for art. The reality was a shock. In a large house at Chiswick she found a gathering of most respectable English people, chatting over the regulation tea-cup; not one of them inclined to disregard the dictates of Mrs. Grundy in dress, demeanour, or dialogue. Agatha Walworth lived with her parents and her sisters like any other irreproach-

able young woman. She had a nice little studio, and worked at modelling with a good deal of aptitude; but of Bohemia she knew nothing whatever, save by hearsay. Her 'Nihilist' was no indication of a rebellious spirit; some friend had happened to suggest that a certain female model, a Russian, would do very well for such a character, and the hint was tolerably well carried out—nothing more. Marcella returned in a mood of contemptuous disappointment. The cast she had desired to have was shortly sent to her as a gift, but she could take no pleasure in it.

Still, she saw more of the Walworths and found them not illiberal. Agatha was intelligent, and fairly well read in modern authors; no need to conceal one's opinions in conversation with her. Marcella happened to be spending the evening with these acquaintances whilst her brother was having his chat at Staple Inn; on her return, she mentioned to Christian that she had been invited to visit the Walworths in Devonshire a few weeks hence.

'Go, by all means,' urged her brother.

'I don't think I shall. They are too respectable.'

'Nonsense! They seem very open-minded; you really can't expect absolute unconventionality. Is it desirable?

Really is it, now?—Suppose I were to marry some day, Marcella; do you think my household would be unconventional?'

His voice shook a little, and he kept his eyes averted. Marcella, to whom her brother's romance was anything but an agreeable subject,—the slight acquaintance she had with the modern Laura did not encourage her to hope for that lady's widowhood,—gave no heed to the question.

'They are going to have a house at Budleigh Salterton; do you know of the place? Somewhere near the mouth of the Exe. Miss Walworth tells me that one of our old school friends is living there — Sylvia Moorhouse. Did I ever mention Sylvia? She had gleams of sense, I remember; but no doubt society has drilled all that out of her.'

Christian sighed.

'Why?' he urged. 'Society is getting more tolerant than you are disposed to think. Very few well-educated people would nowadays object to an acquaintance on speculative grounds. Someone — who was it? — was telling me of a recent marriage between the daughter of some well-known Church people and a man who made no secret of his agnosticism; the parents acquiescing

cheerfully. The one thing still insisted on is decency of behaviour.'

Marcella's eyes flashed.

'How can you say that? You know quite well that most kinds of immorality are far more readily forgiven by people of the world than sincere heterodoxy on moral subjects.'

'Well, well, I meant decency from *their* point of view. And there really must be such restrictions, you know. How very few people are capable of what you call sincere heterodoxy, in morals or religion! Your position is unphilosophical; indeed it is. Take the world as you find it, and make friends with kind, worthy people. You have suffered from a needless isolation. Do accept this opportunity of adding to your acquaintances! — Do, Marcella! I shall take it as a great kindness, dear girl.'

His sister let her head lie back against the chair, her face averted. A stranger seated in Christian's place, regarding Marcella whilst her features were thus hidden, would have thought it probable that she was a woman of no little beauty. Her masses of tawny hair, her arms and hands, the pose and outline of her figure, certainly suggested a countenance of corresponding

charm, and the ornate richness of her attire aided such an impression. This thought came to Christian as he gazed at her; his eyes, always so gentle, softened to a tender compassion. As the silence continued, he looked uneasily about him; when at length he spoke, it was as though a matter of trifling moment had occurred to him.

'By-the-bye, I am told that Malkin (Earwaker's friend, you know) saw Peak not long ago—in America.'

Marcella did not change her position, but at the sound of Peak's name she stirred, as if with an intention, at once checked, of bending eagerly forward.

'In America?' she asked, incredulously.

'At Boston. He met him in the street—or thinks he did. There's a doubt. When Malkin spoke to the man, he declared that he was not Peak at all—said there was a mistake.'

Marcella moved so as to show her face; endeavouring to express an unemotional interest she looked coldly scornful.

'That ridiculous man can't be depended upon,' she said.

There had been one meeting between Marcella and Mr. Malkin, with the result that each thoroughly dis-

liked the other—an antipathy which could have been foreseen.

'Well, there's no saying,' replied Christian. 'But of one thing I feel pretty sure: we have seen the last of Peak. He'll never come back to us.'

'Why not?'

'I can only say that I feel convinced he has broken finally with all his old friends.—We must think no more of him, Marcella.'

His sister rose slowly, affected to glance at a book, and in a few moments said good-night. For another hour Christian sat by himself in gloomy thought.

At breakfast next morning Marcella announced that she would be from home the whole day; she might return in time for dinner, but it was uncertain. Her brother asked no questions, but said that he would lunch in town. About ten o'clock a cab was summoned, and Marcella, without leave-taking, drove away.

Christian lingered as long as possible over the morning paper, unable to determine how he should waste the weary hours that lay before him. There was no reason for his remaining in London through this brief season of summer glow. Means and leisure were his, he could go whither he would. But the effort of decision and

departure seemed too much for him. Worst of all, this lassitude (not for the first time) was affecting his imagination; he thought with a dull discontent of the ideal love to which he had bound himself. Could he but escape from it, and begin a new life! But he was the slave of his airy obligation; for very shame's sake his ten year's consistency must be that of a lifetime.

There was but one place away from London to which he felt himself drawn, and that was the one place he might not visit. This morning's sunshine carried him back to that day when he had lain in the meadow near Twybridge and talked with Godwin Peak. How distinctly he remembered his mood! 'Be practical—don't be led astray after ideals—concentrate yourself';—yes, it was he who had given that advice to Peak: and had he but recked his own rede——! Poor little Janet! was she married? If so, her husband must be a happy man.

Why should he not go down to Twybridge? His uncle, undoubtedly still living, must by this time have forgotten the old resentment, perhaps would be glad to see him. In any case he might stroll about the town and somehow obtain news of the Moxey family.

With vague half-purpose he left the house and walked

westward. The stream of traffic in Edgware Road brought him to a pause; he stood for five minutes in miserable indecision, all but resolving to go on as far as Euston and look for the next northward train. But the vice in his will prevailed; automaton-like he turned in another direction, and presently came out into Sussex Square. Here was the house to which his thoughts had perpetually gone forth ever since that day when Constance gave her hand to a thriving City man, and became Mrs. Palmer. At present, he knew, it was inhabited only by domestics: Mr. Palmer, recovering from illness that threatened to be fatal, had gone to Bournemouth, where Constance of course tended him. But he would walk past and look up at the windows.

All the blinds were down—naturally. Thrice he went by and retraced his steps. Then, still automaton-like, he approached the door, rang the bell. The appearance of the servant choked his voice for an instant, but he succeeded in shaping an inquiry after Mr. Palmer's health.

'I'm sorry to say, sir,' was the reply, 'that Mr. Palmer died last night. We received the news only an hour or two ago.'

Christian tottered on his feet and turned so pale that

the servant regarded him with anxiety. For a minute or two he stared vacantly into the gloomy hall; then, without a word, he turned abruptly and walked away.

Unconscious of the intervening distance, he found himself at home, in his library. The parlour-maid was asking him whether he would have luncheon. Scarcely understanding the question, he muttered a refusal and sat down.

So, it had come at last. Constance was a widow. In a year or so she might think of marrying again.

He remained in the library for three or four hours. At first incapable of rejoicing, then ashamed to do so, he at length suffered from such a throbbing of the heart that apprehension of illness recalled him to a normal state of mind. The favourite decanter was within reach, and it gave him the wonted support. Then at length did heart and brain glow with exulting fervour.

Poor Constance! Noble woman! Most patient of martyrs! The hour of her redemption had struck. The fetters had fallen from her tender, suffering body. Of *him* she could not yet think. He did not wish it. Her womanhood must pay its debt to nature before she could gladden in the prospect of a new life. Months must go by before he could approach her, or even

remind her of his existence. But at last his reward was sure.

And he had thought of Twybridge, of his cousin Janet! O unworthy lapse!

He shed tears of tenderness. Dear, noble Constance! It was now nearly twelve years since he first looked upon her face. In those days he mingled freely with all the society within his reach. It was not very select, and Constance Markham shone to him like a divinity among creatures of indifferent clay. They said she was coquettish, that she played at the game of love with every presentable young man—envious calumny! No, she was single-hearted, inexperienced, a lovely and joyous girl of not yet twenty. It is so difficult for such a girl to understand her own emotions. Her parents persuaded her into wedding Palmer. That was all gone into the past, and now his concern—their concern—was only with the blessed future.

At three o'clock he began to feel a healthy appetite. He sent for a cab and drove towards the region of restaurants.

Had he yielded to the impulse which this morning directed him to Twybridge, he would have arrived in that town not very long after his sister.

For that was the aim of Marcella's journey. On reaching the station, she dropped a light veil over her face and set forth on foot to discover the abode of Mrs. Peak. No inhabitant of Twybridge save her uncle and his daughters could possibly recognise her, but she shrank from walking through the streets with exposed countenance. Whether she would succeed in her quest was uncertain. Godwin Peak's mother still dwelt here, she knew, for less than a year ago she had asked the question of Godwin himself; but a woman in humble circumstances might not have a house of her own, and her name was probably unknown save to a few friends.

However, the first natural step was to inquire for a directory. A stationer supplied her with one, informing her, with pride, that he himself was the author of it—that this was only the second year of its issue, and that its success was 'very encouraging.' Retiring to a quiet street, Marcella examined her purchase, and came upon 'Peak, Oliver; seedsman'—the sole entry of the name. This was probably a relative of Godwin's. Without difficulty she found Mr. Peak's shop; behind the counter stood Oliver himself, rubbing his hands. Was there indeed a family likeness between this fresh-looking young

shopkeeper and the stern, ambitious, intellectual man whose lineaments were ever before her mind? Though with fear and repulsion, Marcella was constrained to recognise something in the commonplace visage. With an uncertain voice, she made known her business.

'I wish to find Mrs. Peak — a widow — an elderly lady'——

'Oh yes, madam! My mother, no doubt. She lives with her sister, Miss Cadman—the milliner's shop in the first street to the left. Let me point it out.'

With a sinking of the heart Marcella murmured thanks and walked away. She found the milliner's shop—and went past it.

Why should discoveries such as these be so distasteful to her? Her own origin was not so exalted that she must needs look down on trades-folk. Still, for the moment she all but abandoned her undertaking. Was Godwin Peak in truth of so much account to her? Would not the shock of meeting his mother be final? Having come thus far, she must go through with it. If the experience cured her of a hopeless passion, why, what more desirable?

She entered the shop. A young female assistant came forward with respectful smile, and waited her commands.

'I wish, if you please, to see Mrs. Peak.

'Oh yes, madam! Will you have the goodness to walk this way?'

Too late Marcella remembered that she ought to have gone to the house-entrance. The girl led her out of the shop into a dark passage, and thence into a sitting-room which smelt of lavender. Here she waited for a few moments; then the door opened softly, and Mrs. Peak presented herself.

There was no shock. The widow had the air of a gentlewoman—walked with elderly grace—and spoke with propriety. She resembled Godwin, and this time it was not painful to remark the likeness.

'I have come to Twybridge,' began Marcella, gently and respectfully, 'that is to say, I have stopped in passing—to ask for the address of Mr. Godwin Peak. A letter has failed to reach him.'

It was her wish to manage without either disclosing the truth about herself or elaborating fictions, but after the first words she felt it impossible not to offer some explanation. Mrs. Peak showed a slight surprise. With the courage of cowardice, Marcella continued more rapidly:

'My name is Mrs. Ward. My husband used to know

Mr. Peak, in London, a few years ago, but we have been abroad, and unfortunately have lost sight of him. We remembered that Mr. Peak's relatives lived at Twybridge, and, as we wish very much to renew the old acquaintance, I took the opportunity — passing by rail. I made inquiries in the town, and was directed to you—I hope rightly'——

The widow's face changed to satisfaction. Evidently her straightforward mind accepted the story as perfectly credible. Marcella, with bitterness, knew herself far from comely enough to suggest perils. She looked old enough for the part she was playing, and the glove upon her hand might conceal a wedding-ring.

'Yes, you were directed rightly,' Mrs. Peak made quiet answer. 'I shall be very glad to give you my son's address. He left London about last Christmas, and went to live at Exeter.'

'Exeter? We thought he might be out of England.'

'No; he has lived all the time at Exeter. The address is Longbrook Street'—she added the number. 'He is studying, and finds that part of the country pleasant. I am hoping to see him here before very long.'

Marcella did not extend the conversation. She spoke of having to catch a train, and veiled as well as she could

beneath ordinary courtesies her perplexity at the information she had received.

When she again reached the house at Notting Hill, Christian was absent. He came home about nine in the evening. It was impossible not to remark his strange mood of repressed excitement; but Marcella did not question him, and Christian had resolved to conceal the day's event until he could speak of it without agitation. Before they parted for the night, Marcella said carelessly:

'I have decided to go down to Budleigh Salterton when the time comes.'

'That's right!' exclaimed her brother, with satisfaction. 'You couldn't do better—couldn't possibly. It will be a very good thing for you in several ways.'

And each withdrew to brood over a perturbing secret.

III

THREE or four years ago, when already he had conceived the idea of trying his fortune in some provincial town, Peak persuaded himself that it would not be difficult to make acquaintances among educated people, even though he had no credentials to offer. He indulged his fancy and pictured all manner of pleasant accidents which surely, sooner or later, must bring him into contact with families of the better sort. One does hear of such occurrences, no doubt. In every town there is some one or other whom a stranger may approach: a medical man —a local antiquary—a librarian—a philanthropist; and with moderate advantages of mind and address, such casual connections may at times be the preface to intimacy, with all resulting benefits. But experience of Exeter had taught him how slight would have been his chance of getting on friendly terms with any mortal if

he had depended solely on his personal qualities. After a nine months' residence, and with the friendship of such people as the Warricombes, he was daily oppressed by his isolation amid this community of English folk. He had done his utmost to adopt the tone of average polished life. He had sat at the tables of worthy men, and conversed freely with their sons and daughters; he exchanged greetings in the highways: but this availed him nothing. Now, as on the day of his arrival, he was an alien—a lodger. What else had he ever been, since boyhood? A lodger in Kingsmill, a lodger in London, a lodger in Exeter. Nay, even as a boy he could scarcely have been said to 'live at home,' for from the dawn of conscious intelligence he felt himself out of place among familiar things and people, at issue with prevalent opinions. Was he never to win a right of citizenship, never to have a recognised place among men associated in the duties and pleasures of life?

Sunday was always a day of weariness and despondency, and at present he suffered from the excitement of his conversation with Sidwell, followed as it had been by a night of fever. Extravagant hope had given place to a depression which could see nothing beyond the immediate gloom. Until mid-day he lay in bed. After

dinner, finding the solitude of his little room intolerable, he went out to walk in the streets.

Not far from his door some children had gathered in a quiet corner, and were playing at a game on the pavement with pieces of chalk. As he drew near, a policeman, observing the little group, called out to them in a stern voice:

'Now then! what are you doing there? Don't you know *what day* it is?'

The youngsters fled, conscious of shameful delinquency.

There it was! There spoke the civic voice, the social rule, the public sentiment! Godwin felt that the policeman had rebuked *him,* and in doing so had severely indicated the cause of that isolation which he was condemned to suffer. Yes, all his life he had desired to play games on Sunday; he had never been able to understand why games on Sunday should be forbidden. And the angry laugh which escaped him as he went by the guardian of public morals, declared the impossibility of his ever being at one with communities which made this point the prime test of worthiness.

He walked on at a great speed, chafing, talking to himself. His way took him through Heavitree (when Hooker saw the light here, how easy to believe that the

Anglican Church was the noblest outcome of human progress!) and on and on, until by a lane with red banks of sandstone, thick with ferns, shadowed with noble boughs, he came to a hamlet which had always been one of his favourite resorts, so peacefully it lay amid the exquisite rural landscape. The cottages were all closed and silent; hark for the reason! From the old church sounded an organ prelude, then the voice of the congregation, joining in one of the familiar hymns.

A significant feature of Godwin's idiosyncrasy. Notwithstanding his profound hatred and contempt of multitudes, he could never hear the union of many voices in song but his breast heaved and a choking warmth rose in his throat. Even where prejudice wrought most strongly with him, it had to give way before this rush of emotion; he often hurried out of earshot when a group of Salvationists were singing, lest the involuntary sympathy of his senses should agitate and enrage him. At present he had no wish to draw away. He entered the churchyard, and found the leafy nook with a tombstone where he had often rested. And as he listened to the rude chanting of verse after verse, tears fell upon his cheeks.

This sensibility was quite distinct from religious feeling.

If the note of devotion sounding in that simple strain had any effect upon him at all, it merely intensified his consciousness of pathos as he thought of the many generations that had worshipped here, living and dying in a faith which was at best a helpful delusion. He could appreciate the beautiful aspects of Christianity as a legend, its nobility as a humanising power, its rich results in literature, its grandeur in historic retrospect. But at no moment in his life had he felt it as a spiritual influence. So far from tending in that direction, as he sat and brooded here in the churchyard, he owed to his fit of tearfulness a courage which determined him to abandon all religious pretences, and henceforth trust only to what was sincere in him—his human passion. The future he had sketched to Sidwell was impossible; the rural pastorate, the life of moral endeavour which in his excitement had seemed so nearly a genuine aspiration that it might perchance become reality—dreams, dreams! He must woo as a man, and trust to fortune for his escape from a false position. Sidwell should hear nothing more of clerical projects. He was by this time convinced that she held far less tenaciously than he had supposed to the special doctrines of the Church; and, if he had not deceived himself in interpreting her behaviour, a mutual

avowal of love would involve ready consent on her part to his abandoning a career which—as he would represent it—had been adopted under a mistaken impulse. He returned to the point which he had reached when he set forth with the intention of bidding good-bye to the Warricombes—except that in flinging away hypocrisy he no longer needed to trample his desires. The change need not be declared till after a lapse of time. For the present his task was to obtain one more private interview with Sidwell ere she went to London, or, if that could not be, somehow to address her in unmistakable language.

The fumes were dispelled from his brain, and as he walked homeward he plotted and planned with hopeful energy. Sylvia Moorhouse came into his mind; could he not in some way make use of her? He had never yet been to see her at Budleigh Salterton. That he would do forthwith, and perchance the visit might supply him with suggestions.

On the morrow he set forth, going by train to Exmouth, and thence by the coach which runs twice a day to the little seaside town. The delightful drive, up hill and down dale, with its magnificent views over the estuary, and its ever-changing wayside beauties, put him into the

best of spirits. About noon, he alighted at the Rolle Arms, the hotel to which the coach conducts its passengers, and entered to take a meal. He would call upon the Moorhouses at the conventional hour. The intervening time was spent pleasantly enough in loitering about the pebbled beach. A south-west breeze which had begun to gather clouds drove on the rising tide. By four o'clock there was an end of sunshine, and spurts of rain mingled with flying foam. Peak turned inland, pursued the leafy street up the close-sheltered valley, and came to the house where his friends dwelt.

In crossing the garden he caught sight of a lady who sat in a room on the ground floor; her back was turned to the window, and before he could draw near enough to see her better she had moved away, but the glimpse he had obtained of her head and shoulders affected him with so distinct an alarm that his steps were checked. It seemed to him that he had recognised the figure, and if he were right—But the supposition was ridiculous; at all events so vastly improbable, that he would not entertain it. And now he descried another face, that of Miss Moorhouse herself, and it gave him a reassuring smile. He rang the door bell.

How happy—he said to himself—those men who go to

call upon their friends without a tremor! Even if he had not received that shock a moment ago, he would still have needed to struggle against the treacherous beating of his heart as he waited for admission. It was always so when he visited the Warricombes, or any other family in Exeter. Not merely in consequence of the dishonest part he was playing, but because he had not quite overcome the nervousness which so anguished him in earlier days. The first moment after his entering a drawing-room cost him pangs of complex origin.

His eyes fell first of all upon Mrs. Moorhouse, who advanced to welcome him. He was aware of three other persons in the room. The nearest, he could perceive without regarding her, was Sidwell's friend; the other two, on whom he did not yet venture to cast a glance, sat—or rather had just risen—in a dim background. As he shook hands with Sylvia, they drew nearer; one of them was a man, and, as his voice at once declared, no other than Buckland Warricombe. Peak returned his greeting, and, in the same moment, gazed at the last of the party. Mrs. Moorhouse was speaking.

'Mr. Peak—Miss Moxey.'

A compression of the lips was the only sign of disturbance that anyone could have perceived on Godwin's

countenance. Already he had strung himself against his wonted agitation, and the added trial did not sensibly enhance what he suffered. In discovering that he had rightly identified the figure at the window, he experienced no renewal of the dread which brought him to a standstill. Already half prepared for this stroke of fate, he felt a satisfaction in being able to meet it so steadily. Tumult of thought was his only trouble; it seemed as if his brain must burst with the stress of its lightning operations. In three seconds, he re-lived the past, made several distinct anticipations of the future, and still discussed with himself how he should behave this moment. He noted that Marcella's face was bloodless; that her attempt to smile resulted in a very painful distortion of brow and lips. And he had leisure to pity her. This emotion prevailed. With a sense of magnanimity, which afterwards excited his wonder, he pressed the cold hand and said in a cheerful tone:

'Our introduction took place long ago, if I'm not mistaken. I had no idea, Miss Moxey, that you were among Mrs. Moorhouse's friends.'

'Nor I that you were, Mr. Peak,' came the answer, in a steadier voice than Godwin had expected.

Mrs. Moorhouse and her daughter made the pleasant

exclamations that were called for. Buckland Warricombe, with a doubtful smile on his lips, kept glancing from Miss Moxey to her acquaintance and back again. Peak at length faced him.

'I hoped we should meet down here this autumn.'

'I should have looked you up in a day or two,' Buckland replied, seating himself. 'Do you propose to stay in Exeter through the winter?'

'I'm not quite sure—but I think it likely.'

Godwin turned to the neighbour of whose presence he was most conscious.

'I hope your brother is well, Miss Moxey?'

Their eyes encountered steadily.

'Yes, he is quite well, thank you. He often says that it seems very long since he heard from you.'

'I'm a bad correspondent.—Is he also in Devonshire?'

'No. In London.'

'What a storm we are going to have!' exclaimed Sylvia, looking to the window. 'They predicted it yesterday. I should like to be on the top of Westdown Beacon—wouldn't you, Miss Moxey?'

'I am quite willing to go with you.'

'And what pleasure do you look for up there?' asked Warricombe, in a blunt, matter-of-fact tone.

'Now, there's a question!' cried Sylvia, appealing to the rest of the company.

'I agree with Mr. Warricombe,' remarked her mother. 'It's better to be in a comfortable room.'

'Oh, you Radicals! What a world you will make of it in time!'

Sylvia affected to turn away in disgust, and happening to glance through the window she saw two young ladies approaching from the road.

'The Walworths—struggling desperately with their umbrellas.'

'I shouldn't wonder if you think it unworthy of an artist to carry an umbrella,' said Buckland.

'Now you suggest it, I certainly do. They should get nobly drenched.'

She went out into the hall, and soon returned with her friends—Miss Walworth the artist, Miss Muriel Walworth, and a youth, their brother. In the course of conversation Peak learnt that Miss Moxey was the guest of this family, and that she had been at Budleigh Salterton with them only a day or two. For a time he listened and observed, endeavouring to postpone consideration of the dangers into which he had suddenly fallen. Marcella had made herself his accomplice, thus

far, in disguising the real significance of their meeting, and whether she would betray him in her subsequent talk with the Moorhouses remained a matter of doubt. Of course he must have assurance of her disposition—but the issues involved were too desperate for instant scrutiny. He felt the gambler's excitement, an irrational pleasure in the consciousness that his whole future was at stake. Buckland Warricombe had a keen eye upon him, and doubtless was eager to strike a train of suspicious circumstances. His face, at all events, should give no sign of discomposure. Indeed, he found so much enjoyment in the bright gossip of this assembly of ladies that the smile he wore was perfectly natural.

The Walworths, he gathered, were to return to London in a week's time. This meant, in all probability, that Marcella's stay here would not be prolonged beyond that date. Perhaps he could find an opportunity of seeing her apart from her friends. In reply to a question from Mrs. Moorhouse, he made known that he proposed staying at the Rolle Arms for several days, and when he had spoken he glanced at Marcella. She understood him, he felt sure. An invitation to lunch here on the morrow was of course accepted.

Before leaving, he exchanged a few words with Buckland.

'Your relatives will be going to town very soon, I understand.'

Warricombe nodded.

'Shall I see you at Exeter?' Godwin continued.

'I'm not sure. I shall go over tomorrow, but it's uncertain whether I shall still be there when you return.'

The Radical was distinctly less amicable than even on the last occasion of their meeting. They shook hands in rather a perfunctory way.

Early in the evening there was a temporary lull in the storm; rain no longer fell, and in spaces of the rushing sky a few stars showed themselves. Unable to rest at the hotel, Peak set out for a walk towards the cliff summit called Westdown Beacon; he could see little more than black vacancies, but a struggle with the wind suited his temper, and he enjoyed the incessant roar of surf in the darkness. After an hour of this buffeting he returned to the beach, and stood as close as possible to the fierce breakers. No person was in sight. But when he began to move towards the upper shore, three female figures detached themselves from the gloom and advanced in

his direction. They came so near that their voices were audible, and thereupon he stepped up to them.

'Are you going to the Beacon after all, Miss Moorhouse?'

Sylvia was accompanied by Agatha Walworth and Miss Moxey. She explained laughingly that they had stolen out, by agreement, whilst the males of their respective households still lingered at the dinner-table.

'But Mr. Warricombe was right after all. We shall be blown to pieces. A very little of the romantic goes a long way, nowadays.'

Godwin was determined to draw Marcella aside. Seemingly she met his wish, for as all turned to regain the shelter of houses she fell behind her female companions, and stood close by him.

'I want to see you before you go back to London,' he said, bending his head near to hers.

'I wrote a letter to you this morning,' was her reply.

'A letter? To what address?'

'Your address at Exeter.'

'But how did you know it?'

'I'll explain afterwards.'

'When can I see you?'

'Not here. It's impossible. I shall go to Exeter, and there write to you again.'

'Very well. You promise to do this?'

'Yes, I promise.'

There was danger even in the exchange of these hurried sentences. Miss Walworth had glanced back, and might possibly have caught a phrase that aroused curiosity. Having accompanied the girls to within view of their destination, Peak said good-night, and went home to spend the rest of the evening in thought which was sufficiently absorbing.

The next day he had no sight of Marcella. At luncheon the Moorhouses were alone. Afterwards Godwin accepted a proposal of the mathematician (who was generally invisible amid his formulæ) for a walk up the Otter valley. Naturally they talked of Coleridge, whose metaphysical side appealed to Moorhouse. Peak dwelt on the human and poetical, and was led by that peculiar recklessness of mood, which at times relieved his nervous tension, to defend opium eating, as a source of pleasurable experience.

'You will hardly venture on that paradox in the pulpit,' remarked his companion, with laughter.

'Perhaps not. But I have heard arguments from that place decidedly more immoral.'

'No doubt.'

Godwin corrected the impression he perhaps had made by turning with sudden seriousness to another subject. The ironic temptation was terribly strong in him just now. One is occasionally possessed by a desire to shout in the midst of a silent assembly; an impulse of the same kind kept urging him to utter words which would irretrievably ruin his prospects. The sense that life is an intolerable mummery can with difficulty be controlled by certain minds, even when circumstances offer no keen incitement to rebellion. But Peak's position to-day demanded an incessant effort to refrain from self-betrayal. What a joy to declare himself a hypocrite, and snap mocking fingers in the world's face! As a safeguard, he fixed his mind upon Sidwell, recalled her features and her voice as clearly as possible, stamped into his heart the conviction that she half loved him.

When he was alone again, he of a sudden determined to go to Exeter. He could no longer endure uncertainty as to the contents of Marcella's letter. As it was too late for the coach, he set off and walked five miles to Exmouth, where he caught a train.

The letter lay on his table, and with it one on which he recognised his mother's handwriting.

Marcella wrote in the simplest way, quite as if their intercourse had never been disturbed. As she happened to be staying with friends at Budleigh Salterton, it seemed possible for her to meet him. Might she hope that he would call at the hotel in Exeter, if she wrote again to make an appointment?

Well, that needed no reply. But how had she discovered the address? Was his story known in London? In a paroxysm of fury, he crushed the letter into a ball and flung it away. The veins of his forehead swelled; he walked about the room with senseless violence, striking his fist against furniture and walls. It would have relieved him to sob and cry like a thwarted child, but only a harsh sound, half-groan, half-laughter, burst from his throat.

The fit passed, and he was able to open the letter from Twybridge, the first he had received from his mother for more than a month. He expected to find nothing of interest, but his attention was soon caught by a passage, which ran thus:

'Have you heard from some friends of yours, called Ward? Some time ago a lady called here to ask for

your address. She said her name was Mrs. Ward, and that her husband, who had been abroad for a long time, very much wished to find you again. Of course I told her where you were to be found. It was just after I had written, or I should have let you know about it before.'

Ward? He knew no one of that name. Could it be Marcella who had done this? It looked more than likely; he believed her capable of strange proceedings.

In the morning he returned to the seaside. Prospect of pleasure there was none, but by moving about he made the time pass more quickly. Wandering in the lanes (which would have delighted him with their autumnal beauties had his mind been at rest), he came upon Miss Walworth, busy with a water-colour sketch. Though their acquaintance was so slight, he stopped for conversation, and the artist's manner appeared to testify that Marcella had as yet made no unfavourable report of him. By mentioning that he would return home on the morrow, he made sure that Marcella would be apprised of this. Perhaps she might shorten her stay, and his suspense.

Back in Longbrook Street once more, he found another

letter. It was from Mrs. Warricombe, who wrote to tell him of their coming removal to London, and added an invitation to dine four days hence. Then at all events he would speak again with Sidwell. But to what purpose? Could he let her go away for months, and perhaps all but forget him among the many new faces that would surround her. He saw no feasible way of being with her in private. To write was to run the gravest risk; things were not ripe for that. To take Martin into his confidence? That asked too much courage. Deliberate avowals of this kind seemed to him ludicrous and humiliating, and under the circumstances —no, no; what force of sincerity could make him appear other than a scheming adventurer?

He lived in tumult of mind and senses. When at length, on the day before his engagement with the Warricombes, there came a note from Marcella, summoning him to the interview agreed upon, he could scarcely endure the hour or two until it was time to set forth; every minute cost him a throb of pain. The torment must have told upon his visage, for on entering the room where Marcella waited he saw that she looked at him with a changing expression, as if something surprised her.

They shook hands, but without a word. Marcella pointed to a chair, yet remained standing. She was endeavouring to smile; her eyes fell, and she coloured.

'Don't let us make each other uncomfortable,' Peak exclaimed suddenly, in the off-hand tone of friendly intimacy. 'There's nothing tragic in this affair, after all. Let us talk quietly.'

Marcella seated herself.

'I had reasons,' he went on, 'for going away from my old acquaintances for a time. Why not, if I chose? You have found me out. Very well; let us talk it over as we have discussed many another moral or psychological question.'

He did not meditate these sentences. Something must of necessity be said, and words shaped themselves for him. His impulse was to avoid the emotional, to talk with this problematic woman as with an intellectual friend of his own sex.

'Forgive me,' were the first sounds that came from Marcella's lips. She spoke with bent head, and almost in a whisper.

'What have I to forgive?' He sat down and leaned sideways in the easy chair. 'You were curious about my doings? What more natural?'

'Do you know how I learnt where you were?'

She looked up for an instant.

'I have a suspicion. You went to Twybridge?'

'Yes.'

'But not in your own name?'

'I can hardly tell why not.'

Peak laughed. He was physically and mentally at rest in comparison with his state for the past few days. Things had a simpler aspect all at once. After all, who would wish to interfere maliciously with him? Women like to be in secrets, and probably Marcella would preserve his.

'What conjectures had you made about me?' he asked, with an air of amusement.

'Many, of course. But I heard something not long ago which seemed so unlikely, yet was told so confidently, that at last I couldn't overcome my wish to make inquiries.'

'And what was that?'

'Mr. Malkin has been to America, and he declared that he had met you in the streets of Boston—and that you refused to admit you were yourself.'

Peak laughed still more buoyantly. His mood was eager to seize on any point that afforded subject for jest.

'Malkin seems to have come across my *Doppelgänger*. One mustn't pretend to certainty in anything, but I am disposed to think I never was in Boston.'

'He was of course mistaken.'

Marcella's voice had an indistinctness very unlike her ordinary tone. As a rule she spoke with that clearness and decision which corresponds to qualities of mind not commonly found in women. But confidence seemed to have utterly deserted her; she had lost her individuality, and was weakly feminine.

'I have been here since last Christmas,' said Godwin, after a pause.

'Yes. I know.'

Their eyes met.

'No doubt your friends have told you as much as they know of me?'

'Yes—they have spoken of you.'

'And what does it amount to?'

He regarded her steadily, with a smile of indifference.

'They say'—she gazed at him as if constrained to do so—'that you are going into the Church.' And as soon as she uttered the last word, a painful laugh escaped her.

'Nothing else? No comments?'

'I think Miss Moorhouse finds it difficult to understand.'

'Miss Moorhouse?' He reflected, still smiling. 'I shouldn't wonder. She has a sceptical mind, and she doesn't know me well enough to understand me.'

'Doesn't know you well enough?'

She repeated the words mechanically. Peak gave her a keen glance.

'Has she led you to suppose,' he asked, 'that we are on intimate terms?'

'No.' The word fell from her, absently, despondently.

'Miss Moxey, would anything be gained by our discussing my position? If you think it a mystery, hadn't we better leave it so?'

She made no answer.

'But perhaps,' he went on, 'you have told them—the Walworths and the Moorhouses—that I owe my friends an explanation? When I see them again, perhaps I shall be confronted with cold, questioning faces?'

'I haven't said a word that could injure you,' Marcella replied, with something of her usual self-possession, passing her eyes distantly over his face as she spoke.

'I knew the suggestion was unjust, when I made it.'

'Then why should you refuse me your confidence?'

She bent forward slightly, but with her eyes cast down. Tone and features intimated a sense of shame, due partly to the feeling that she offered complicity in deceit.

'What can I tell you more than you know?' said Godwin, coldly. 'I propose to become a clergyman, and I have acknowledged to you that my motive is ambition. As the matter concerns my conscience, that must rest with myself; I have spoken of it to no one. But you may depend upon it that I am prepared for every difficulty that may spring up. I knew, of course, that sooner or later some one would discover me here. Well, I have changed my opinions, that's all; who can demand more than that?'

Marcella answered in a tone of forced composure.

'You owe me no explanation at all. Yet we have known each other for a long time, and it pains me that —to be suddenly told that we are no more to each other than strangers.'

'Are we talking like strangers, Marcella?'

She flushed, and her eyes gleamed as they fixed themselves upon him for an instant. He had never before dreamt of addressing her so familiarly, and least of all in this moment was she prepared for it. Godwin despised

himself for the impulse to which he had yielded, but its policy was justified. He had taken one more step in disingenuousness—a small matter.

'Let it be one of those things on which even friends don't open their minds to each other,' he pursued. 'I am living in solitude, and perhaps must do so for several years yet. If I succeed in my purposes, you will see me again on the old terms; if I fail, then too we shall be friends—if you are willing.'

'You won't tell me what those purposes are?'

'Surely you can imagine them.'

'Will you let me ask you—do you look for help to anyone that I have seen here?' She spoke with effort and with shame.

'To no one that you have met,' he answered, shortly.

'Then to some one in Exeter? I have been told that you have friends.'

He was irritated by her persistency, and his own inability to decide upon the most prudent way of answering.

'You mean the Warricombe family, I suppose?'

'Yes.'

'I think it very likely that Mr. Warricombe may be able to help me substantially.'

Marcella kept silence. Then, without raising her eyes, she murmured:

'You will tell me no more?'

'There is nothing more to tell.'

She bit her lips, as if to compel them to muteness. Her breath came quickly; she glanced this way and that, like one who sought an escape. After eyeing her askance for a moment, Peak rose.

'You are going?' she said.

'Yes; but surely there is no reason why we shouldn't say good-bye in a natural and friendly way?'

'Can you forgive me for that deceit I practised?'

Peak laughed.

'What does it matter? We should in any case have met at Budleigh Salterton.'

'No. I had no serious thought of accepting their invitation.'

She stood looking away from him, endeavouring to speak as though the denial had but slight significance. Godwin stirred impatiently.

'I should never have gone to Twybridge,' Marcella continued, 'but for Mr. Malkin's story.'

He turned to her.

'You mean that his story had a disagreeable sound?'

Marcella kept silence, her fingers working together.

'And is your mind relieved?' he added.

'I wish you were back in London. I wish this change had never come to pass.'

'I wish that several things in my life had never come to pass. But I am here, and my resolve is unalterable. One thing I must ask you—how shall you represent my position to your brother?'

For a moment Marcella hesitated. Then, meeting his look, she answered with nervous haste:

'I shall not mention you to him.'

Ashamed to give any sign of satisfaction, and oppressed by the feeling that he owed her gratitude, Peak stood gazing towards the windows with an air of half-indifferent abstractedness. It was better to let the interview end thus, without comment or further question; so he turned abruptly, and offered his hand.

'Good-bye. You will hear of me, or from me.'

'Good-bye!'

He tried to smile; but Marcella had a cold face, expressive of more dignity than she had hitherto shown. As he closed the door she was still looking towards him.

He knew what the look meant. In his position, a

man of ordinary fibre would long ago have nursed the flattering conviction that Marcella loved him. Godwin had suspected it, but in a vague, unemotional way, never attaching importance to the matter. What he *had* clearly understood was, that Christian wished to inspire him with interest in Marcella, and on that account, when in her company, he sometimes set himself to display a deliberate negligence. No difficult undertaking, for he was distinctly repelled by the thought of any relations with her more intimate than had been brought about by his cold intellectual sympathy. Her person was still as disagreeable to him as when he first met her in her uncle's house at Twybridge. If a man sincerely hopes that a woman does not love him (which can seldom be the case where a suggestion of such feeling ever arises), he will find it easy to believe that she does not. Peak not only had the benefit of this principle; the constitution of his mind made it the opposite of natural for him to credit himself with having inspired affection. That his male friends held him in any warm esteem always appeared to him improbable, and as regards women his modesty was profound. The simplest explanation, that he was himself incapable of pure devotedness, perhaps hits the truth. Unsympathetic, however, he could with

no justice be called, and now that the reality of Marcella's love was forced upon his consciousness he thought of her with sincere pity, — the emotion which had already possessed him (though he did not then analyse it) when he unsuspectingly looked into her troubled face a few days ago.

It was so hard to believe, that, on reaching home, he sat for a long time occupied with the thought of it, to the exclusion of his own anxieties. What! this woman had made of *him* an ideal such as he himself sought among the most exquisite of her sex? How was that possible? What quality of his, personal, psychical, had such magnetic force? What sort of being was he in Marcella's eyes? Reflective men must often enough marvel at the success of whiskered and trousered mortals in wooing the women of their desire, for only by a specific imagination can a person of one sex assume the emotions of the other. Godwin had neither that endowment nor the peculiar self-esteem which makes love-winning a matter of course to some intelligent males. His native arrogance signified a low estimate of mankind at large, rather than an overweening appreciation of his own qualities, and in his most presumptuous moments he had never claimed the sexual prefulgence which many a commonplace fellow so

gloriously exhibits. At most, he had hoped that some woman might find him *interesting*, and so be led on to like him well enough for the venture of matrimony. Passion at length constrained him to believe that his ardour might be genuinely reciprocated, but even now it was only in paroxysms that he held this assurance; the hours of ordinary life still exposed him to the familiar self-criticism, sometimes more scathing than ever. He dreaded the looking-glass, consciously avoided it; and a like disparagement of his inner being tortured him through the endless labyrinths of erotic reverie.

Yet here was a woman who so loved him that not even a proud temper and his candid indifference could impose restraint upon her emotions. As he listened to the most significant of her words he was distressed with shame, and now, in recalling them, he felt that he should have said something, done something, to disillusion her. Could he not easily show himself in a contemptible light? But reflection taught him that the shame he had experienced on Marcella's behalf was blended with a gratification which forbade him at the moment to be altogether unamiable. It was not self-interest alone that prompted his use of her familiar name. In the secret places of his heart he was thankful to her for a most effective

encouragement. She had confirmed him in the hope that he was loved by Sidwell.

And now that he no longer feared her, Marcella was gradually dismissed from mind. For a day or two he avoided the main streets of the town, lest a chance meeting with her should revive disquietude; but, by the time that Mrs. Warricombe's invitation permitted him once more to follow his desire, he felt assured that Marcella was back in London, and the sense of distance helped to banish her among unrealities.

The hours had never pressed upon him with such demand for resolution. In the look with which Sidwell greeted him when he met her in the drawing-room, he seemed to read much more than wonted friendliness; it was as though a half secret already existed between them. But no occasion offered for a word other than trivial. The dinner-party consisted of about a score of people, and throughout the evening Peak found himself hopelessly severed from the one person whose presence was anything but an importunity to him. He maddened with jealousy, with fear, with ceaseless mental manœuvring. More than one young man of agreeable aspect appeared to be on dangerous terms with Sidwell, approaching her with that air of easy, well-bred intimacy which Godwin knew too

well he would never be able to assume in perfection. Again he was humiliated by self-comparison with social superiors, and again reminded that in this circle he had a place merely on sufferance. Mrs. Warricombe, when he chanced to speak with her, betrayed the slight regard in which she really held him, and Martin devoted himself to more important people. The evening was worse than lost.

Yet in two more days Sidwell would be beyond reach. He writhed upon his bed as the image of her loveliness returned again and again,—her face as she conversed at table, her dignity as she rose with the other ladies, her smile when he said good-night. A smile that meant more than civility; he was convinced of it. But memory would not support him through half-a-year of solitude and ill-divining passion.

He would write to her, and risk all. Two o'clock in the morning saw him sitting half-dressed at the table, raging over the difficulties of a composition which should express his highest self. Four o'clock saw the blotched letter torn into fragments. He could not write as he wished, could not hit the tone of manly appeal. At five o'clock he turned wretchedly into bed again.

A day of racking headache; then the long restful sleep

which brings good counsel. It was well that he had not sent a letter, nor in any other way committed himself. If Sidwell were ever to be his wife, the end could only be won by heroic caution and patience. Thus far he had achieved notable results; to rush upon his aim would be the most absurd departure from a hopeful scheme gravely devised and pursued. To wait, to establish himself in the confidence of this family, to make sure his progress step by step,—that was the course indicated from the first by his calm reason. Other men might triumph by sudden audacity; for him was no hope save in slow, persevering energy of will. Passion had all but ruined him; now he had recovered self-control.

Sidwell's six months in London might banish him from her mind, might substitute some rival against whom it would be hopeless to contend. Yes; but a thousand possibilities stood with menace in the front of every great enterprise. Before next spring he might be dead.

Defiance, then, of every foreboding, of every shame; and a life that moulded itself in the ardour of unchangeable resolve.

IV

Martin Warricombe was reconciled to the prospect of a metropolitan winter by the fact that his old friend Thomas Gale, formerly Geological Professor at Whitelaw College, had of late returned from a three years' sojourn in North America, and now dwelt in London. The breezy man of science was welcomed back among his brethren with two-fold felicitation; his book on the Appalachians would have given no insufficient proof of activity abroad, but evidence more generally interesting accompanied him in the shape of a young and beautiful wife. Not every geologist whose years have entered the fifties can go forth and capture in second marriage a charming New England girl, thirty years his junior. Yet those who knew Mr. Gale—his splendid physique, his bluff cordiality, the vigour of his various talk—were scarcely surprised. The young lady was no heiress; she had, in fact, been a school

teacher, and might have wearied through her best years in that uncongenial pursuit. Transplanted to the richest English soil, she developed remarkable aptitudes. A month or two of London exhibited her as a type of all that is most attractive in American womanhood.

Between Mrs. Gale and the Warricombes intimacy was soon established. Sidwell saw much of her, and liked her. To this meditative English girl the young American offered an engrossing problem, for she avowed her indifference to all religious dogmas, yet was singularly tolerant and displayed a moral fervour which Sidwell had believed inseparable from Christian faith. At the Gales' house assembled a great variety of intellectual people, and with her father's express approval (Martin had his reasons) Sidwell made the most of this opportunity of studying the modern world. Only a few days after her arrival in London, she became acquainted with a Mr. Walsh, a brother of that heresiarch, the Whitelaw Professor, whose name was still obnoxious to her mother. He was a well-favoured man of something between thirty and forty, brilliant in conversation, personally engaging, and known by his literary productions, which found small favour with conservative readers. With surprise, Sidwell in a short time became aware that Mr. Walsh had a frank liking for

her society. He was often to be seen in Mrs. Warricombe's drawing-room, and at Mrs. Gale's he yet more frequently obtained occasions of talking with her. The candour with which he expressed himself on most subjects enabled her to observe a type of mind which at present had peculiar interest for her. Discretion often put restraint upon her curiosity, but none the less Mr. Walsh had plausible grounds for believing that his advances were not unwelcome. He saw that Sidwell's gaze occasionally rested upon him with a pleasant gravity, and noted the mood of meditation which sometimes came upon her when he had drawn apart. The frequency of these dialogues was observed by Mrs. Warricombe, and one evening she broached the subject to her daughter rather abruptly.

'I am surprised that you have taken such a liking to Mr. Walsh.'

Sidwell coloured, and made answer in the quiet tone which her mother had come to understand as a reproof, a hint of defective delicacy:

'I don't think I have behaved in a way that should cause you surprise.'

'It seemed to me that you were really very—friendly with him.'

'Yes, I am always friendly. But nothing more.'

'Don't you think there's a danger of his misunderstanding you, Sidwell?'

'I don't, mother. Mr. Walsh understands that we differ irreconcilably on subjects of the first importance. I have never allowed him to lose sight of that.'

Intellectual differences were of much less account to Mrs. Warricombe than to her daughter, and her judgment in a matter such as this was consequently far more practical.

'If I may advise you, dear, you oughtn't to depend much on that. I am not the only one who has noticed something—I only mention it, you know.'

Sidwell mused gravely. In a minute or two she looked up and said in her gentlest voice:

'Thank you, mother. I will be more careful.'

Perhaps she had lost sight of prudence, forgetting that Mr. Walsh could not divine her thoughts. Her interest in him was impersonal; when he spoke she was profoundly attentive, only because her mind would have been affected in the same way had she been reading his words instead of listening to them. She could not let him know that another face was often more distinct to her imagination than his to her actual sight, and that her

thoughts were frequently more busy with a remembered dialogue than with this in which she was engaged. She had abundantly safe-guarded herself against serious misconstruction, but if gossip were making her its subject, it would be inconsiderate not to regard the warning.

It came, indeed, at a moment when she was very willing to rest from social activity. At the time of her last stay in London, three years ago, she had not been ripe for reflection on what she saw. Now her mind was kept so incessantly at strain, and her emotions answered so intensely to every appeal, that at length she felt the need of repose. It was not with her as with the young women who seek only to make the most of their time in agreeable ways. Sidwell's vital forces were concentrated in an effort of profound spiritual significance. The critical hour of her life was at hand, and she exerted every faculty in the endeavour to direct herself aright.

Having heard from his brother that Sidwell had not been out for several days, Buckland took an opportunity of calling at the house early one morning. He found her alone in a small drawing-room, and sat down with an expression of weary discontent. This mood had been

frequent in the young man of late. Sidwell remarked a change that was coming over him, a gloominess unnatural to his character.

'Seen the Walworths lately?' he asked, when his sister had assured him that she was not seriously ailing.

'We called a few days ago.'

'Meet anyone there?'

'Two or three people. No one that interested me.'

'You haven't come across some friends of theirs called Moxey?'

'Oh, yes! Miss Moxey was there one afternoon about a fortnight ago.'

'Did you talk to her at all?' Buckland asked.

'Yes; we hadn't much to say to each other, though. How do you know of her? Through Sylvia, I dare-say.'

'Met her when I was last down yonder.'

Sidwell had long since heard from her friend of Miss Moxey's visit to Budleigh Salterton, but she was not aware that Buckland had been there at the same time. Sylvia had told her, however, of the acquaintance existing between Miss Moxey and Peak, a point of much interest

to her, though it remained a mere unconnected fact. In her short conversation with Marcella, she had not ventured to refer to it.

'Do you know anything of the family?'

'I was going to ask you the same,' returned Buckland. 'I thought you might have heard something from the Walworths.'

Sidwell had in fact sought information, but, as her relations with the Walworths were formal, such inquiry as she could make from them elicited nothing more than she already knew from Sylvia.

'Are you anxious to discover who they are?' she asked.

'Oh, not particularly.'

Buckland moved uneasily, and became silent.

'I dined with Walsh yesterday,' he said, at length, struggling to shake off the obvious dreariness that oppressed him. 'He suits me; we can get on together.'

'No doubt.'

'But you don't dislike him, I think?'

'Implying that I dislike *you*,' said Sidwell, lightsomely.

'You have no affection for my opinions.—Walsh is an honest man.'

'I hope so.'

'He says what he thinks. No compromise with fashionable hypocrisy.'

'I despise that kind of thing quite as much as you do.'

They looked at each other. Buckland had a sullen air.

'Yes, in your own way,' he replied, 'you are sincere enough, I have no doubt. I wish all women were so.'

'What exception have you in mind?'

He did not seem inclined to answer.

'Perhaps it is your understanding of them that's at fault,' added Sidwell, gently.

'Not in one case, at all events,' he exclaimed. 'Suppose you were asked to define Miss Moorhouse's religious opinions, how would you do it?'

'I am not well enough acquainted with them.'

'Do you imagine for a moment that she has any more faith in the supernatural than I have?'

'I think there is a great difference between her position and yours.'

'Because she is hypocritical!' cried Buckland, angrily. 'She deceives you. She hasn't the courage to be honest.'

Sidwell wore a pained expression.

'You judge her,' she replied, 'far too coarsely. No one is called upon to make an elaborate declaration of faith as often as such subjects are spoken of. Sylvia thinks so differently from you about almost everything that, when she happens to agree with you, you are misled and misinterpret her whole position.'

'I understand her perfectly,' Buckland went on, in the same irritated voice. 'There are plenty of women like her—with brains enough, but utter and contemptible cowards. Cowards even to themselves, perhaps. What can you expect, when society is based on rotten shams?'

For several minutes he pursued this vein of invective, then took an abrupt leave. Sidwell had a piece of grave counsel ready to offer him, but he was clearly in no mood to listen, so she postponed it.

A day or two after this, she received a letter from Sylvia. Miss Moorhouse was anything but a good correspondent; she often confessed her inability to compose anything but the briefest and driest statement of facts. With no little surprise, therefore, Sidwell found that the envelope contained two sheets all but covered with her friend's cramped handwriting. The letter began

with apology for long delay in acknowledging two communications.

'But you know well enough my dilatory disposition. I have written to you mentally at least once a day, and I hope you have mentally received the results—that is to say, have assured yourself of my goodwill to you, and I had nothing else to send.'

At this point Sylvia had carefully obliterated two lines, blackening the page into unsightliness. In vain Sidwell pored over the effaced passage, led to do so by a fancy that she could discern a capital P, which looked like the first letter of a name. The writer continued:

'Don't trouble yourself so much about insoluble questions. Try to be more positive—I don't say become a Positivist. Keep a receptive mind, and wait for time to shape your views of things. I see that London has agitated and confused you; you have lost your bearings amid the maze of contradictory finger-posts. If you were here I could soothe you with Sylvian (much the same as sylvan) philosophy, but I can't write.'

Here the letter was to have ended, for on the line beneath was legible 'Give my love to Fanny,' but this again had been crossed out, and there followed a long paragraph:

'I have been reading a book about ants. Perhaps you know all the wonderful things about them, but I had neglected that branch of natural history. Their doings are astonishingly like those of an animal called man, and it seems to me that I have discovered one point of resemblance which perhaps has never been noted. Are you aware that at an early stage of their existence ants have wings? They fly—how shall I express it?—only for the brief time of their courtship and marriage, and when these important affairs are satisfactorily done with their wings wither away, and thenceforth they have to content themselves with running about on the earth. Now isn't this a remarkable parallel to one stage of human life? Do not men and women also soar and flutter—at a certain time? And don't their wings manifestly drop off as soon as the end of that skyward movement has been achieved? If the gods had made me poetical, I would sonnetise on this idea. Do you know any poet with a fondness for the ant-philosophy? If so, offer him this suggestion with liberty to "make any use of it he likes."

'But the fact of the matter is that some human beings are never winged at all. I am decidedly coming to the conclusion that I am one of those. Think of me hence-

forth as an apteryx—you have a dictionary at hand? Like the tailless fox, I might naturally maintain that my state is the more gracious, but honestly I am not assured of that. It may be (I half believe it is) a good thing to soar and flutter, and at times I regret that nature has forbidden me that experience. Decidedly I would never try *to persuade anyone else* to forego the use of wings. Bear this in mind, my dear girl. But I suspect that in time to come there will be an increasing number of female human creatures who from their birth are content with *walking*. Not long ago, I had occasion to hint that — though under another figure — to your brother Buckland. I hope he understood me—I think he did —and that he wasn't offended.

'I had something to tell you. I have forgotten it—never mind.'

And therewith the odd epistle was concluded. Sidwell perused the latter part several times. Of course she was at no loss to interpret it. Buckland's demeanour for the past two months had led her to surmise that his latest visit to Budleigh Salterton had finally extinguished the hopes which drew him in that direction. His recent censure of Sylvia might be thus explained. She grieved that her brother's suit should be discouraged, but could

not persuade herself that Sylvia's decision was final. The idea of a match between those two was very pleasant to her. For Buckland she imagined it would be fraught with good results, and for Sylvia, on the whole, it might be the best thing.

Before she replied to her friend nearly a month passed, and Christmas was at hand. Again she had been much in society. Mr. Walsh had renewed his unmistakable attentions, and, when her manner of meeting them began to trouble him with doubts, had cleared the air by making a formal offer of marriage. Sidwell's negative was absolute, much to her mother's relief. On the day of that event, she wrote rather a long letter to Sylvia, but Mr. Walsh's name was not mentioned in it.

'Mother tells me,' it began, 'that *your* mother has written to her from Salisbury, and that you yourself are going there for a stay of some weeks. I am sorry, for on the Monday after Christmas Day I shall be in Exeter, and hoped somehow to have seen you. We—mother and I—are going to run down together, to see after certain domestic affairs; only for three days at most.

'Your ant-letter was very amusing, but it saddened me, dear Sylvia. I can't make any answer. On these

subjects it is very difficult even for the closest friends to open their minds to each other. I don't—and don't wish to—believe in the *apteryx* profession; that's all I must say.

'My health has been indifferent since I last wrote. We live in all but continuous darkness, and very seldom indeed breathe anything that can be called air. No doubt this state of things has its effect on me. I look forwards, not to the coming of spring, for here we shall see nothing of its beauties, but to the month which will release us from London. I want to smell the pines again, and to see the golden gorse in *our* road.

'By way of being more "positive," I have read much in the newspapers, supplementing from them my own experience of London society. The result is that I am more and more confirmed in the fears with which I have already worried you. Two movements are plainly going on in the life of our day. The decay of religious belief is undermining morality, and the progress of Radicalism in politics is working to the same end by overthrowing social distinctions. Evidence stares one in the face from every column of the papers. Of course you have read more or less about the recent "scandal"—I mean the *most* recent.—It isn't the kind of thing one cares to

discuss, but we can't help knowing about it, and does it not strongly support what I say? Here is materialism sinking into brutal immorality, and high social rank degrading itself by intimacy with the corrupt vulgar. There are newspapers that make political capital out of these "revelations." I have read some of them, and they make me so *fiercely* aristocratic that I find it hard to care anything at all even for the humanitarian efforts of people I respect. You will tell me, I know, that this is quite the wrong way of looking at it. But the evils are so monstrous that it is hard to fix one's mind on the good that may long hence result from them.

'I cling to the essential (that is the *spiritual*) truths of Christianity as the only absolute good left in our time. I would say that I care nothing for forms, but some form there must be, else one's faith evaporates. It has become very easy for me to understand how men and women who know the world refuse to believe any longer in a directing Providence. A week ago I again met Miss Moxey at the Walworths', and talked with her more freely than before. This conversation showed me that I have become much more tolerant towards individuals. But though this or that person

may be supported by moral sense alone, the world cannot dispense with religion. If it tries to—and it *will*—there are dreadful times before us.

'I wish I were a man! I would do something, however ineffectual. I would stand on the side of those who are fighting against mob-rule and mob-morals. How would you like to see Exeter Cathedral converted into a "coffee music-hall"? And that will come.'

Reading this, Sylvia had the sense of listening to an echo. Some of the phrases recalled to her quite a different voice from Sidwell's. She smiled and mused.

On the morning appointed for her journey to Exeter Sidwell rose early, and in unusually good spirits. Mrs. Warricombe was less animated by the prospect of five hours in a railway carriage, for London had a covering of black snow, and it seemed likely that more would fall. Martin suggested postponement, but circumstances made this undesirable.

'Let Fanny go with me,' proposed Sidwell, just after breakfast. 'I can see to everything perfectly well, mother.'

But Fanny hastened to decline. She was engaged for a dance on the morrow.

'Then I'll run down with you myself, Sidwell,' said her father.

Mrs. Warricombe looked at the weather and hesitated. There were strong reasons why she should go, and they determined her to brave discomforts.

It chanced that the morning post had brought Mr. Warricombe a letter from Godwin Peak. It was a reply to one that he had written with Christmas greetings; a kindness natural in him, for he had remembered that the young man was probably hard at work in his lonely lodgings. He spoke of it privately to his wife.

'A very good letter—thoughtful and cheerful. You're not likely to see him, but if you happen to, say a pleasant word.'

'I shouldn't have written, if I were you,' remarked Mrs. Warricombe.

'Why not? I was only thinking the other day that he contrasted very favourably with the younger generation as we observe it here. Yes, I have faith in Peak. There's the right stuff in him.'

'Oh, I dare say. But still'——

And Mrs. Warricombe went away with an air of misgiving.

V

In volunteering a promise not to inform her brother of Peak's singular position, Marcella spoke with sincerity. She was prompted by incongruous feelings — a desire to compel Godwin's gratitude, and disdain of the circumstances in which she had discovered him. There seemed to be little likelihood of Christian's learning from any other person that she had met with Peak at Budleigh Salterton; he had, indeed, dined with her at the Walworths', and might improve his acquaintance with that family, but it was improbable that they would ever mention in his hearing the stranger who had casually been presented to them, or indeed ever again think of him. If she held her peace, the secret of Godwin's retirement must still remain impenetrable. He would pursue his ends as hitherto, thinking of *her*, if at all, as a weak woman who had immodestly

betrayed a hopeless passion, and who could be trusted never to wish him harm.

That was Marcella's way of reading a man's thoughts. She did not attribute to Peak the penetration which would make him uneasy. In spite of masculine proverbs, it is the habit of women to suppose that the other sex regards them confidingly, ingenuously. Marcella was unusually endowed with analytic intelligence, but in this case she believed what she hoped. She knew that Peak's confidence in her must be coloured with contempt, but this mattered little so long as he paid her the compliment of feeling sure that she was superior to ignoble temptations. Many a woman would behave with treacherous malice. It was in her power to expose him, to confound all his schemes, for she knew the authorship of that remarkable paper in *The Critical Review*. Before receiving Peak's injunction of secrecy, Earwaker had talked of 'The New Sophistry' with Moxey and with Malkin; the request came too late. In her interview with Godwin at the Exeter hotel, she had not even hinted at this knowledge, partly because she was unconscious that Peak imagined the affair a secret between himself and Earwaker, partly because she thought it unworthy of her even to seem to threaten. It gratified

her, however, to feel that he was at her mercy, and the thought preoccupied her for many days.

Passion which has the intellect on its side is more easily endured than that which offers sensual defiance to all reasoning, but on the other hand it lasts much longer. Marcella was not consumed by her emotions; she often thought calmly, coldly, of the man she loved. Yet he was seldom long out of her mind, and the instigation of circumstances at times made her suffering intense. Such an occasion was her first meeting with Sidwell Warricombe, which took place at the Walworths', in London. Down in Devonshire she had learnt that a family named Warricombe were Peak's intimate friends; nothing more than this, for indeed no one was in a position to tell her more. Wakeful jealousy caused her to fix upon the fact as one of significance; Godwin's evasive manner when she questioned him confirmed her suspicions; and as soon as she was brought face to face with Sidwell, suspicion became certainty. She knew at once that Miss Warricombe was the very person who would be supremely attractive to Godwin Peak.

An interval of weeks, and again she saw the face that in the meantime had been as present to her

imagination as Godwin's own features. This time she conversed at some length with Miss Warricombe. Was it merely a fancy that the beautiful woman looked at her, spoke to her, with some exceptional interest? By now she had learnt that the Moorhouses and the Warricombes were connected in close friendship; it was all but certain, then, that Miss Moorhouse had told Miss Warricombe of Peak's visit to Budleigh Salterton, and its incidents. Could this in any way be explanatory of the steady, searching look in those soft eyes?

Marcella had always regarded the emotion of jealousy as characteristic of a vulgar nature. Now that it possessed her, she endeavoured to call it by other names; to persuade herself that she was indignant on abstract grounds, or anxious only with reference to Peak's true interests. She could not affect surprise. So intensely sympathetic was her reading of Godwin's character that she understood—or at all events recognised—the power Sidwell would possess over him. He did not care for enlightenment in a woman; he was sensual—though in a subtle way; the aristocratic vein in his temper made him subject to strong impressions from trivialities of personal demeanour, of social tone.

Yet all was mere conjecture. She had not dared to utter Peak's name, lest in doing so she should betray herself. Constantly planning to make further discoveries, she as constantly tried to dismiss all thought of the matter—to learn indifference. Already she had debased herself, and her nature must be contemptible indeed if anything could lure her forward on such a path.

None the less, she was assiduous in maintaining friendly relations with the Walworths. Christian, too, had got into the habit of calling there; it was significant of the noticeable change which was come upon him—a change his sister was at no loss to understand from the moment that he informed her (gravely, but without expressiveness) of Mr. Palmer's death. Instead of shunning ordinary society, he seemed bent on extending the circle of his acquaintance. He urged Marcella to invite friendly calls, to have guests at dinner. There seemed to be a general revival of his energies, exhibited in the sphere of study as well as of amusement. Not a day went by without his purchasing books or scientific apparatus, and the house was brightened with works of art chosen in the studios which Miss Walworth advised him to visit. All the amiabilities of his character came

into free play; with Marcella he was mirthful, affectionate, even caressing. He grew scrupulous about his neckties, his gloves, and was careful to guard his fingers against corroding acids when he worked in the laboratory. Such indications of hopefulness caused Marcella more misgiving than pleasure; she made no remark, but waited with anxiety for some light on the course of events.

Just before dinner, one evening, as she sat alone in the drawing-room, Christian entered with a look which portended some strange announcement. He spoke abruptly:

'I have heard something astonishing.'

'What is that?'

'This afternoon I went to the matinée at the Vaudeville, and found myself among a lot of our friends—the Walworths and the Hunters and the Mortons. Between the acts I was talking to Hunter, when a man came up to us, spoke to Hunter, and was introduced to me—a Mr. Warricombe. What do you think he said? "I believe you know my friend Peak, Mr. Moxey?" "Peak? To be sure! Can you tell me what has become of him?" He gave me an odd look. "Why, I met him last, some two months ago, in Devonshire." At that moment we

were obliged to go to our places, and I couldn't get hold of the fellow again. Hunter told me something about him; he knows the Walworths, it seems—belongs to a good Devonshire family. What on earth can Peak be doing over there?'

Marcella kept silence. The event she had judged improbable had come to pass. The chance of its doing so had of course increased since Christian began to associate freely with the Walworths and their circle. Yet, considering the slightness of the connection between that group of people and the Warricombe family, there had seemed no great likelihood of Christian's getting acquainted with the latter. She debated rapidly in her troubled mind how to meet this disclosure. Curiosity would, of course, impel her brother to follow up the clue; he would again encounter Warricombe, and must then learn all the facts of Peak's position. To what purpose should she dissemble her own knowledge?

Did she desire that Godwin should remain in security? A tremor more akin to gladness than its opposite impeded her utterance. If Warricombe became aware of all that was involved in Godwin Peak's withdrawal from among his friends—if (as must follow) he imparted the discovery to his sister——

The necessity of speaking enabled her to ignore these turbulent speculations, which yet were anything but new to her.

'They met at Budleigh Salterton,' she said, quietly.

'Who did? Warricombe and Peak?'

'Yes. At the Moorhouses'. It was when I was there.'

Christian stared at her.

'When you were there? But—*you* met Peak?'

His sister smiled, turning from the astonished gaze.

'Yes, I met him.'

'But, why the deuce——? Why didn't you tell me, Marcella?'

'He asked me not to speak of it. He didn't wish you to know that—that he has decided to become a clergyman.'

Christian was stricken dumb. In spite of his sister's obvious agitation, he could not believe what she told him; her smile gave him an excuse for supposing that she jested.

'Peak a clergyman?' He burst out laughing. 'What's the meaning of all this?—Do speak intelligibly! What's the fellow up to?'

'I am quite serious. He is studying for Orders—has been for this last year.'

In desperation, Christian turned to another phase of the subject.

'Then Malkin *was* mistaken?'

'Plainly.'

'And you mean to tell me that Peak——? Give me more details. Where's he living? How has he got to know people like these Warricombes?'

Marcella told all that she knew, and without injunction of secrecy. The affair had passed out of her hands; destiny must fulfil itself. And again the tremor that resembled an uneasy joy went through her frame.

'But how,' asked Christian, 'did this fellow Warricombe come to know that *I* was a friend of Peak's?'

'That's a puzzle to me. I shouldn't have thought he would have remembered my name; and, even if he had, how could he conclude——?'

She broke off, pondering. Warricombe must have made inquiries, possibly suggested by suspicions.

'I scarcely spoke of Mr. Peak to anyone,' she added. 'People saw, of course, that we were acquaintances, but it couldn't have seemed a thing of any importance.'

'You spoke with him in private, it seems?'

'Yes, I saw him for a few minutes—in Exeter.'

'And you hadn't said anything to the Walworths that —that would surprise them?'

'Purposely not.—Why should I injure him?'

Christian knit his brows. He understood too well why his sister should refrain from such injury.

'You would have behaved in the same way,' Marcella added.

'Why really—yes, perhaps so. Yet I don't know.—In plain English, Peak is a wolf in sheep's clothing!'

'I don't know anything about that,' she replied, with gloomy evasion.

'Nonsense, my dear girl!—Had he the impudence to pretend to you that he was sincere?'

'He made no declaration.'

'But you are convinced he is acting the hypocrite, Marcella. You spoke of the risk of injuring him.—What are his motives? What does he aim at?'

'Scarcely a bishopric, I should think,' she replied, bitterly.

'Then, by Jove! Earwaker may be right!'

Marcella darted an inquiring look at him.

'What has he thought?'

'I'm ashamed to speak of it. He suggested once that Peak might disguise himself for the sake of—of making a good marriage.'

The reply was a nervous laugh.

'Look here, Marcella.' He caught her hand. 'This is a very awkward business. Peak is disgracing himself; he will be unmasked; there'll be a scandal. It was kind of you to keep silence—when don't you behave kindly, dear girl?—but think of the possible results to *us*. We shall be something very like accomplices.'

'How?' Marcella exclaimed, impatiently. 'Who need know that we were so intimate with him?'

'Warricombe seems to know it.'

'Who can prove that he isn't sincere?'

'No one, perhaps. But it will seem a very odd thing that he hid away from all his old friends. You remember, I betrayed that to Warricombe, before I knew that it mattered.'

Yes, and Mr. Warricombe could hardly forget the circumstance. He would press his investigation—knowing already, perhaps, of Peak's approaches to his sister Sidwell.

'Marcella, a man plays games like that at his own peril. I don't like this kind of thing. Perhaps he has

audacity enough to face out any disclosure. But it's out of the question for you and me to nurse his secret. We have no right to do so.'

'You propose to denounce him?'

Marcella gazed at her brother with an agitated look.

'Not denounce. I am fond of Peak; I wish him well. But I can't join him in a dishonourable plot.—Then, we mustn't endanger our place in society.'

'I have no place in society,' Marcella answered, coldly.

'Don't say that, and don't think it. We are both going to make more of our lives; we are going to think very little of the past, and a great deal of the future. We are still young; we have happiness before us.'

'We?' she asked, with shaken voice.

'Yes—both of us! Who can say'——

Again he took her hand and pressed it warmly in both his own. Just then the door opened, and dinner was announced. Christian talked on, in low hurried tones, for several minutes, affectionately, encouragingly. After dinner, he wished to resume the subject, but Marcella declared that there was no more to be said; he must act as honour and discretion bade him; for herself, she

should simply keep silence as hitherto. And she left him to his reflections.

Though with so little of ascertained fact to guide her, Marcella interpreted the hints afforded by her slight knowledge of the Warricombes with singular accuracy. Precisely as she had imagined, Buckland Warricombe was going about on Peak's track, learning all he could concerning the theological student, forming acquaintance with anyone likely to supplement his discoveries. And less than a fortnight after the meeting at the theatre, Christian made known to his sister that Warricombe and he had had a second conversation, this time uninterrupted.

'He inquired after you, Marcella, and—really I had no choice but to ask him to call here. I hardly think he'll come. He's not the kind of man I care for—though liberal enough, and all that.'

'Wasn't it rather rash to give that invitation?'

'The fact was, I so dreaded the appearance of—of seeming to avoid him,' Christian pleaded, awkwardly. 'You know, that affair—we won't talk any more of it; but, if there *should* be a row about it, you are sure to be compromised unless we have managed to guard ourselves. If Warricombe calls, we must talk about Peak

without the least show of restraint. Let it appear that we thought his choice of a profession unlikely, but not impossible. Happily, we needn't know anything about that anonymous *Critical* article.—Indeed, I think I have acted wisely.'

Marcella murmured:

'Yes, I suppose you have.'

'And, by the way, I have spoken of it to Earwaker. Not of your part in the story, of course. I told him that I had met a man who knew all about Peak.—Impossible, you see, for me to keep silence with so intimate a friend.'

'Then Mr. Earwaker will write to him?' said Marcella, reflectively.

'I couldn't give him any address.'

'How does Mr. Warricombe seem to regard Mr. Peak?'

'With a good deal of interest, and of the friendliest kind. Naturally enough; they were College friends, as you know, before I had heard of Peak's existence.'

'He has no suspicions?'

Christian thought not, but her brother's judgment had not much weight with Marcella.

She at once dreaded and desired Warricombe's appear-

ance. If he thought it worth while to cultivate her acquaintance, she would henceforth have the opportunity of studying Peak's relations with the Warricombes; on the other hand, this was to expose herself to suffering and temptation from which the better part of her nature shrank with disdain. That she might seem to have broken the promise voluntarily made to Godwin was a small matter; not so the risk of being overcome by an ignoble jealousy. She had no overweening confidence in the steadfastness of her self-respect, if circumstances were all on the side of sensual impulse. And the longer she brooded on this peril, the more it allured her. For therewith was connected the one satisfaction which still remained to her: however little he desired to keep her constantly in mind, Godwin Peak must of necessity do so after what had passed between them. Had but her discovery remained her own secret, then the pleasure of commanding her less pure emotions, of proving to Godwin that she was above the weakness of common women, might easily have prevailed. Now that her knowledge was shared by others, she had lost that safeguard against lower motive. The argument that to unmask hypocrisy was in itself laudable she dismissed with contempt; let that be the resource of a

woman who would indulge her rancour whilst keeping up the inward pretence of sanctity. If *she* erred in the ways characteristic of her sex, it should at all events be a conscious degradation.

'Have you seen that odd creature Malkin lately?' she asked of Christian, a day or two after.

'No, I haven't; I thought of him to make up our dinner on Sunday; but you had rather not have him here, I daresay?'

'Oh, he is amusing. Ask him by all means,' said Marcella, carelessly.

'He may have heard about Peak from Earwaker, you know. If he begins to talk before people'——

'Things have gone too far for such considerations,' replied his sister, with a petulance strange to her habits of speech.

'Well, yes,' admitted Christian, glancing at her. 'We can't be responsible.'

He reproached himself for this attitude towards Peak, but was heartily glad that Marcella seemed to have learnt to regard the intriguer with a wholesome indifference.

On the second day after Christmas, as they sat talking idly in the dusking twilight, the door of the drawing-

room was thrown open, and a visitor announced. The name answered with such startling suddenness to the thought with which Marcella had been occupied that, for an instant, she could not believe that she had heard aright. Yet it was undoubtedly Mr. Warricombe who presented himself. He came forward with a slightly hesitating air, but Christian made haste to smooth the situation. With the help of those commonplaces by which even intellectual people are at times compelled to prove their familiarity with social usages, conversation was set in movement.

Buckland could not be quite himself. The consciousness that he had sought these people not at all for their own sake made him formal and dry; his glances, his half-smile, indicated a doubt whether the Moxeys belonged entirely to the sphere in which he was at home. Hence a rather excessive politeness, such as the man who sets much store on breeding exhibits to those who may at any moment, even in a fraction of a syllable, prove themselves his inferiors. With men and women of the unmistakably lower orders, Buckland could converse in a genial tone that recommended him to their esteem; on the borderland of refinement, his sympathies were repressed, and he held the distinctive part of his mind in reserve.

Marcella desired to talk agreeably, but a weight lay upon her tongue; she was struck with the resemblance in Warricombe's features to those of his sister, and this held her in a troubled preoccupation, occasionally evident when she made a reply, or tried to diversify the talk by leading to a new topic. It was rather early in the afternoon, and she had slight hope that any other caller would appear; a female face would have been welcome to her, even that of foolish Mrs. Morton, who might possibly look in before six o'clock. To her relief the door did presently open, but the sharp, creaking footstep which followed was no lady's; the servant announced Mr. Malkin.

Marcella's eyes gleamed strangely. Not with the light of friendly welcome, though for that it could be mistaken. She rose quietly, and stepped forward with a movement which again seemed to betoken eagerness of greeting. In presenting the newcomer to Mr. Warricombe, she spoke with an uncertain voice. Buckland was more than formal. The stranger's aspect impressed him far from favourably, and he resented as an impudence the hearty hand-grip to which he perforce submitted.

'I come to plead with you,' exclaimed Malkin, turning to Marcella, in his abrupt, excited way. 'After accepting

your invitation to dine, I find that the thing is utterly and absolutely impossible. I had entirely forgotten an engagement of the very gravest nature. I am conscious of behaving in quite an unpardonable way.'

Marcella laughed down his excuses. She had suddenly become so mirthful that Christian looked at her in surprise, imagining that she was unable to restrain her sense of the ridiculous in Malkin's demeanour.

'I have hurried up from Wrotham,' pursued the apologist. 'Did I tell you, Moxey, that I had taken rooms down there, to be able to spend a day or two near my friends the Jacoxes occasionally? On the way here, I looked in at Staple Inn, but Earwaker is away somewhere. What an odd thing that people will go off without letting one know! It's such common ill-luck of mine to find people gone away—I'm really astonished to find you at home, Miss Moxey.'

Marcella looked at Warricombe and laughed.

'You must understand that subjectively,' she said, with nervous gaiety which again excited her brother's surprise. 'Please don't be discouraged by it from coming to see us again; I am very rarely out in the afternoon.'

'But,' persisted Malkin, 'it's precisely my ill fortune to hit on those rare moments when people *are* out!—

Now, I never meet acquaintances in the streets of London; but, if I happen to be abroad, as likely as not I encounter the last person I should expect to find. Why, you remember, I rush over to America for scarcely a week's stay, and there I come across a man who has disappeared astonishingly from the ken of all his friends!'

Christian looked at Marcella. She was leaning forward, her lips slightly parted, her eyes wide as if in gaze at something that fascinated her. He saw that she spoke, but her voice was hardly to be recognised.

'Are you quite sure of that instance, Mr. Malkin?'

'Yes, I feel quite sure, Miss Moxey. Undoubtedly it was Peak!'

Buckland Warricombe, who had been waiting for a chance of escape, suddenly wore a look of interest. He rapidly surveyed the trio. Christian, somewhat out of countenance, tried to answer Malkin in a tone of light banter.

'It happens, my dear fellow, that Peak has not left England since we lost sight of him.'

'What? He has been heard of? Where is he then?'

'Mr. Warricombe can assure you that he has been living for a year at Exeter.'

Buckland, perceiving that he had at length come upon something important to his purposes, smiled genially.

'Yes, I have had the pleasure of seeing Peak down in Devon from time to time.'

'Then it was really an illusion!' cried Malkin. 'I was too hasty. Yet that isn't a charge that can be often brought against me, I think. Does Earwaker know of this?'

'He has lately heard,' replied Christian, who in vain sought for a means of checking Malkin's loquacity. 'I thought he might have told you.'

'Certainly not. The thing is quite new to me. And what is Peak doing down there, pray? Why did he conceal himself?'

Christian gazed appealingly at his sister. She returned the look steadily, but neither stirred nor spoke. It was Warricombe's voice that next sounded:

'Peak's behaviour seems mysterious,' he began, with ironic gravity. 'I don't pretend to understand him. What's *your* view of his character, Mr. Malkin?'

'I know him very slightly indeed, Mr. Warricombe. But I have a high opinion of his powers. I wonder he does so little. After that article of his in *The Critical*'——

Malkin became aware of something like agonised entreaty on Christian's countenance, but this had merely the affect of heightening his curiosity.

'In *The Critical?*' said Warricombe, eagerly. 'I didn't know of that. What was the subject?'

'To be sure, it was anonymous,' went on Malkin, without a suspicion of the part he was playing before these three excited people. 'A paper called "The New Sophistry," a tremendous bit of satire.'

Marcella's eyes closed as if a light had flashed before them; she drew a short sigh, and at once seemed to become quite at ease, the smile with which she regarded Warricombe expressing a calm interest.

'That article was Peak's?' Buckland asked, in a very quiet voice.

Christian at last found his opportunity.

'He never mentioned it to you? Perhaps he thought he had gone rather too far in his Broad Churchism, and might be misunderstood.'

'Broad Churchism?' cried Malkin. 'Uncommonly broad, I must say!'

And he laughed heartily; Marcella seemed to join in his mirth.

'Then it would surprise you,' said Buckland, in the

same quiet tone as before, 'to hear that Peak is about to take Orders?'

'Orders?—For what?'

Christian laughed. The worst was over; after all, it came as a relief.

'Not for wines,' he replied. 'Mr. Warricombe means that Peak is going to be ordained.'

Malkin's amazement rendered him speechless. He stared from one person to another, his features strangely distorted.

'You can hardly believe it?' pressed Buckland.

The reply was anticipated by Christian saying:

'Remember, Malkin, that you had no opportunity of studying Peak. It's not so easy to understand him.'

'But I don't see,' burst out the other, 'how I could possibly so *mis*understand him! What has Earwaker to say?'

Buckland rose from his seat, advanced to Marcella, and offered his hand. She said mechanically 'Must you go?' but was incapable of another word. Christian came to her relief, performed the needful civilities, and accompanied his acquaintance to the foot of the stairs. Buckland had become grave, stiff, monosyllabic; Christian

made no allusion to the scene thus suddenly interrupted, and they parted with a formal air.

Malkin remained for another quarter of an hour, when the muteness of his companions made it plain to him that he had better withdraw. He went off with a sense of having been mystified, half resentful, and vastly impatient to see Earwaker.

END OF VOL. II

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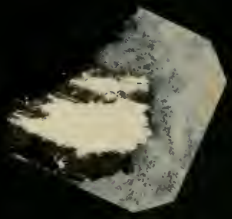

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