

# The Destroyer

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by

Benjamin Swift

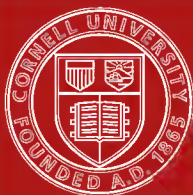
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## THE DESTROYER



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# THE DESTROYER

BY  
BENJAMIN SWIFT  
AUTHOR OF  
"NANCY NOON" AND "THE TORMENTOR"

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NEW YORK  
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

*JS*

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*To*

**M. MAURICE MAETERLINCK**

**Sir,**

I offer these rude Northern chapters, not because they are fit to be offered, but because even a rude gift may be allowed to express a sincere admiration.

**Yours, with respect,**

**THE AUTHOR.**





## NOTE

Most of the incidents in connection with the Siege of Paris  
are taken from the *Journal des Goncourt*.

***“Piaga d'amor non si sana mai”***

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BOOK I



THE WRONG CHOICE



# THE DESTROYER

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## CHAPTER I

### MAKES SURPRISING DISCOVERIES

WHEREAS Lady Rimmon had begun to talk early about the sort of man she would choose for a son-in-law, Sir Saul appeared to take no genuine interest in that question. Whether he would be fat or lean, dark or fair, even whether he was going to be rich or poor, it seemed to matter nothing to Sir Saul.

“But his temperament!” said Lady Rimmon, “*that* is the main thing.”

“They’re all choleric,” replied Sir Saul.

He was too bored by his wife’s suggestions, especially when they referred to the spiritual endowment of him whom Providence was to send as their son.

“We should have had one of our own,” he said, and used to go whistling to the kennels.

Indeed, Sir Saul was almost always out of doors, which was taken as a bad sign. He preferred his hounds and jesses. He said he could keep his hounds in leash well enough, whereas he never could control the yelling pack of his wife's words.

“‘Yelling!’ was the word your father used,” said Lady Rimmon to Violet, “as if I *yell*, and I have never got over the way he described my voice. He said my voice was an ‘earsore!’ That was the voice which, when I married him, was ‘a bird’s warble.’ It agitated me for a week, and I have never forgotten it.”

But she accepted her illusions, and reserved all her affection for her daughter. She determined to discover a safe marriage. She felt it to be surprising that Sir Saul had turned so careless on a matter so grave.

“Let the girl decide,” he said.

“But it is not her business, it is ours, you strange man!” she repeated until she drove him away again.

“Men don’t like emphatic women, mother,” said Violet. “Women who shake their heads at every third word, you know.”

“Indeed!” said Lady Rimmon, astonished.



It was the first time Violet had ventured to give criticism and advice.

Lady Rimmon, in spite of similar provocations, adored Violet, and had long ago decided that no son-in-law could ever be good enough. Whoever he was going to be, she hated him in advance. Violet would be thrown away in any case, but, at least, the shock could be made as mild as possible.

“Now, child, tell me *whom* would it be?” she asked, allowing Violet for a moment to consider the business as her own.

“Edgar,” said Violet.

That was Edgar Besser, son of their rich neighbor of Mulvey House; “superb youth,” as was said, but with some awkward leanings towards the priesthood.

“Edgar! And you know he is perhaps a priest already!”

“He’ll not remain a priest. Leave me, mother, please,” said Violet.

Lady Rimmon thought that if she had a strange husband she had now a frantic child. She could make headway with neither of them. In vain she had told Violet that whether Edgar Besser—

a good enough family to be sure—was going to be a priest or not, he never would be *her* choice, and therefore never could be her daughter's.

“Edgar!” persisted Violet, even till the very night she saw him drive past with his luggage on his way to Oxford. And, at any rate, a prospective young priest, driving in his father's carriage, clasping a missal, should hardly have risen in the carriage and kissed his hand. He should have been kissing his missal rather—unless, perhaps, the lips of his missal were already found to be too cold. It all seemed to mean that one day he might come driving as rapidly back again. At least so pondered Violet. Not once or twice a hand waved to her through dreams as if to warn her he was coming, and she felt the power of that dream-gesture. And she may have been right when she wrote in her book that “Many a cathedral priest is doubtless an exiled and disguised priest of Apollo, and swings a sad censer.” But Edgar was not yet a priest. He was merely studying at Oxford, although his friends prophesied that sooner or later the Catholic Church would be his goal.

“It is all Edgar, Edgar, with her *yet!*” exclaimed Lady Rimmon to Sir Saul.

“What about it?” said he.

Violet was drooping, and it became necessary to look for guidance and advice elsewhere. But, indeed, Lady Rimmon seldom turned to her husband for advice, and usually applied to her brother, Prince Euxine, who was their invariable guest at regular intervals. The Prince's visits used to occur so often, and took so long to expire, that Sir Saul had years ago discovered his brother-in-law to be insufferable. There was no other word. During the first months of his marriage it was doubtless a desirable thing to enter a club with a prince as kinsman. But that vanity had long ago worn off. The Prince began to develop surprising migratory habits, and he invariably hibernated at Rimmon House. His letters announcing his arrival always ended with: “And now I am coming to bow in the House of Rimmon.” There was no bowing him out. Sir Saul had long ago discovered the futility of an “international marriage.” “We will do good to each other,” Prince Euxine used to say. “We will break down racial animosities after you wed my sister, you know, Saul.”

“ These Russians ! ” exclaimed Sir Saul, when his house was overrun by his wife’s kindred.

Lady Rimmon, subduing her voice for once with success, only looked very steadily across the breakfast-table by way of feminine rebuke, when Sir Saul muttered an oath over any fresh announcement of the Prince’s arrival.

“ I hope he’s his own cigars this time, ma’am, that’s all.”

But he always came smiling to the gate, and brought the Prince grandly and brotherly in. Lady Rimmon longed for her brother’s arrival, because, in spite of what might have been expected to the contrary, Sir Saul became more amiable during his visits. If he treated him with inward contempt, he also showed full outward respect, and it was even said that Euxine was the only one who could “ manage ” Sir Saul, and that in some way Sir Saul feared him.

A certain gloom was settling on Rimmon House, but it was sometimes lifted when the Prince came. Sir Saul, Lady Rimmon, and the proud Violet found things stifling when given up to each other’s company.

“ You see,” wrote Violet in her journal, “ how

many small jagging miseries accumulate like needles when two or three people come together."

"Your father is so strange, Violet—strange and capricious," said Lady Rimmon.

"You mean selfish," replied Violet.

Lady Rimmon fell to weeping, and said she was a persecuted woman. "You know what I have suffered. We are being talked about, and I feel that things are coming to a height in this house."

"Yes," said Violet, "and I've grown up in an atmosphere of suspicion and dread—stifling it is—and I've never heard anything except yours and father's muffled anger."

"Child, is it my fault? Do I not wish to see you well out of it? I see now that English and Russian tempers never will agree. We are lions and bears trying to live in the same cage. And yet I've become absolutely English for him," said Lady Rimmon.

But then she broke off to talk more excitedly.

"I wish one thing, Violet," she said. "Will you follow your father some day through the wood in the afternoon when he goes out?"

"No," said Violet, and hastily left the room.

It was not the first time that that request had

been made, and the same answer returned in the same way.

Although Prince Euxine knew a good deal of the inner privacy of his sister's household, he would have been surprised to be told that quarrels occurred so often, and with such rapidity. The cause lay far deeper than in a mere collision of temperaments. That would have been bad enough, but it was an effect rather than a cause. Subtle inquiries, not advanced in words, but in looks and gestures between Sir Saul and Lady Rimmon, and between Violet and Sir Saul had been growing sharper and sharper of late. Lady Rimmon stood before the impalpable truth of a coming disgrace with the sort of feeling a child has when it doesn't know the meaning of a word, but guesses that it means something unclean.

"Follow him through the wood, do!" she said in haste to Cubitt, the woodman, whom, in her desperation, she had made her confidant. "Quick! he has gone this moment! Keep well behind!"

She delayed to bring her suspicions to Euxine only till they were all horribly ripe. It must have been at that time that Violet, whose intelligence was much swifter than her mother's, and

was long ago in possession of the truth that made the House of Rimmon bow down, never to rise any more—I say, it must have been in those days of sickening mistrust and innuendo that Violet wrote in her journal: “Marriage fails if it is founded on the fiction of the permanence of the emotions. If the emotions were permanent, they would not be emotions. Emotion comes in tides. Everything is episodic, even vice.”

“I feel . . . I do,” exclaimed Lady Rimmon, sinking into her chair, and covering her face with her hands, and ruining her bodice by twisting herself within it, “that I have been living with a bad man for *years!*”

## CHAPTER II

### FINDS TRAGEDY STILL HALF ASLEEP

PRINCE EUXINE never lost any time in making himself at home. The first thing the valet had to do was to remove his white gaiters and walking shoes, and bring a pair of riding boots.

“Whiten the gaiters, boy, and take this hat and steam it. Don't let the iron be too hot else you'll burn the silk.”

The servants at Rimmon House had a peculiar contempt for the Prince.

“Think o' one o' our English princes steamin' his old hats, and gettin' gaiters whitened!”

He used to bring a shabby English man-servant with him in frayed clothes, who shaved him in the morning, and told tales in the servants' hall.

“The Prince is parsimonious on soap,” he said, “I daren't waste it. I put on a thin, watery lather, and then he complains about me scraping his chin. As if such a beard don't require pails



o' soap to soften it! I feel inclined to cut out that mustache o' his. I would make 'im look better, don't ye think?"

"Better!—not it. His skin is like a pig's back," said one irreverently. "Our aristocracies' skin's prime clear and soft."

"A prince! A Russian prince! Our Sir Saul's more a prince than 'im. If *you* saw our gold plate and the dishes, and her ladyship's dresses, and Miss Violet's, it would make *your* court dim-tawdry!"

While Sir Saul's household cried up his possessions, Prince Euxine's man was never content till he made his master appear to be a hopelessly indigent aristocrat.

"We're rich paupers," said he.

"It's like it," said they. "What's he coming living on *us* for? Blessing for 'im that his sister married *our* Sir Saul."

But of course the Prince received obsequious bows if he met any of the servants about the grounds. They even admitted that he seemed to have as much authority on the estate as Sir Saul. The chief peasant, old Isaac Dagon, always brought round to the main door, an hour after

the Prince's arrival, the dappled gray mare. It was on this animal—which Sir Saul allotted to his brother-in-law because, as he said, it was only fit to carry old women to picnics—that the Prince made excursions into the woods and fields to see what progress was being made round the home farm.

“And what sort o' home farm have he?” asked the Rimmon servants in scorn. “We'd be ashamed to be an Englishman like you serving such a poor lord.”

“That's true,” said the dejected menial, “but we must take no less than we get. Home farm! Ho, ho! nothing grows there but snow in the winter and ants and field mice in the spring. It's a moor.”

The Prince described it otherwise.

“You remember,” he said to Lady Rimmon, “the wood, *our* wood where I used to do *tiaga*?\* Well, I have cut a great deal of it down, and I think Saul should do the same here,” and he pointed in the direction he meant.

“I'm sure Saul will do it, Euxy,” said Lady Rimmon.

\* A Russian practise of waiting for game in the woods at dusk.

“And I’m sure Saul will do nothing of the sort!” said Sir Saul in private.

Prince Euxine had a passion for removing trees, and if he had got his way he would have made the Rimmon estate as bare as his own moor. He enjoyed free winds and open lands.

It was always an event when he mounted the dappled mare. Sir Saul, Lady Rimmon, and old Isaac invariably assisted in case of any accident when he made the supreme leap from a chair or from the doorstep. He used to meet old Moll with peace-offerings of sugar and buns.

“Steady, old mistress—*do* be steady!” he said in a humble key.

Probably he never would have mounted at all had he not thought it becoming in a prince. He fed the horse from the saddle, *en chemin*, as he said, to keep it in continuous good-humor. The mare sometimes stopped and turned its head in expectancy without being bid. It was then that Euxine ventured to use his riding-whip in a hesitating way. But Moll knew how to keep backing till the Prince surrendered and delivered another *bon bon*.

“Get on, greedy English beast !” exclaimed Euxine, and began to flog.

“He might as well ride a crab !” said Sir Saul, as he watched these regressive movements, and then turned in to enjoy an hour’s respite from his brother-in-law’s company. And it was always that hour which Lady Rimmon chose to give the last touches to her brother’s apartments.

“The Prince is coming, you know,” she used to say to Edgar Besser’s mother, “and we are making preparations.”

That was long ago ; Edgar Besser’s mother was dead, but the Prince was still periodically announced as being on the way.

“You were talking about Violet’s wedding,” he once said to Lady Rimmon, on his return from an excursion with Moll, “eh, *ma petite ?*” and he turned to Violet herself.

“Oh, no,” said Violet, and left the room, with a forced smile.

“Yes,” said Lady Rimmon, as if she had a great deal to communicate, and felt its oppressiveness. “Yes, Violet appears to me to be more English than Russian. It may come from my long stay in this country that she has taken on

English ways. She has English pride, and takes completely after Saul. . . . Well, we *must* talk. We'll do nothing else all these months. And I'm decided on one thing, Euxy—the young man will be good. I mean to lay stress on that—on his character, you know—the shape of his soul, I might say.”

“The soul, sister, appears to be a matter of zoology nowadays.”

“Such days they are!” said Lady Rimmon, as if the age had brought a special affliction to herself. “The sin of the age is criticism; everything is criticised adversely—from corsets to parents. A child thinks nothing now of addressing her mother as if she were an unpleasant tea-gown.”

Euxine laughed, and lit one of his brother-in-law's cigars.

“Where's Saul?” he said.

“Oh, *he's* always out. Horses, dogs, game, pigeons, rabbits, and—and other things” (here Lady Rimmon had been forming her lips to say a word which fell to pieces in her mouth). “That's what he's interested in. He should have kept a menagerie!”

“The world *is* largely a menagerie, Mathilde.

Have you never thought how significant it is that the coats-of-arms of the European nations are made up of portraits of savage beasts. We've the bear—England the lion—Germany and Austria hideous vultures. I think Siena was a bear too, and Florence a lion. They shake hands with each other in a Mosaic on the floor of Siena cathedral, if I remember. Nothing ever looked so impossible. It all points to the fact that the world is a sort of frightful jungle. It does look as if we had the beasts for ancestors, else why would we keep that savage heraldry. Beaks and claws are behind everything."

Euxine's general timidity made him a great enemy to all physical conflict. But he was far from mild-looking. The mustache which his servant condemned on esthetic grounds gave him rather a fierce expression, which was augmented by the red gloss of his face. Physical bravery and beauty he had none. He had never been in the army, and had spent an idle life maneuvering his scanty patrimony with some skill. If he was interested in anything it was in the usefulness of other people to himself, and he always judged things as a pure worldling. He would never make a

man an open enemy so long as he might be useful. He had no love for his kinsman, Sir Saul, but he knew he was valuable. Although he remained a bachelor he had been a great marriage-maker among other people, but it was generally more to his own profit than to theirs. Violet trembled for her uncle's officiousness.

The day was when she had had a full respect for him, and now every one recognized it as a matter of course, although Violet had long outgrown it.

"You are such a favorite with the Prince!" her friends used to say.

"Old dolt!" she wrote in her book.

It was becoming difficult to keep up the fiction. Violet felt that the day was past when the discussion of any project should be reserved till his arrival. She had been taught never to look for any wisdom from her father, and always to turn to the Prince. It was not long since he used to take her on his knee, although, as he admitted himself, she "had outgrown the situation." She objected to the mustache, which pricked her like a wire brush when it came too close.

"Oh, uncle, you're jaggy!" she used to say.

Indeed, it did look as if Euxine was regretting

the English custom which forbids a union between an uncle and his niece. In Germany, where the Prince had a small estate, it was different. If he and Violet had been in Germany——

“There is time, plenty,” he used to say to his sister when she urged him on the subject of Violet’s wedding. “We shall talk. I intend to take time and be careful.”

It seemed to be agreed on all sides that it was the Prince who had the disposal of Violet’s hand.

“The task of bridegroom-finding,” he said, “consists in a skilful process of selection and omission; winnowing, winnowing, until, by perpetual rejection, you arrive at the few highest types and then make your final choice. Leave it to me, Saul and Mathilde.”

Saul seemed willing and likewise Mathilde, while Violet, guarding silence, felt satire pricking her lip.

“Her eyes, you know!” said Euxine to Mathilde, “and then that Rimmon gait, which really we must admire, although we were brought up to other things.”

There was certainly a great deal to talk about, although Lady Rimmon’s suspicions concerning



Sir Saul were not yet full-grown. For instance, Cubitt, the woodman, came running back with no damnatory evidence.

“No, ladyship, I’ve searched the woods and there’s not a wench in’t. I saw no red cheeks except the cranberries! Sir Saul went two miles with his gun, and I came slow behind. He turned at the big pond, shot two wood pigeons, and came back the same road.”

“Keep your tongue to yourself, then,” said Lady Rimmon, dropping a sovereign in his hand, “and be ready when I need you.”

She went to her room, and tried to chastise herself out of suspicion. But could she? Not the least of her troubles, surely, was the astounding fact, long known to the neighborhood and only slowly brought home to herself, that Violet’s beauty, which was indisputable, was somehow shared by a little peasant girl in their midst, Miriam Dagon. Lady Rimmon had seen it herself, and had at first simply expressed her astonishment at Nature’s freaks: at which all the women “teheed!”

“Simple Lady Rimmon!” they said afterwards.

“Now, if two women met and saw at a glance that they resembled each other very much, Euxy, they would feel indignant, wouldn't they?”

“Almost more indignant,” replied Euxine, “than if their dresses at a ball happened to be of the same stuff and made in the same way. But what do you mean?”

Lady Rimmon burst out weeping until her brother had to go and take her by the hand.

“What is it, Mathilde?”

She had never really brought herself to face this perturbing truth. She refused to possess it, and wanted to see if her brother would refuse it also as the wicked hallucination of her own and other people's brains.

“That peasant you've heard about! Saul's slave!” It was a Russian habit which made her talk of slaves.

She said no more, but looked anxiously at her brother. Unluckily, she saw a dark smile pass over his face, and he slightly protruded his tongue, and pressed it against his upper lip, as he always did when he discovered quirks in men and things. He had known it, then.

“Oh gracious, is it *true*?” cried Lady Rim-

mon in a sore paroxysm. "I know it. Oh! . . . Oh help me, Euxy—*is* it?" and she bent her body double.

But Euxine asked her what she meant. He said he didn't understand.

"True? What?"

"Why did you *smile*?" she cried; "it was wicked of you!"

"Smile? I was thinking of other things, Mathilde. You're hysterical; I don't see what you mean. Tell me."

"Oh, no," she said, "I'm glad you don't see. I'm ill just; it's nerves. I'm always afraid something bad will happen, and I lose control of myself."

She went to her room, while Euxine smiled and smiled, and contracted his eyes, and nodded his head ever so gently. He looked very closely at Sir Saul all that day, while they spoke about hedging and ditching. His scrutiny of Violet was likewise as persistent though it attracted no attention. In the afternoon old Moll was brought round, and after the Prince had gone successfully through the ordeal of jumping on her back, she ambled with him through the estate towards the

home farm where was "the little peasant." But before he started he went softly to his sister's room, where he found her still sobbing.

"Oh, I'm better," she said.

"I've kept the best news till the end," he said. "I've got a splendid proposal for Violet. I wished to give you a surprise."

"Oh, who is it?" said Lady Rimmon, rallying and brightening. "How good of you! Yes, I'm living for her."

"I'll tell you when I come back," he said. "Think."

"Oh, tell me just now, Euxy!"

But he went, saying: "Ta, ta."

## CHAPTER III

### SOUNDS AN ALARUM CLOCK WHICH WAKENS TRAGEDY

NOW it may have been a compliment to Miriam Dagon, old Isaac's child—as we were once all given to understand—when she heard that she resembled Miss Violet, but it could be nothing except distressing news for Violet. That Nature, prodigal of types, should have fixed a resemblance so startling between well-born and base-born seemed sufficiently intolerable, but it was peculiarly malicious to place them in sight of each other. Yet there could be no serious question of the truth. Violet was twenty-three and Miriam only seventeen, and, of course, the one was full-formed, whereas the other was a raw girl. Yet the difference of age and full development only served to emphasize the peculiarity of the resemblance between them. Violet had got to know it early, not suddenly, but with a creeping sense

of bewilderment as her intelligence began to grasp the possibilities of moral mishap. It had colored all her girlhood somberly. It had made her silent when she should have laughed in gay ripples. She felt a sense of something wrong, but it was already so complex a feeling that she could not reduce it to its cause. She had played with Miriam although six years were between them. They had played together in innocence, which seemed cruelly naïve in face of what all the countryside was saying. And then Miriam got to know it much later, with as keen a surprise—but it was more vanity than surprise. It became at first pure foolish delight. Each single individual, old Isaac for one, for instance, got to know it, some sooner, some later—Isaac got to know it *very late*—by a sort of unseen process of revelation which was really the result of unconscious stages of sight and hearing. We are surprised that Mulvey tolerated Sir Saul so long. But there were causes for that; also it is easy enough to say that if the parties interested had had any wits Miriam could have been removed as a baby. Would *that* have been easy? That would have brought things more swiftly still to a more ugly

height. Would Isaac have allowed his dear baby, as he supposed her to be, or his child when she was two years, or four years, or even eight years old, to be sent suddenly off to the neighboring shire, or to a big town, for instance, or anywhere else?

It would have been interesting to have had photographs of these children at the same relative periods as they grew up. But, of course, it was meantime well for them and for others that no such minute record of their physiognomy was preserved. It was just because little Miriam was allowed to grow up in an obscure corner of the home farm, her face bespattered with the mud of Sir Saul's lands, so that nobody could recognize what sort of face it was, or was going to be, her little hands all grimy from assiduous work in Sir Saul's byres and stables, that her recognition was so long put off. But the day, of course, did arrive when Miriam, becoming audacious—she became very audacious—washed her face only to discover blemishes of an unwashable sort on the faces of some other people. It was when she was about twelve or fourteen, and used to sit in church in her crimson frock, that neighbors used

to say: "Really, the child looks something finer than the Dagon's heyday!" Alas! then, what if Nature has just those freaks which you compel her to have!

One thing was obvious in those later years—that if Miriam had been of a build less robust, if her lips had been less full, and her hair slightly finer in texture, she *might* have passed for a younger sister of Violet. It would be going too far to say that if Miriam had been dressed in Violet's clothes, and especially if she had been running over the cornfields at a distance, she would have been taken for Violet; yet some of the women maintained it when Miriam came to be *nineteen*—and in a case like *this* women might be accepted as reliable judges of the appearance of their own sex.

But it was long since that Violet and Miriam had been running across the hayfields or wading together in Sir Saul's pond. Whenever Violet approached, Miriam now used to run across the paths which cut through the cornlands, and which were generally in August long red lanes of poppies. And as for Violet, she now spent most of her time in looking at the world from the



pages of her journal, and in studying her parents. But she already seemed to know all about them.

Miriam grew up to be audacious, it was said. For instance, when she was not more than *nine*, she once met Sir Saul in the woods killing game. He was swinging a magnificent pheasant by the legs. Miriam crouched behind a tree, and then scampered off.

“Mir! Mir!” cried Sir Saul.

She stopped and came back, but shrunk away again. He caught her in his arms, and the pheasant’s feathers brushed against her face, leaving a spot of hot blood.

“See this pretty bird!” said Sir Saul, sitting down and taking her between his knees. “Why did you run?”

“Because you’re wicked,” said the little minx, “killing pretty beasts and birdies.”

“Wicked!” he said; “look at me!”

She looked up in his face with the tears of shyness in her eyes, and then bent down her sturdy neck. He took her by the chin, and lifted her face up again.

“Wicked, eh, little hussey?”

“Yes, you’re wicked and *old!*” replied Miriam, with petulant emphasis.

She dodged successfully under the circle of Sir Saul’s arms, and was soon lost to view.

“Hey!” said he, and sat talking interjections and monosyllables in the sun.

“‘Wicked and old!’”

He took the pheasant’s limp neck, and stiffened it up between his fingers. He opened the beak and looked in, and then drew up the closing eyelid.

“‘Wicked *and* old!’ I’ve heard before that they sometimes go together.”

And he was troubled for some short time by that wisdom out of the mouth of babes.

But those early years slipped by, and Miriam began to give pretty curtsies instead of unpleasant adjectives. She used to come tripping back to Mother Dagon to say: “Oh, Sir Saul’s given me two shillings! Sir Saul’s given me five! Sir Saul’s given me *ten!*”

“Keep in ’e house,” said buxom Mother Dagon in a flutter, “and don’t go pushing yourself forward.”

Mother Dagon was Isaac’s second wife, and was at least fifteen years younger.

"I'll marry 'er," Isaac said once to Sir Saul, "marry 'er, if ye'll permit it, sir. She's skill in liftin' cream, and since the old wife died the cows have drooped."

Permission was given, and the new Mother Dagon, as she was called to keep up the familiar name, came to the home farm with the freshest cheeks and best petticoats that all Mulvey had ever seen.

When Miriam was born, old Isaac received Sir Saul's chaff good-naturedly and in ignorance of its meaning.

"Aye, in old days, sir," said Isaac, stroking his gray beard and laughing, and straightening his back, "it's like kindling some new fire at 'e hearth, it is."

"It is," said Sir Saul, as he gave a present of money. But of course it was much later that he discovered the appropriateness of Isaac's speech. For that "new fire" did kindle and made things much too warm for everybody at those hearths.

"For all the world," said Lady Rimmon, after Miriam had come to receive a present on her fifteenth birthday, "their noses are the same."

"They're nothing of the sort," said Sir Saul, "and what although?"

"So funny, if not awkward and displeasing. It's the Rimmon nose," continued her ladyship. "I never knew anything so foolish." And then since foolish things should be laughed at, she laughed over it as heartily as she could. But some say these were only subtle feminine thrusts and arrows to find the truth, as yet all well controlled, and that it was much later she broke down.

"You might as well say it's the Roman nose," retorted Sir Saul.

At any rate, the Rimmon nose formed a faultless line from the brow, and even Lady Rimmon had to admit that, whereas in Violet's case the line was perfect, in Miriam's there was a hesitancy at the point.

"Turned up, in other words," said Sir Saul, "as it should be. Stop talking nonsense."

In short, taken all round, Miriam was, as was only to be expected, molded on a much rougher pattern.

"Oh yes," said Lady Rimmon to herself, "and then the feet, you know, and the coarseness of

the creature's skin, her vulgar eyes, hands, boots . . . petticoats . . . Oh, I *am* dreaming! I'm a foolish woman!"

But she was sure to contradict herself next day, and to discover new resemblances. In a sort of dread which she could hardly explain to herself she took care that Miriam was kept out of sight when Euxine came.

All this was matter of congratulation, at first, among Miriam's peasant friends, and Cubitt, her lover (for she had now a lover)—dressed in corduroys, and working as plow lad and planter under old Isaac on the Rimmon estate—was envied all round. But he was told jestingly by his friends not to mistake mistress for maid, as he might do in the woods at dusk, for instance, and so get himself into difficulty.

"Oh, it's not true!" said Miriam, when Cubitt praised her beauty.

But her mirror contradicted her and agreed with Cubitt. Surely, besides, mirrors tell lies only when they make us ugly.

"Oh, it *be* true!" said Cubitt in raptures.

"And why not?" he added, after he had said she was the loveliest of all the maids of Mulvey.

Moreover, Miriam had caught on airs not to be expected among the peasantry. For instance, it pleased her little to talk peasant talk, and she objected when the low-roofed barn was reeking with the men's pipes in the evening. She used to throw open the doors and windows imperiously, while Mother Dagon checked her for her insolence, and hastily closed them again. But old Isaac encouraged Miriam with many a laugh when she corrected Cubitt's grammar.

"Our Mir'll be goin' for to become a great miss like Miss Violet, I'll be sure," said he over his beer at night. "Ye'll be keepin' the pace with 'er, Cubitt?"

Cubitt longed to be grammatical.

"And you'll come and give me a rub up with learnin' o' nights," he said to the schoolmaster. "Mir'll be fine and so would I."

But it was not merely a question of grammar which threatened to separate Miriam and Cubitt. She seemed to take a stride in advance every year. Her mother strove to keep her well in the background, but Miriam was always pushing herself forward. And when one day she came home, saying that, as she was running across the corn-

fields, a gentleman, mistaking her for Miss Violet, had called out "Violet, Violet!" Mother Dagon could eat nothing all that day.

"Ye'll ape the big folks!" said Mother Dagon, facing her, and then turning away while Miriam giggled.

To Isaac's amusement Miriam could hardly be got to make a bed or cook a potato. She used to watch Cubitt and the old man plowing Sir Saul's land, and when Cubitt came up with a can of buttermilk, when the sun was high, "Ugh!" she said, "what stuff!"

"Eh!" said Cubitt, returning to Isaac, "the milk's too sour for Mir, maybe," until Isaac made the plow handles shake with his laughing.

If she troubled herself with the corn sheaves it was to take out the poppies and blue corn flowers and bind them round her throat. Mother Dagon was all the more incensed since she was herself so industrious and shy.

"'Deed, ye're no like me who would rather run than stand in her ladyship's way. What are ye thinkin' of?"

When Lady Rimmon came to the home farm Mother Dagon used to be as good as her word,

and run and shut herself in her room ; whereas Miriam used to saunter about the dairy, and come round eating nuts and berries. When Mother Dagon was called to give an account of her stewardship of the cows and poultry, she came trembling and curtseying with a "God-bless-you-ma'am !"

"Keep back, Mir, keep back," said Mother Dagon, edging between Miriam and Lady Rimmon.

Certainly there was never a better dairy-woman than Mother Dagon. Cows and hens were reported to be flourishing, and were always discovered to be so. Never were the milk-pails brighter, and all Mulvey knew that Mother Dagon's butter was the best ever made. Lady Rimmon never had a fault to find.

"I would send your girl into the town to do sewing or something," said Lady Rimmon, eying Miriam.

"Anything you suggest, ma'am," said Mother Dagon, folding her hands, and letting her eyes fall.

"Come here," said Lady Rimmon, as she lifted her glasses to her eyes.



Miriam came forward, while her mother began to rub needlessly, with a dry linen cloth, the shining rim of a milk-pail.

Lady Rimmon surveyed Miriam a long time without speaking.

“You’re like a wild thing of the woods.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“You’re getting a big girl. Would you not like to go and learn needlework?”

“No, ma’am.”

“Don’t say no to her ladyship,” said Mother Dagon.

“But her ladyship asked me what I would like,” replied Miriam.

Miriam’s dark eyes were fixed on Lady Rimmon, who was not pleased with their defiance.

“Learn to look more gently, girl,” she said.

“Yes, ma’am,” and Miriam dropped a curtsey prettily.

Lady Rimmon went back in a curious mood. “Upon my word!” she said, “upon my word!” feeling a slight convulsion among her nerves, and poking the soft earth with her parasol until a worm crawled away.

It was good that the countryside owed so much

to Sir Saul. All Mulvey, indeed, was his debtor, so that if any one ventured to drop a surprising hint about the baronet, he took care to explain it away again, and generally ended up with denying that he ever had dropped it. Mother Dagon's reputation was meantime safe, because of the cowardice which prevented her enemies attacking her. Isaac was allowed to sleep since he was too dull to discover things for himself. Sir Saul's munificence to the neighborhood was too highly valued, his benefactions were too solid for any one to run the risk of forfeiting them by investigating incidents that might turn out in the end to have occurred so obscurely as to be no longer capable of proof. And yet, in spite of this conspiracy of silence, there was now and again a low "Ha! ha!" muttered and ejaculated all over the countryside, a low "Ha! ha!" which might any day become an ugly roar to shake the old House of Rimmon to its foundations.

"You see," observed the silent Violet in her journal, "how the state of the world's emotions depends on the state of its finances. These people know all about it. But because my father gives them loads of coal in winter, and hundreds

of rabbits in autumn, fruit in summer, milk, bread, flour, potatoes, everything, in short, they suppress their moral conscience for the sake of Economics. Your moral indignation will run the chance of being curiously enfeebled if the person to whom it is addressed happens to be your benefactor. Even if you inwardly condemn him, you will let him alone in public. My father! I loathe him. But I don't know how to act. A terrible struggle may be coming. Poor mamma! . . . I wonder how Besser is. He will not remain a priest. Oh, I am sick!"

Violet looked about for consolation but found none. She was delicately reticent to her mother whom she pitied. She had long discovered the tyranny of other wills, centuries back, over her own. "We are all projections of a moving line far behind us," she said, "and we help to push it further." But Violet tried to accept resignedly that subtlety of her fate. "They have made me handsome, and thoughtful," she said, "those climbing centuries, climbing up to me! They have been working out this Rimmon type. I must accept the bitter with the sweet. But the bitter is very bitter. What right has the peasant

Miriam, my father's slave, to the distinction of the Rimmons? We are old, and are traced back to ancient Syrian greatness. It is a belief that my ancestors were priests of Naaman's God, and were given the honor of his name. And here, in England, the stock was to be vulgarized . . . Miriam is like me! Think of the awkwardness when my lover comes . . . Half a woman's charm consists in the uniqueness of her beauty. But if I am like a peasant . . . Oh! I wonder if Besser ever saw her. She has even physical advantages. I am the attenuated type. She has fresh, peasant blood mingling with ours. A problem:—Suppose two girls, twins, for instance, were almost absolutely alike, just as the Corsican brothers were, and a man was attracted by one of them . . . I shall remove her!"

In those days she seldom appeared beyond the grounds of Rimmon House. But she drove with her mother out of the woods, and used to tell the coachman not to drive back by Mulvey. She had also ceased going to church where she was stared at. They used to drive along the road which circled the Bessers' house. The house was closed because the heir was away.

“Where is he?” she wondered.

Lady Rimmon began to wish after all that Edgar would come home, so that she might see him and present him as a candidate to Euxine. It was with a shudder that she drove past The Gates, a large asylum, which was considered the one blot on Mulvey. It was only two miles from Besser's house, and was partly screened by trees. Objections had been raised by all the proprietors except Sir Saul, who was not perturbed by such things.

“I'd rather have a graveyard!” said Lady Rimmon, shuddering in her carriage beside Violet, and they both heard the barking of the four great dogs. “Why do we always come this way? Just look at them in the windows shaking their fists!”

Violet thought differently; and had even been at The Gates many a time out of curiosity, but had never told her mother. She would have liked to nurse those sick minds. Dr. Bede willingly allowed her to come.

“What mostly helps to fill a place like this, doctor?”

“Ah, what interest have you in that?”

"I'm not a baby, and I don't shudder like mamma."

"I'm glad, then," he said. "Your sex is generally cowardly in face of scientific truths. Do you really wish to know?"

"Yes," said Violet, "I'm a born nurse, and often wish somebody would turn ill for me to nurse."

"Well, then," replied placid Dr. Bede, "it's the war-god who most fills our house here."

"The war-god?"

"Yes. There are so many of them! But I mean Love. Love is a war-god, not easy-going at all, as weak novelists make out, but terrible, he. Hundreds here are all shot through by his arrows."

"Love is a Destroyer then?"

"Yes, he *may* become a Destroyer in two ways. I mean if you obey him to excess, and also if you *disobey* him altogether. If you disobey him he will avenge himself, perhaps."

"Priests disobey him," said Violet timidly.

"My dear, the world is extremely blind! There is a sort of marriage of which it knows nothing, clandestine—but not as *it* understands

that word—I will call it dream-marriage. There is a secret destruction when two have seen each other but cannot come near, and only kiss hands in their dreams.”

Violet shuddered. She had known the power of that dream-gesture.

“ Ah! the world! — the respectable world knows nothing of the physiology of that sorrow,” added the doctor.

“ Doctor,” said Violet, who had turned pale, “ I’ve often thought that our house would do admirably for a place like this. It’s so somber—almost the color of dead seaweed. It’s been sitting in the earth’s decay for hundreds of years, and it is just fit for an old house of dotage.”

“ Oh, no! surely not,” said Dr. Bede, lifting up his hands deprecatingly, “ as long as you’re there, Miss Violet.”

Violet went home and filled her book with grave thoughts. “ I’ll fill it with smiles by and by,” she said, “ when my lover comes.” Meantime she wrote: “ Beauty has come, like Christ, to send not peace but a sword. I’m not a wise old maid at all, nor a blue-stocking.” She measured her foot against the leg of one of Sir Saul’s

smallest terriers, and found, with a laugh, that it was the same length. Yet, when she heard her beauty praised, the pleasure seemed to die out of her eyes and from her lips, and she became afraid.

At first the truth of the disgrace of the old House of Rimmon had offered itself to her secretly, evasively, disappearing and then coming to her again, until at last it came and shook her. She always remembered an August night which saw her weep till the morning. She was standing at the edge of the lake which was considered the chief ornament of her father's grounds. The evening was "full of linnets' wings," and the trees were shining. She saw her father come out of the wood with his gun. As usual, he had been shooting, but he had only two brace of grouse slung round his neck with their heads dangling in front.

"Poor little things!" said Violet.

Sir Saul, who was fifty-four, looked well in his sporting suit. He hardly ever wore anything else. He was the leading sportsman of the district. He had no great intelligence, but he managed his lands well. Violet feared him. She knew that he was a more powerful nature than



her uncle. There was a strong resemblance between father and child. For instance, the unmistakable Rimmon nose. She watched him come through, and a strange feeling possessed her for the first time. She would have liked to run away. Why, she could not have told. But she repressed herself, waited, and said "Good-evening, father!" and asked why he had had such poor luck.

"What are *you* doing here?" he said, and passed on with an attempted smile.

She watched him retreating, but turned her head at the sound of a voice in the woods. It was Miriam singing:—

And the poppies are red,  
And the cornflowers blue;  
Ah! bright is our bed  
When the moon is new.

Violet waited, but the voice stopped. She heard, however, the crackle of dead twigs, as if some one was extricating herself from the brushwood where the cranberries grow.

"Miriam! Miriam!" she called. She felt an overmastering impulse to speak, but especially to *look* at Miriam.

“ Miriam ! ”

“ Yes, I'm coming. ”

The wood sloped down to the lake, and Miriam was mounting to the ridge. Presently she appeared extricating herself from a thorn-bush. She was as tall as Violet, and rounder. Only ten minutes had gone since Sir Saul had passed.

“ What is it, Miss Violet ? ” said Miriam, smiling shyly, with lips made redder by the red berries.

“ Come down, ” said Violet, turning pale.

“ Are you ill, miss ? ”

“ Yes . . . oh ! ”

The recognition came on her too suddenly, and made her almost faint.

“ Shall I run ? ” exclaimed Miriam, astonished. “ Oh, Miss Violet, dear, let me help you ! ” and she came and held her gently.

“ No, no, ” said Violet, “ leave me ! ”

She turned her back on Miriam, and then went forward homewards, in spasmodic leaps, while Miriam stood amazed.

## CHAPTER IV

### ATTENDS THE UNBURYING OF AN OLD SIN

IT came then, at last, to be Prince Euxine's turn to discover why the old House of Rimmon was tottering uneasily. And, of course, he was likely to increase those oscillations of its fortunes. For whereas Violet, out of pride—and perhaps half out of self-interest—remained silent, and added only a little more slumbering fire to that hot fuel of suspicion, Prince Euxine threatened to bring things almost to the point of conflagration.

“Not,” he said, “that I am a sort of moral incendiary. See how long I have let things simmer. I don't approve of the people who willingly set fire to another man's life. A clumsy preacher does so. Perhaps society would go collectively mad if some of us didn't sin. And really it is a sort of moral arson, that doctrine of hell. You see,” he reasoned, “I have a regard

for my sister, but then my brother-in-law is indispensable to us *both!*”

For instance, he had had often pecuniary assistance from Sir Saul. Euxine saw, therefore, that what he should do was to make himself indispensable to his brother-in-law. He had long suspected delinquency. His ear had been open to the backbiters, but he had never looked very closely at Miriam. Like a careful man of the world he let tragedy lie quietly till it began to turn in its own lair. It was when he saw the presentiments at work in his sister that he thought it necessary to take a step or two for the common good.

“Saul, my dear brother,” he said after that strange conversation he had had with his sister, “Violet is very handsome. She is very like *you*, Saul! There is no single girl like her that I know. I have noticed that no really beautiful woman—unless perhaps in the case of *sisters*—was ever like any other. We are disappointed if we discover no special characteristic which makes a woman’s beauty entirely her own. Beauty consists in a subtle emphasis on one or two features, eh, Saul? Well, then, you should be proud of Violet.”

“ I *am* proud of her, damn it all ! ” said Sir Saul.

“ Yes, but they say there is a girl here that resembles her. It must be in some far-off sort of way. *Do* tell me, is it possible ? ”

Sir Saul's eye had become too steady by long gun practise to wince at a question like this, but there was a slight tremulousness about the muscles of his face.

“ What ? ” he said, contracting his expression as if he hadn't understood.

“ Oh ! ” said Euxine, laughing outright, “ they say little Miriam is like Violet. I haven't seen the child for a long time. But it's too ridiculous ! I have heard of subtle influences between people, and that you actually become like the people you live with. ”

“ In that case, ” said Sir Saul, “ *you* should be getting very like me ! ”

Euxine received the thrust good-naturedly, because he felt sure of his man.

“ I'm going out, ” said Sir Saul quickly. “ Will you come ? ”

“ Not just at present, Saul, ” said Euxine, putting on his eyeglass and looking at the retreating form of his brother-in-law.

He observed that after such encounters, and especially after this particular conversation, Sir Saul began to whistle and hum.

“I do not think that whistle is gay,” said Euxine privately. “Men have a habit of humming in a peculiar manner when discomfort is at hand. It is like the low whistle of the coming storm.”

At any rate, Sir Saul went out of doors humming a low “damn! damn!” while Euxine mounted old Moll, told her to be never so good, and went ambling towards the home farm, humming a little “damn! damn!” of his own.

The home farm was a very prosperous-looking and solid building. It formed a square which was open at one end. The open side was closed by long folding gates which Miriam used to guard with great joy when the carters came and went with the produce of the fields. She admitted the cows one by one, giving a pat to her favorites and a thump to her enemies. In rainy weather the courtyard was a bespattered place, owing to the extreme softness of the earth, which is characteristic of all Mulvey. But Mother Dagon, with the permission of Sir Saul, had got a little garden cut out in the middle, surrounded by a wicker railing

and planted with shrubs, so that in dreary weather the courtyard had one spot of brightness. The long byre formed one side of the square, with the milk-house at the end, while the stables, cart-houses, and plow-houses formed the side opposite. The Dagon occupied the remaining side, and the workers lived above. There was an entrance leading to the pasture land which ran down about the length of five acres towards the woods. Sir Saul was proud of his estate. Whatever mistake he had made in its management had been due to the advice of his brother-in-law.

“Too dense,” said Euxine, “cut down more wood.”

But for every tree that was felled two were planted.

“He must have his wood to hide in,” thought Euxine, as he came out of it along the road which led in a straight line to the door of the home farm. As he approached he saw Mother Dagon sitting with Miriam on the bench. Mother Dagon rose and went in, telling Miriam to follow. But Miriam remained, and rose to curtsy to the Prince. The home farm used to be thrown into a great flutter when he made his inspection. He

was considered to be more formidable than Sir Saul. When it was thought that he might be coming, there was a combined effort among the workmen and workwomen. And those who believed it was more important to please the Prince than Sir Saul, ran to hold the bridle.

“Eh, little wench,” said Euxine, as Miriam rose to salute him, “and how are you?”

“Very well, I thank you, Prince,” replied Miriam, who was growing slender at that time.

She looked the Prince very full in the face, and smiled not too boldly. He did not dismount, but took out his eyeglass to examine Miriam.

“Long long time, little minxsie, since I’ve seen you. Where have you been?”

“With my auntie in the village,” she said.

“Ha!” said the Prince, and looked at her up and down.

He dismounted laboriously, uttering an ejaculation when he met the ground too sharply with his gouty foot. He told Cubitt, who was standing by the bridle, to take the beast to the stable. Then he sat down on the bench, and invited Miriam to chat. Miriam sat at the end, and



smiled acquiescently at whatever the Prince was pleased to say.

“Why,” he said, “you don’t look as if you work on Sir Saul’s fields. Your cheeks are not red and brown like a little peasant’s. Come nearer.”

“No,” said she, coming nearer, “Sir Saul says I’m not to. I’m not strong enough.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Euxine, “let me feel your pulse to see if you haven’t a strong little peasant’s heart.”

He drew Miriam towards him.

“One—two, one—two, ah, it’s a *strong* little machine!”

He then examined her hand, looking at the form and fineness of it.

“Pointed fingers,” he noted; “nice little body woven of two very different webs!”

Miriam wondered when he said, “Now, put out your little foot.” She advanced it below her skirt, whereupon Euxine said, half audibly, “Ah, it’s not a little foot,” and concluded that there the peasant element predominated.

“Clumsy little peasant foot,” he said, tapping it with his riding-whip, while Miriam pulled it in.

“But I’ve never really seen your pretty face, Miriam,” he said. “Let me see your face.”

She turned blushing, while he crumpled his cheek up towards his eyeglass, to keep it steady, and peered through.

“Sir Saul says you’re not to work,” he said absently while he looked at her.

“No, your worship,” says she.

“I observe,” he pondered silently, “the same quick inquiry which irritates one in Violet and Saul! How curious, just where it can be so easily seen the truth lies open here on her face. If this creature had been given an aristocratic spine, or some internal organ aristocratically made, which no one would have noticed; if her teeth even, and those lower physiological details had been given the secret to keep, how lucky for Sir Saul! But here the plain tale is written for the sun to shine on.”

Miriam had never undergone so close an inspection.

“A delicate little hussy of a peasant!” exclaimed Euxine, tapping her shoulder. “Tell your mother I wish to see her.”

Miriam went in, but Mother Dagon had been

preparing herself, for she had heard everything from the window above. Miriam found her wringing her hands. The blood had left her cheeks.

“What’s wrong?” asked Miriam. “Come down to the Prince.”

“Oh,” said her mother, “tell ’m I’ll be directly.” “Here’ll be the close o’t!” said Mother Dagon to herself.

The Prince sat waiting, and nodding his head in the accustomed manner.

“We’ll arrange it nicely,” he said. “The historical family row will take place according to my own recipe.”

He was disturbed in these reflections by Mother Dagon, who came bustling bravely out, lifting the two borders of her apron as she curtsied.

“God bless your highness!”

“God bless you, my good woman! We all need it.”

“Keep back, Mir,” said Mother Dagon, for Miriam was showing herself at the door again.

“No, no,” said the Prince; “come forward, Miriam,” and he looked at Mother Dagon, whose eyes sought the ground.

“She’s a fine girl, Mother Dagon.”

“Yes, Prince,” says she.

“She’s not working in the fields or in the dairy?”

“No, Prince,” said Mother Dagon gently.

“Why?”

Mother Dagon gave Sir Saul’s pleasure as the reason.

“My good woman,” thought Euxine, “that blush of yours is a very clumsy little drop scene! It lights up, not covers, the little Volkspiel within!”

“Sir Saul is good, isn’t he?” he said, looking her up and down the way he had surveyed Miriam.

“Yes, Prince,” they both said simultaneously.

“Miriam doesn’t take after *you*,” said the Prince.

Mother Dagon’s heart was beating as it had never beat before. Prince Euxine saw the corners of her mouth beginning to fall. “Ah, this is the physiological moment!” he thought.

But he saved things by calling out, “Holloa, Cubitt.”

Cubitt came running, and the Prince ordered his horse.

"She doesn't take after Isaac either?" he asked Mother Dagon again.

"Isaac's at the turnips, Prince," says Mother Dagon.

The Prince contracted his eyes in the Russian fashion, and looked at her through his eyelashes. He let her evasion pass, however, and began to chaff her on Isaac's age.

"The old man's all right and hearty," said Mother Dagon, laughing now.

"No, no," said the Prince, "spring marrying autumn will never do. You must take care of *this* girl. It's to be Cubitt, isn't it?"

"Oh aye," said Mother Dagon, rallying, as Cubitt came along leading Moll.

"He's a strapping boy," said the Prince, turning to Miriam.

Miriam pouted as if she didn't believe it. Cubitt gave her a lover's wink as he helped the Prince to climb Moll.

"Good day," said the Prince to them all frigidly, and rode away.

Cubitt playfully made a run at Miriam, but she dodged him.

"Eh, Mir! Mir!" he exclaimed, doubling his

knuckles on his hips as he looked at her running off.

Things were becoming incomprehensible on the Rimmon estate, thought Cubitt. He took up his spade and went down in silence to the turnip field. But he couldn't work, and Isaac quarreled him for uneven plowing. Yet Cubitt had taken prizes at Mulvey agricultural sports, and no one could match him in breaking up hilly ground. On the most recalcitrant soil he always left perfect curves. But this day his head was unsteady, and the plow rocked before him, leaving a wriggling furrow behind. He was largely built, with features roughened by exposure to the wind and sun. Mostly taciturn on the field and at the fireside, he could yet laugh heartily with Miriam, and his courtship had been full of exquisite rough chivalry. When he said "Mir! Mir!" with his deep voice, and looked at her out of eyes which had a good deal of submerged peasant fire and melancholy, he had been irresistible. But he had an uneasy suspicion that Miriam was growing too fine, and every day he seemed to see less of her.

"No, I can't go on!" he exclaimed, and made the horses stop at the top of a furrow.

The plowshare stuck in the thick soil, and one of the horses neighed.

"Where are ye goin'?" called Isaac, leaning on his hoe, as he saw Cubitt turning the horses on the grass.

"To Mir!" said Cubitt, and trudged back to the home farm.

He found her on the bench where the Prince had found her, and she was now sewing a kerchief in the sun.

"Look here, Mir," he faltered, feeling his throat big as he stood before her, "have I done anything to vex ye?"

"No," says she, keeping her eyes on her needle-work.

"I thought I had," said Cubitt, as he sat beside her. "But ye've done something to vex *me*, Mir."

"Don't be stupid," said Miriam.

"Well, Mir, ye don't like me as well as before. Are we not going to wed, Mir?"

"Ye'll have to be higher up," said Miriam, avoiding his glance.

"Oh, I'm poor!" said Cubitt bitterly.

"It's not that," protested Miriam, "but there's enough time."

“ Well, I’m willin’ to wait,” said Cubitt, “ but lovers shouldn’t be a killing of time. And ye know I’m true. I’d run to the death for ye, Mir.”

“ Oh, it’s cruel,” said Miriam, with her eyes filling as his tone became gentler, “ to talk like that.”

“ Eh, dearie ! ” said Cubitt as he embraced her. “ Well, we’re friends and lovers again.”

And for the moment it was true.

Meantime, Moll ambled back with Prince Euxine, who was not very indignant. “ We won’t allow *all* the world,” he said, “ to be present at the unburying of this old sin.” He rather felt encouraged in his own startling project, which was to marry Violet. In Germany uncles may marry their nieces. He and Violet could retire to Germany. Violet would doubtless be provided with an excellent dowry. Sir Saul, of all people, would agree, and likely Mathilde, when she heard that this was the “ splendid proposal.” It might be a case of spring marrying autumn, but the thing was different surely when “ autumn ” was a well-preserved old aristocrat.

He had no sooner made these reflections when



he saw Sir Saul through the trees, crouching as if in the act of taking an aim.

“Good God, stop!” he cried.

Sir Saul rose and looked round, and Euxine trotted up the carriage road which cut through the woods.

“Eh!” exclaimed Euxine out of breath, “you might have had us both, Moll and me.”

“Indeed I might,” said Sir Saul. “Doing *tiaga*, in fact.”

He then playfully pricked Moll, and teased her tail until she began to kick and stamp, making Euxine roll in the saddle.

“Stop it, Saul,” said he. “I wish to dismount.”

“Dismount then.”

Euxine’s consciousness of his physical cowardice made him vindictive at that moment. He dismounted painfully, and let Moll snuff among the brushwood. Perhaps it was now Sir Saul’s turn to play the coward. The two men looked at each other as if business was in the air. Contrary to his usual habit, and perhaps as a result of his fright, Euxine began abruptly.

“By the way, I don’t think Mathilde is well,” he began.

“What’s wrong with her?”

“She’s agitated about something, about *you*, I think.”

Sir Saul leant against a tree, poising his gun with his right hand.

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said.

“Yes, yes, Saul, you *do*. The farce has gone on too long, and I must take this opportunity——”

“What do you mean?” asked Sir Saul fiercely.

“What do ugly rumors mean?”

“What do you mean, sir?” asked Sir Saul again.

“I mean, then,” replied Euxine, as he drew himself up, “that the girl Miriam Dagon——”

Euxine stopped, because he trembled more than Sir Saul. He had chosen an awkward moment.

“Do you see that?” demanded Sir Saul, holding up his gun.

“Well!” said Euxine, attempting to smile, “are you going to use it on me?”

“I’ll use it on——”

“No, no, Saul!” said Euxine, laying his hand on his brother-in-law’s shoulder. “I’m surprised! We’re both men of the world, you know, and can arrange these things.”

Sir Saul said he knew nothing about these references. But the Prince began to present the thing in a very persuasive way.

“Look you, Saul!” he said, “we are both old, and Mathilde is old. There is no use making a disturbance now. These sins of youth! why, they’re just the frolics of young blood! As if I don’t know it all!”

“What the devil are you going on about then?” asked Sir Saul. “I suppose you had your own frolics.”

“Ah, but Mathilde!” rejoined the Prince, “and the countryside. The thing is getting awkward now. I must disabuse her mind, and how, how to do it! It is getting hot for you, Saul. I’ve been silent for years, and have spoken only because I see what is coming.”

Sir Saul shrugged his shoulders.

“What do you want?” he asked impatiently.

Euxine then unfolded his scheme. He said the way was clear. He pointed to the increasing misery of Violet. Had Sir Saul watched Violet? It was eating her life away. Now, would it not be better that he and Violet, in true German fashion, should wed and retire to Hildesheim?

“Dog!” exclaimed Sir Saul, at last roused to his duties. “Say what you will, defame me as you please, but don’t suppose I’ll give my daughter up to your cursed habits!”

Prince Euxine was amazed, since he had felt so sure of his man.

“Your morals are appearing somewhat late, sir,” he said with an icy smile.

“Maybe!” said Sir Saul, “yes, maybe, but I’ll turn the two of you out. She’ll get her divorce, get it, get it, and you’ll go with her!”

Euxine was surprised indeed. But he still felt sure of his man. So he scrambled on Moll’s back, and in the midst of his exertion intimated that he would hastily acquaint his sister with everything.

“Go, go!” cried Sir Saul, laughing a loud sportsman’s laugh, “and get another man’s horse, and take lessons in climbing him.”

The Prince thought to dismount again, but was too agitated, and whipped the horse to go on. Sir Saul fired his gun in the air behind Moll’s back, and the horse, taking fright, plunged forward down the road carrying Euxine at a terrific gallop.

“ Ride like a piston ! ” cried Sir Saul ; “ it’s the only way. What ho ! ”

He saw Euxine struggling in the air, reeling to the left with his right stirrup lost. In a moment he was flung from the saddle and fell heavily, being dragged along till his foot extricated itself from the left stirrup. Sir Saul ran up.

“ Are you hurt ? ”

But Euxine did not reply. He was lying in a heap against a tree, with his face on the ground. His head had struck the tree, and he was insensible. Sir Saul looked for the horse, but only heard her hoofs clattering through the woods. He laid down his gun, deadly pale, and ran home to bring the carriage.

## CHAPTER V

### ATTENDS THE BURVING OF AN OLD SINNER.

THE field-workers came running from all points of Sir Saul's estate, some of them carrying, absent-mindedly, hoes and shovels on their shoulders, and collected in a group behind at the offices to hear the latest news of the Prince's condition. Old Isaac was there, and Cubitt and Miriam, and all the carters and reapers, and Sir Saul's shepherd, for Sir Saul had a thousand sheep. Dr. Bede was seen driving rapidly up the great linden avenue, which the Prince used to call "Unter den Linden."

"There's Bede!" said the group, and shuddered.

"I must say," remarked Isaac, who, in spite of his age and bent shoulders, was the tallest of them all, "the Prince didn't know a horse, and I expected this. When I gave 'im Moll four hours ago I thought him nervous and excited like."

"Where's Moll?" asked one.

"The old blasted witch," said Isaac, "I wonder what put her in tantrums to-day. She came scampering down to the turnips, with the stirrups clapping on her back, and the reins at her feet, puffing, and I knew somethin' was wrong, I could hardly lay hold o' 'er. She must have fallen, for she's scratched."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Cubitt, putting his hands in his pockets and looking at Miriam.

"The Prince is as fine a gentleman as there is," said Isaac.

"He is," said the shepherds in support.

"They say he hasn't money," continued Isaac, rubbing his thumb on his forefinger, which he always did when he wished to indicate great wealth, "but he did princely by me with what he had."

"He spoke to *me*," said Miriam, "half an hour ago, so kindly like."

"And he used to pat *me*," said a milk girl, wishing to announce her share of the honors that were perhaps gone forever.

While Euxine was being thus eulogized, his own servant came out with a dish in which linen bandages were lying. The group moved after him

to the pump, where he let the water run till it became as cold as possible. Cubitt managed the handle for him, and kept pumping, pumping, while every one asked how the Prince was, and what the doctor had said.

“Head badly cut,” said the man, shaking his own head. “Bede says it’s concussion. Lyin’ still as a stone, and hardly breathing.”

One of the servants in the group, who was a Catholic, crossed herself, and then the man ran in with the soaked bandages.

“You should see the oozing blood,” he said when he came out again with a bowl full of discolored water. “There’s a bit o’ his brain in the bowl, they say.”

They all surrounded the bowl and saw little greasy globules in it.

“It’s like a bit suet,” said one, and lifted up her hands.

“Just look!” exclaimed Isaac, puzzled, “it’s like a bit sheep’s sweetbread!”

“Can’t speak, perhaps, because he’s lost that bit!” said Euxine’s man, “but sometimes his hand goes up to his brow as if feeling for something lost!”



"What does Bede say?" they asked.

The man shook his head, and ran in again.

"It'll be a funeral," said Isaac, "and me saying 'How d'ye do, Prince?' this afternoon, only some hours back!"

Dr. Bede had hurriedly told Sir Saul that his brother-in-law would be dead shortly. It was not likely that he would return to consciousness. He must have fallen with terrific violence against the tree, because the skull was badly fractured. The rumor spread, for Euxine's man came out with each item of news till the group at the back door swayed with horror.

"And that dog's barkin'!" said one of the women.

"It's Bede's dog from The Gates!" another replied.

The huge dog came snuffing round the group for its master. But the doctor was still busy inside.

"How did it happen?" he asked Sir Saul, in the anteroom.

"She must have taken fright with the gun. I shot a sparrow hawk before Euxine was out of sight, and then she tore off," Sir Saul whispered.

"I never knew she could go so fast ; and *he* could never ride."

Lady Rimmon was too broken down to follow intelligently the doctor's instructions, and she let Violet attend the bed.

"Euxy!" cried Lady Rimmon in her grief, "oh, speak!"

"Hush, mother," said Violet, as she removed and laid again the cloths on the shattered brow.

"Oh, I knew something would happen, and I'm alone now! Where's your father?"

Dr. Bede returned in an hour.

"Has he been groaning?"

"Yes," said Violet.

"Much?"

"Yes."

"Not a word will he say. O doctor, save him, save Euxy," said Lady Rimmon, with her face in her hands.

"He may return to a sort of consciousness," said the doctor to Sir Saul as he drove away again.

Another hour passed and the Prince groaned "Mathilde," and there was hope that he might rally. Lady Rimmon refused to leave him, and sat up all night while Violet and Sir Saul took

some sleep. It was a perfectly dark night and the trees were whispering all round the house.

Lady Rimmon thought she saw a change.

“Yes, Euxy, I am here,” said Lady Rimmon, shuddering. “Oh, I am afraid!”

“O—oh—hands of pain heavy on my brow!”

She eased the cloths, while her tears were falling on them, and she could hardly see what she did.

“Ma—thilde!”

“Yes, Euxy, I am here beside you.”

“Wh—ere? He—is innocent, and where am I?—Innocent.”

He made a movement to sit up and was about to tear the cloths off his head.

She quieted him for a moment. He looked up at her as she bent over him, and had a moment's lucid interval. He seemed to be feeling for his eyeglass while she ran to call the others.

“I'll be forgiven that *mensonge* for her sake!” muttered Euxine, lying back.

“Oh, I am widowed!” exclaimed Lady Rimmon, returning too late with Violet and Sir Saul. “Widowed!” as if Euxine had been to her all that Sir Saul should have been.

They buried him according to the Russian rite

in the Episcopal cemetery. The coffin, which was made of oak from one of Sir Saul's trees, was carried by old Isaac, Cubitt, Euxine's man-servant, and five other workmen on the estate. Sir Saul, Lady Rimmon, and Violet followed in the carriage, with the horses reined in to a funeral pace. They said nothing to each other, and Sir Saul shuffled his knees impatiently from side to side. Lady Rimmon was sobbing under her deep veil, while Violet sat impassive beside her. The blinds were drawn so that it was all dark within. They heard slow tramp of sixteen feet ahead. It was almost impossible to believe the reality. Four days ago the Prince had been walking above the ground, and now he was on his way to his sealed sleep beneath it. And if any one ever laughed over his foibles or his parsimony, he made up for it now by misplaced eulogy. Even Violet had struck "old dolt" out of her journal the night he died. The silence was so oppressive that she ventured to break it.

"Poor uncle never rode well," she said.

"No," said Sir Saul.

"Oh, I told him so often," said Lady Rimmon.

"Were you far off, father?"

“ No ; I think it must have been the gun.”

“ The gun ! ” exclaimed Lady Rimmon, lifting her veil. She drew up one of the carriage blinds, and looked at Sir Saul with red swollen eyes.

“ Yes, the report perhaps frightened Moll.”

“ O Saul ! ”

“ He mismanaged her. She was used to firing, and it shouldn't have set her off.”

“ O—oh ! ” sobbed Lady Rimmon, in sobs that appeared to be echoes of each other.

“ I have made a statement,” said Sir Saul ; “ I thought it was right to do it. Of course it is only my conjecture.”

“ Here ! ” said Violet, astonished at her father's statement.

The carriage stopped. Lady Rimmon was unable to leave it, and sat covering her face while they buried the Prince.

“ Euxy ! ” she sobbed, as she waited for them in a sort of weeping dream. “ Euxy ! ”

The servants stood in a crowd round the open grave while the coffin was being lowered. Then Cubitt and Isaac began to fill the grave up, while everybody's eyes followed the motion of the shovels. Sir Saul stood at the head with his hat

off, and Violet at the foot with her head bent towards the ground.

Old Isaac flung the last spadeful and beat the brown earth all over.

“Aye, aye,” said he, as he let a tear slip; “good-by, Prince. Ye shook hands wi’ me here where prince and beggars don’t shake hands, and ye’ll do it yonder where, they say, we’ll all be kings!”

He leant on his spade, and looked up at the sky like an old priest of the soil.

“Mir!” he called.

Miriam, who was dressed in a black frock, and was standing beside Mother Dagon, came forward with a wreath of red poppies and blue corn-flowers of her own twisting, and laid it at the foot, while Violet turned hastily back to the carriage.

The weeks followed somberly at Rimmon House. “How death,” wrote Violet, “makes all this activity grotesque! Great master of deaf mutes!”

Lady Rimmon abandoned herself to her grief, and Sir Saul was now seldom out of doors. The Prince’s mishap caused no surprise, since every one knew his want of skill in riding. Really, it was only his sister who missed him. She visited

his grave and chose his monument. She used to take her needlework and sit in the cemetery beside the stone while the stonecutter was carving the epitaph which she had composed.

TO MY

BELOVED BROTHER

**Prince Ivan Feodor Euxine**

NOVGOROD (RUSSIA), AND VILLA GOTHA (HILDESHEIM)

*Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh.*

“Do you know the meaning of that last line?” she asked the stonecutter.

“No, ma’am.”

“It means ‘On every summit there is peace,’” she said, and tore herself away weeping, after she gave him his day’s fee.

“Yes, ma’am,” said the stonecutter, pocketing the money.

## CHAPTER VI.

THINKS THAT LOVE DISCOVERS BEAUTY WHERE  
NONE WOULD SEE IT.

EUXINE'S name was seldom out of Lady Rimmon's lips, and Sir Saul began to feel the dead man's ascendancy again. He seemed still to be filling the house, and Sir Saul almost expected to meet him in a corridor, or to see him in an easy chair. It was difficult to control himself when his wife burst into tears almost at every meal over Euxine's empty place. If Sir Saul ever asked Violet where her mother had gone, the invariable reply was, that she had taken a book or her needlework to the cemetery. Sometimes Violet went for her and brought her back. Even Sir Saul, however, became gentler after Euxine's death, as if the dead man's hand was constraining him to it. But he was secretly irritated when he discovered that Euxine seemed as great a reality



as ever, and that he was almost more in evidence when dead than when he was alive.

“He was so good,” said Lady Rimmon. “His last words before he went out for that ride were about you, Violet. He was always thinking of others. He said he had ‘a splendid proposal.’ You never did him full justice, Saul.”

Sir Saul smiled and repeated ironically :  
“Splendid proposal !”

He felt tempted to disabuse his wife’s mind by letting Euxine appear in an evil light, and so oust the dead man from his place in the household. Quite brutally, therefore, he destroyed his wife’s last illusion.

“Do you know what it was?” he asked, turning first to Lady Rimmon and then to Violet.

“No,” said Lady Rimmon eagerly. “I had confided Violet’s future to him. Did he tell you? He was keeping it as a surprise for *me*.”

“Yes,” said Sir Saul. “It would have been a surprise! The splendid proposal was himself. That was the result of ‘winnowing, winnowing.’”

“Euxine never said that!” exclaimed Lady Rimmon.

“He did,” said Sir Saul.

"I quite believe it," said Violet.

"Oh, never! It's iniquitous of you both to say it!" said Lady Rimmon, wiping her eyes.

"I told him I never would permit it, Violet," said Sir Saul. "He said that the Prussian law permitted it, and that his property at Hildesheim, where he would have taken you, would have given him the right, etc."

"Don't believe it, Violet. Oh, it's cruel and shameful of you to speak like that, and he spoke in the end so nobly of *you!*"

"That doesn't change anything," said Sir Saul.

"No, I'm afraid it doesn't," replied Lady Rimmon, leaving the room to hide her bitter double grief.

"You know," said Sir Saul to Violet, "you are free to marry whom you like—provided, of course, he has position."

"I know," said Violet, detecting, with something like scorn, her father's conciliatory tone. "If he has position! A Rimmon would never make a *mésalliance!* I have got an invitation from the Proudfoots, and I am going soon."

"The Proudfoots? Does that mean anything?"

"No," said Violet.

"Is your mother going with you?"

"I don't know. I hope not, but she was asked."

Those were all the sort of confidences that Violet ever gave her father. The truth was she was going to the Proudfoots because she could no longer bear the affront of her position. She pitied her mother and had affection for her, but she wrote in her journal that her own life had begun, and would have to be lived independently. The days that passed seemed made up of an interminable delaying which promised nothing. The House of Rimmon had grown dark and decrepit. It was no place for a girl who felt within her, she said, the stir of a hundred sympathies with the outer world. The outer world could never be anything like this! When she heard the revelation of Euxine's mean, ludicrous project, she longed to escape from an atmosphere where motives so shameful were at work. It was time to see things and choose them for herself. Sir Saul took care to let her know that he would have saved her from that obloquy. She thanked him, but that was all. He should have saved her from other obloquy. In any case *he* could not be her

protector. That right was forfeited long ago. The luxury of Rimmon House had no delight because of its inner shame. And the vile tolerance of that accepted scandal made her soul grow sick. There was a perpetual waiting for a decisive moment which never came, and which she was too proud to bring on. As for him, he was living his bucolic life undisturbed. Euxine was done with, and the past was a *fait accompli*. Seldom did Violet permit her eyes to light on her father, not because she was guilty, but he, and she was too ashamed. "Strange," she wrote, "that the iniquity of another makes me so nervous. And mamma is slowly dying of it." She asked herself if she should wait on for her mother's sake, and continue to suffer with her, but she answered: "No, I will make things only worse. Besides, mamma may live with me if she likes, and we shall have done with him." And then she went to her glass to see where the red spot was burning on her cheek.

Now Lady Rimmon also was asking herself if she should continue at her post, and she answered: "Yes," for her daughter's sake. At least she would wait on till she saw Violet in safe hus-

band's hands. Otherwise, indeed, she felt eager to flee from the house, and more than once she had secretly packed and prepared to retire to Hildesheim. She could not bring herself to go through the shame of a public renunciation of her husband. She would forgive him as best she could, and flee silently away, and her only regret would be to leave her brother's dust in foreign soil. She had told Cubitt to forget what she had once asked him to do. She had explained pathetically that it was her nervousness which used to make her afraid lest Sir Saul would have an accident in the woods. Luckily, Cubitt was dull and honest, and would have remained taciturn even without a bribe, which, indeed, he refused, wondering what it all meant, and considering it due to her ladyship's hysteria over the Prince's loss. So Lady Rimmon was covering it all up and suffering alone, and not making even Violet a confidant any more; waiting only till Violet was safe; then she might go quietly away and spend her last days in her own country. But she had said to Euxine that she was living for Violet, and it was still true. It was good for her she would not bring herself to believe that Euxine had wished

to take advantage of that Prussian law, and shock English opinion. *That*, she considered, to be a wicked invention of the man who, on his own confession, had been the probable cause of her brother's death. It was all too bitter and unaccountable. Like Violet, she felt the immediate necessity of a change of air, if nothing else. Although it seemed too soon after Euxine's death to accept an invitation, yet, since Violet insisted on going, Lady Rimmon, whose parental instinct of control never could have recognized entire independence on the part of a child, decided to accompany her. Besides, the Proudfoots—Besser's cousins, by the way—were old friends. They had often been at Mulvey, and their London house in Trebovir Road seemed always like a home.

“Are you going, mother?”

“Yes, dear, I will come, although I'd rather not.”

“Oh then, don't,” said Violet.

“Yes, yes, I am ready.”

Violet was disappointed. She would have preferred to go alone. Her mother was old-fashioned, and acted like a drag. She even objected because

Violet took colored dresses with her. "Oh, but I'm a fright in black! I can't go about like a nun!" said Violet, and packed gay silks. She looked at her journal, and read her descriptions of Besser. "How silly of me!" she thought. "We women keep clinging so long round things that don't even need us. But *that* is done!" And she scored page after page. Yet she stopped to read her portraits of him. "His head is one of those shining heads which seem to diffuse light all about. His liturgy can't be fixed. It must be changing every year. It must be poetry. . . . Not a word from him!" She paused at the entry. "He will not remain a priest!" "Yes, he will," she said, and struck it out. "His features are extraordinarily regular." She left that in. "His disinterestedness is plain, else why would he live like a poor monk near Siena, and let his land here grow waste. I know what it is. I believe he has entered the Church to get an insight into the world, and he will come out full of strange knowledge. Perhaps not, though." Her eyes fell on the entry. "He must be twenty-five now," and she shut her book.

What a dull life! Would something interest-

ing never happen? From the beginning she had been made to learn what she should have learned—if she ever learned it at all—safely late. I say, “safely late,” because the emotions really wish to be deceived, and can never believe that they are the pain that they are. Yet, was Violet sorry? Not quite, because her knowledge of the brutality that is in the world only gave her a periodic thoughtfulness which, although it interrupted her gaiety, really vivified it and made it more gay. And, of course, just because that habit of scrutiny never became predominant in her, she could be saved by it no more than any other girl. The future seemed still to be coming to meet her in roses and dances. “Oh!” she said, “what are our nerves but stringed instruments to improvise a pleasure?”

That hurry of her feeling, long delayed, became her real danger. Mulvey had turned intolerable. She would have been the last to deny that she was dreaming of a deliverer, or to have considered *that* fact vulgar or improper. “Will my hands be idle?” she asked. “Nature has given me a lap to nurse things on, and kind hands of maternity. O whimpering women, the world is full,



and is needing us, and we are needing it!" And wisely she decided that it would be ludicrous to dream any more of Besser. "*Un ami perdu, c'est une crise,*" she had written in that part of her book which she kept in French. But he was beyond reach. "And still I have my sphere," she thought. "I wonder who is waiting."

Hubert Proudfoot was waiting, but neither he knew it nor she. Of all men, Hubert! Really, life is too strange. If Lady Rimmon had known that in a few weeks Violet would be wedded, and that there would be no undoing it, she would have lifted her hands in appeal against that fatality.

"D'you know, Edgar," said Hubert one night to Besser in their rooms at Oxford, "did you ever pass through a state when you thought there was nothing worth having except beauty?"

"Yes," said Besser; "everybody does."

"Well, then?"

"Get out of it."

"Why, Edgar?"

"Because it'll ruin you."

"No, Edgar," said Hubert. "I'll tell you, old chap. *I* reject the Devil, not because he's bad,

but because he's ugly. It comes to the same thing."

"Perhaps," replied Besser, knitting fine brows, "but I'm deep in the Middle Ages, and I find there a living belief that Lucifer, who was once lovely, turned ugly when he turned bad. Thus, virtue will keep our good looks!"

"Not always true!" cried Hubert, who admired Besser but never shared his seriousness; "you used to say that religious passion desolates a man's body just like any vice. Outwardly it seems to have almost the same effect."

"Yes, outwardly," said Besser.

"Look at this scarred Saint Francis of yours."

"Yes, I agree; and Christ's face could never have been immobile, as the portrait has it, but ravaged by emotion. Tintoretto is the only man who saw it."

"Yes, Edgar, old chap, and *you* are being ravaged by it."

"No, no, but it is true that to be religious you must be something of a flagellant, stinging yourself to sainthood."

"But to come back to beauty, isn't it awful, Edgar, that it's oftenest given to mediocre people

who become frightfully alluring and master you. I've seen men do anything just for a pair of eyes and a mouth."

"Yes," said Besser, "and you can't get five minutes' talk out of them, although you could look at them all day."

"They have you in their power, and you think wise people stupid beside them."

"Yes," said Besser, as if he felt the problem of that unequal distribution of beauty.

"O God!" cried Hubert, "our fate's in the five senses. Here I go!"

Edgar caught him before he went. It was the last night they were to be together in Oxford, and Hubert, who had done nothing but play the guitar, was leaving without a degree. The two youths were in striking contrast. Hubert was slim and fair, with moist eyes and thin lips. He was not tall, but because of his slimness he appeared taller than he really was. His hair was full, covering his brow, so that some people used to take him for an artist. And, indeed, the degree of his sensibility, and especially his over-refined sense of touch, indicated a nervous system highly mobile. When he spoke excitedly he used to lift his hands

in gestures above his head. But Besser's was a body better knit. He was dark, with deep, voluminous eyes, and a certain sense of brooding about his brow. Both men were talking about a career, but Besser was as yet only by a sort of instinct exploring the Middle Ages, whereas Hubert would spend years of traveling before he became fixed. Hubert had never been serious, but he had never been gross. His danger lay in that fine-strung body, most delicate mechanism. It was like a wavering instrument for registering infinitesimal atmospheric pressure of sensation. And it was precisely in the power of feeling, and of feeling finely, that the two men found sympathy. But there was an obvious difference. For when the doctors finally got hold of Hubert, they said that his centers of control were hardly developed. As yet Besser's predominant feeling was that passion of piety which is always like a lovely anachronism in youth.

"Hubert," he said, "years of traveling and fun."

"Yes, and *fun!*"

Besser still held him by pressure of hand. The religious consciousness knows so little of fun,

“Good luck to you, old chappie!” cried Hubert.

And, as he turned in, Besser thought he would never forget the sharp night wind of spring blowing through the open door, with Hubert’s voice, and shaking the new leaves. And he asked himself why so many sinners are lovable.

So Hubert went, and Edgar stayed with his missals and “the folly of the Cross.” Hubert took with him that smattering of his fate which he had recounted to his friend. It was almost ghastly to see him fighting against the five senses. The issue of that struggle had so long ago been determined, apart even from any choice, by Hubert. “You know,” he wrote to Besser, “the state I’m in.” He meant that he had a single worship, and that it was his chief end to glorify beauty and enjoy it forever. “I find,” he wrote again, “that the fundamental sense is the sense of touch. Even plants have it. Is any deep friendship possible without it? Everywhere it is the universal language. The heat here is exciting, under this sun of Asia, and the alluring East.”

“Hubert,” wrote Besser, “your body is only your soul’s sentry-box and point of vigilance.

I've left Oxford. I'm tonsured. You know what that means."

Hubert was being slowly desolated by that secret tyranny. Hundreds of beings appear to be born for no other purpose. Only a dull on-looker mistakes their tragic appearance. I have seen them in the exciting streets. At *twenty-six* Hubert's unquiet eyes, moist and glistening, were already full of the mocks and hazards of their search. For this tyranny of beauty colors the eyes as with rainbows of sorrow and pain. It came to him as a sort of challenge. It never came as an appeaser. He was at the point which, later, Besser was himself to traverse, conquering; the moment at which man becomes supremely tragic; the moment when his esthetic consciousness and his moral consciousness are at war. Besser telegraphed him to come home, but no answers came. "He's gone under," wrote Besser to a friend. Meantime Hubert went north and south, east and west, changing climates and moralities, allowing a hundred civilizations to pass through him—*not* as through a sieve. His observation became quickened. "There are as many different sorts of species of souls as of peoples in the world,"

he wrote his mother, "and they would all need special evangels—so different that I would almost begin to believe in the dogma of special creation of souls, if not of plants and animals." His mother—the tall Mrs. Proudfoot, as she used to be called—waited for his return, but he went on dating his letters from all points of the compass. His money, three thousand a year, was in his own control. He was drawn hither and thither as by some unseen magnet. He was living in the epidemics of sensation. Many a night his mother started from her chair, letting her work fall, and ran to the door when she heard a cab stop at Trebovir Road. "Ah! he will come," she said, and turned back with a tear. Hubert was yet too busy with the rose-gardens of pleasure and their delusion. Besser would have marveled at that swift, easy wreck. Rumors came that he was living somewhere in the gorgeous East, surrounded by Bacchanals, tipsy with beauty, like St. Francis. A messenger was sent in search, but when he arrived at Damascus, he heard that Hubert was either among the Bedouin Arabs or in Corsica. Wherever he arrived he heard that Hubert had just left. There was no possibility of hemming him

in by a stoppage of supplies. His fortune was independent of his mother's control. So he lived through that cycle of his vanity. And if the prodigal ever returned, it was doubtful whether Christian society would meet him a great way off, after the manner prescribed by its Founder. But, happily, he had a mother. Mysterious paradox, that to make God's reputation for mercy, sin must touch heinous limits!

Suddenly came a telegram that he was returning ill. Three years had passed. Not wishing to give his mother a great shock he sent home a portrait of himself. "*Was it he?*" she asked affrighted. He seemed sallow, yet pale, and his eyes were like wandering lights. To make the contrast more strange, there was a smile on him. Sometimes he looked like Franz Hal's "*Homme Joyeux.*" So he was coming to stern England with the scents of that palace of sweet sin upon him, and feeling like an alien in the bitterness of his returning. And the smile was a soft smile of delusion of the soul after the short prides of life. She looked at the portrait—three years had done it—and she rose at night to look at it again. She kept wondering if it were a mistake, and wished



to destroy it. It was the face of a fugitive. He was to be home in a month, and she hid his portrait, not showing it to her friends. "Yes, he comes," she said. She often started to walk nervously about the room. "I should have gone to him!" she cried. "He was always trembling with uncontrolled emotion, my child!" She counted interminable days and slow serpent hours. She went to the dining-room and took down a portrait that hung at the left window. It was the portrait of Hubert's grandfather when he was about *thirty*, and she compared it with Hubert's. She saw marks of that same scourge, and the atavism of it, and the same smile as of infinite delusion.

The night on which he was expected she waited till *twelve*, but he did not come. She fell asleep on her chair, with her eyelids wet. Her hair was white and smooth, and her features relaxed with advancing age. She must have been about sixty-four, but she was worn beyond her years, and her aquiline features exaggerated her decay. She limped as the result of a carriage accident which took place, ironically, on the tenth anniversary of her marriage, when she was driving in Hyde Park

to celebrate it with her husband. *He* was long dead, and Hubert had been their only child. *She* had been the daughter of a bishop, and had married Proudfoot late. Proudfoot had had the reputation of a sensitive recluse. He had translated French and Italian books, and had lived on his ample patrimony. Hubert had inherited his father's delicate organism, and pale eyes and hair. He had been too devotedly brought up. On this very night Mrs. Proudfoot had gone to his room and warmed his night-shirt as she did long ago, taking it out of a drawer where she was keeping it for his first sleep on his return. She put night-lights on a table, and added coals, having sent the servants to bed. She came back and waited, and waited, and at length fell asleep. She started with a fright. But it was a dream merely. She thought he was gripping her hand. She went to the door, however, in case a cab might have stopped, but she returned and sat down again. At last a cab drove up. Breathless, she limped to the door and down the steps.

“Hubert!”

“Yes, ma—ma.”

She kissed him before he left the cab, and

thought his lips cold. The luggage was brought in, and he entered and sat down opposite her, saying nothing, but looking round the room.

“It’s all so strange,” he said.

His eyes were pale but shining, and she noticed the recurrence of old habits, as, for instance, the throwing of the hands above the head. He immediately desolated her with his confession, while she clasped him in sobs. “No more, dear boy!” she said. “Nothing more!”

“I never could hide anything,” he said. “I—I want to see Dr. Bede. Do you remember him at Mulvey? Is he there? It’s all over with me, I believe. There seem to be two beings in me, and the one hates the other.”

She put him to bed, while her heart was wrung. But she, too, slept that night, although her eyelids were wet, slept on the belief that there is more joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons.

Dr. Bede ordered a year’s perfect quiet for him in his mother’s keeping. He did not tell them that Hubert was showing signs of incipient paralytic dementia, but he knew that that was true. Luckily, in science, truth is a matter of demon-

stration, and can be easily chased to its hiding corners. Dr. Bede shook his head. It was another proof of his theory of the Destroyer. But a year's repose might restore that wavering equilibrium. Hubert gave himself up, and his mother nursed him back to sanity. The months passed in the quietest way, and he seemed to be getting better, so that Dr. Bede marveled at his progress. He drove with his mother every day in Hyde Park, and gave his night to books. A slight excitement came with the spring, and he began to lose sleep again. But his flesh was less flaccid and pale. Like all lonely men he began to long for dialogue and companionship.

"I wish I could see Besser," he said to his mother. "When was he last at Mulvey? I've something to say to him about Lucifer."

"He's been away for years," said Mrs. Proudfoot.

"I wish we had somebody, mother."

"We'll ask the Rimmons," she said. "They will be seeking a change after Prince Euxine's death."

"I've forgotten Violet. What's she like?" asked Hubert.

"We'll have them up," said his mother. "We'll give a ball, Hubert."

So it was settled, and the Rimmons came. Hubert was surprised at Violet's beauty, and at first talked shyly to her. He seemed the gentlest of beings. The year's repose had brought back a great deal of the charm of his face and its melancholy. They were much thrown in each other's company, but Lady Rimmon looked anxiously on.

"We shall not stay long, Violet," she said after the third day.

"Why?" asked Violet; "they expect us to stay at least a fortnight. There's going to be a dance."

"Mrs. Proudfoot has been telling me that her son was once very wild—quite awful! it seems—away in the East. I'm sure he doesn't look like it."

"No, he doesn't," said Violet.

The truth was, she and Hubert were becoming more and more interested in each other.

"Have you seen Besser lately?" he asked.

"No," she said, "not for four years. He's at the Monastery of Monte Oliveto, near Siena. Do

you know that lovely view of Siena and its towers?"

"Oh, yes!" he said. "Look here, Miss Violet, let's put off the dance. What interest have *we* in other people? Do you want it?"

"No," she said, and smiled.

"Edgar's a dreamer," said Hubert. "Do you like dreamers?"

"It depends on what they dream."

They went often out together while their mothers spent half the day alone.

"You know," said Mrs. Proudfoot, "the doctor says Hubert's never to marry."

Lady Rimmon felt relieved. She repeated it to Violet.

"Really?" said Violet abruptly. "There's not going to be a dance."

"Oh, we can go, then," said Lady Rimmon.

"No, mother, that would be rude," said Violet.

She liked his paleness. "I hate red-faced men!" she wrote in her journal. And the delicacy of Hubert's features indicated delicate feeling. She never thought he was "dissolutely pale." He was drawn to her by her strength, and she to him by his weakness, and the atmosphere of

sympathy was pressing around them. He said little because he was suffering much. She was bewitched by the pale form, with shining eyes, and the smile of infinite delusion. He seemed to have lived through his soul's eclipse, and to have passed out, half luminous again, with strange lights.

"No, no," he said, when he was alone, "all that is past."

A single year of purification had not been enough. A century would not be, he said. There was never so complete a renunciation of iniquity by any one. Jesus, for instance, would have accepted him straight away; would have said that he was "born again," and that his past was now dead and meaningless, of no moral or physical importance any more. But the world secretly objects to this doctrine of Jesus, and Science disputes it. Yet a criminal may be on the point of renouncing his crime just as you lay your hand upon him. Here, too, the irony was that the renunciation was simultaneous with the handcuffs and subtle chains of disease. Happily, there is a religion that believes that we are never stained through and through, and that iniquity takes pos-

session of the periphery, not the center of our souls. But he felt the piquancy of modern Christian feeling which, although rising out of the fine dogma of forgiveness, and the perfect washing of sin, never forgives. He even acquiesced in it. Really, if Jesus instead of having lived a tragic romance, had written one, and had brought into it that incident of the woman taken in sin, together with the fineness of His pardon, He would have been called indecent.

But the moments were getting big with feeling. "I never thought," wrote Violet in her journal, "that Love's face had this look of crisis!"

"No," he said to her calmly, "I am bound to live like an anchorite. I'm only a mass of sensitive vegetation. Nature has pleased to make it so! I am holding on to the last perishing kingdoms."

"Our souls," she said, "are like asbestos—unburnable, unseared. Even the old doctrine of hell believes it!" and she smiled.

It was the fine illusion to which her love was helping her, and at that moment she believed in the permanence of the emotions she had once denied.



“Violet!” he said, as if he wished her to persuade him it were true.

He felt it glorious to break the glass and toilet of his vanity, and become again like a little child.

She turned all his negatives to positives, every “no” to a “yes”; opening shut doors of the irrevocable, for a moment, into the open kingdoms of a woman’s perfect trust.

“Violet,” urged Lady Rimmon, “let us away!”

“Will some wretch of a De Goncourt say that I love the *faisandage des choses*?” she wrote in her journal. “If so, let love and charity be cursed for mockeries. I love him, and he *is* new-born.”

They were to be caught, then, in that hurry and rate of their fatality. Love, indeed, so securely blind! Love always in a hurry! Mrs. Proudfoot felt secretly glad, in spite of the doctor’s warning that Hubert could bear no excitement, and, least of all, the excitement of love. Only Lady Rimmon felt harassed, and wondered what Euxine would have said. She thought of telegraphing to Sir Saul, but delayed.

Violet once overheard him speaking aloud.

“I wish I could see Edgar,” he was saying.

She stopped and listened, since it was love's own eavesdropping.

"So many mouths in the world and so few to talk softly, so many hands and none——"

"Mine, mine!" she whispered to herself.

She thought she heard the compression of his body, that reduction of bulk when a spasm of feeling descends. He came out, and she started.

"I've been eavesdropping," she said, "forgive me!"

He looked wildly at her, appealingly.

"I've nobody to save me but *you!*" he cried.

"And I am here!" she said.

So that for once love was really mingled with feelings of redemption. Yet, when he kissed her, his lips felt like autumn dust.

"Mother," cried Violet, "we're betrothed!" and kissed the astonished mothers.

Lady Rimmon sat unable to speak, but muttered to herself: "This is the result of winnowing, winnowing, as poor Euxine used to say!"

"Violet," said Mrs. Proudfoot, leaning on her cane, "my son——"

But Hubert entered, and she stopped.

“My dear child!” said Lady Rimmon resignedly as he came forward.

And then it was the moment for *die Thräne in lachenden Auge*. Hubert had entered solemnly, but he was now smiling, almost rejuvenated, and with his eyes shining. He sat down and said nothing, but nodded to Violet, slightly throwing back his head. Of course Sir Saul telegraphed congratulations.

But next day a shadow fell on their already somewhat somber delight. Dr. Bede came in a great hurry to Trebovir Road. He had heard at Mulvey the rumor of Violet’s engagement, and he came to prevent the wedding. He attacked first Mrs. Proudfoot and then Lady Rimmon, who implored Mrs. Proudfoot to listen. He had been at Sir Saul, but Sir Saul had shrugged his shoulders.

“It ought not to be,” said Dr. Bede emphatically; “I dare not allow it! The excitement will kill him. He is not fit to stand it, however things may look to the contrary.”

“I told you, I told you!” said Lady Rimmon, running to Violet, while Mrs. Proudfoot hid the fact of the doctor’s arrival from Hubert.

"The excitement of breaking it off will kill him!" implored Mrs. Proudfoot.

But the doctor shook his head angrily. Hubert had got to know of his arrival, but refused to come in.

"What's he wishing?" he asked, as he felt a cold shiver pass over him.

Violet was deaf to her mother's entreaties.

"Tell him I won't see him," she said. "Talk hygiene!"

So Dr. Bede returned from his thankless expedition.

"We are going to be married," says Violet in her book, "almost as expeditiously as holy George Herbert." And then she quotes "George Herbert's Life"—"This haste might in others be thought a love frenzy."

Strangely enough, on the very day they all arrived at Rimmon House, there was a rumor in Mulvey that Edgar Besser was returning. And, indeed, Mulvey House was being opened, and the gardeners were cutting the lawn. The rumor was immediately supplemented by another that he had given up the priesthood.

“ I said he would,” said Violet, laughing ; “ how strange ! ”

“ I’d give anything to see him,” said Hubert. “ Given up the church ? I wonder why ! ”

Lady Rimmon could only do a mother’s part, and help on a consummation in which she had no trust. Preparations were made for a quiet wedding, and, indeed, Mrs. Proudfoot was the single guest. Sir Saul’s peasants, with old Isaac at their head, hastily prepared their gifts, and “ Miss Violet’s going away ! ” was on every lip. Sir Saul welcomed Hubert as he would have welcomed any other one, but he despaired of making him a sportsman. He never went out shooting, but only walked in the grounds with Violet. The workers were pleased with his gentle air, but they thought he looked as fragile as a ghost. Once when she saw Miriam at the borders of the wood Violet turned quickly back with him.

At last the day came, and the peasants gathered on the lawn after the ceremony. Hubert had been excited all day. The peasants came forward in turn with their gifts, Cubitt staking up with a porcelain jug, and old Isaac with a leather cigar-case for the newcomer. Miriam, dressed in

a blue gown, with lace at the neck and wrists, presented a little screen of sewed work, which was her own and Mother Dagon's gift. When she came forward Violet appeared to be agitated, and Hubert turned with a strange look. His sharp eyes had caught the resemblance between the girls. He seized Miriam and Violet simultaneously, calling out "Violet—two Violets!" to the confusion of every one. All the peasants began to move, some tittering, while old Isaac asked what was wrong, and Mother Dagon left her place to go home. Violet had turned white, and likewise Sir Saul, and Lady Rimmon went hastily into the house of the veranda.

"Hubert!" cried Mrs. Proudfoot, and released Miriam, "you're joking!"

"Oh, yes," he said as they went in, while the peasants left the lawn to go to the dinner that had been prepared for them, talking eagerly to each other.

Hubert laughed, and when he asked who Miriam was, Violet said she didn't know, and took him to see their presents. Sir Saul chatted with Mrs. Proudfoot, while Lady Rimmon was preparing to leave forever. As the day waned—it seemed

never going to wane—Hubert became more excited, and repeated “Two Violets!” till Violet trembled.

“Hubert,” she said, “let’s go for a drive.”

“Yes, yes,” and they went.

“Violets grow, don’t they?” he said curiously to her, till she became afraid.

As they passed The Gates he cried out: “What huge house is that? Oh, yes, I remember.”

“It’s a prison,” said Violet.

“Coachman, drive quick!” cried Hubert, seizing Violet’s hand. “It’s a monstrous place!”

Violet felt dizzy.

“Mother,” she implored when they got back, “don’t go! I will need you! Don’t go, he is ill!”

“O child,” said Lady Rimmon, “our cup is full!”

Mrs. Proudfoot tried to quieten her son, but he talked for two hours till dinner, reciting old poetry and odd verses.

It was suddenly decided that they should not leave for their honeymoon till next day, and Hubert acquiesced. Hardly a word was spoken

at dinner, though Violet, whose imagination was always full of imagery, seemed to hear the hurrying wings of her calamity. Sir Saul called for the health of the young pair.

“Yes, old boy!” exclaimed Hubert with a curious leer. He took up his guitar, and looked exactly like the “*Homme Joyeux*,” and his mother noticed the look on him with which he had come home. He sang unintelligible songs of Damascus and the East, passing his eyes from face to face round the table, till at length he stood up and kept time with his foot, and then vanished with Violet. Sir Saul, Lady Rimmon, with her head bowed, and Mrs. Proudfoot, all sat speechless, turning their wine-glasses mechanically. Then they said “Good-night!” in whispers, and the lights were extinguished in the old House of Rimmon.

Later there were cries of “What a night, O God!” through the old House of Rimmon, “What a night of nuptials!” as all its inmates rose, and the servants ran with lights and gestures through the corridors to the eastern gable. Some of the servants crossed themselves and passed gestures to each other, while Sir Saul burst a door.



“Oh, oh!” rose, intermittent with the clashing of doors, in the dead middle of the night and that skirmish, and a low “Ha, ha!” as of some creature fastened with chains. . . .

“Love!”—wrote Violet next day, so that we seem to feel the very soreness of her emphasis—*“Love! . . . They took him raving to The Gates. . . . I wished something to nurse, and I have it. . . .”*

And from that day her journal was to become Love’s solemn Breviary and Book of Hours.

END OF BOOK I.



BOOK II



THE UNEASY LOVER



## BOOK II

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### CHAPTER I

DISCOVERS ONE OF THE SUPREME MOMENTS IN  
THE HISTORY OF FRANCE, AND OF TWO EN-  
GLISHMEN

PRAHL thought his master would sleep soundly that night, and he looked into the room at half-past ten to listen to his breathing. The bed was elosed up by muslin curtains to protect the sleeper from the gnats. Edgar Besser was breathing lightly, and was evidently in his first sleep. He had given up the priesthood three months ago, and was traveling in Sicily, expecting to return to England at the end of summer. A curtain served for a door because of the heat, and was generally left drawn to let as much air through as possible. It was already too late for

Sicily, and even on the heights of Taormina the June sun was becoming intolerable.

"It's too hot here, Prahl," said Besser; "it's exciting, like the human warmth in a crowd."

"I'd bear it all but for the devilish gnats, sir," said Prahl. "Begging your pardon, I like what you call the human warmth in crowds."

"Yes," said Besser, who was in the habit of throwing away good things on his servant, "it would be well if history could invent a sort of historical thermometer to measure for us the differences of heat in all the great crowds that have ever gathered round the crisis of the world's affairs—the crowd round the Cross of Christ; the Greek crowd waiting for the news from Marathon; the French crowd round the Bastille, and I don't know how many others. You can't write history without thermometers!"

"Eh, master?" said Prahl, "and the lips and the eyes in the crowd!"

Prahl was searching for the invisible gnats in his master's bed, and slapping the walls with a towel.

"Oosh! . . . oosh! . . . hist!"

"I'll make smoke, master, and choke 'em out."

“ No, leave me,” said Besser in a bad humor. “ To-morrow at six.”

Prahl came back in half an hour, and threw a stone lightly on the mat at the door ; he advanced a step on tiptoe and threw another on the mat in the middle of the room. And when the sleeper gave no sign of waking, he threw another stone more loudly on the mat at the bedside. The room was bright with the moon, which made the muslin curtains shine like silver. Edgar Besser was sleeping quietly. His watch and pocket-book were lying on a small table. Prahl took up the pocketbook, but found nothing in it. Edgar Besser slept with his money under his pillow, not out of fear of Prahl, but of the Sicilian servants. The doors and curtains were open all day and half the night, and any thief might be hidden in the corners of the house. Prahl opened the muslin curtains. His master was lying on his back in a deep sleep. Edgar Besser was younger than Prahl, yet they were of the same build—which was convenient for Prahl when he felt inclined to wear his master’s clothes. Prahl’s features had smoothness and regularity, and his eyes a certain brilliance. But even a poor

observer might have discovered the notable difference, only to be expected, between the physiognomy of master and of servant. Besser's extremely mobile lips, and the haste in his eyes, had been remarked long ago by Hubert at Oxford.

"Master's poetic," said Prah. l.

Edgar Besser was twenty-five, and Prah. l, who was one year older, considered himself twice superior in knowledge of the world.

"Master's a youngling," he said.

He took a feather which he held in his left hand, while he drew back the curtain with his right. He tickled the youngling's neck, and then let the light curtain fall hastily into its place. He waited at the edge of the bed, and heard the youngling turn with a slight murmur. He opened the curtain again. Besser was now lying on his side with his face to the wall. A roll of notes, tied round by a string, was lying half way down the bed. Prah. l lifted it, and took out some Italian notes. He put the roll in its place again, and let the curtain fall. Edgar never counted his money. "Poets never do," said Prah. l. He admired his master's tastes in clothes.



“ Master’s extravagant,” he said.

He took up Besser’s clothes, and longed to put them on. They were white, and resembled silk rather than linen, and were finely sewn.

“ Master’s waist’s the same as mine,” said Prah. “ Gott ! such socks, too—and the ties ! ”

He took away the whole suit, and sat an hour in it before his own glass.

It was necessary, indeed, to wear clothes of such a light texture in “sun-trodden” Sicily. And yet, lovers of sun-clad Sicily would not have said the sun was becoming intolerable. They would have followed the goatherds into the cool places where the trees threw clots of shadow on the ground, and listened half the day to the pan pipes ; or gone down to the sea, and sat in a sapphire pool ; or even, out of mere love of sun-heat, would have sat for hours half-naked in the sun. Prah and his master had been doing nothing else for days, and were already sun-scorched. On the gradual abandonment of one superfluous garment after another, Besser detected the allurements of Paganism and its excitement. (And, indeed, half our ethics may be tailor-made.) Not once or twice in a day they went down to bathe, and

seemed to come back hotter than they went. Instead of walking up the long serpentine road, or taking the green path through the bushes zig-zag to the ruined Greek theater, they went leisurely on horses, half asleep in their saddles, with their feet loose in the stirrups. It was pleasant to meet a Sicilian maid, with an orange-basket or lemon-basket on her head, and pay her double, whether she asked it or not, on every lemon and orange. The vines were ripening. Even Etna, far off, with thick snow cloak, seemed to tell, in spite of himself, by the diaphanous heat-shimmer he was sending up, how much fire still lies in the earth's old heart.

"Let us get to England, Prahl," said Besser in the morning; "it's not so hot there."

"And yet," he said, after a pause, "I feel hot everywhere, and when I go home I know the whole atmosphere will be as if charged with electricity. Are you looking forward to Mulvey, Prahl?"

"Yes, master, and I'll follow you to the ends of the earth."

"You will find Mulvey strange, and may not like it, but I must spend the summer there. I

should have been there long ago. It is my own place, and I promised my mother to take care of it after her, but I've neglected it for years."

"Why will it be strange, sir? said PrahL.

"Because I've heard strange rumors about some of my friends there."

PrahL asked no more questions; he began to pack up. He thought Edgar Besser must be extremely rich, and was eager to see Mulvey House. He had knocked about a good deal, and it seemed the height of luck to have attracted Besser's attention. It was at the Hôtel des Palmes in Palermo, where Besser had been staying all May. PrahL was a waiter. Besser had need of servants for Mulvey House, since the old lot had been dismissed when the house had been shut up. He was returning to the world, and it became necessary to carry on his estate in a proper style. PrahL seemed to give promise of being a good butler. But, indeed, he had been everything in turn. His father was a German, his mother an Englishwoman, and himself, as he said, a cosmopolitan. His education had been good, and he talked English with surprising correctness, but he had found a German home too dull, and had run

off at seventeen. His parents could have apprenticed him to a decent profession, but he preferred to go through a variety of adventures. He had done all sorts of things. Quick-witted, and of good manner, he could adapt himself to whomsoever he met, and his gentlemanly air won him good places. But his restlessness drove him about, and he suffered reverses because of his vanity and caprice, and sometimes his dishonesty. But this never prevented him, from getting good berths. He had been down a mine, and on a fishing boat, and he once managed a mill. He had a smattering of most European languages, and passed from one country to another. If he saved money he was sure to spend it recklessly in the end, and was forced to accept any work that turned up. Besser saw he had wits, and was something more than a server of dishes. He spoke to him, and asked him if he would become a private servant.

“I’m going to my property,” said Besser, “and I need a man like you.”

Prahl accepted at once.

A few days, indeed, were sufficient to let him see what a fine fortune had tumbled at his feet.

To be the private servant of a young dreamer, as Besser seemed to be, rich and generous, was a chance worth having.

“ I was once a priest you know, Prah!.”

“ A priest, sir !” exclaimed Prah!, astonished.

“ Yes; some months ago. Look !”

And Besser bent his head to show the mark of the tonsure. The circle, once bald, was now grown over and covered by the thickening dark hair.

“ I gave it up for various reasons.”

Prah! smiled, but checked himself. He watched the ex-priest, and thought he looked like a boy set free from school.

“ I’ll always remain loyal to the Church,” Besser had said to the Abate di Negri, at Monte Oliveto, “ because it expresses our emotional needs, but I can’t find how all the mass of the world’s contradictions fit into its formulæ. They are condemned but not explained, or else are crushed in unscientifically.”

The old abbot, smiling, laid his hand upon him and said: “ We are all children of the same Father ” (*noi siamo, tutti, figli, dello stesso Padre !*).

Edgar had been at Monte Oliveto three years. Although he had been instinctively moving since

early youth towards the ritual of the Roman Church, he had arrived a Protestant at Monte Oliveto, and had remained a Protestant for eighteen months. It was because faith for him was so charged with imagination that the change would be inevitable. Protestantism knew too much, was coldly logical, and seemed to walk round God in full comprehension. It fatigues the imagination just because it gives it no work to do. Edgar had come, weary of the intellectual battle, and had sought repose. His first intention was merely to learn Italian, and he had gained permission from Siena to remain at the monastery for purposes of study. Many a day he sat in the pillared library, while the sun poured through the windows, and he leant over Dante and Leopardi. He left the great Virgil untouched—perhaps, because he found both already so full of him. Every forenoon, before the great bell rang for dinner, he walked round and round the old cloisters, where the walls are covered with work of Signorelli and of Bazzi. Below the pavement the monks are sleeping, and, alas! the Abate di Negri was there only lately laid. Often Besser stood before the great flagstone on which is in-

scribed "*Monachorum Sepulchrum*," near the wall where Bazzi's herculean Christ seems more than fit to bear the Cross. When the boys came out to draw water from the great central well, Besser used to pull the chain up for them. Ah! *Giorni dolci!* He seemed at last to have found peace in the vast empty monastery, which was still echoing with the footsteps of old beliefs. There were only two monks, both old, the abbot and Dom Guiseppe, and, at least, the abbot was unforgettable. So, indeed, was Dom Guiseppe, with his simple peasant heart and faith. The night he arrived, Besser was set at the head of the supper-table in the novitiates' refectory, now used instead of the great refectory, which did service when there were more than two hundred monks. The Abate playfully said that he was to be their new abbot.

*Giorni dolcissimi!* From his three western windows he saw Siena far away and its towers, and the rough-and-tumble Tuscan landscape lit by the Tuscan sun. In his first letter to Hubert he wrote: "What a place for stars!" He was present when the olives were being crushed, and he took part in managing the great horse mill,

and his wages were bottles of "virgin" oil. He helped, too, in making the wine, and stood at the wine vats, foaming with purple drippings of grapes, and used to dream that he was seeing Dionysus—beautiful wine god! Often, too, he went with the goat-herd to gather in the goats at *Ave Maria*, but, indeed, they seemed to know the bell, and came, undriven, tinkling home. Every morning Abate di Negri knocked at his door to say "*Buon giorno!*" and to give him, as long as it lasted, a sprig of jasmine. Soon the place became for him a medieval home, and he wept tears of joy and thanked God that he had found once more the very knees of prayer. Almost uninterruptedly—unless when it was snowing in January—he rode to Buon Convento, or through Chiusuri to San Giovanni d'Asso, and invariably the abbot met him on the way home. He used to dismount and give the horse to a groom, and walk back with the abbot. The abbot—dear saint!—his face used to shine as with St. Francis' sweet "Folly of the Cross," and his head, too, as with an aureole. Often he came at night to Besser's room, and sat at the well-heaped fire, bringing a bunch of raisins and figs of his own



drying, and a newspaper from Genoa, and a "Book of Hours." Besser listened to his wisdom which was always tickled with humor, and used to marvel at his knowledge of English history, and especially of the period of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth. Long were their talks, but never once did Abate di Negri attempt to apostatize, and when Besser used to call him "*padre mio*," he refused it with a fine gesture. He meant what he said, when he declared so often: "*Siamo figli dello stesso Padre!*"

The spirit of the place, its medieval glow, was fast penetrating Besser's highly imaginative and receptive nature. He used to ring the bell for Matins, and sometimes helped to clean the church. From the beginning he had kept their Saints' Days out of courtesy, and he never ate beef on Fridays. The first Friday the abbot had got a chicken and a cutlet prepared for him, while the others partook of polenta and fish. But Besser, with a fine delicacy, identified himself with them, and sent the beef to a beggar. When visitors came, he used to show them over the building, lingering long at the wonderful doors of the library. He began to feel the stir of old emo-

tions now embodied and intensified in an actual life. He used to lie awake in his little iron bed, hearing the owls hoot under the cypresses in the vast garden. He lay awake, and when he did sleep and awoke again, why were his eyelids wet? He kept a book of "Stray Notes," and under the date December 19th, he had written: "Mere midnight in my brain! Read Leopardi, which made things worse!"

"So che natura è sorda  
Che miserar non sa. . . ."

That moment of pained impulse drove him to surrender. Next day he astonished the abbot by asking to be received into the Church. The abbot refused, and told him to wait.

"Dear Edgar," said the abbot, "I assure you that my best friends are your countrymen, and they are all Protestants."

That indeed was true. And if the abbot had been orthodox, he never would have quoted, as he so often did, the sermons of Savonarola, always adding, "*Poveretto!*" But Edgar insisted. It was the impatience of a warm nature. He wished to become a priest. The imaginative and

emotional moment had come, and he could not pass it, brief though it was going to be. He pleaded for entrance, and the abbot at length yielded, but warned him that the change had come only because Besser was generous and impressionable, open to the fineness of beliefs opposed to his own.

“Yet, let it be!” said the old man. “If you pass out of it you will be richer. *I* am richer by remaining in it. O Edgar, in such an age we cannot afford to throw away even the splinters and dust of that poetry (*quella bella poesia*).”

A special Dispensation was received from Rome. Abate di Negri had met Pius XI. and was his friend. Edgar was found learned in the theology of the Church, and was received without training—doubtless partly because of his wealth. He spent his money freely among the poor. At first it was proposed that he should take up his place at Orvieto, where there was a vacancy, but he refused to leave Abate di Negri. His independence and large fortune, doubtless, helped to make the circumstances special for him, and he was left free. Soon “*il prete inglese*” became as familiar in the countryside as the abbot himself or Dom

Giuseppe. The next eighteen months passed in the fulfilment of simple duties. Besser was now twenty-five, and he was going to pay the price of a nature developed as much on the side of the intellect as on the side of the imagination. Such a nature can never find salvation in a single mood, and it was with dread that he began to suspect that his medieval dream might be coming to an end. What was really to be wondered at, was that a young man so rich, and with opportunities of worldly distinction so great, had ever embraced such a life at all. But he now felt the need of change, and he seemed to hear the noise of the world sounding far off like a vast symphony. *Ci chiama il mare!* "Am I wise? Have I been wise?" he was asking himself with a sickening heart. He could not help being modern. He had forgotten it only a moment at the insurrection of that deep feeling of the charged mystery of life. He had obeyed the impulse, and wisely, because at the moment he could have done nothing—ought to have done nothing but stammer in that broken speech of emotion. Yet—yet—Nemesis was already perhaps lurking. He was a being of complex needs, with a rapid intellect and

a desire for the fights in the world. Could he wait? He looked at himself. He was tonsured ; he wore a medieval garb. It was the strangest metamorphosis. It seemed to be the very wizardry of the invisible that had transformed him into a believing being in the old robes of faith. And when he suspected the moment to be approaching at which he must put them off, he shrank back ashamed and afraid. He had explored the Middle Ages as a poet, not as a believer ; yet his face had now the mark and color of the great Age of Faith, when the Church seemed to set its seal on every lip, and subdued the very physiognomy of the world to the image of Another Kingdom. A look of sorrow and awe hung upon Besser's face till it took on the pigment of his discomfiture. Was stern England not calling him? Were the poor of Mulvey, who had been his mother's care for thirty years, not left to him by her as a sacred charge? And he had deserted them for the glow of this medieval dream. The Tuscan sun, the Tuscan landscape, Siena and its towers, the life of monks, vine-dressing, olive-gathering, the saunter at *Ave Maria* under the cypresses, whose tops were like pinnacled gold, the very health of

the place and its deep peace, was it not all cushioned luxury in disguise, even though his floor had no carpet, and his bed no quilt?

"Ah, I told you!" said Abate di Negri gently. "*Chi va piano va sano e lontano!*"

"No, no," said Besser abashed, "but it's—but it's——" and he stammered his distress.

He could never go *piano*.

"*Lei è troppo bello per un prete!*" said the abbot. "You're too good-looking to be a priest."

"Padre Abate!" exclaimed Besser. "It's my England that I've deserted. I've allowed the Church to rob me of my fatherland. I threw it away for a bunch of sentiments!"

"I love your countrymen," said the Abate, with his quickening smile. "*Sono tanto amabili!*" and he caught Besser's monk's sleeve.

Really, Besser did not know that he was being driven from his refuge by unsatisfied love. Yet, once he had said to himself aghast: "My soul is sitting in sedition!" For he had come to the point of the great interruption in a man's life when every other interest is suspended, and there are natures to whom a sense of possible coming guilt is like a sense of guilt

already come. Nay, nay, how could *he* know love as a hunter?

He must put off those robes of faith, and quickly. He went away suddenly, hugging his crucifix, while he was telling the beads of his emotion, if not of his beliefs. It was wonderful, indeed, that he was to become just doubly strong *after* he had thrown aside that vesture. "I will denude myself of it!" he cried. "I will take away every pillar and prop of official morality that might hold me up, as it holds so many men who would otherwise fall. I will stand absolutely alone with the bare bodkin of intellect, and fight this mystery! Religious passion really excites the body. Think of the flagellants! And I have known men who became, as it were, slaves before God, till he whipped them to sainthood. But a man can take refuge in his brain alone, and in the intellectual scorn of ribaldry. . . . I will think of Hubert! A man needs nothing except crushing force of will to let him see that passion is a farce. I, too, have heard that wildness within me, and it sounded the way an insolent knock sounds at your door!"

Yet it was with reluctance that he was admit-

ting to himself that he was beset by the arrow of love that flieth by night, and he felt a secret indignation. Nothing but a sure target, he! He knew that the moral struggle of the modern man is keener than the world has ever known it, just because he contains all its accumulated contradictions, the very core and central skirmish of that battle. Heirs of all the ages—yes, and of their vice as well! To England, then, where the battle lay in a form known to himself, and waged of weapons that were native to him. Thus his destiny was quickening within him. He never juggled with himself. “I am meant for the world,” he said. “I have been an impulsive fool!” But it was long before the final admission came: “I must marry!” Surely, however, just because his romance had been so long invisible—as true romance always is—it was thus deeper and more richly colored.

Would he ever forget the farewell? He left Monte Oliveto robed like a priest.

“And yes, yes!” he exclaimed, “dear *padre*, I shall remain one, though not formally,” while the Abate smiled, sure of the uninterrupted inner goodness of his young apostate.



“ Ah, child ! ” he said, “ what if, after all, our beliefs are only the caricature of God ? ”

The great oxen came round to the main door, yoked to a cart shaped in the antique pattern that is to be seen in Greek sculpture. Besser's luggage was put upon it, and a crowd of swarthy peasants, many of them weeping, stood round. The night before, the abbot had given him an Italian Bible, and the thing was so strangely done that unless Besser had been sure of the old man's delicacy, he might have suspected irony. For it was a *Protestant* Bible, and on the flyleaf there was inscribed, in the abbot's fine and almost invisible handwriting :—

“ M.O.M.

*“ Affettuoso ricordo dell' Abate di Negri all' egregio e studiosissimo, SIGR. EDGAR BESSER. ”*

What may be translated thus :—

“ Affectionate souvenir from Abbot di Negri to the much-honored and most-learned, SIG. EDGAR BESSER. ”

“ Father, ” he said, “ I am still your son. ”

In the morning the old man, with tears in his eyes, kissed him on both cheeks. They were both standing under the great gable of the church.

As he went up the cypress avenue, waving adieu, Besser felt the deplorable deceptiveness of the emotions, for he could have run back again, overpowered by the "Folly of the Cross."

He took with him the Protestant Bible and a crucifix, a volume of Giordano Bruno, and of Machiavelli, all the gifts of the abbot, and they seemed symbolical of his myriad mood.

So now he was coming to stern England, with the scent of that sweet incense upon him, and his eyes were colored as with the rich glow of medieval windows. At first he felt the vague uneasiness of all unanchored things. All through life he was to bear about with him the smoke of incense, like an elusive symbol. Even when he had put off his old robes of faith, it seemed to cling to his garments, now less picturesque, and to surround him like a protecting atmosphere. His heart was so full, and he knew so well the need of disclosure, that he was in danger of unveiling himself even to those who were unfit to hear. For he had a wild orator in him, and he always sublimated an audience to his level. Long ago, in England, he had once made a speech to miners, and when he told them all the hidden

greatness that was in them—nuggets and veins of bright metal—their faces glowed for a moment as if it had been true. “Look, men,” he had said, “I will take each of you at his finest moment, I will possess him in golden packets and gorgeous bits!”

Thus, too, he spoke deeply to his servant Prah, throwing away hundreds of pearls upon *him*, until Prah thought he had become the servant of a mad dreamer. They were now in Paris. It was September, 1870, a few months before the beginning of the siege. Besser felt the extraordinary dramatic contrast of this commotion after the still life he had been leading. They had got in with the greatest difficulty, but Prah knew a colonel of a regiment who gave them lines, and they passed the “military zone” unmolested. Besser saw the wreck of the nation, and he waited to see more. He smiled derisively at the wan beings who were called out to form the national defense—men undermined by modern pleasures, and who, because they had been beaten in that battle of the instincts, as he said, would never face the Prussian guns. It was the evening of the *third* of September, when the news came that Mac-

Mahon was defeated, and the Emperor in captivity. Night was coming down on the vast city, with its two millions of breathless beings, pale with emotion. What a scene! The Court had fled. There were cries of "*Déchéance!*" "*Vive Trochu!*" "*Vive la République!*" They were moved involuntarily from street to street by the crowds ebbing and flowing. The whole nation seemed to have expanded into a huge family in a moment, and a *frisson* of brotherhood, in face of the invader, passed through the hearts of rich and poor, and linked them electrically. Groups were storming the kiosks for the journals, and were reading by the feeble gaslight, for the Government had already ordered economy of gas. Half the city was enveloped in darkness, and there was a feeling of calamity imminent. The chairs of the cafés on the Boulevards were occupied by a standing, not a sitting crowd, and Besser seemed to catch the very gesture of the nation's despair. There were loud, angry cries, and blasphemies against great names that had yesterday been mentioned obsequiously, and then a low, suppressed groan of the enraged multitude, muttering against its traitors. Here, indeed, was

one of the great crowds of history with passion hot enough to make a lover of paradox say that the difference of historical periods is thermometric.

“Keep near,” said Besser, gripping Prah, “this is life!”

They were in the Rue de Rivoli, and were being carried along past the gates of the Tuileries to the Place de la Concorde. The September sky was blue dark above the city. The crowds were already taking up their position for to-morrow round the Chamber of Deputies where the Republic would be proclaimed. Carriages and carts were arrested in the mid traffic, and were standing stock still, with people climbing up on them. The roofs were packed, and boys had mounted the lamp-posts to see better, and be out of danger. The Imperial arms set above the doors of those who had been yesterday *fournisseurs* to the Court were being torn from their places amid the revengeful laughter and mockery of the people.

“Crickie,” said Prah, “the squeezes!”

He found a grisette near him, and whispered to her, while Besser held colloquy with his neighbor, who was a gendarme.

"*Qu'est ce que tu veux, chérie ?*" whispered Prah! and put his arm round her waist. "*Mignonne ! l'amour c'est la vraie révolution, la vraie guerre, n'est ce pas ?*"

Grisette said yes, and nudged nearer.

The Prussians were almost within six marches of Paris. When the wounded, who had gone out hale to meet them, passed in slow military wagons through the crowd, there was a murmur of sorrow and pity. The ramparts were rising all round the city, and houses were being pulled ruthlessly down to make room for the "military zone," while those who were now homeless were flocking into the city. The Bois de Boulogne was being devastated, and the great trees were falling to the ax. Besser went hither and thither to examine the main points of the city, and he was present at the Louvre when the great pictures and treasures of art were being packed and sent off to Brest, marked "fragile." There were already signs of the approaching famine. In some quarters only the bakers' shops were open, and the indispensable hairdressers, since the last thing France would surrender would be its toilet. Horseflesh was already being consumed in the

poorer quarters, and the city was living on a diminishing *menu*.

But Besser marked still another phase in the great city's commotion. The Prussian guns might boom, but lust still sent its votaries, like children, early to bed. Nay, it was known that the courtezans were hurrying to nurse the wounded, hastily improvising themselves into nurses, in order to mingle the excitement of war with their own personal excitement in therapeutics. Besser stood watching the ghastly physiognomy of men and women who made the public calamity the occasion of private debauch. He saw the idiotic smile of invitation, and whispered to Prahl: "Paris will fall!"

One night he had an unforgettable experience. He went to dine at Bréban's, where Renan, Edmund de Goncourt, Berthelot, Nefftzer, and Saint Victor regularly assembled. He saw Renan enter and sit at a table to read a newspaper. He was like a priest, large, corpulent, with double chin, but his white hair, which was still plenteous, rounded off a noble head. Besser watched him moving his arms in gestures of disappointment and irritation as he read the latest evil fortunes

of the war. When the others had assembled, Besser bribed a waiter to allow him to remain behind the red baize service door, and he heard part of the conversation. Renan was foretelling the destruction of France, and blaming Catholicism.

“ *Oui, messieurs,*” he was saying, “ *les allemands sont une race supérieure ! Le Catholicisme est une crétinisation de l'individu.*” Besser almost came out from his lurking-place in defense of his mediæval dream. Had *he* been *cretinized* ? Ah, what if——? But his reflections were interrupted by the loud protest of the other guests, although he could not distinguish which voice was loudest. Perhaps it was De Goncourt's. He ventured to look through the glass paneling, and he saw Renan rise and walk round the room, beating the air with his hands, and pointing contemptuously to the rabble in the street, and adapting fragments of Scripture :—

“ Blessed is the nation that hath her quiver full of them, they shall meet with the enemy in the gate.”

“ *Il n'y a rien que ça !* ”

Besser hurried out, but he was to be witness of a still stranger scene. The streets were full of the murmuring crowd, who seemed to have



become more panic-stricken. He had arrived at the Rue de Vannes when he heard a strange cry. It was one of the badly-lit streets, but he was able to distinguish an angry mob that stood beneath some lighted windows. He heard a persistent cry: "*A bas les lupanars!*" (Down with the bawdy-houses!) A strange shiver passed over Besser, as he said to Prahl: "This is one of the great moments of history!" Indeed, the people seem to have detected the root of their peril. They knew where the Destroyer sat! The lights were turned out, and in a few moments Besser saw some pale wretches being dragged from the beds of their delusion into the hisses and jeers of the angry crowd. Besser felt it was the apex of national tragedy. He, too, began to take part in the cry, and shouted "*A bas les lupanars!*" when he became aware of a strange figure who seemed to be addressing the crowd in excited gestures. He was a man, slightly built, not tall, of refined features, now animated with the intoxication of rapid speech, and with fair hair appearing below the brim of a low, brown hat. He had been calling out alternately in French and English, in hoarse voice: "*A bas les lupanars!—Oui!*"

“O God!” exclaimed Besser, when he saw his face, “it’s Hubert!” and he was almost stunned.

He struggled to get near him, crying: “It’s Hubert!”

Hubert was standing on a bench, and turned at the sound, but at first could not recognize Besser in the sea of faces.

He went on with his speech—“*A bas! A bas les lupanars!*”—as if a demon energy had possession of him.

“Hubert!” cried Besser again with his voice breaking.

Suddenly Hubert saw him, and jumped down with nightmare on his face. They shook hands without speaking, and disappeared, clinging to each other, through the pressing crowd.

“O Edgar, I’m glad it’s dark that you can’t see me! Give me your hand, old chappie!”

## CHAPTER II

### L'HOMME JOYEUX

“THEY are all upbraiding me,” wrote Violet, three days after Hubert had been taken from her. “They say I deserve my punishment. Oh yes, perhaps I do; because I never believed the worst they said, and because, even though I had, I would have taken him in his repentance. I am wicked! O God, help me to bear this! I am crushed; I am not proud any more. Because I loved him, and not merely loved his love for me, like other women, I have received this blow. They wag their heads at me, and ask why I married him. I answer that I married him because I saw his soul shining like a light in a poor temple. I confess I did not wish to know that the temple was in ruins. I am wicked because I took him in the middle of his renouncement. I loved him. I couldn't help it. Yes, it was sudden like a shipwreck. . . . Oh, I am afraid! Father is raging.

*He!* And mother is weeping her life away. *I* have done it all. They tell me he will have lucid intervals, and I will have him back. *I* will never have lucid intervals! Now I begin to see why insanity fascinated great dramatic minds, like Shakespeare and the Greek tragedians. . . . Come, sorrow, whet your music!"

She shut herself in, fleeing from the dry "Ha! ha!" and "I told you!" of their virtue. She knew that joy was finished, and that, if it ever came again, she would meet it with the surprise with which we meet purple flowers in autumn.

"Oh," she cried in her desolateness, "God—Christ—any kind power of mercy, give me, then, a whip of cords for my profanation! for I offer myself completely, and am not proud any more."

There was now silence in the old House of Rimmon, and the very servants went tiptoe. Not a sound along the huge corridors, double carpeted, except now and again the noise of a shutting door. Violet used to let her terrier sit for hours whining at her bedroom and scraping to get in. She never saw her father, and her mother came knocking, but often went away unanswered. The summer heat was beating

against the walls, and sending bees humming through the open windows, but she never stirred. Dr. Bede came to see her, and found her sometimes lost in a waking dream. He came softly to her, not mentioning *his* old warning, or screwing his eyes in satisfaction over the accuracy of it.

“Doctor,” exclaimed Violet, “the iniquitous velocity of it!”

“My dear,” said the doctor, “have patience. We shall make him well again. It’s the remittent type.”

“The what?” she cried, amid the dropping of her tears.

Dr. Bede did not explain everything, although he gave Hubert’s disorder many a name. It was likely that he would live about two years. Half Violet’s burden was lightened when she heard that the disease was congenital. The grandfather, whose portrait Mrs. Proudfoot had taken down to compare with her son’s, had died of paralysis. Hubert’s trouble, latent for years, had suddenly displayed itself in an attack of maniacal excitement. It was the fulfilment of Bede’s prophecy. Meantime, he told Violet that it was the result of neurasthenia. But it was far more. Hubert

had already the *Délire des grandeurs*. He had assured the doctor that he was the greatest reformer the world had ever seen, and that he was busy healing the sick, and especially delivering mankind from the bondage of a fiend. He complained of the vast crowds that pressed round him for help.

“Oh, *I!*” he exclaimed rapidly, but in an apparently normal voice, “I will crush it out of the world, you know. I will ruin him, you know, the way he has ruined *me*. *A bas!*”

The Gates was a vast building, containing some two hundred and fifty of the insane. Hubert was kept alone, while those who were less excitable were herded in long rooms, where most of them stood immobile for hours. And yet, if you visited it, you would ask, like Burke, where the insane are, since they go about like ordinary people, and appear to act from the same motives. In Hubert's case the main effort was to bring back his bodily health, and, at least, he had youth on his side. Two months passed, and Dr. Bede announced a “remission,” to be followed, doubtless, by a lucid interval. The unmistakable signs were already appearing. The pupils of his eyes,

which had become like pin points, were resuming their usual condition, and the old, rather uncanny light, began to shine in them. But Bede refused to allow Violet to see him, although she implored. She would nurse him, she said. It could not be. The slow doom seemed at last to have fallen on the old House of Rimmon, and it lay inert on its foundations, dead without and within. Not even the servants appeared at church, obeying a command to keep down publicity. Only now and again Lady Rimmon might be seen sitting at Euxine's grave. Violet was never seen at all. Slow hours! She was studying forms of alienation, or looking from her windows, like a frightened creature, on the ripening lawn. The peasants did their work mechanically, unsupervised, almost in whispers, and when they came together used to gossip their awe.

"All's goin' wrong since the Prince died," muttered Isaac.

"Aye, me!" said Mother Dagon.

Violet came no more into the fields to welcome the reapers, and the poppies were again left for Miriam to pluck. Miriam was still puzzling Cubitt, and laughing at his awkward legs. Cubitt

was still bewildered, and waiting in patience. Isaac grew more blind and bent, and Mother Dagon's step was as nervous as sin's. Only once or twice Miriam used to sing, but not loudly, among the sheaves:—

The clematis climbs  
Like a purple adder  
And the sun's on the limes!

But Violet used to hum a low song over *die Verlorene Liebe*. "I believe," she wrote, "that sympathy is our master feeling, and I never leave a plant alone but give it a companion plant. . . . If they will let me, I will go and see him. I am frightened he will escape and go storming through the world. Ah, me! he once said, almost in the words of Dr. Bede, that he would spend his life, like Edgar Besser, lifting men out of the fate of the five senses! . . . He used to talk about Lucifer. . . . They say he gets quieter, and some day—perhaps?—resurrection! It's a wonderful word!"

"Look here," said Hubert one day to Bede, who welcomed a new firmness of tone, "I'm happy."



"You're getting better," said Bede; "I congratulate you, Hubert."

"Better?" he asked vacantly.

They had allowed his hair to grow long, and he looked like a musician. They often gave him his guitar, and he sang himself to sanity.

"How did you feel those weeks?" asked Bede.

"What weeks?"

"The weeks you've been ill."

Hubert looked surprised.

"You think I've been ill. I'm like a diver who has seen all the sunk jewelry of the sea!"

"Well, what have you brought up?" asked Bede, smiling.

"Eh!" said Hubert with a knowing leer, "gay pearls and strange fish."

He seemed, meantime, content, and another week was let pass.

"How is he?" asked Violet with quickened breathing; "will I see him soon?"

"Let him be for another month," he replied.

"Look!" said Hubert, tapping his head as if he felt new and better sensations.

The truth was, the attack was passing, but

Bede had no intention of immediately releasing him. Hubert had said one day, with recurrent excitement, due to his consciousness of his surroundings, that he would never go back to Rimmon House. Like all the mentally alienated, he had no distinct consciousness of the period of darkness, but neither could he take up, intelligently, the thread of his life where it had been broken.

"I know what's wrong with me," he said helplessly, one day. "I remember poor Violet. Where's Violet? Were there two? I can't see them. Let me go. . . ."

Dr. Bede preferred it thus, and communicated with Mrs. Proudfoot. Hubert's release was to be kept secret. In a month's time, perhaps, the old relations might be renewed, and Violet and Hubert would come together again. So he was driven late one night, thirty miles out of Mulvey, to catch a train at Trenton. His removal was kept a profound secret. Dr. Bede accompanied him to Trebovir Road. During the journey he remained silent, but gave a cry of recognition, as he drove up to his door and saw his mother standing on the steps. She controlled herself for the

sake of her son, and received him as if he had parted from her last week. No reference was made to his illness or his marriage, but she wept over his indifference and the slow dawning of his reason. A man-servant was directed to follow him continually. Hubert knew it, and resented it. Sometimes he reddened as if ashamed, and spoke harshly to his mother. But with the peculiar cunning of all disturbed minds, he lay in wait for his opportunity. As they all do, he simulated perfect sanity with extraordinary skill. He appeared to be so convalescent that his own money was put into his hands when he asked for it. He read the newest books. He would have driven with his mother, or even ridden in the Park, but that he wished for a time to escape his friends. None of them saw him, for he remained indoors, and no one knew of his apparition. Bede reported progress after each visit. Violet believed him to be still near her, and when she asked Dr. Bede he said he was getting better. The month was nearly at an end, and he hoped to bring him back to Mulvey.

As we know, it was the year of the Franco-Prussian war. Hubert had been reading the

papers, and the stir had excited him. Paris seemed like a huge electric battery drawing him by unseen coils. Suddenly one day he disappeared. He had been long planning his escape. Search was made all over London, but in vain. Mrs. Proudfoot, amazed and stricken, telegraphed to Bede, who immediately came to town. She thought he might be at Mulvey. Bede telegraphed to Violet, and when the reply came that he wasn't, the excitement of both families became intense. In an hour all Mulvey knew the rumor. Three days passed, and no news came. Violet hurried to London, and Dr. Bede had at last to tell her the truth, and bear the bitterness of her upbraiding. Rumor came that an Englishman had jumped from the steamer that sailed between Reggio and Messina. They immediately concluded it was he.

"It is Hubert!" cried Violet, almost beside herself; "he would be going to see Besser, as he always wished to, and Besser's in Sicily, not come home yet."

Sir Saul, secretly hoping it might be true, caused inquiries to be made, and the description first furnished of the unknown traveler seemed

to answer to Hubert's. Mrs. Proudfoot, Lady Rimmon, and Violet put on mourning, and the long empty space in Violet's journal indicates the passing of empty days. But, to cause the bewilderment of them all, other news came that it was not Hubert who had been drowned, but an Englishman named Arthur, for whom letters were waiting at Messina. The three frantic women put their black dresses into their wardrobes again; the stonemason, who had chiseled Euxine's epitaph, was arrested in his design of a memorial tablet for Hubert, and Sir Saul deplored that the truth was not what he had wished it to be. Violet, stunned, remained in her room, waiting events.

Hubert, then, had found his way to Paris by the Lyons route, drawn thither, partly through his old love of wandering, and partly through his desire to see the great city's confusion. He offered himself as one of the National Guard, but was put aside as a harmless, mad Englishman. He loved France. The sound of war, the crowds, even the danger and dramatic feeling of the time, suited his perturbed mood. At first he kept himself well in check. He spoke French, like Besser, with very little accent, because he had learned it

when he was a child. He wandered about the city. Like a sleuth-hound he traced vice to its centers, and visited old scenes to pronounce his curse on them. He transformed himself into a sort of maniacal reformer, and was among the first to join in the cry "*A bas les lupanars!*" But it was a curious sight, and he was himself hardly conscious of its irony or pathetic ludicrousness. He was making wild efforts the night Besser stumbled on him. The crowds who used to follow him from place to place where he laid siege had given him a sobriquet, and called him, "*Le Jésus Anglais.*" "*Oui!*" he replied, accepting it. "*Je suis le Jésus Anglais. Eh bien, mes frères. A bas ces mauvaises maisons, s'il vous plait! Elles détruisent vos beaux corps, chers garçons. Allons!*" Roars of French laughter used to follow these speeches, but sometimes the crowd caught their deeper meaning.

When, at length, he recognized Edgar that night, Hubert almost fainted. The two men shook hands, and pushed their way through the bleared multitude into quieter streets. They went forward, unable to speak, till at last Besser asked him where he was living.

"O Edgar," said Hubert, "how strange! What has not happened since we parted? Where was it?"

"At Oxford."

"I'm *never* going back to England!"

"Yes, yes," said Besser, "you'll come back with me."

"You know I was married to Violet Rimmon?"

"Yes," said Besser.

"I could never see her again, you know."

"Why not?"

"There was a great blank. I'll tell you again."

"We'll give them a surprise, Hubert," said Besser, nudging him. "You'll come and live with me, and we'll go over some morning and take them unawares."

"Oh, never!" exclaimed Hubert. "It was awful, and I'm ashamed!"

They had arrived at Besser's hotel, and Prah, who had been following, came in shortly behind.

"Will you not rather stay here?" asked Besser doubtfully, and observing the old perpetual strange inquiry in Hubert's eyes which now flickered unsteadily.

“Oh yes, I would like to,” he replied. “I’ll do anything to be with you, Ed.”

“I’ll send my man for your things.”

“Here’s money for the bill,” said Hubert, handing three hundred francs to Prahl.

“You’re better, Hubert?”

Hubert nodded, but Besser was not quite sure of him.

“D’you know,” said Hubert quickly, “this war is a huge joke. They’re just trying to get it up to frighten *me*. They fill the papers with it, and it’s just a pretense and a cowardly attempt to frighten *me*.”

“No, no, Hubert, we’re going away.”

“Away! Where are you going?”

“Home, and you’ll come with me, you know. Back to Violet and Mulvey. It’ll be all right.”

“Never!” exclaimed Hubert; “my work’s here—*à bas!*”

“It’s all right, Hubert,” said Besser, quietening him.

“It’s a conspiracy to take me away. Oh, I won’t, you know!” replied Hubert angrily.

“Yes, yes. D’you not know me? I’m Edgar.”

“Yes, you’re Edgar of long ago.”



When Prah! came back, Besser told him that they must escape next day. They would have to take Hubert away by force, and he explained to Prah! most that had happened, and who Hubert was. Besser thought to take him home, get him in unobserved to his own house, and make everything right again in a few days. He had sent instructions to Ruth Profeit, who was a poor relative of his mother, to make final preparations for his return. But now that he had stumbled on Hubert he did not give the exact day of his arrival, for he wished to avoid publicity. Meantime, Hubert was to be Prah!'s special charge, and Prah! took an oath of secrecy.

"Crickie!" said Prah!, as he ran out to obtain pass lines, "I'm to be keeper of a mad gent, am I?"

Next day Besser saw that the sooner he left with Hubert the better. He was becoming more difficult to manage and persuade. But at last Besser humored him with some success, and said they were merely going into the country. They took his baggage away, and in a few hours they had left Paris behind, and were on their road to Marseilles. Luckily, Hubert had fallen into a

state of depression and sleep, and seemed unaware of his surroundings. They were in London in a week, but without Prah's help Besser could hardly have brought the journey to so successful an end. At first he thought it right to go to Mrs. Proudfoot, and leave Hubert at Trebovir Road. He sent Prah to make inquiries, but Mrs. Proudfoot was not at home, and the house was shut up. There was nothing for it but to take him to Mulvey, but he determined to arrive at night. Hubert seemed resigned.

"Edgar," he said, "you're right. I'm happy. *I've* a thought. I'm the *homme joyeux* ! I was shocked and ashamed. Now I know my duty. It is this—you'll marry Violet. Oh yes ! I'll free her. I'm unworthy. I'll look at her only once to say, 'I make you free,' and then I'll go away."

"Don't talk nonsense, old chap," said Besser, who noticed the strange alteration of Hubert's moods. "You're all right. We'll give them a surprise !"

"Yes," said Hubert, breathing more quickly, "a surprise !"

They traveled in the same compartment from

London, while Prah! was alone in a second-class carriage. They were to dismount at Trenton, about ten at night, and then drive to Mulvey. It was moonlight, and Besser looked out of the windows of the train on the familiar landscape which he had not seen for four years. Hubert was sleeping, and he did not disturb him. He kept thinking how he was going to break the news to Violet. Surely it was going to be one of the great services of his life. He had rescued Hubert. He knew all that had happened since he had seen Violet, but Hubert had made only vague mention of it. Besser knew that Violet would feel grateful to him forever. Thanks to his renunciation of the monastic life he was able to do a thing like this. It was not with repulsion that he had seen Hubert again. Really, there is inexplicable fascination about the dissolute before they have been finally ruined. They have their dooms on them. They have the look as if they have been sitting in strange places, where the paleness of their delusion came over them. They have touched beauty and it has withered. They know empty cups. They played long with Error till it tossed them on its horns! And they know that

there is nothing so ludicrous in the whole physiology of love in its decay as the limp touch which simulates ecstasy. On these things Besser pondered as he looked at Hubert. It was fulfilled prophecy. And yet Hubert was now more pitiable still after all that fatigue of sin. It was tragic, but there were worse tragedies. His was still the inner delicacy of feeling made pathetic in its ruin and inversion. A late come reformer! It is strange that the finest organism is most in danger, struck and shifted by every wind. I know, thought Besser, as he looked at Hubert's pale, stretched form, beauty is a scourge, and he has been whipped. We said it long ago. But so also suffered St. Francis, and just because he knew sensuous things, and partook their stain, is he lovable. Nay, half his later "Folly of the Cross" came from his sensuousness. The abbot and I used to have long talks about this. Who would have thought him a possible saint in the midst of his orgies? He must have been as repulsive as poor Hubert. Had he, too, this soft *sourire* of delusion? Moral immobility is not sainthood. Saint, I must know your dreams!

Meantime, in another part of the train, Prahl

sat turning *his* fortunes over in his mind. "A pair of strange pals!" he thought as he considered Besser's and Proudfoot's conduct during the past few days. He could not understand why Besser had saddled himself with a madcap like Hubert. He wondered for what exact purpose Besser had made him swear secrecy. Doubtless, thought Prah, he's going to have jinks with the wife. "Given up the priesthood," exclaimed Prah, as he hurried to his conclusion, "ha! ha! He's going to have jinks with the idiot's girl! Here's a shine!" As he ruminated thus, the train stopped at a station about forty miles from London. A dark-eyed girl, with her hair falling on her brow beneath her hat, which was set with poppies and corn-flowers, came up to the window, and took the handle of the door as if she wished to enter. It was Miriam, who had been on an errand for Sir Saul, and was now returning. When she saw that Prah was alone she withdrew, obeying a curious instinct seen every day on the railways. Prah rose, pulled down the window, opened the door, and lifted his hat. Miriam had turned, but she turned again and saw him. The guard's whistle sounded, and the train was begin-

ning to move. The other carriages seemed full, and she stepped forward again towards Prahls.

“Jump!” he said, “you’ll be late.”

Miriam sprang on the footboard, and Prahls caught her up by the waist, and pulled her in.

“That was a narrow shave!” said Prahls. “Are you frightened?”

“Oh no,” said Miriam, panting and smiling, opposite.

Then she blushed like the poppies, and looked shyly at the stranger. He appeared so like a gentleman with his slim figure dressed in black, smooth cheeks, well-cropped head, and laughing and inquiring eyes, that she addressed him with a shy “Yes, sir, if you please,” when he asked a question. They both smiled, which made things pleasant for a start. The carriage was dimly lit, but Prahls could detect all Miriam’s charm, and the uncertain light of the wick above seemed to add to her witchery. He noticed that her head had a tendency to be poised upwards. He thought it was to show her neck—but whether or not, he agreed that every face looks best at that pose.

“Where are you going, my pretty maid?” he asked playfully, for he knew that form of address.

"To Mulvey, sir," she said.

"Mulvey! So am I. That's jolly!"

The train stopped at another station, and Prah rose with a frown. Miriam knew why he was frowning.

"Oh, this is not Mulvey!" she said.

"No, but I've to get out at a place called Trenton; perhaps it's it?" he asked.

"Oh! that's four stations off yet," said Miriam.

"Ah! all right."

His next anxiety was lest any one might enter, and he crowded the window with himself as a make-belief that there was a crush inside. But the train began to move off, and he sank back with a sigh. He looked at Miriam, and they both smiled once more. It was the smile which lingers to do the work of words on such occasions. Ten minutes ago he was cursing the train for its slowness and now he was cursing its speed; although it was unchanged. The muscles of his hands were moving and he was sending his nails into it. Miriam thought she had never seen such a handsome lad. . . . Cubitt!

"Where do you live at Mulvey?" he asked.

"Rimmon House."

"Ah!" said Prah! with a start, for he had heard that name.

"Where are you going to live, sir?" Miriam ventured.

"Mulvey House."

"Oh, that's quite near! We can see its chimneys and the red tower."

"All the better," said Prah!, laughing; "I'm to be the new butler."

Miriam's eyes brightened.

"You're to be the new butler?" she said, surprise heightening her voice.

"Yes, and keeper of a mad gent. We'll see each other, eh?" he said, rising and settling near her.

The knowledge that they were on the same social level helped to hurry matters. Miriam made room for him.

"Isn't it horrid!" she said, "that *we've* to travel *second*?"

"Yes," said Prah!, "but does it matter when we've it all to ourselves?"

"Oh!" she said, pushing him away.

"We know each other already, eh?"

"Mr. Besser's not home yet, but the house is ready. They've got in two cows and some horses



just to make a start with *their* home farm. He's been such a time away!" said Miriam.

"We'll see each other often," urged Prah!.

"Why are you going out at Trenton?"

"To look after something."

"Trenton's thirty miles from Mulvey," she said.

"Yes. Isn't it beastly I've to go out?"

"Ye—es," she said, smiling.

"It's always the way."

"Yes."

"You've had experience?"

She laughed and pushed him away.

"It's a pity winter's coming on," he said; "there'll be nothing to do outside."

"Oh, there's plenty to do in the big flower-houses!"

"Is that where you're to be found?"

"Yes, often."

"Will you tell me your name?"

"Miriam Dagon," she said.

"Mine's Prah!"

"Prah?"

"Yes. It's a German name. Heinrich Prah! Call me Heinrich if you like."

“Hein—rich!” repeated Miriam.

“My mother was English, but she wasn’t so good-looking as you. There, now!”

“Oh!” she said, “is that the way foreign gentlemen go on?”

“Now give me your hand,” said Prah! rising. “This is Trenton, I suppose, and we’ll say ‘Good-night’ before the train stops.”

“Good-night!”

He bent down but caught himself awkwardly half-way. It was only postponed. He lingered at the door outside.

“Prah! Prah!” Besser was calling.

## CHAPTER III

### PERTURBATION

THERE had been an anxious night with Hubert.

“Edgar,” he said, the moment he entered Mulvey, and in contradiction of what he had said previously, “*I will not see her. I refuse!*”

“You’ll see her to-morrow, old chap. You’re all right.”

“No!” he said; “it’s cruel of you to have brought me here. I meant to stay away, and then free her forever. It’s iniquitous what she’ll suffer!”

“She’s suffering because she thinks you’re lost, Hubert.”

“Yes, I’m lost!”

“Not to her.”

“Oh!” cried Hubert, “I never felt like this before. I wish I were a child again at my mother’s knee.”

“Hubert!”

“Yes, Ned, why should all the bad things have come running to me like beetles? *I* never wanted them.”

“Hubert, get to bed! You’re ill and tired with the journey.”

“Do *I* sleep at night?”

“Hubert!” exclaimed Besser again, agitated and wondering for the future.

“Let me climb the tower to see the lights at her window. You can see their house, can’t you, over the trees?”

“Yes, but you mustn’t to-night.”

“*I will!* She may not be in bed,” and he ran out of the library.

“Prah! Prah!” he called, “where’s the door for the tower? Come, Prah!”

“Devil if *I* know!” said Prah, sauntering from the butler’s pantry.

“If you wish, then,” said Besser, dismayed. “Bring a light; here’s the door.”

Ruth Profeit, the housekeeper, a woman about forty, with a pleasant, homely face and brown eyes, came with a lantern.

“The stairs are dirty, Mr. Edgar,” she said. “They haven’t had a drop of water for years.”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Besser, and they began to ascend.

Besser went first with the light, then Hubert, then Prah, up the winding stair.

“Your tower’s as tall as Bologna’s,” said Hubert, fatigued half-way.

Besser stopped for him, and held the light against the wall, where a broad black stroke was painted.

“This is half-way. That’s the mark I painted years ago,” said Besser, “to mark the first hundred and fifty steps. There’s another hundred and fifty. I remember counting them when I was quite young.”

“It’s hot,” said Hubert.

“What the devil are we climbing a tower at midnight for, after a journey? This is the tower that Miriam sees,” thought Prah.

They began to ascend again, and were soon at the top. It was a cool night, and the moon was at three-quarters, cloud-bound. The parapet formed a circular stone balcony, solidly built.

“The stars!” said Hubert. “Ah, there!—there’s her window lit! She’s not in bed!”

Mulvey lay below them, silent and dark, unprotected on the flat plain by any hill.

“‘Cared for till cockcrow,’” said Besser.

They heard the carriage which had brought them moving along the main road.

“That’s her window in the eastern gable,” murmured Hubert again. “How dark the other windows are! How strange!”

“That’s Miriam’s window. How strange!” mocked Prah! inwardly. “It’s the maids that have to sit up o’ nights—not the dames.”

Prah! held the lantern now, and it cast a full light on the parapet. He held it in Hubert’s face, and Hubert started back.

“Beg pardon, sir,” said Prah!. “We’re *rum* night watchmen!”

Not a wind stirred, and the tower seemed to rise out of the foundations of the immobile night. Besser stood looking eastward, with his hand on Hubert.

“Let’s go down,” he said.

“No, let me sleep here,” said Hubert; “it’s warm. I’ll make my bed on the tower in sight of her window.”

Besser motioned to Prah!, and they took hold

of him. "Violet! Violet!" he cried, "they're keeping me from you! . . ."

He shook himself off from them, and ran to the other side of the tower. Then he saw The Gates, lit, too, and lying massive and still on the outskirts of Mulvey. He recognized The Gates.

"Let me away!" he cried. "Edgar, it's a monstrous place!"

Prahl ran one way, Besser the other.

"Oh—oh——"

His voice died, echoless, and they took hold of him, and brought him down docile, step by step. Besser locked the top door, but left the key on the inside. Hubert hurried to bed, and he got more sleep than Besser.

Next morning Prahl thought that that first night's labor was compensated when Besser gave him a letter for the House of Rimmon. The hop-pickers were busy as he passed through the green lanes. The lanes were still green because Summer was not yet shaken on her throne. Yet the bags of hops carried in carts, or as huge burdens on the back, the smell of October brewings and the show of last season's vats and mash tuns, wisps of hay and barley, and ears of corn dropped

from the wains on the roadside, gray light instead of the blush light of June, and the birds grown stubborn and miserly in their singing—all this meant that her kingdom was withering. Another hand was busy on the scored palimpsest of the soil. But roses and clematis, and other wild heliotropes were still snug at their roots, sitting isolated in the warm earth, with a sort of unconscious egoism, as if they would never fold their petals and go. For it was not cold; it was not autumn. It was a sort of Indian summer, rare at Mulvey. And yet the atmosphere had the negative flavor, mildly piquant of chrysanthemums, which is like a delicate minor in the hush music of flowers. The hop clover was withering to light brown. The barley was lying in the cisterns, the malt mill and mashing machines were ready, and the mash tuns awaited the malt. Sir Saul Rimmon had a small system of his own, and his men were busy. Isaac had brewed at Rimmon House for twenty years and more, and he might have been likened to a priest of Isis who taught brewing so long ago in Egypt! His was the best brew in all Mulvey. He was turning, with a wooden shovel, the barley heap or *couch*, as it is



called, when Prah! came up. Cubitt was passing to and fro from the kiln where the grain was to be dried. He was now standing near Isaac with his knuckles on his haunches. There was a musty, half-bitter flavor in the air, and from an adjoining building came the sound of a mashing machine. Isaac, bending over his work, did not hear Prah! addressing him, and did not see him. Cubitt saw and heard, but stood surveying him in the slow manner of peasants. The slim Prah!, with dark, quick eyes, was bearer of a letter to Violet. It was addressed "Mrs. Proudfoot." He had come on purpose a roundabout way to Rimmon House, for he wished to pass through the home farm. He was pleased with his first impressions of Mulvey, and amazed at the old splendor of Mulvey House. His chief disappointment consisted in the fact that he was "keeper of a mad gent." But he was told that it would not be for long, and although he had let a word slip last night to Miriam, he determined, since doubtless it would be to his own profit, to keep silence.

"Look here," said Prah!, nodding to Cubitt, and speaking loudly to make himself heard above

the noise of the mashing machine, "this is Rimmon House?"

Cubitt nodded without saying anything. Isaac stopped work, and lifted his bent back with a groan.

"Good-mornin', sir!"

"Good-morning," said Prahl. "What's the soonest way to the big house?"

"Along by the hops where the wenches are pullin'." Prahl thanked them and left.

"Who's that?" asked Isaac.

"It'll be the new man at Mulvey House," said Cubitt, walking back to the kiln, while Isaac began to shovel the *couch* again.

Prahl took the road that led to the hopfield, and he thought he espied Miriam among the pickers. Mother Dagon was picking beside her, and a basket was between them. Other pickers were scattered over the field. Miriam's head was bare, while Mother Dagon wore a summer hat of yellow straw with a broad front. Miriam was in a blue gown. Prahl jumped the paling.

"Who's this?" said Mother Dagon.

"Oh, it's the new butler at Mr. Besser's. We

came in the train together last night," said Miriam, blushing.

Prahl came up and lifted his hat.

"This is my mother," said Miriam, smiling; "you're early afoot!"

"Yes," said Prahl, shaking hands, "I've to go to the house."

"With a letter from Mr. Edgar maybe?" suggested Mother Dagon. "It's a time since he's been here. A fortune could have been made in *that* time!"

Prahl eyed Miriam, who was breaking a catkin, and rubbing it between her fingers to get the aromatic scent, till her hand was yellow with the powder.

"You've a fine country here," said he.

"If it weren't for the hop flies," said Mother Dagon. "Look ye, there's one; she's lost her wings."

She seized a green fly with long legs and a black head.

"A fine country!" she repeated, "weren't not for hop flies and the fates o' our betters."

"They lose their wings in June," said Miriam, looking at Prahl; "it's so funny!"

"How are *you*?" said Prah! in an undertone.

She pulled a fiber off one of the old stems, and wound it round her fingers.

"They're tough, eh?" said Prah!.

"Yes," said Miriam, "we make cords and strings out of them."

"How's Mr. Edgar?—we always called him that," continued Mother Dagon. "How's he pleased with the way the house is gotten ready?"

"All right," said Prah!.

"Ruth's a clever woman."

Mother Dagon moved to the next hop, and kept talking as she picked.

"How did Mr. Edgar pick *you* up?" she asked.

"Oh, just like a hop!" said Prah!, smiling.

"Be in the flower-houses this afternoon?" he whispered.

"Yes," said Miriam, as she pretended to bite a hop.

"I'll have to be going," said Prah! aloud, and he lifted his hat to both.

Miriam watched him leap the paling again, and she pulled hops mechanically for an hour, answering at random all her mother's questions.

"That's a good-lookin' butler," said Mother Dagon.

"He's awful polite and kindly like," said Miriam.

Meantime Prah had found his way to Rimmon House. He asked to see Mrs. Proudfoot, and was admitted to the vast hall. Lady Rimmon, whose cheek was still fresh although her hair was gray, came to see him. She wore a black morning-gown without any ornament, and appeared to be in mourning.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I am to give this to Mrs. Proudfoot."

"I'll take it," said Lady Rimmon.

"I was to give it to herself, and wait an answer."

"From whom is it?"

"Mr. Besser."

"Oh, he's home! Just wait," said Lady Rimmon as she went into a room, and rang a bell.

Prah thought Rimmon House the most silent mansion he had ever seen. The roofs were apparently not so high as at Mulvey House, but the rooms and corridors were longer. The hall windows were of stained glass, three on each side of

the door, and each consisting of a panel with a medieval knight in armor. The walls were covered with old weapons—especially guns and polished shields. Prah! was taken into a morning-room, paneled in oak with a lily and rose design. In a few moments Violet came in, dressed, like her mother, in black. Her eyes seemed to suffer from the light, and she told Prah! to pull down the blinds. He was struck by her demeanor and her beauty. But he was struck by something else. "Crickie!" he thought, "what a resemblance!" Violet was utterly pale, and looked as if she had passed months in a sort of waking dream. She spoke with a slight tremor in her voice.

"This is a letter, madam," said Prah!, and handed it.

It ran thus:—

"Could I see you this afternoon at three? I returned last night.  
EDGAR BESSER."

Violet went to a side-table and wrote a card. He was to come at *three* o'clock.

"Yes, madam," said Prah!.

He took the direct road back, because Besser was waiting on him; but he would have liked to pass through the hop-fields again to have another

look at Miriam. She was twice as interesting to him now. He knew, however, that Besser was waiting for him, so he made straight for Mulvey House.

Meantime Besser was busy with his fatal guest. He had sworn to do his duty by him, and the cousinship helped him to do it.

"Are you sure," he asked, "that you don't know where Aunt Proudfoot is?"

"Would I tell you lies, Ed?" asked Hubert. "She's likely looking for me."

"Where? We could easily find out. She must have left an address."

"How do I know? She's in Egypt, perhaps, or anywhere else."

"We'll find out."

"Oh no!"

"Why?"

"Because I don't wish to see any of them; you've brought me too soon. If you leave me alone I'll try and think it all out and get reconciled!"

"You're feeling better?"

"Yes; but, Ed, I can't see Violet!"

"Why do you change your opinion so often?"

Last night you said we were keeping you from her, Hubert !”

“ Oh, Ed, if you only felt how I feel ! *Whenever I say that I want to see her don't believe me !*” said Hubert, emphasizing every word of the last sentence.

“ What am I to say ? Really, Hubert, this is awful !”

“ Say I'm dead !” said Hubert, with a strange look.

Besser seemed now taller than his cousin. Hubert was shrinking in bulk, but the animation of his face made him appear to be in health.

“ I'm in a peculiar predicament !” exclaimed Besser.

“ Ed,” said Hubert, “ it's awful to feel that you belong to the brutality of things !”

“ Don't you see that the servants know that you're here ?” said Besser.

Hubert started.

“ Tell them I'll bribe them ; give them large sums to say nothing ! Please, please !” he said earnestly.

“ You know the way servants gossip.”

“ Oh, bring them, and we'll persuade them.”



"I'll try," said Besser, "we'll calculate for a week's silence."

"Swear, then, Ed—swear!"

"What?"

"That you'll never tell *anybody* till I ask you."

"Don't you see you'll be noticed in the grounds?"

"I'll stay in. It won't be for long. Perhaps I'll face it in a month," he said, holding his head, and looking like a cowed thing before his friend.

"I swear for your sake," said Besser, perturbed, "but can guarantee nothing. It's the strangest situation!"

"Swear on something," persisted Hubert.

"Here on my old beads," said Besser, taking the string from his pocket.

"No, no, you don't believe in them!" exclaimed Hubert.

"I do," said Besser.

"Edgar, I'll recompense you."

"Recompense!" repeated Besser.

"Are you going over to see her to-day?" asked Hubert excitedly.

"Yes."

"Oh, I'll watch you from the tower!"

“Hubert!” exclaimed Besser, “you must obey Prah! or I’ll abandon you.”

“I’ll obey Prah!,” said Hubert, while Prah! took him to his room.

As he went over to Rimmon House in the afternoon, Besser wondered what he would find to say. He saw that it was quite impossible for the secret to be long kept. He put little faith in the word of servants. It was too curious a pledge. Doubtless, Hubert’s horror of being discovered was perfectly genuine, since it often happened in the case of those who were mentally alienated. But how long might it continue? And if, by mere accident, the truth came out, and the excitement and alarm of reappearing among his friends aggravated his malady, Besser felt that in some way he would be responsible. Hubert suffered, evidently, from two great fears. He had a terror of The Gates, and he prayed his cousin to keep him safe; and he had, besides, a fixed desire, broken now and again by fits of jealousy, to avoid his wife. It was a situation beset by a hundred accidents. Besser wrote to the Abate di Negri asking advice. He also wrote to his aunt’s lawyers, and awaited news of her return. Meantime, he went

over to Rimmon House to make inquiries. But at first his difficulties seemed to increase. He saw Lady Rimmon, and she told him that they were all persuaded that Hubert was dead.

“You see we are in mourning,” she said, after having expressed surprise at Besser’s sudden return. “And although it seems a strange thing to say, it is a mercy! You know that it would *kill* Violet to hear that he was alive. She is very ill, but resigned. We had a letter from his wretched mother, who is in Corsica. She thinks she has discovered his grave, in the very wildest parts. The man who was his guide took her to what they think is his grave. It seems he died there quite suddenly. . . . He was fond of Corsica.”

“Really?” said Besser. “These Corsicans are a wild lot. They might say anything, you know, especially if they knew she was looking for her son, and had said that she was expecting to find him dead. I’ve read lots about them.”

“Oh no,” said Lady Rimmon, “it’s a Providence! I knew that his mother would bring home either his corpse or a bit of his grave. . . . You

know I was against it from the first. There is insanity in the whole family."

"But why do you think it would harm her if she knew he was alive?"

"The doctor says so, and that it would harm *him*, you know. The same thing would happen. Oh, the disgrace, Edgar! . . . I call you Edgar like long ago. . . . No, it is better so. And yet I tremble for every footstep in the avenue, thinking it might be Hubert walking up! Violet is really ill. She doesn't get sleep, although I've made her a pillow of the new hops."

"Yes," said Besser. "My mother used to make me one. It sends you to sleep."

"Now, if you see Violet—I think she is coming down—never mention his name," said Lady Rimmon.

"What does Sir Saul say?" asked Besser. "Could I see him?"

"You needn't speak to *him*," said Lady Rimmon, agitated. "I know you liked your cousin, but *he* hates the name of him. He's preparing for a voyage. He's been angry for months all over Violet. I feel the need of my brother to guide us all——"

"Ah, I heard!" said Besser.

Lady Rimmon lifted her eyes now and again to look at Besser. She questioned him on his abandonment of the priesthood.

"We were not surprised," she said. "You're too—shall I say?—you're too independent."

"Oh, I thought I was losing myself," said Besser. "That's all."

She looked closely at him, and noticed how he had developed. She was thinking that if he had given up the priesthood a little earlier the fortunes of the House of Rimmon need not have fallen so low. Besser sat with a concentrated expression as if he had a great deal to think about. "His head," Violet had written long ago, "is one of those that shine." It was his eyes, of course, that gave that feeling of illumination. He had the glow, too, of perfect health. His features were settling into their final form, but a look of curbed impatience saved their mobility.

"If he had been as healthy as you!" exclaimed Lady Rimmon.

"Oh, I'm all right," said Besser, smiling.

"I must keep gay, you know, for Violet's sake. Half a year will bring her back again. I some-

times try to make her laugh, and poke her with my fan. If her father would only leave her alone. Now, just wait, and I'll see if she would come. I think summer will never end this year, it's so warm," said Lady Rimmon, as she went out of the room.

During the quarter of an hour that elapsed Besser thought himself the most unenviable being alive. What could he say? The door opened, and he rose. She came in with a slight smile—"The very first," as her mother said, "I have noticed since May." Besser shook hands, saying nothing, but with a look of inquiry and surprise. Lady Rimmon left them.

"Four rapid years do make a difference, don't they?" said Violet, in the quietest voice Besser had ever heard.

His face was still full of inquiry and surprise, as if looks, not words, were to put all the questions. It was the first time he had felt *le frisson tragique de la beauté*. At first they talked common things, and he put scout questions. Yet he wished to be silent. All the common questions were interlaced and divided by great spaces of thought and imagination behind the creaking veil

of words. He never knew till then that the meaning of years of a life may be discovered in a flash. Some slow feeling of the irreparable, of destinies fixed and unalterable, came offering itself. He wished to know his relation to it. It was perhaps the first time he was brought face to face with a reality. All else was phantasmagoric—his past life, the spires of Oxford, Siena and its towers—even the long inner trouble of his impassioned nature. Everything seemed mist and unreality. The one moment of perturbing insight which lifted the veil on the future and showed it busy had come. “And this is he,” thought Violet, “of whom my book is full!” He looked at her perfect Greek features, tranquilized by long grief, and shadowed by the unruly mass of her hair.

“You are glad to be home?” she asked, raising her eyes and eyebrows, and leaving her mouth slightly open when the question was finished.

“Yes and no!” he said.

“I always said you would give it up, you know,” she continued, in a voice that became fuller in tone.

“I’m not ashamed. Feeling must get its innings, mustn’t it, even though they are to be short?”

"Yes," she said, "that's quite a modern view. I agree with you. Yet some people would think you shallow because you passed rapidly from state to state. I don't. The modern mind is essentially a sieve, and must pass hundreds of things through it. And now——?"

"I don't know."

"Parliament, of course. That would be good, because now you know all men's sins!"

"Well," he said, smiling, "it *is* true that the most exciting drama in the world is the weird *tête-à-tête* of a confession."

"Oh, you speak like that! I try to write like that," she said. "I'm almost afraid of you now, you must know so much about us. I have suffered."

As on the previous day she was utterly pale.

"I hope you are better," he said.

"We can speak, can't we?" she asked. "We are more nearly related than we used to be. I am a sort of cousin to you now."

"Yes."

"Though the link's broken. . . . We have every reason to believe that Hubert is dead. . . .



We are waiting on my mother-in-law's return," she said, with her voice faltering again.

Besser shuffled.

"I admit," she continued, "that Fate has at last been kind. We never could have met again. Never! It would have killed him, poor boy—and me!"

Besser asked her how she knew, and she answered she knew. He suppressed as well as he could the gesture of his wonder and pain. "It is perfectly monstrous," he thought, "that she is so chained, and does not know it?" He tried hard to accept and understand this pungency of their destiny. Perhaps they divined each other's thoughts, but he knew what she could not know, and she would guess as yet in vain. One thing he did feel, that his heart's own rue seemed to climb up like a hush midnight burglar unresisted.

"I'm not so old as you," she said, "but, perhaps, I know more!"

"*Know* more!"

The afternoon seemed to have brought to him something utterly new, as yet uncomprehended. He had heard numerous confessions, but it was the first time that a soul seemed to lay itself bare

before him, and he was dazed with compassion.

“Hubert is dead, I believe,” she said. “It’s over.”

“Oh, yes, he is *dead*,” said Besser, with a feeling of strange sickness.

“I didn’t know he was dead when I married him.”

“That’s what I mean,” he said hurriedly.

He began to feel the strain of the conversation, and he rose. Lady Rimmon was in the hall.

“I must go,” he said.

“This is Father Confessor,” said Violet.

“You’re the first that has made her smile,” said Lady Rimmon. “We shall come over to see you soon. I used to promise your mother to look after you.”

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DOPPELGÄNGER

AFTER Besser had seen Violet he cautioned Prah! to watch Hubert closely, and he shut himself in his own room that night. He thought over all that Violet had said, and he wondered whether it was not his duty to announce Hubert's actual presence in Mulvey. After all, was it *his* business whether both of them could stand the shock? Sooner or later the news must spread, and the delay might aggravate its terror. He could not guarantee his servants' fidelity. It seemed ridiculous to expect it. He saw that Violet lived in the assurance of Hubert's final release from all suffering, and she said frankly that it was better he was dead. On the other hand, Hubert, throughout a whole variety of moods, seemed to preserve fixed his hesitation and fear of reunion with his wife. If Besser hurried it, he might only be hurrying a double catastrophe. Yet the ex-

citement of the delay, heightened as it was by contiguity, might have the same result for Hubert. Indeed, Hubert was under the belief that he would be able to watch from the tower everything that Violet did. Besser was troubled by the variety of accidents that might any day occur. He urged Prah! to be faithful, and promised a reward. He took him completely into his confidence, so that Prah! soon began to dominate the rest of the household, and to hold up the terrors of banishment to any who had even a longing to betray the news that Mr. Hubert Proudfoot was in Mulvey. Prah! had seen many a thing, and entered with something like a detective's enthusiasm into his master's plan. The comedy would help to enliven Mulvey. His arrogant, though menial, nature soon subdued Hubert, who began to complain that he was afraid of him. At this Besser was pleased, because it meant that Hubert was safe. Yet there was many a danger, and Lady Rimmon's proposed visit was not the least. He put it off, saying that his house was not yet in order, and would not be for a month. After he had seen Violet he had gone privately to Dr. Bede and astonished him with the news. He

told him that Hubert had refused to see either Violet or him, and that it would be quite impossible to pay a visit. Hubert's fear of The Gates formed a strong motive in a desire to escape which often overtook him. Bede said he understood it all, and advised absolute silence on the whole matter. It was, in any case, impossible for Violet to see him in the meantime. "Even if," said the doctor, "I had him here, I would never let her know, and from what you tell me about him he has got the *horror feminæ*, which sometimes accompanies his trouble. It would be criminal to bring them together. I am sorry. We had been hoping she was free. Her mother is anxious to see her married. You can hardly imagine her suffering, and I doubt—I doubt if she will come out of it."

"What am I to do?" asked Besser.

"Keep him quiet. Give me all his symptoms. Doubtless he remembers me. If he gets worse we must take him back, but meantime I will send some one to examine him whom he does not know, and who will do it disguisedly."

"And *they* think he is dead!" exclaimed Besser.

“Let them think so. I don't think he will last long in any case, and may die in your hands.”

“That would be awful!” said Besser. “They would never forgive me.”

“Oh yes, they would, when they know,” said Bede. “This will try your metal, and your servants' metal.”

“They!” exclaimed Besser. “How could I trust them long?”

“I see nothing for it but to wait,” said Bede. “The fact is, I am hoping that somehow Violet might get a divorce.”

“He wishes to release her,” said Besser.

“Does he really?” asked Bede, surprised.

“Sometimes only,” said Besser.

“I could give a certificate that he was really insane when he married her. We shall see,” replied Bede, and shook hands. “That's good!”

Besser went home, and the silence of his house was oppressive. He gave orders that no other rooms were to be thrown open, for he had a feeling that his stay would be short. The huge dining-room was left dark, and its great curtains swayed in the gloom, when the wind passed through the windows opened for air. But a fire

was lit in the library, and he spent half the day looking through old books. He felt the uselessness of his possessions. They were irrelevant to his asceticism. They almost seemed impious after his vows. He had often felt ashamed of his wealth when he rubbed shoulders with a poor man. His previous life seemed to have made it superfluous. He would always have a spiritual irritant in his composition which would interfere with his perfect pleasure in the world. He felt there was nothing stable, and that everything was passing. "Great wealth—ah! great vulgarity," he once wrote; "I have seen poor people look magnificent."

He thought of Monte Oliveto when he saw his monk's robe and hat lying outside his packing-boxes. Ruth had laid them on the bed. He took them up with a smile. All that night he was trying to banish a thought which came obtrusively back. A whole multitude of vague feelings and surprises had awakened within him. With some bitterness he said that the situation in which he was placed might afford material for a vulgar novelist. "Think," he said, "of the sensational incidents he could discover among us.

She is over there, I am over here, and she does not know who is with me. Think of what he would make of the runnings back and forwards, the hairbreadth escapes, the intrigue, the midnight climax, and so forth. Yes, if I were weak — They wish us to go wrong; it is their trade."

He made a long pause. "*If I were weak!*" The cast-off garments of his monkhood seemed to convict him. He had lived more in that single day than he had done in years. It looked like a conspiracy of the Invisible to mock and try him. He had invited it. He had said he knew the power that decimated some men, and wished to fight it. He had sat long at the confession, and had heard the endless old saga of the human soul. The universe had become for him a great liturgy, old miracle play! He had dried the tears of hundreds unknown. He knew chords and sorrows, but now they were going to bind himself.

"And it'll be for 'auld land syne,' as the Scotch say," he said, "that I'll put these on."

He put on his monk's robe, smiling at his "folly." He hung his crucifix above his bed,



and he laid on his table his old "Book of Hours." It looked as if he wished to rediscover the simplicity of his monkhood, or it looked like the tuning of weapons for a great fight.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, as Hubert came bursting in.

"O Lord! Edgar," said Hubert, "I thought you weren't a monk any more."

"Neither I am," said Besser.

"Well?"

"Well!"

"Why didn't you come," asked Hubert excitedly, "to tell me what Violet said? I've been kept chained like a dog by that brute, Prahl. Edgar, I won't stand it! How's Violet?"

"She's not well," said Besser.

"Edgar," said Hubert, looking at him fixedly, "you're quite changed. Something has happened. I know! I see!"

"What do you see? Quieten yourself, else it will be all the longer till you see *her*."

"O God, you're jealous! You—you love her, *I believe*. Here, here, let me see your lips!" cried Hubert in a frenzy of blind passion.

"What do you mean, Hubert?"

"I mean," said Hubert, "that I know what you are feeling. I see it in your face. You wish me dead! You've kissed her!"

"Kissed her!"

"Or wanted to. You're utterly different from what you were in the morning."

"Hubert, you told me you wanted to give her up and release her."

"Hear him!" exclaimed Hubert.

"Don't misunderstand me. I'm——"

"Oh, I am ill—very ill!" exclaimed Hubert, as he abruptly left the room, while Besser followed him.

Prahl complained that he was becoming more unmanageable. It was almost impossible to pacify him that night, till Besser threatened to send for Violet or Dr. Bede. And then he became silent and went sobbing to bed.

"No, Ed, I *don't* wish to see her," he urged.

"Nor I!" exclaimed Besser, as he went away sick at heart.

The events of the next few days resembled, as he said, the incidents of a third-rate stage. Prahl, as we know, took every opportunity of seeing Miriam, but as Miriam did not wish him to be

seen at the home farm, it was necessary for her to come over to Mulvey House. Prahl's sharp eyes saw the truth at a glance. He had been making inquiries about Miriam, and dropping hints as to her parentage. As yet he had said nothing to Miriam. Perhaps she knew, because her manner seemed to indicate that she expected better fortunes than what a peasant husband could bring her. But it was just about that time that all Mulvey became roused. A new Dissenting preacher called Mabb had been installed, and, as he was a person of intense and sincere convictions, he was becoming a thorn in the baronet's side. For he had heard the gossip that had turned old in the women's mouths, and he began to preach on the sins of those in high places. Sir Saul openly expressed contempt for the orator, but it was obvious that he was uneasy. The denunciations became less vague, and the district was being prevailed upon to rouse itself up. Mabb called upon all those who were in the service of sinners to give up their places and seek honest masters. Old Isaac belonged to Mabb's flock, and it seemed as if trouble was brewing. It did not save Sir Saul that Besser was likewise at-

tacked, though on different grounds. Mabb, with apparent reference to the owner of Mulvey House, warned his congregation against "monkish propensities." But it became clear that his main battle was directed against the House of Rimmon. Mother Dagon went seldom to chapel. It was in vain that Lady Rimmon invited the clergyman to dinner. But he visited the home farm, although Mother Dagon was generally fortunate enough to elude him. It was whispered that Sir Saul's prospective voyage was due to these attacks. Meantime this turn of events suited Prahl's nimble wits. He guessed that the baronet would be pleased if some one would take Miriam out of sight.

"D'you know," he said to Miriam, "that you're a *Doppelgänger*?"

"What's that?"

"Oh, it means that you're the *double* of some other body, that you might pass for her, eh?" said Prahl, slyly nudging her elbow and smiling.

"Yes," she said, blushing.

"You know it?"

"Almost everybody does," she replied.

"There's a row coming on," said Prahl.

“ You mean through Mabb? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ My mother is frightened out of her wits. I've had an awful strange time and a funny childhood. I felt there was something wrong long ago, but didn't know what, till I saw people smiling and winking. And that's all they've been doing for years. ”

“ How does old Isaac treat you? ” asked Prahl.

“ Oh, he sometimes looks hard at me, and once took my face in his great rough hands, and wouldn't let me go. Often he's silent for days, and often puts strange questions when he's blinking at the fireside. But he's getting blind. I think my mother'll drown herself. I believe Cubitt knows it, but never says anything. Everybody's frightened to lose his place. ”

“ Cubitt! ” repeated Prahl in derision.

“ Oh, well, Cubitt! ” said Miriam, smiling roguishly; “ he's an honest lad, but—— ”

Prahl chuckled and drew her to him.

“ Has Sir Saul ever spoken to you? ” he asked.

“ Oh yes, but nothing direct, ” said Miriam. “ I hardly see him now. I used to meet him in the woods. The woods were my nursery. ”

“ Does he know about Cubitt and you ? ”

“ Yes,” said Miriam, “ but he wasn’t pleased. It was just when Cubitt and me were babies that we loved each other.”

Her darkeyes shone on Prah! and meant that it was all different now.

“ Now, *Liebchen* ? ” said he.

“ What’s that ? ” asked Miriam, laughing, “ are you calling me names ? ”

“ It’s just a word for dearie,” said he. “ What does Miss Violet say ? ”

“ I’m not so like as I used to be,” replied Miriam, “ and the place is quietening down about it, if it weren’t for Mabb. She’s ill, poor thing ! and I’ve always avoided her. Her chap went mad the first night, they say. They put him in The Gates, but he escaped, and they say he’s dead——”

Prah! was tempted to betray the great secret, but he resisted.

“ Lady Rimmon’s so tarty,” said Miriam.

“ Wait,” said Prah!, “ we’ll arrange it all ! ”

They were at the cross-roads, about a mile from Rimmon House, where the stone cross, half covered by velvet of moss, stretches its old arms.

They were saying good-by, because it was time to go back.

“Will you come over?” said Prah.

“What time?” said she.

“About six to-night.”

“I might be seen.”

“No; come in by the south gate, where I'll go among the bushes yonder. It'll be getting dark about six.”

“All right,” said Miriam, and let him kiss her.

She came before six, and he was waiting to receive her in the twilight. Only one person saw them—not Besser, who was in his library, but Hubert on the tower. He had bribed Prah to get the key, and was often on the outlook surveying Mulvey. He knew how to conceal himself below the balustrade if Besser happened to be walking in the garden. He used to stand for hours gazing at the old House of Rimmon, half tempted to shout across to it. Sometimes he saw a slim figure on the lawn, doubtless Violet, and he had a maniacal desire to wave a handkerchief. Sometimes she walked along the terrace of her window, and he used to shed tears on the tower as he saw her come and go. Yet, although he

was brooding over all sorts of projects for meeting her, he always shrank back in the end, afraid. Bede pointed out to Besser that whereas a casual onlooker might detect little that was abnormal in Hubert's reasoning, a skilled observer would see that there was one topic on which his brain seemed always to go astray. At the thought of his relationship to Violet he became generally uncontrollable. But he seemed to be waiting for some opportunity, with the unwearied patience of a cat waiting for its prey. He sat on the tower behind the balustrade taking the air, while the sun was streaming into Mulvey, and the smoke of the village was curling up. The landscape was perfectly still except for the intermittent noise of the railway station five miles off. The tower commanded a view of all the gates of Mulvey House. The grounds were not so extensive as Sir Saul Rimmon's. There were fewer trees. A serpentine avenue joined the three gates, and the house stood on a high level in the midst. Hubert crept to the south side of the tower, when he heard the click of the gate. He saw Prah! shut it after a girl had come in—a girl dressed in black, whom he immediately supposed



to be Violet. Every woman he saw he expected to be Violet. He watched them kiss each other, and then go behind the trees. They emerged again into one of the side paths which ran parallel with the wall. He was sure it was Violet. It was growing dusk, which maddened him the more. What could Violet have to do with Prah! He strained his eyes in the direction they walked. He was trying, in the confusion of his suppressed fury, to discover what it meant. He saw them walk back again along the path. A bell rang—Besser's bell—and Prah! hastily left Miriam, with gestures, and ran up the south avenue. Hubert hastened down the tower, and ran unobserved out towards Miriam. He surprised her among the trees, and seized her, crying "Violet!" She shrieked, but he embraced her in tears, asking forgiveness.

"O—oh, Violet, it is you!"

"Help!" cried Miriam.

Their voices were heard in the house, and Besser and Prah! came running down.

"Good God!" said Besser, "you've let him escape!"

Prah! rushed into the brushwood and struck

him off, releasing Miriam, who had almost been suffocated.

“After him!” cried Besser.

Hubert was scrambling among the bushes, and making towards the wall as if to climb it and jump. Prahl caught him in time, however, and threw him among the bushes, while he cried “Violet! Is she not mine?”

Then Besser ordered them to return to the house.

## CHAPTER V

### DREAMS

THE newest anxiety was lest Miriam might reveal what she knew. She had recognized Hubert, and was suffering from the fright. Besser tried to coax her, while Prah! was locking Hubert in and maltreating him. "I knew," thought Besser, "that the whole thing would tumble down like a house of cards!" But he won a promise from Miriam, whose resemblance to Violet sickened him. He asked her what she was doing in the garden, and when she told him, he was surprised that Prah! had made her acquaintance so soon. She undertook to tell no one what she had seen. He explained the situation frankly.

"You observe," he said, "that he is not responsible. By a most fortunate chance we picked him up in Paris, and we are keeping him till he gets better. But he will not get better unless he is kept quiet. I appeal to your sense of honor."

Miriam curtsied and left. Prah! was waiting for her.

“O Mir,” said he, “for any sake say nothing to any one! It’ll cost me my place! I shouldn’t have left that devil and come to you. What was Mr. Besser saying?”

“He just patted me on the back, and told me to be quiet.”

“All right,” said Prah!, “I’ve given the other one a slapping for touching *you!*”

“What a man!” exclaimed Mir. “He knew me.”

“What did he do?” asked Prah!.

“Oh gracious, he kissed me!”

“Kissed you! I’ll *whip* him.”

“He makes me shudder,” said Miriam. “I’ll never come over again. Mr. Besser says I mustn’t.”

They said good-night at the gate, and Prah! returned to punish Hubert. Besser blamed him for negligence, and seemed to have lost confidence. Prah! was crestfallen, and blamed everything on Hubert. In vain Hubert asked forgiveness. The room was high up, and Besser could not hear the altercation.

“Take that for touching my girl,” said Prahl.

“Oh! O Prahl! I didn’t know Violet was yours. Are there two Violets?”

Prahl terrified him by menaces.

“I’ll never do it again, Prahl—never!” exclaimed Hubert, taking refuge in his bed, and covering himself with the clothes. “Money! money!”

He promised so much money that at length Prahl desisted, and Hubert lay exhausted in the bed. The episode proved so injurious to him, that next day Bede was sent for. Luckily, Hubert was in a somnolent state, and did not recognize him. Bede said that it was not likely he would give trouble for some time.

“It will be a blessing if he will die,” said Bede. “But as yet his pulse is good. They sometimes linger six months and more after this stage.”

“Die?” asked Besser, “what on earth would they say when they know he was here all the time! Don’t you think it should be brought to an end at once?”

“No; it’s impossible. We must take care of Violet.”

“ I’ve had a letter from my aunt’s lawyers saying they expect her soon.”

Bede left, encouraging him to hold out a little longer. “ Violet will be so grateful to you,” he said, “ when she knows.”

Besser disguised his own feelings from the doctor, and indeed he disguised also from himself the thought that Hubert’s death would not be deplorable. He was far, indeed, from ardently wishing it, but the thought was secretly housed somewhere in his brain. He could not help it. In spite of himself his own perturbation grew. Everything was ripe for that inner sedition which he had suspected and foretold long ago. It was not likely, indeed, that a man of his nature could escape it. It was not enough that he had spent half his fire in religious passion and the flames of words. Even Savonarola and St. Francis, his two saints, had fallen in love. To him it was coming—perhaps late, but it was coming. He saw before him some long mortal struggle. Never were the nets and springes better laid. The organization of all the forces and circumstances that may mislead a man was never more perfect. It was, he said, incomparable stuff for a stupid

tragedy. He was perfectly conscious of it, and of the part he was to play. Sometimes he sneered, which was rare to him, but a more serious mood supervened, for the reality of his condition was expressed by a physical sign. During successive days he had experienced that peculiar sensation—the most unutterable a human being can bear—which seems to take its seat about the region of the heart, and up through the chest towards the mouth. Only human beings cause it to each other. It is the sensation which accompanies the strange beginnings of all love. The loss of other things, wealth, reputation, and the rupture of fortune, brings another of its own kind. This is the very cruellest and refined of all. “Now, now,” he said sharply to himself, “I will catch myself in this early root and budding of my folly!” Or, in plain words, with no disguises, he loved Violet. He had never known love before. It was irony that he was to be brought so late so near towards the ways of instinct after he had forgotten them. Long years of self-discipline may have been making him, in mockery, easier prey. His moral sensitiveness had its physical accompaniment. The long, inner

oppression of natural feeling and desire was exhausting him. He looked closely into himself to discover and exaggerate the shape of his deformity. Can a man, he thought, allow sin to pass through his soul as through a witch's sieve, and gather out of it what may be good? Is there goodness in evil? Nay, how could *he* have known that beauty sits waiting for all men, making the streets dramatic?

He pressed hard against the shutting door of his wisdom. "Is it possible," he asked, "that I have something monstrous in me suddenly showing itself? Then let me die rather! Let death come down like a portcullis!" But he felt the persistence of his destiny offering itself, pushing against him, laughing half kindly over him. Unsatisfied love had driven him from the monastery. Yet now his fate was worse than before, because his new-old love was impossible. He never mentioned to himself her name. He tried to forget her name. He longed to return to Monte Oliveto, but he received a letter from Abate di Negri encouraging him. "*Carissimo figlio,*" the old man wrote, "*presto verrà il giorno di Vittoria!*" And after all, he was glad that he had no official



label stuck on his back to keep him right. He had no obligation except his pride, which is one of the good roots of ethics. "I will wait till Hubert can return to her," he said. "As for myself, I will take refuge in mockery of this portentous nightmare. It will pass away—I will pass away. We are splinters and fragments."

Unfortunately, since ever he had returned, he had been told in a hundred ways that his duty to her was meanwhile to shield her from the truth. So that during those weeks he seemed to share only a small part of his own real inner life. No one except Maeterlinck, perhaps, could let us see his soul sitting, as it were, apart from him, and watching the scars of his alienation. It was then he began to understand why some men are afraid to become good, in case goodness is humdrum. Will it give scope for their passion? He saw all the vigor of iniquity, its daring, its love of hairbreadth escapes, in a life's imminent deadly breach. Here, then, he thought, is an occasion of all sorts of spiritual fencing and drill.

But when night came and he did sleep, he was helpless in his dreams. He had said: "Saint, what about your dreams?" He turned from

sleep, afraid, and fled from it like a fugitive. Yet it laid soft, voluptuous hands upon him in mockery of long vigils. "Our dreams," he said, "are the best criticism of our life. They are of vast significance. They are the parody and caricature of our error, and the *reductio ad absurdum* of our vice." Our vice? In his dreams he had kissed Violet night after night with long, passionate kisses. It was a curious way for him to discover that we are double beings, and that the unconscious plays still so large a part within us, not yet subdued under the politics and parliament of our brain. He felt eager to run to Hubert, and urge him to go away. He was puzzled by the divergent morality of his dreaming and his waking life. He might have known surely that many saints find their dreams as awkward. But he began to wonder which part of his life was more real.

Mulvey House seemed more still even than the House of Rimmon. Everything was still. Even the mice and rats seemed to have fled on the occupant's return. The great curtains still swayed in the gloom when the autumn wind passed through the open door. Besser had arrested

further preparations. Few carpets were laid. If a door closed the noise echoed through the huge house, and he felt as if he were putting up at an inn on a midnight journey.

Besser secretly desired Miriam to betray the truth, and so take the burden away, although Dr. Bede said it would be almost criminal. But the strain was too great, and seemed to threaten indefinite duration of itself. One morning Besser, who had so often witnessed the humiliation of others, felt eager to confess to Hubert. He thought that by exaggerating his dream-sins he might bring on the crisis of Hubert's jealousy. The truth was, that he was the victim of the sensitiveness of his moral imagination. He merely excited Hubert, and raised new dangers.

"Hubert," he said, "get well quickly."

"Why, Ed?"

"Oh, it's an unnatural condition. It's perturbing. I dream about you and Violet every night."

"You dream about Violet?" said Hubert, rising in his bed. "What can you dream about?"

"Yes, yes. I admit I have no right. It's the excitement."

“No, Edgar, you’ve no right; it’s monstrous of you!”

“Hubert—I wish to confess. I kissed her in my dreams—once—twice!”

“O Ed! Oh, you kissed her! I told you,” cried Hubert, covering himself with the bed-clothes.

“Only dreaming, Hubert.”

“O God! it’s the same thing. I am lying helpless.”

He refused to speak more, but became uncontrollable again in his malevolence.

“Hubert, Hubert, let me explain!” but it was no use trying to explain.

A few moments of such conversation seemed to send him off his equilibrium. At the beginning he reasoned correctly, but invariably got unmanageable at the close.

To make matters still worse, Lady Rimmon and Violet called that afternoon at Mulvey House. Besser turned pale when they were announced.

“Now, *doesn't* he look wobegone?” said Lady Rimmon as he came in. “You’re like the ghost of the house, you know.”

“The only haunted house is the human body!” said Besser with a smile.

“Yes,” said Violet, looking at him.

“I think we’re all in the dumps at Mulvey,” said Besser. “It seems dark and chill after the south. I would like to build a temple to the sun.”

It was the first time Violet had gone out since May. Both she and her mother were in deep mourning. Besser knew why, and felt confused.

“You know,” said Lady Rimmon, lowering her voice, “we’ve had word. The worst is over. Mrs. Proudfoot has found his grave, and she is coming home very soon.”

Besser controlled himself with difficulty. He observed the pardonable satisfaction of Lady Rimmon’s tone, and when he looked at Violet she was perfectly still.

“But,” he said, “my aunt might be easily deceived. She knows nothing of the language. Those Corsicans are perfect rogues, and might say anything. They may have palmed off any new-made grave on her. It is to be hoped she spoke to our consul. There must be a consul at Ajaccio.”

"It was in the very wilds of the island," said Lady Rimmon.

"She saw his guide," said Violet; "it's quite certain."

Besser rose under pretense of pulling up a blind.

"It's getting so soon dark," he said.

"What a huge room," exclaimed Lady Rimmon. "I remember your mother used to be proud of her rooms."

"I'm not opening the house," said Besser.

"Why?"

"Oh, I may not stay," he replied.

"Now then, you're not going to forsake us so soon! You need a wife!"

"I'll wait till my aunt comes back to see what I'll do."

Besser knew not to mention Sir Saul's name. Underneath Lady Rimmon's apparent good spirits he detected her trouble. The whole countryside was becoming perturbed by Mabb. It was said that Sir Saul was about to leave on a long voyage.

Lady Rimmon bravely alluded to Mabb's attack on Besser's popery.

"You've been attacked by the new clergyman," she said.

"Oh yes," said Besser, smiling.

"Yes," she said, "that's the way to take it. As if people care anything for what *he* says!"

Besser's and Violet's eyes met. He looked at her lips, and he wondered at the curious difference between the morality of an act done, and of the same act dreamt or imagined. He sat trembling in case Hubert might surprise them, for he had not had time to give Prahl warning. It was impossible to lock him in, because he invariably opened the windows and shouted. He had come upon Besser suddenly more than once. If Prahl chanced to be absent for an instant he used to come down the stair. While he was speaking to Lady Rimmon, Besser heard a noise on the staircase and started.

"Excuse me," he said, and left the room abruptly.

He saw Hubert on the stair in his dressing-gown. He beckoned him in silent gestures to remain where he was. Hubert stood looking down on him. Besser mounted quickly, making dumb gestures all the way. Both of them spoke

the dumb alphabet, and used to use it when they wished no one to overhear their conversation. It had become for Hubert a sign of danger, and whenever Besser began it he knew to reply in the same way. Besser rapidly improvised a conversation, and told Hubert that there was some one in the house.

“Who?” he asked in the dumb alphabet, placing his hands in the equivalent position.

Besser hesitated.

“Who?” Hubert asked again.

“Violet!” answered Besser.

Hubert made his way up the stair to his room, and Besser came down. But no sooner was he in his room than Hubert stood at the door listening. He came forward and walked along the gallery, stopping to lean over. He tried to disobey the impulse that was driving him to take Violet unawares. He heard them come out, and he opened the second door of the tower which communicated with the gallery and ran up. His bribe to Prahl still made him master of the key of the top door. When he arrived at the top he saw them in the avenue. He crouched on the balcony, and looked through the little pillars of



the balustrade. Besser was walking between Lady Rimmon and Violet. Lady Rimmon stopped and looked about the grounds and then up to the tower. Violet and Besser did the same. Hubert saw Violet's face looking up at him, but she could not see him on account of the solid stonework that formed the base of the balustrade. The tears hurried down his cheeks. Then the three walked to the main gate, while Hubert went silently down the tower to his room.

## CHAPTER VI

“Ah, Love! Somewhat let be!”—FR. THOMPSON.

PRAHL was watching his master. Events were apparently going to happen as he had foretold, and his shrewd brain grasped the situation on its more obvious and vulgar side. He had been quietly making inquiries in Mulvey, and had found out that Besser and Violet had grown up together, and used to be friends. Ruth Profeit, Besser's housekeeper, remained, indeed, discreetly silent, because her suspicion of Prahl was as strong as her faith in her young master. Whereas the younger servants were afraid of Prahl since he had now Besser's confidence, and seemed to possess a brief authority. Ruth alone among them made him feel that he was an interloper. She furnished him with the least possible information about the inhabitants of Mulvey and their ways. If the conversation ever turned on Rimmon House she used to evade his questions by feigning ignorance.

“Mabb’ll be able to say,” she said. “He and other new upstarts seem to know all about us here. I’d thank you just to be more careful about our invalid gent, and not bring that Miriam about *this* house.”

Prahl told her that, not having traveled, she knew nothing of the world, and out of the abundance of his superior knowledge he gave hints of future events.

“D’you suppose,” he asked, “that this can last? It’s a farce!”

“It’s not mine to say whether it’ll last, nor yours neither,” said Ruth. “We’ve to do our work and not meddle.”

“That’s a virtuous dame!” exclaimed Prahl.

“And I’m not so sure that you’re a virtuous gent,” said Ruth.

“Oh, now, Mistress Ruth,” said he, “you’re not going to tell *me* that every one in Mulvey’s as innocent as you!”

“It’s not mine to say they’re not,” said Ruth, “All I care about is that our master’s the finest and purest of gents.”

“He is,” said Prahl, and turned away.

He knew that all gaps in his information would

be filled up by Miriam. He had Miriam now so completely enthralled in her love for him that he could count on her obedience. She had said nothing to any one about what she knew, for she was aware that if the secret of Hubert's presence in Mulvey leaked out it would mean the loss of his place to Prahl. Likewise, the other servants were kept well in check, and there was no danger that any passer-by might see Hubert in the grounds, because he now lay in bed more or less in a somnolent state. His power of speech was leaving him, and he was having recourse more and more to the dumb alphabet. But Prahl, measuring his master by himself, believed that Besser's delay in surrendering Hubert was easily explained. He was laughing in his sleeve. He thought it a huge, roundabout English joke. The apparent connivance of the doctor only made things brighter and more amusing. He had, moreover, a personal interest in the affair, and might any day turn it to profit. Meantime he watched Besser, and played with Miriam. Miriam's peculiar position required delicate handling, not, indeed, because she was still Cubitt's nominal lover—that was nothing—but Prahl had not yet seen Sir Saul,

although he had a plan about him. He intended to go straight to him some day and offer to take Miriam out of Mulvey. Doubtless Sir Saul would be too well pleased, and would give her a secret dowry. Indeed, it was precisely what Sir Saul was desiring. Yet Prahl waited, because Cubitt had to be “settled,” and, besides, it was convenient to take notes of Mabb’s sermons. They would be useful in an interview with Sir Saul.

Mabb was still perturbing the district. Old Isaac began to be persuaded to go to hear him. When he returned, he rehearsed the vague accusations to Mother Dagon, who professed to know nothing about them. Cubitt was doubtless in the mystery, but he remained taciturn, with a peasant’s slow penetration of its relations to himself. He ran after Miriam no more. Rather, she came to *him* with awkward simulation of love.

“No, no, Mir,” said the big-legged lad, “thou art giving me hard ground to plow.”

Miriam could never come to the point of giving him up, although she had told him often he wasn’t refined enough. She thought she would write a letter. But the final rupture was caused by Cubitt himself. He was too inarticulate to

show his indignation in anything except deeds. So an opportunity came when he once saw Prahl near Sir Saul's pond on a winter day. Doubtless, thought he, the German was waiting for Mir. Prahl was dressed in his black suit, while Cubitt's drab-colored clothes were stained by his labor in the fields.

"Good morning," said Prahl condescendingly.

"It's a good morning," replied Cubitt, coming down to him at the edge of the pond. "You're waiting for Mir, maybe?"

"And what's that to you?" asked Prahl.

"Nothing," said Cubitt.

Without another word he took him by the collar, twisted him in the air, and threw him screaming into the pond. Prahl went down, and came up shivering to the surface, while Cubitt with his hands on his haunches watched him wade out. He stood imperturbable, with a slight grin at Prahl's ineffectual oaths.

"Don't know what you say," said Cubitt.

At that moment Miriam came in sight, and gave a little shrill cry. Prahl's clothes, glossy with the water, were sticking to him, and he stood ludicrous on the bank. When he saw

Miriam, he shouted words of revenge and disappeared. Miriam took off the little ring Cubitt had given her and threw it into the pond, and called Cubitt a coarse bully. Cubitt grinned when she said she would get him paid off, and then shouldered his spade, and trudged through the brushwood.

That incident helped to hurry and complete Prah's design. It became known all over Mulvey that Cubitt had thrown him into the pond, so that wherever he went he was derided. But he had won Miriam. He asked her if she would like to travel about with him, and she said yes. After all, Mulvey was a poor, stale place for a cosmopolitan. He bethought him to go at once to Sir Saul. But he believed in his luck, and still delayed. It might not be wise to surrender so suddenly the good berth he had already. And although it was humiliating to be the keeper of a mad gent, it had been thus far profitable. And it might be more profitable still. For instance, if Besser ever became rough on him, and dismissed him, he could threaten to let the House of Rimmon know all the ongoings of the past few months. Indeed, it was not till Hubert had mis-

taken Miriam for Violet that Prah! saw how useful the affair might become to himself. Meantime, he remained very discreet, and warned his fellow-servants to keep steady. It was not often that he went to see Miriam at the home farm. Cubitt was sure to be there, huge, silent, and formidable. Besides, Mother Dagon began to be afraid of Prah!, and writhed under his acuteness. He had quizzed her in all sorts of ways. Luckily, Mabb had caught a chill, and was in bed, so that there was a lull in his denunciations. The winter might pass quietly, but no one knew what might happen in spring, although Miriam whispered to her mother that, for one thing, she and Prah! would get wedded and go.

At Rimmon House they were waiting the arrival of Mrs. Proudfoot. It was a year since Lady Rimmon had decided to leave Mulvey forever, but she had remained for Violet's sake, and had braved everything that had happened. Now that Hubert was out of the way, there appeared at last to be some hope of seeing Violet happy. She took refuge from her own distresses in complete silence, convinced that any attempt to obtain her rights would only make the situation



worse. Mabb was doubtless a vexation, especially since things had gone on slumbering for so long. She had played her part, and not unwisely. The grossness of her surroundings heightened her consciousness of the wisdom of her reserve. Besides, her sole thought was Violet's marriage with Besser. They had long talks about him.

“What's the good of saying that the thing's impossible?” she asked Violet.

“You used to say so yourself.”

“Yes, long ago. Now, it's different.”

“I don't think so,” said Violet. “He can dispense with me or any one.”

“Every one is saying it will happen, and you know by his looks! If he had not gone into that church, you never would have been ‘Mrs. Proudfoot.’ If he had even been content with the English Church, where the men are sensible enough to marry! But he adores you now.”

“I think rather he pities us!” said Violet.

“Wait, dear. We women wait well. I'm perfectly sure it'll come all right. It's going to be the one happiness of my life. Just think! I don't believe I would go away. I would wait on to see your happiness, my dear,” said Lady Rim-

mon, kissing her. "Neither of us cares anything for the outside talk, do we?"

"No, mother."

"We'll have a little island of bliss all to ourselves. He's so noble!"

Lady Rimmon kept thus dreaming her last dream, and perhaps Violet was dreaming hers.

"It's perfectly true," she wrote in her journal, "what mother says—we women suffer well. As for me, I am becoming impervious. You might as well jag a mummy as jag me now. We get mummified to sorrow. I somehow feel that the world is in the end utterly irrelevant to us, all its crime and cruelty. We sit in the middle of it, dreaming other things. It's too shallow, and we need the deep sea."

She turned over the pages and read her scored-out descriptions of Besser. At the side of them she wrote mechanically: "I'm a poor prophetess—or a prophetess who recants her prophecies!"

Might the day come when her mother could say again: "It's all Edgar, Edgar with her *yet!*" Perhaps love might come again as sudden as the ringing of a bell. "But I dare not," wrote Violet, "put on the loud pedal to that tune!" Yet, for

all she knew, she might run towards love again as quickly as she used to run, when she was a child long ago, to a band of music. After all, she admitted to her mother that if it was not love that was disturbing Besser, she did not know what it was. He had come over often, apparently with something to say, but had never said it. A smile loitered about his face, and he had an inexplicable sad mien. Lady Rimmon and Violet gave their own explanation of that outward dejection.

“He thinks it’s too soon,” said Lady Rimmon. “That’s what he meant when he said he was waiting till his aunt came home, you remember. He doesn’t want to hurt her feelings. I’ve told your father to encourage him. But do you know what he said to me? He said that he believes Hubert is alive! It’s wicked of him.”

Besser, indeed, came over one night fully persuaded that he could withhold the truth no longer. For although Hubert lay quiet in bed, and agreed to almost every proposal that was made to him, even allowing Dr. Bede to examine him, Besser felt that the strain was becoming more unbearable every day. Dissimulation was being forced upon him, and he felt that not even

the most skilful of us can be long scientifically wicked. Besides, Prahl seemed to be growing retivse.

“ Well, then,” said Dr. Bede, “ do as you like. But I warn you ! I’ll wait till you come back.”

He found Violet in the divan sewing an altar-cloth.

“ You see,” she said, “ I am turning a perfectly amiable Dorcas. I used to laugh at needle and thread, but now it’s almost all I do.”

Besser was more pale than she had ever seen him, and his hair was lying rough on his brow.

“ What’s wrong ? ” she asked in her full-toned voice.

“ Oh, nothing,” he said. “ May I smoke ? ”

A little green and yellow lamp, suspended from the roof, and caught like a censer, swung above them. He took a low seat near her, and lit a cigar.

“ You like this dim light of churches ? ” he asked.

“ Oh yes,” she said, “ I suppose I’m stupid and sentimental. I give way before solemn music and dark aisles, and it’s then I understand what drove you to the Church. The world’s noise outside

seems perfectly irrelevant to us. But the worst of it is, that with people like me, and I think you, no single feeling prevails. Have you one?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Shame," he said.

"Shame! Why?"

"I really don't know."

"*You!*—*you!* Never! You've too great moral sensitiveness, you know. It's perfectly wonderful that the human soul has grown like a sensitive plant, becoming more and more afraid of its rough moral surroundings. Compare *your* idea of crime with a savage's, or Cesar Borgia's or Eccelino's. As human judgment becomes more sensitive it begins to condemn Nature as a huge, lewd thing."

"Yes," replied Besser, wondering where she had got her thoughtfulness, "but it means that crime does not disappear, but only becomes more and more subtle and refined, secret and deadly. The world is a meshwork of concealed hands."

He paused. The phrase had jumped to his mouth, and he saw how it described the situation. Violet laid down her work. Their eyes met, and

Besser's were moist. The secret was on his lips, but she did not know.

"Concealed hands?" she repeated.

"Yes," he said, "and mankind love chiefly gossip."

"Ah, you're *grumbly* to-day," she said, smiling.

"To think," he said within himself, "that I dare not even touch her hand!"

"You don't object to this smoke," he said aloud, sending out a cloud which almost concealed his face.

"No, no," she said, "what astonishes me is that I've kept my temper so much better than you! You know the kind of life I've had. If heredity is true, I should be the most vulgar of beings."

He knew to what she was referring.

"We have a family iniquity of our own," Violet continued, "a sort of special variety. By all the laws of nature I should carry it on. But I am the stop-gap. Long ago I took refuge in the truth that, after all, the saints are on the side of esthetics. I think you taught me it. Real saintliness does preserve human beauty."

"Yes," said Besser, "I suppose no saint could

be really vulgar. We could object to ‘sin,’ just as we object to a bad stench.”

“Mabb wouldn’t put it in that way!” exclaimed Violet.

“Oh, he wouldn’t understand it,” said Besser. “These men are scavengers; but a moralist doesn’t use such a tremendous shovel and brush.”

“My father is a huge coward,” said Violet.

The proprieties forbade Besser acquiescing. But he had come for another purpose, and had not meant to let the time slip away on such talk. Violet was amused by the old look of impatient search in his eyes, which used to be accompanied by a sort of undeveloped frown on his brows.

“You always seem to be looking for something,” she said, laughing.

He could not break in upon her that night, so he went abruptly away.

“Has he gone?” said Lady Rimmon, coming in. “What was he saying?”

“Heaps of things,” said Violet. “He’s a kind of eccentric latter-day saint.”

“I believe he is,” said Lady Rimmon, “and saints don’t wed!”

Violet wrote much in her book that night be-

fore she went to bed. "Love chooses only once. I have loved only one man, and it is he, and he is in love with me. Life, then, is going to be kind. I never would have known him rightly, revered him enough, unless I had come through that gross tribulation."

Meantime, Besser had gone home. Bede was anxiously awaiting him.

"Well?" exclaimed the doctor, "have you killed her?"

"I didn't tell," said Besser, "I was afraid."

Bede's eyes brightened.

"I've news," he said.

"What?"

"He's got a real lucid interval just now, and is perfectly quiet and reasonable. We have had a long talk. He understands everything, and he wishes to release Violet, and is eager to see you."

Besser made a negative gesture.

"Stop," said Bede, "the thing can be done. We'll just go up. He's quite anxious to see you and Violet happy. I think it can be managed. I can certify that he was insane when he married her, and that is enough, supposing this renunciation comes directly through him, and of his own



accord. At any rate we'll allow him to make any statement he wishes. There's no time to lose.”

“Does he really?” said Besser, following the doctor. “I was just going to tell you the thing must come to an end.”

“How long,” asked Bede, “has he been talking this dumb alphabet?”

“A week or so.”

“He'll die any way, you know,” said Bede, shaking his head. “This embarrassment of speech is due to ataxia, which is a sure sign of the coming collapse.”

“O God!” cried Besser.

They came up to Hubert. He was lying quietly in bed, and Prah! was reading in a corner of the room. Besser signed to Prah! to leave. Hubert was trying to mouth “Ed, Ed!” and was stretching out his hands. He then began to use his fingers in the dumb alphabet, and indicated that he wished paper and ink, which they brought him, together with a little table. He took the pen and wrote something in a tremulous hand, but it was unintelligible. He looked at Besser eagerly, and said in the dumb speech that he was wishing to release Violet forever. He began to

write again: "I, Hubert Proudfoot——" but he stopped. The doctor encouraged him. Besser was waiting, and Hubert looked anxiously, and for a moment almost steadily, at him. He mumbled: "N—no, she's mine!" letting the words tumble from his lips. Then he began to shake himself angrily from side to side as if he suspected them.

"Let us go," said Bede, "it's no use."

Hubert continued to arraign them in dumb, burning language and muffled oaths, which were no less terrible because they were muffled.

"What's to be done?" exclaimed Besser when they had got out.

"Give him time," said Bede, "he can't last so very long now; and yet it's extraordinary how they hold out, like tough fungi."

"It'll be worse if he die in our hands," said Besser, who often urged that fear on the doctor.

"Yes, at first, not afterwards," said Bede. "His mother will be home in ten days. Can you trust your servant till then?"

"I think so," said Besser as Bede left.

"Can I trust my servant?" he repeated, when he was alone, "can I trust myself? I hate

Hubert ; I hate him for not releasing her. It's monstrous that she remains his. Hubert is dead—he is no longer Hubert. I am hers, she is mine. . . . Come, duty, oh like a fearful sickle, and cut away the deadly root and nightshade of my sin !”



BOOK III



THE TWIN SACRIFICE



## BOOK III

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### CHAPTER I

#### MRS. PROUDFOOT RETURNS

DR. BEDE had made a long study of human love. He had heard the confessions and renunciations of hundreds, and yet he admitted that love remained to him still as great a mystery. Nothing, he said, was quite so unintelligible as beauty and love. They might be the beginning of all sorts of moral totterings. "And nothing," he wrote to a disciple, "is clearer to me than that beauty is one of the great disturbing forces of the world, making mankind quite helpless when it comes. Beauty seldom brings repose, if the spectator is impressionable at all." He had had a vast experience. He had found hundreds sitting among the ruins of love. He had witnessed all sorts of spiritual autopsies, for men and women had

come to him to lay bare their souls as they had never done to any priest. "Have you noticed," he wrote to his young follower, "the blunting of the features in mid passion? It appears to be caused by a shifting of the centers of control." Of course, he knew that the individual may successfully crucify himself by his will. He was observing it in Besser, for instance. "This young man," he continued to his pupil, "is going the road of all the saints, and it is a wonderful spectacle. He is dying inwardly. Consider his position. He had loved this girl long ago. He became a priest. Love quickened again within him, and he left the priesthood, obeying a principle of St. Paul: 'It is better to marry,' etc. He cannot deliver himself from his old love. But, for reasons which I cannot disclose to you, he dare not approach her. The world has a great deal of unknown tragedy, and it is due to those inward reverses and distortions."

On the other hand, there was Violet, who had already seen love's most darkened picture. But her nature was as responsive as Besser's, and as kindled. Both of them were under that supreme mastery. They really belonged to each other as



no two human beings ever belonged to each other before. It was only ironic that Besser, in the confusion of feeling of young manhood, when religious passion and love are often mingled and indistinguishable, had made a single choice. But all our passions are mixed up with each other, as everybody knows who knows anything about the psychology of the saints. Besser's nature, like all complex natures, was interblended and inter-fused. He would remain religious and emotional to the very end, doubtless. But, as yet, love had discovered only a subterfuge, and the real longing had come back to cause spiritual bewilderment. Violet watched the strange oscillation of his moods, and guessed only half its cause.

"D'you know," he once said to her, with a sort of pale heat on his face, "love always forgets to build a sepulcher."

She answered nothing, caught suddenly in a strange illumination.

"But he should build one; it is his place!" he continued. "He is born for death."

"No, no, Edgar," she said, "he would roll away the stone!"

When she called him "Edgar" she must have known it was a struggle for him not to come nearer and take her hand. She saw his eyes moist, and she guessed and wondered. When he went abruptly away she began to think she was sitting in the darkness of unrequited love again. True, she did not yet know that it was bringing them both down in ruins. But now and again she wrote a word like a throb in her journal. "I wonder," she wrote, "if in love, as in religion, the supreme sacrifice is a broken spirit." Nay, how could they know that they were not yet full of all the anxiety that beauty brings? Soon enough they would be thinking that each was sitting in the dust of beauty's and each other's disdain. "Will he not come near me?" she cried, with a strange premonition of the consistency and symmetry of her fate, while Besser, with the smile still loitering, almost like a sign of conquest, on his face, exclaimed in his loneliness: "This is a slow crawl to righteousness!"

Bede was watching them both, and he had confidences from each. His one desire was to save them. "They remind me," he wrote, "of Paolo and Francesca, though they are innocent." His

great fear was lest Hubert might linger too long. Besser never tired of repeating that it would be all the worse when the truth came out.

"I admit," said Bede, "that you must keep your eye on Prah!"

"Oh, he's all right," said Besser; "all the others are frightened for him. He keeps them wonderfully in order. But my aunt is to be here to-morrow."

"That doesn't complicate matters," said Bede.

"Does it not?" exclaimed Besser, going to the door with him.

"Tuts!" said Bede, "are we not carrying out yours and his own original idea, which was to keep him quiet till he was well enough to see Violet. Well, then, he's not well enough yet, and we must wait."

Besser shook his head and closed the door. Late at night Prah! knocked at the library.

"Come in," said Besser.

"Please, sir," said Prah!, "I would like to speak to you."

"Not to-night," said Besser. "Is it important?"

"Not very, sir."

“Well, to-morrow night,” said Besser. “I’ve enough to think about.”

Next day he went with Sir Saul Rimmon to meet Mrs. Proudfoot. He seldom spoke to the baronet, for whom he had a personal dislike. In conversation they never got beyond the commonplaces of everyday talk. But the baronet’s friends were dropping off one by one, and he was glad to be seen in company with the young owner of Mulvey House. They drove in Sir Saul’s landau. Sir Saul asked Besser why he wasn’t opening up his house, and Besser replied that he didn’t mean to stay long.

“Ah, well, neither do I,” said the baronet; “Mulvey’s stale.”

“When are you going off?” asked Besser.

“In a week or so. There’s not a decent sportsman in the place, and the very birds are turning tame.”

They had arrived at the railway station, and were waiting on the platform.

“We’ve had a nice shine!” said Sir Saul. “I’m glad it’s all over now.”

Besser remained silent.

“I was against it from the first, but now

I'm glad my daughter's a widow. Here's the train."

It steamed into the station, and Mrs. Proudfoot, dressed in black, alighted not far from where they were standing. Sir Saul gave her his arm, and they walked to the carriage. Mrs. Proudfoot carried a box which seemed to be extremely heavy. Besser relieved her of it, and was surprised at the weight. It was as heavy as stones. His aunt was very pale, and seemed to have grown much older. Also, she appeared to be more lame than before, and when she sat back in the carriage she gave a sigh.

"Where's the box, Edgar?" she asked.

"In front," he said.

"Ah!" she whispered across, "it's some earth from his grave, you know, to plant a few flowers in."

Besser hardly knew where to look.

"You've had a long, long journey, Mrs. Proudfoot," said Sir Saul.

"Oh yes," she said. "Are you all well? How is Violet?"

"I think she's better," said the baronet. "She's looking forward to seeing you."

As they drove through Mulvey every one knew who Mrs. Proudfoot was, and the events of six months ago began to be discussed again. It was New-Year's day, and the shops were closed. The people were in the streets. Those who had been at chapel were coming out, and they nudged each other as the carriage drove past.

"You must come and live with your old aunt now and again, Edgar," said Mrs. Proudfoot. "What are you doing with yourself?"

"Oh, perhaps he'll get married," said Sir Saul. "An ex-monk mightn't make a bad husband."

"I think you were right, Edgar," said Mrs. Proudfoot. "You've too many opportunities here to throw away."

They were now within the grounds of Rimmon House. Old Isaac was at the gate, and he lifted his hat as the carriage entered. Lady Rimmon and Violet were waiting at the door.

"Will you stop for lunch?" said the baronet to Besser, while Mrs. Proudfoot was embracing Violet and Lady Rimmon. "Ladies must sob."

Besser was prevailed upon to stay.

"We're so glad to see you safe," said Lady Rimmon, "out of that dreadful island. I re-

member reading 'Les Frères Corses,' by Dumas *père*. What people! It's a wonder you're alive."

Mrs. Proudfoot began to give some of her experiences in a subdued voice. Violet asked many questions.

"I've brought," she whispered to Violet, "some earth from his grave, dear. I'll give you half of it to put in a box to plant forget-me-nots."

When the conversation extended into details about Hubert's supposed grave it became almost impossible for Besser to sit still. It was likewise impossible for him to disturb his aunt by casting doubts on the authenticity of the reports she had believed. She had been taken to the wildest part of Corsica which, owing to the outbreak of the war, was in a state of disturbance. The Consul at Ajaccio was absent, and his place had been taken by a young Frenchman, who could offer no definite information about recent English travelers. But at Liscia Mrs. Proudfoot had discovered Hubert's guide, Rotto, whom he had mentioned in his letters long ago. He was a rogue, and comprehended the situation at once. A grave was improvised near a little village at the foot of Monte

Cinto. When she asked for his luggage Rotto told her that he had sold everything because he was poor, and Hubert had expressly wished him to do so. Rotto's English was extremely imperfect, but that helped to darken matters.

"He worshiped Hubert," said Mrs. Proudfoot.

"Are you going already?" said Lady Rimmon to Besser, who had risen, "not wait for the fruit even?"

"Oh no!" he said, "I've something to attend to. Good-by, aunt."

He hurriedly said good-by to them all.

"When shall I come over to see you, Edgar?" asked Mrs. Proudfoot.

"Oh, any time you like," he said.

They wondered at his haste, but he could sit no longer. For one thing, he was eager to hear what Prah! had wished to tell him the night before. When he arrived at Mulvey House he called him into his room. Prah! began by saying he would like a rise in his wages. Besser was astonished, and asked the reason. Prah! replied that it was too humiliating to have to attend to a "mad gent," who was becoming more mad every



day. He had been brought up to other things, and would rather leave than bear it any longer. Besides, it was no light thing to have to keep all the servants in order, and be responsible for their gossip. Prah! asked, with a sly look, how long the episode was to last.

“A confidant, sir, deserves a higher wage than an ordinary.”

Besser was irritated by his demeanor, and he knew what Prah!’s behavior meant. He would threaten to go, and that, of course, would bring Bede’s scheme to the ground. Prah! knew that his master was in love, and conceived that it was Besser’s object to prolong the secrecy. And there was no possibility of denying that, had it not been for Prah!, the “plot,” as he called it, would have been discovered long ago. But Besser remained firm.

“You are not to suppose,” he said, “as a man of your experiences might be tempted to suppose, that you are in a criminal secret. We are acting under the doctor’s instructions. It is not a criminal but a humanitarian secret, and when my friend becomes better, as we all hope, every one will feel grateful to us for having saved him.”

"Yes," said Prahl, with a dubious grin.

"Therefore," continued Besser, "although I cannot compel you to keep your trust, I can only say that it rests with you to behave honorably, and it will certainly be to your advantage. I have nothing more to say, Prahl."

Prahl left, crestfallen. This unexpected straightforward statement gave him more trouble than any dissimulation on Besser's part could ever have done. He paused in his game because he was doubtful whether now and again honesty might not be the best policy.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PLEBEIAN WINS

BUT Prahl wished to leave Mulvey, and it seemed possible to drive a bargain with Sir Saul Rimmon. He possessed news which would doubtless astonish Sir Saul Rimmon. He had grown tired of Mulvey and of English life, and though it might be cumbersome to take Miriam over the continent, he could not decide to leave her behind. He agreed to suffer the conventions and get married, since there was no other way of winning the aristocratic little peasant. Perhaps it was due to mixed blood that she was so incomparable. The worst of it was, he saw little of her. Fear of Cubitt prevented him visiting the home farm too often. Cubitt seemed doubly powerful because of his ominous and persistent silence. Old Isaac was beginning to discover too many troubles of his own to offer much sympathy to the huge peasant. But, indeed, if Cubitt required it, he

made no outward sign. He drank his beer and ate his mutton as usual at the table which Mother Dagon used to spread for all the laborers. He knew, perhaps, more about Miriam than Miriam herself, but he preserved his taciturnity. Yet he was ready to throw Prah into the pond again if the occasion should ever present itself. He made things so awkward for Miriam by his great peasant's disdain and natural haughtiness, that she was wishing to get out of his sight. She trembled at his footstep. But he smoked his pipe, and read by the fire all sorts of savage romances suited to his mood. He still worked tenaciously, and it looked as if some day he might fill Isaac's place.

That day, to be sure, was not far distant, because Isaac's work at Rimmon House was almost at an end. It might be thought that innuendo and suspicion slumbering for about nineteen years had little chance of doing much damage in the end. Yet although so many had been playing a double game of gossip, this nebulous condition of rumor could hardly continue forever. Years often pass before bad repute fertilizes itself. And the quick wits of Prah and the declamation of Mabb might do things in the reverse way in

which, for instance, Euxine would have done them.

Neither Violet nor her mother had become by any means insensible to the wound ; but they judged wisely that they would only irritate their condition by meddling with that vulgarity. And it has never yet been discovered whether Lady Rimmon really disbelieved Euxine's last words. Long ago, indeed, she had decided to leave Mulvey forever. She and her husband appeared to be disconnected units. But she had delayed her departure for her daughter's sake. In spite of Violet's superior endowments there was a close bond between them both. They lived in each other's company very intimately after Violet's misfortune had become half-mitigated by the lapse of time. For the sake of private pride and decency the House of Rimmon was carried on as if no taint had stained it, although, perhaps, an acute observer might have described the household as being in a state of armed peace. The moral value of the head of the house had been discovered to be a cipher. He seemed almost to acquiesce in it, and the weight and preponderance of opinion on any matter had passed to his

daughter. His sporting instinct had invaded his whole being. Everything was a quarry to be shot down, and he professed his daughter's accomplishments to be unintelligible and beyond him; yet he continued to bestow his immense charities on Mulvey, and since he had been doing it all his life, they were not to be considered as acts of cowardice and attempts at conciliation. Money, of course, is often a powerful protection to cowards, but he made no display of it for a particular purpose. He was still voted the most generous proprietor Mulvey had ever seen, and his benevolence was on so large a scale that any one who professed to be his enemy only made himself ludicrous. But as he grew old on the road that withers towards age he was harassed by a vulgar circumstance. Like most men, he quarreled with his folly because it had left a trace. We blame our egoism only when it fails and leaves too broad a mark. And thus it was curious that he proposed so late to set out on a journey in order to deliver himself from a society which knew him through and through. Perhaps, after all, silent judgments are the worst to bear. Any one who is accused has always the chance that his accusation may be

pronounced too vehemently and cruelly, so that the exaggeration is noticed, and he wins sympathy on the other side. Mabb's onslaught was, after all, not so vexatious as the proud, silent denunciation of Violet and Lady Rimmon.

Miriam had told Prah "the latest." Old Isaac had come home from hearing Mabb one Sunday morning. He sat at the fireside in the spacious barn roofed with oak beams, which served for his dining-room and sitting-room in one. He bent over the fire till dinner-time, and at dinner he said nothing except the blessing. Cubitt was away.

After dinner Isaac resumed his seat at the fire, and slowly smoked a pipe. Contrary to his usual custom he did not fall asleep. The fire lighted up his strong face which was deeply plowed by time and labor. Now and again he emitted a deep, bass groan as if something was perplexing him. Mother Dagon flitted in and out, and when she flitted in her eyes fell first on Isaac, and when she flitted out she turned back to look at him. But he seemed as still as a stone. At regular intervals, however, he passed his right hand through his hard, gray hair as if in a gesture of doubt and dumb surprise. Once he rose to put on a log of

wood which crackled after he had laid it, and then he sat down again. He watched it getting blacker, and then a few mutterings escaped him.

"Ye've to turn black before ye burn well," he said.

His dumb imagination was working, half awake, so late. He rose and flung on another log, putting the one against the other till they both caught flame.

"A log burns best in company with another," he said.

Mother Dagon heard him, and flitted out. It was their custom to walk through the woods on a Sunday afternoon or visit Prince Euxine's grave ; but although it was already gray, he still sat beside the fire, and he remained beside it till supper-time. Mother Dagon drew the beer and served him copiously.

"That's a fine brew, Isaac," she said.

"Oh, it's a fine brew!" said he. "Where's Mir?"

"She's with Prahl, I think," said Mother Dagon, conscious that there was something wrong.

But he said nothing more. She washed the



dishes, and set the supper for the laborers, who would come in late, and went early to bed. Isaac heard some one come in.

“Is that you, Mir?”

“Yes,” she said, and came in.

“Sit here,” said he, and drew a chair opposite.

Miriam told Prah! that Isaac kept looking at her for a long time without uttering a word.

“Till I was sad for the old chap,” she said, as Prah! laughed. “I’m sure it isn’t my fault? Though he’s been suspecting it for long, since he took me often to look at me, it was the first time he was awake.”

Old Isaac looked into the fire, and then towards Miriam again.

“Thou’lt not be kissing me to-night, Mir,” he said.

“Why no?” said she.

“Oh—oh!” exclaimed Isaac, covering his face, “get thee to bed.”

“And d’ye know,” said Miriam to Prah!, “the old chap wouldn’t let me kiss him as usual, but pressed his hands on his face, and I just kissed the old hands instead. He’s been a father to me, and is always so kindly-like! Much good Sir

Saul's done me! I've always felt as if I've no right to be in the world. I wish away."

"Wait a bit," said Prahl, "I'll make papa stump up—isn't that the word?—a dowry for you, and then we'll go."

He then sought an interview with the baronet, but found some difficulty in presenting himself, owing to the suspicions of the baronet's own butler that he was after *his* place. Prahl was an object of curiosity among all the domestics of Mulvey. They couldn't understand him. His superciliousness and his boast of having traveled round the world moved their jealousy. Then the baronet's man, a gaunt individual, bald and turned forty, was fully persuaded that the mysterious foreigner had come to oust him. He surveyed Prahl carefully, and asked the nature of his errand.

"And what's that to you?" asked Prahl sharply.

"Nothing to me, but perhaps to my master," said the other with a grimace.

"Precisely," said Prahl. "Then let me in."

The baronet's man gave way.

"I'm only half an Englishman," said Prahl, "but I'm worth ten of you."

The abject servant seemed to acquiesce, and

led Prahl in, awaiting the result with foreboding. He put Prahl into the morning-room where he had been before.

"Give that," said Prahl, handing a card with his name on it.

In a few moments the gaunt butler came back, and conducted Prahl to the baronet.

"Dem, dem, what can *I* have done?" he asked the maids as the enemy protracted his visit.

Meantime, Sir Saul had asked Prahl what he wanted. Prahl was slightly embarrassed by his haughty manner, and he hesitated, standing in the middle of the room.

"I'm Mr. Besser's man," he said, "and——"

"Well," asked the baronet, "have you any message from him?"

"No, sir, but I would like to speak to you about myself a little, if you would permit."

"What is it?" asked Sir Saul, laying down his newspaper.

"Oh, I would like to marry your—one of your—servants, Miriam, sir."

"I suppose you can marry her, then," said the baronet, forcing a smile; "you're a foreigner, aren't you?"

“Half a foreigner, sir,” said Prah! with more assurance in his tone. “My mother was English.”

“H’m! you speak English well. Are you going to stay on here?”

“Well, sir, if it paid to go away we would go. . . . I was just wondering if you would help us.”

The baronet looked closely at him, and Prah! returned the glance as acutely.

“I thought, perhaps, you might feel inclined to give Mir a little dowry, sir,” said Prah! to the astonished baronet.

“Little dowry! What do you mean?”

“Well, sir, if I were taking Mir away, relieving Mulvey of Mir . . . and you of her, sir—well, I thought you might help us!”

The baronet disguised his feelings poorly, and he was debating inwardly what to do. It was peculiar that a foreign menial was forcing him in his own house to save his pride, by doing what, in any case, would be equivalent to a confession. He was being made ridiculous in his old age. Perhaps it was the first time he had become conscious of his contempt of himself. Euxine would have done the thing far more gently. He re-

gretted that he had not allowed Euxine to manage it long ago ; he would have done it so well. Prah! however, was standing before him, and was a curious and startling substitute for the dead man. It was true that he had heard with satisfaction of Miriam's rupture with Cubitt and engagement to the foreigner. If she married Cubitt it meant her permanence in Mulvey. He had proposed, indeed, that Cubitt should take a farm elsewhere, and had promised to stock it. But Cubitt, with a sort of filial devotion to the land he had plowed since he was a lad, had overcome those generous proposals. Prah!'s advent seemed to offer a way out of the embarrassment, but his audacity had not been taken into account. Prah! stood watching the aristocrat's discomfiture.

"Perhaps you'll pardon me, sir," he continued, after a pause, during which the baronet had not spoken, "but I think I ought to know something about Miriam's parentage, since it's disputed."

Here the baronet threw up his shoulders.

"I've helped some of my masters before now, sir," said Prah!. "Mir tells me there's been a row at the home farm, and that her mother has run off, nobody knows where."

"Indeed!" said the baronet half indifferently.

"And old Isaac's sitting speechless."

"Indeed!" repeated the baronet mechanically.

He seemed difficult to move, and Prahl thought he would let him know that good value could be got for his money, since he was being hoodwinked by something going on a quarter of a mile from his own door. But just as he was going to lay the bait, the baronet cut him short by rising abruptly and going to his desk. So Prahl kept his bait for another occasion, since the minimum of pressure appeared to have produced the desired result. In fact, the baronet was writing out a check for £2,000. He did it, of course, for Miriam's sake.

"Take it," he said, "and never let me see your or her face again."

"Oh yes," said Prahl.

"Ah, very well, good morning!" said the baronet.

Prahl stood waiting.

"You're not satisfied?"

"Well, sir," said Prahl, "if you doubled this, I might give you some information that would startle you."

"Startle me?" repeated Sir Saul with an anxious glance at the sinister foreigner.

"I would have to know how much you would give me, sir."

"Is it important to me?"

"Yes."

The baronet was growing suspicious, and began to think he was being humbugged. On the other hand, Prahl changed his tactics again, and saw that delay might bring a better occasion.

"Oh well, sir, another time," said Prahl as he left.

"No; stop, man!" cried the baronet.

"Another time, sir," repeated Prahl, and shut the door.

And not the least of the baronet's chagrins that day consisted in the feeling that the foreign menial was somehow his superior, although it was mitigated by the extraordinary and inexplicable obsequiousness of his own man. It was the first time he felt that long years of moral dodging had made him at last weak.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ELDER MRS. PROUDFOOT IS TOLD THE TRUTH

DURING the first days of her visit Mrs. Proudfoot was often with her daughter-in-law. She seemed to recognize that it was her duty to comfort her, and Violet reciprocated the sympathy. They talked much of Hubert, and Violet felt drawn towards the pale, suffering lady whom age and infirmity had not prevented from undertaking a long and painful journey in search of her son. On the other hand, Mrs. Proudfoot was anxious to settle money on Violet as Hubert's wife. In the hurry of the marriage these things had been left undone. But Mrs. Proudfoot now asked Sir Saul's cooperation, and made a generous provision for Violet's widowhood. She had brought down his portrait from London, and they all looked at it before it was hung in the dining-room. Sir Saul observed that he was like the bishop, Mrs. Proudfoot's father, whom he remembered



having seen at the consecration of St. Bride's at Mulvey, but Mrs. Proudfoot pointed out that there was no resemblance at all. It was his other grandfather whom he resembled, both in appearance and character. They then began to discuss the influence of parents on their children, and confessed themselves a little troubled by the thought of the transmission of character from one generation to another. Lady Rimmon refused to believe it.

"But you would like to believe it," said Violet, "if only your good qualities were reproduced, and you saw them working again before your eyes."

"Oh, I believe it," said Mrs. Proudfoot, "though it's a mystery, and it makes motherhood such a serious affair."

"I certainly would not like to believe it," exclaimed Lady Rimmon, "especially if I were you!"

"Well," said Violet, "I'm modern enough to believe that the moral survey of an individual should be preceded by a physiological survey, if you wish to judge him scientifically. Edgar tells me he has found an esthetic basis for morals. We object to bad people because they're nasty."

"Oh," said Sir Saul, "Edgar's a monk, and monks are the most inconsistent people alive."

"He's not a monk," said Lady Rimmon.

"The only thing I ever remember from the history class at college," continued Sir Saul, "is that we owe gunpowder to a monk. It's the most ironical thing in the world."

"Edgar," said Mrs. Proudfoot, "has some gunpowder of his own."

"You mean he's passionate?" asked Lady Rimmon.

"Oh, he's plenty of fire," broke in Violet, and Mrs. Proudfoot nodded assent, as if that was her meaning.

"I wonder why he's not coming over oftener," said Lady Rimmon. "His monk's experience has made him shy for one thing."

"He was always a hard student," said his aunt, "and I suppose he's busy at something. But I'll go over to-night and take him by surprise."

The truth was, that Lady Rimmon was beginning to think that Mrs. Proudfoot was rather "in the way." Instead of doing Violet any good, she

seemed to be doing her harm by recalling events that were happily passed, although, perhaps, they could never be forgotten. Still, Violet had been much brighter before her mother-in-law's arrival. The perpetual reference to Hubert became irksome. Besides, Lady Rimmon gave her own explanation of Besser's rare visits. She supposed them due to the fact, that, in the presence of his aunt, he could hardly display the affection for Violet which she felt sure was quickening within him. That would be to oust too quickly Hubert's memory. And yet it was precisely what Lady Rimmon wished to see accomplished. She was really living for the sake of her daughter, and her stay at Mulvey would, doubtless, come to an end whenever Violet was settled. She had sacrificed her pride to attain it, and she felt sure that at last Violet's happiness would be secured. Mrs. Proudfoot might see for herself, thought Lady Rimmon, that Violet had already outgrown her widowhood. Indeed, it seemed impossible to consider her a widow at all. She had been a few hours married, and the thing had come suddenly to an end. In any case, it was an extraordinary situation, because, when her

mother-in-law spoke of Hubert, Violet's thoughts were really elsewhere. She blushed at the new birth of love, but she knew that it was the supreme gift of her life. She had been true to it till the last possible moment, and now it was only a re-discovery of hidden treasure once fully possessed. The "cathedral priest," as she had called him, had come back, "swinging a sad censer" indeed. And she burned that she had not had faith in her own prophecy of his return. Yet he had seemed to be lost forever, dedicated to austerer things, while she had accepted in his place the poorer offerings of another. "How can I help myself?" she wrote in her book. "I know I am being brightened again, the way dead timber is glorified by fire!" Therefore, her mother-in-law's daily scrutiny of the past appealed to her not at all, and became even heart-breaking. That mirage was past. But she admitted to herself that Besser appeared to be an uneasy lover, and she shared her mother's belief that his reserve was due to his aunt's presence. He had come once in a state of great perturbation as if he had something to communicate, and had asked if his aunt was near. He seemed

exasperated to have to go away without saying a word.

“Mother,” said Violet, “the future will be like the past, full of accidents!”

“I must speak to her, you know,” said Lady Rimmon.

She took the opportunity before Mrs. Proudfoot went over to see Besser, although she had been already suggesting the situation by references which Mrs. Proudfoot could hardly fail to understand. Mrs. Proudfoot, however, appeared to be quite unprepared for the news. She was invariably impassive, except when she spoke of Hubert, and then she wept. Violet's widowhood had been too brief to lead any one to expect a second marriage. And certainly it did not change things in the least when Lady Rimmon pointed out that Violet could hardly be considered to have been married at all. The fact that Mrs. Proudfoot had only a day or two ago made a large provision for her daughter-in-law made the announcement still more painful.

“You know,” said Lady Rimmon tentatively, while they were sitting in the drawing-room, “Violet's had very little pleasure in life.”

"Yes," replied Mrs. Proudfoot, "she knows more about the dark things than you or I with our gray hair."

"I would like to see her settled," said Lady Rimmon, while Mrs. Proudfoot looked at her with some surprise.

Mrs. Proudfoot offered no response.

"You know it's bad for a girl like her," continued Lady Rimmon, "to sit so long on the roost."

"You don't mean to say that she's thinking of marrying soon again?" asked Mrs. Proudfoot with a slight tremor.

"Oh, well, you might see how it is," replied Lady Rimmon. "Have you not noticed Edgar?"

Mrs. Proudfoot looked across with astonishment in her face.

"Have you not observed anything?" continued Lady Rimmon.

"Well," said Mrs. Proudfoot, faltering, "well . . . I must say I am surprised, you see. . . . He has struck me as being strange these past few days. . . ."

"They loved each other long ago," said Lady Rimmon, "before he was a priest."

"Before Hubert?" asked Mrs. Proudfoot, with the tears in her eyes.

"Yes," said Lady Rimmon. "It's been such a roundabout thing . . . and Violet tells me that . . . Hubert used often to say that she should marry Edgar! She will surrender her portion."

Mrs. Proudfoot covered her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Oh, I'm in the road, then," she said, sobbing.

"No," said Lady Rimmon gently, "not that! But Edgar does seem shy. You would have Violet for a niece, you know!"

"I wish them every happiness, then," said Mrs. Proudfoot, "for Hubert's sake. I can take back his portrait."

"Oh, don't speak like that, my dear!" said Lady Rimmon; "you'll be nearer to us than ever."

"It's come about so quickly!" exclaimed Mrs. Proudfoot.

"Don't say anything direct to Edgar this afternoon," said Lady Rimmon. "He's never really declared himself. We are waiting, but any one

can see his intentions. He needs a little encouragement."

Before going over to Besser's, Mrs. Proudfoot went to her daughter-in-law, and kissed her, and took her hand. Violet wondered what she meant.

"Your mother has been telling me, Violet. I am glad for your sake."

Violet was embarrassed, and hardly knew what to do. She said it was foolish of her mother to make such premature statements. It put her in a false position. She asked her mother-in-law to make no reference to Besser about it since nothing was certain. She could not deny that he had come often to see her, but had not even whispered a proposal.

"Oh, I know Edgar," said Mrs. Proudfoot. "That is his way. When I begin to think of it, it will be the best thing, poor child, for you and us all. Only I was surprised! You will not forget me?"

"Really," said Violet, trying to smile, "it's too foolish of mamma to go on like this."

"No, no," interrupted Mrs. Proudfoot, "she is looking to your future happiness. It would come to this any way, and there's no use delaying.



*We shall not see your happiness if it does not come soon."*

"Promise me to say nothing to Edgar," persisted Violet. "I call him 'Edgar' because we have known each other since we were children."

"Ah! that's it," said Mrs. Proudfoot, smiling through her tears, and going away.

Meantime Besser was not expecting his aunt's visit. He had been sitting in his room all day, although it was with difficulty he had kept from going to Rimmon House. He wondered whether the moral egoism of his victory would be worth the pain and humiliation it would cause others. The moral preponderance of a saint, he thought—supposing a saint were possible—is got at a great cost. He rises amid the ruins of others, and is unintelligible apart from the contrast. One brand plucked from the burning is, after all, only one brand, and the others that remain to burn are necessary for the moral spectacle. It was strange that man and God were always to meet in that paradox. Obviously he had already broken the subtler commandment as interpreted by Jesus. Society might never know it. He would never be condemned, but the moral con-

fusion was already perfect within him. And yet a certain contempt of sharing the ordinary routine of temptation pervaded him. He indulged in spiritual laughter over the farce of it. He was too proud to be guilty. He had more to do than pilfer miserable things out of the till-box of vice. Perhaps, he said, the consciousness of having an audience was one of the advantages of being human. He looked at the smiling hazards of life. "I suppose," he said, "if there are saints, and if they live anywhere beyond this world, they look on their lives here with the sort of satisfaction you have in looking at the dirty water of the bath you have come out of!" Meantime it was *his* task to keep the present and the future clean.

What was the thing to be most feared in life? It was not disease, not death, not judgment, not disrepute nor bullets, nor the weapons of enemies, but desire, when it awakes. Well, he was disobeying it, and it was breaking him in pieces. Hubert had obeyed it too thoroughly. Perhaps it might be disobeyed too thoroughly.

So it is a saint's business, is it, to carry on that *necrosis* till he can say not merely that he is dead

unto sin, but that his body is destroyed? He has to elevate his moral consciousness at the expense of the esthetic: he is to avoid beauty and ruin his own. In any case, those who refuse to be driven into the huge slave market of instinct may suffer all sorts of secret distortions and pillage. So the doctors said: the ecstasies of the saints, and the spiritual excitement of the flagellants, were the inverted form of human love? That was what the new psychology taught. Was it true? he asked. He did not know. At any rate, it was also true that virtue is like a uniform that gives distinction to the commonest. He was too busy with his own unquiet problem to solve such questions as these, though he was bewildered by the alternative. "If they only knew," he said, "that I am Wickedness walking incognito, and also Pain."

These exaggerations were likely to go on increasing after his aunt came to congratulate him, as well as she could, on his approach to Violet. Mrs. Proudfoot came in, leaning heavily on her stick. She had walked over from Rimmon House. She seemed to be agitated, and she sank into a chair exhausted.

“I’m getting old, Edgar, and the terrible strain has begun to tell upon me. The journey was terrible!”

She took off her cloak because she was warm with exertion. “Edgar,” she continued, “I’ve come over to tell you that you must not keep from visiting the Rimmons because of me.”

“What do you mean, aunt?”

“You mustn’t suppose that—that I am hurt because Violet and you are coming so close to each other—after—so soon after——”

“Who is saying this?” asked Besser excitedly, and reddening.

“Oh, I might have seen it, Edgar. It’s only natural. Don’t put yourself about. After the little surprise I may almost say I am glad. I believe Hubert would wish it.”

“Aunt, I tell you it could never be!”

“Edgar, what is the use of denying it. No one wishes you to. Violet has suffered so much that we should be thankful for this new love you are giving her.”

Besser rose and walked about the room while his aunt leant back in her chair, muttering that “nothing could really be better.”

“Aunt!” he exclaimed, walking back to her and taking a chair to sit beside her, “I am driven at last to tell you what I hope will not excite you too much.”

His own manner was so excited that it was contagious, and Mrs. Proudfoot began to sit up in her chair.

“Now, calm yourself!” said Besser, speaking rapidly. “Keep quiet!”

“Oh, what is it? Edgar, quick!” gasped his aunt, while he took her hand.

“It’s news that will rejoice you, and also appal you because of its strangeness.”

She implored him by her eyes, to tell her it quick, and when he told her, she almost fainted under the shock, and sat speechless. He ran for a little brandy to revive her, while the word “Impossible!” fell from her lips. She was deathly pale, and her lips were twitching.

“Edgar!” she exclaimed, detaching the words from each other in short spasms, “it’s a hallucination of your own! What can it mean?”

He made her rise.

“Come!” he said, almost lifting her.

She went tottering with him.

"I am old," she said, afraid, "and the world seems to become stranger every day. What is this? I do not understand."

He gave her his arm, and they went slowly up the stairs. She stopped and asked him if he was in his right mind. He told her hurriedly he had found Hubert in Paris.

"But I saw his grave in Corsica!" she said.

"You've been robbed and cheated," he said. "He's perfectly quiet now. He can't speak except with his fingers."

The old lady seemed loath to go, and unutterable feelings took possession of her.

"Let me stop! Let me take breath!" she said.

Besser noticed that the end of her stick was frayed, evidently by heavy leaning on it.

"This is too sudden," she said; "but let us go. My son was dead and is alive again! I am afraid!"

She was perhaps dismayed by an imagination of all the horror that might have to be lived over again, and it made her half jealous of the dead. They arrived at the door where Prahl was sitting as if on guard. Prahl was surprised that the old lady was going to enter. She was the first visitor

Hubert had ever had. She paused at the door, turning round with a look of inquiry and terror on her nephew, but he urged her to go forward. "He was lost and is found!" said Besser, pressing her hand. They came into the darkened room, and Hubert immediately sat up in bed.

"Light, light!" said Mrs. Proudfoot. "Draw the blinds! Let me see him."

Besser drew the blinds. Hubert seemed to recognize his mother, and threw out his arms, struggling to speak. She went forward with a slight cry, and gathered him to her bosom amid his dumb babblement of the irreparable.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUSPENSE

LADY RIMMON and Violet were surprised when a message came over from Mulvey House that Mrs. Proudfoot intended to remain with her nephew. They at once supposed that she had been offended by the news of Violet's friendship with Besser, and their feelings became embittered. And when Besser's carriage came for his aunt's boxes and her maid, their explanation of the new turn of events seemed more justified than ever. In her note Mrs. Proudfoot made some lame excuse that she had sat late with her nephew, and was too lazy to think of returning to Rimmon House. But when, next morning, another note came with the carriage, intimating that she would just remain for the present with Besser, the hollowness of the previous night's excuse became apparent. Lady Rimmon and Violet sat talking all day. They had no intention of going over to



Mulvey House to seek an explanation. Their own conjectures appeared to be too probable to require it, and their presence at Mulvey House was evidently the last thing that was desired. The cold manner in which at first Mrs. Proudfoot had listened to Lady Rimmon's tale of Besser's affection for Violet was now explicable. It was too obvious that her jealousy had been aroused.

"It's wicked of her to put him against us," said Lady Rimmon. "I always distrusted her. I must, after all, go over, you know!"

Violet implored her mother to remain where she was, and although she was greatly disturbed, she put as charitable an explanation as possible on her mother-in-law's conduct.

"She'll come back in a day or two, mother. It's perfectly natural. She spoke about going over the very day she came. I expect Edgar every minute. And, besides, it's not possible to suppose that his aunt could have such an influence over him. She meant what she said, when she said she wished to see me happy."

When Lady Rimmon suggested that Violet should surrender all that Mrs. Proudfoot had set-

tled on her as Hubert's widow, Violet said it would be unkind, and at any rate it was better to wait. And yet she could not deny that she had felt embarrassed in Mrs. Proudfoot's presence. For she had to play, against her inclination, a double part. Her long sorrow was dying out, and it seemed cruel to delay its poignancy. When her mother-in-law spoke of Hubert, Violet was thinking of Besser. It was only now that she began to see that she had not loved Hubert so much as pitied him. It was not so much love as sympathy and her own loneliness which had united them so fatally. She had nothing to be ashamed of. Rather, she was able to rejoice that her experience had made her will so strong. She had no perilous ambition. She had known sorrow, and was still capable of joy. When the old-new love came back, she felt it was doubly sacred. "Birds sing after the rain stops," she wrote in her journal. She had known Love as a Destroyer, but now he was coming as a healer and appeaser. And it was well she already knew the dark things that are in the world, she said, because it helped her to be grateful for a piece of genuine brightness when she found it. She was still midway in

the twenties, not grown old because of premature trouble. She had been long spelling out moral grammar, and now she was perfect for her duties. The delicacy of Besser's wooing increased her love, and the feeling of personal imperfection, which intense love always brings, became almost a pain in her. She wrote in her book that she was unworthy of him. His vast power of self-control, centered in a vehement and upheaved sort of nature, moved her to emulation. Therefore, like himself, she was content to wait, assured of him, delaying those quickenings. It was too mean to suppose that Mrs. Proudfoot had a plot against her.

And, indeed, Mrs. Proudfoot had no plot, but the shock of the truth had made it impossible for her to see them. After she had sufficiently recovered she asked Besser to send for Dr. Bede. When he came they held a consultation, during which Besser offered to send for Violet. But Mrs. Proudfoot shook her head, and agreed with the doctor that it would do no good but a great deal of harm.

"I have been telling him so all through," said Bede, "and I am glad you have come, and approve."

Mrs. Proudfoot's chief anxiety was to know how long Hubert would last. Dr. Bede could give her no exact information. He pointed out that, in such cases, the patient generally sank into a sort of vegetative condition, after all the higher functions had ceased to act. He expressed himself surprised at Hubert's vitality, and admitted privately to Besser, as if he were sorry, that he might last a few months yet. The immediate question, however, was whether or not they should remove him, and whether the Rimmons should be told the truth. To Besser's surprise his aunt seemed adverse to his proposal to let Violet know at once. She shrank from the publicity from which she had already suffered, and besides, she said it would be fatal both to Violet and Hubert. She expressed surprise at the manner in which Besser had carried out the doctor's instructions, and thanked him till the tears dropped. Her own wish was to remove Hubert to London, and she tried to discover a feasible plan. Bede shook his head. When Besser asked what explanation she would offer the Rimmons, she said she would brave it as well as she could. They knew she had intended to stay with him in

any case. But the greatest surprise was still in store, for Mrs. Proudfoot assured Besser that his relations to Violet in no way disturbed her—indeed, she wished him to continue them: and when she heard from Bede that Hubert had more than once expressed a desire to release Violet, and had once actually attempted it, she said she was convinced that she was right when she wished her nephew and Violet to be happy. Hubert was beyond recall. She would take care of him. Not that she wished Besser to marry Violet: she only delicately hinted that, in any case, the future was theirs.

“Don’t misunderstand me, Edgar,” said Mrs. Proudfoot. “I do not mean that you can take Violet to be your wife yet. But it is clear that you belong to each other, and that Hubert——”

Here she broke down.

“It is all so strange,” she continued, “and I am bewildered by all I have come through!”

“I expect that Lady Rimmon will come over,” said Besser. “And you may be prepared for the worst.”

“Ah, my dear boy!” she said, “I am old, and the worst shouldn’t frighten me any more.”

She made Besser tell her over and over again how he had found him, and then repeated to him all the details of the Corsican roguery. During the next three days she nursed Hubert, who hardly opened his eyes, while Prah! watched everything with eyes that were very wide open. But he confessed himself astonished at Besser's conduct, and pronounced him to be still a hopeless "youngling." His interest in the game suddenly increased one day when he announced Lady Rimmon, and he was not surprised when Besser started at the news. It looked as if the "affair," as he called it, could not hang on long now. Mrs. Proudfoot said she would come down directly, whispering to Besser that it was the first time in her long life that she had seen the necessity of lies. What could they do? They could not stop to discover whether it was right or wrong. They were driven to conceal, for a few moments, the ugliness of reality from eyes it would have hurt. Besser went first, and Lady Rimmon, when she shook hands with him, said nothing, but looked curiously at him, as if trying to discover in his appearance the meaning of the estrangement.

"Oh!" he said rather awkwardly, "I should have been over."

"Yes," she said. "Really, you'll excuse me just coming to ask. I thought it was the best and broadest-minded thing to do. We're astonished! What's wrong?"

"Really, nothing at all, Lady Rimmon," replied Besser. "My aunt just took it into her head to stay here. You know her ways, I suppose. She'll be down directly."

"Oh, I'm glad!" said Lady Rimmon, a little assured, and trying to laugh outright. "We thought—oh, well, I don't know *what*, you know! Has your aunt not been well?"

"No, she's not been well," said Besser.

Lady Rimmon seemed not to be quite sure of him yet, because his face had a slightly irritated expression.

"I'm not boring you?" she said.

"Not in the least."

"Why *do* you men read so much? You're just like Violet," said Lady Rimmon, trying to humor him. "Ah, here's your aunt!"

Mrs. Proudfoot came in, leaning heavily on her stick, and smiling as she came up. Lady

Rimmon was surprised at her disheveled look.

"You're wondering!" said Mrs. Proudfoot, shaking hands. "Did you and Violet think I ran off?"

"We did," said Lady Rimmon, brightening, "but you *do* look ill. Had you a shock, or what? Edgar said nothing."

"Well, I *had*," said Mrs. Proudfoot. "How's Violet?"

"Very well," said Lady Rimmon; "she'll come over to see you, if you won't come over to see us."

"Oh, I'll go straight home, soon," said Mrs. Proudfoot. "It's time, you know."

"Well, perhaps it is," said Lady Rimmon. "You'll be wishing to put your house in order."

Besser was surprised at the manner in which his aunt piloted the conversation. Had it been in his own hands it might have broken down. But they spent half an hour in pleasant small talk, and no one would have suspected all that lay beneath the jungle of words, and that hungered to make itself known. Lady Rimmon rose, and asked Besser when he was coming to



see her. He said soon, and she went home to Violet to give her her impressions.

“I don’t know what quite to make of her,” she said. “I don’t know if she’s sincere. Her excuse seemed perfectly natural, and yet there’s something——”

“Oh, no, mother! I don’t think so,” said Violet. “Why should we always be suspecting? Is Edgar coming over soon?”

“He said he would,” replied her mother, “but I’m almost sure she’s putting him against us. Really, Violet, that little brown earth box she gave you looks tiresome, though it’s pathetic!”

“Leave it, mother,” said Violet, “it’s not doing any harm.”

The forget-me-nots would certainly not appear soon above the earth, and Violet knew that when she buried the seed it was like the symbol of her dead love. The little brown earth box remained outside her window on the sill, waiting for the reviving rains and the sun of spring. And she waited, too. He came, indeed, but he was almost dumb with bewilderment. He had dreamt the previous night that he had taken Violet away without telling her that Hubert was in his house.

He woke, excited by these dream vanities, and wondered if they might foreshadow the future, when perhaps Hubert might really go away forever. He turned swiftly round at the thought, as quickly as men turn at the sound of money when it falls. But then he was ashamed, and drove the thought out of him. Yet he could not resist the longing to see her once more. When he came he found the old House of Rimmon in a strange commotion. Lady Rimmon was weeping, and Violet seemed full of a suppressed excitement.

“He’s gone!” said Lady Rimmon to Besser.

“Who?” he said.

“My husband. He has left a letter saying he has gone away, and that he learned to blush only when he became old. I believe it is my fault, I have not spoken to him for months. He says he will never come back, and asks a long forgiveness!”

“Oh, he will come back,” said Besser cheerily.

“Never!” exclaimed Lady Rimmon; “will he, Violet? He says he has been wicked.”

“That means that he didn’t mean to be,” said Besser.

"He has gone away because human faces frighten him," said Violet, "by their pity of his old age."

"We'll never find him," sobbed Lady Rimmon; "it would be like the hunt for Hubert."

"Quieten yourself," said Besser.

"I'll put her to bed," said Violet. "Wait."

"D'you know what he says in his letter?" said Lady Rimmon, addressing Besser as she was leaving the room, and attempting to smile, "he says you are more worthy to take care of us than he was."

He stood waiting till Violet returned, and when she came she took him to the divan, where the little yellow and green lamp swung above them.

"Conscience," she said to Besser, "seems to be a rodent! It has been gnawing and gnawing through him for years, and has just got out."

"What will you do?" said Besser.

"I don't know," she said. "The most peculiar thing to me about human beings is the strange feeling they put into atonement. We do feel that if a human being has been punished or caned,

he's somehow clean again; that his mistake deserves to be forgotten, and that he deserves to be recognized again. I believe that it was some sort of feeling like this that led me to marry your cousin. I suppose I have absorbed too much the literal meaning of the New Testament to be thought proper."

"Well!" said Besser, taking a long breath, "I suppose you are one of those who forgive everything to the uttermost, no matter how you have been deceived."

"Well," she said, smiling, wondering also why she could smile two hours after she had heard of her father's disappearance, "I never forgave you for going to Monte Oliveto. Do you remember when you drove past?"

"Oh yes," he said, remembering that he had kissed his hand.

They paused, while they both were filling up the dream-distances of the future with figures and pageants and tragedy. He knew as little about it now as she. He only tried to dispel the mist which kept closing round him. He lingered beside her as if it might be the last time. He dare not advance a step nearer. He let his love

purr within him unheard. But at least she knew his eyes, and they were full of tears.

“Edgar!” she said, rising as if to help him if he were ill.

“No, Violet—no!” he said, “pardon me. Good-night!”

## CHAPTER V

### THE YOUNGER MRS. PROUDFOOT IS TOLD THE TRUTH

NEXT morning Lady Rimmon kissed Violet, and said they were nearer to each other than ever. She wondered if her husband would have felt as distressed if *she* had gone away as she originally intended. Perhaps he might come back, but his letter said no. In any case it was given out that he had gone a voyage, and meantime her chief concern was her daughter's happiness. They looked at each other, and both seemed to have had no sleep. Violet was haggard for want of it.

"Did you sleep at all?" asked Lady Rimmon.

"No, I counted all the hours," said Violet.

"Were you thinking of your father? I was; I never got a wink."

"No," said Violet, "I wasn't. Last night Edgar was inexplicable."

"What was wrong?"

Violet remained silent, while her mother said that Mrs. Proudfoot was going soon to London, then Edgar would be free. Spring was coming, and the old House of Rimmon might at last begin to smile. Violet had been at her window early that morning, and if her window had been higher she might have seen Besser on the tower. He had been up all night with Hubert, changing the watch with Prah, who grumbled at the labor. Prah, indeed, was almost becoming insolent, refusing to do his work, and threatening to go. Besser feared that in a few hours Violet might have to bear the shock. He could do nothing to prevent it, and he refused to bribe Prah. Mrs. Proudfoot agreed that it must just be as it was to be, and said that the long strain should come to an end. Instead of going to his bed after Prah had relieved him, Besser climbed the tower at dawn. Spring seemed to be sending news of itself from afar off. He looked across and saw the old House of Rimmon lying dark under its trees, with half the roof moss-grown. The trees were dripping in the morning mist. All Mulvey lay quiet except for the isolated cries of a few peasants and field laborers driving the

horses to the fields, and the blackbirds singing in the branches. Besser stood a few minutes on the tower, looking towards the hectic East. The sun seemed like a huge red lens focusing the rays of the kindled universe. But he could sing no "Orient ode," and went down silent and numb.

A few hours after, old Isaac went to Lady Rimmon and gave up his place, saying that Cubitt could take it.

"Ye've been a good lady to me," he said, "but I can't plow the same ground any more. The truth goes a-wriggling before me on't."

Lady Rimmon asked where Mother Dagon was, and Isaac said she was begging to be taken back.

"Let her come back, and stay you on, Isaac."

The old man dried a tear from his eye.

"No, ma'am ; I can't work here ! Cubitt's a fit lad."

"Then we shall provide for you, brave Isaac," she said. "It's quite true that we may not need any more workers. Perhaps this house will be sold."

"Miss Violet will be going to be married," said Isaac. "I wish ye all happiness, Miss Violet."



Violet smiled vaguely, and wished the episode to come to an end. Lady Rimmon told Isaac she would give him a cottage, with a piece of land, on another part of the estate, and he would sit rent-free for life.

“But I can’t take her back,” said Isaac. “She’s gone to her brother.”

“Then let her remain,” said Lady Rimmon; “and Cubitt can take over the home farm here.”

Isaac went away muttering the overflow of his thanks, and when he arrived at the home farm he found Miriam packing. Every one seemed to be on the move, and he asked her what she meant.

“Oh, I don’t belong to here,” she said, and continued gathering her things.

“But I offer ye a house,” said Isaac, “which her ladyship has given me.”

“Oh, but I’m going with Heinrich,” said she.

The truth was that the news of Sir Saul’s departure had been carried by Miriam to Prah as soon as Miriam knew it. It meant a great deal to Prah, because he had intended to speculate with the secret of Hubert Proudfoot’s presence in Mulvey, by offering it to the baronet for a “consideration.” But as soon as he heard he was

gone, he decided first to try Besser by asking a sum for his secrecy. If Besser complied he would leave Mulvey with Miriam at once, and he told her to prepare herself. If Besser refused, then Prah! would run to Lady Rimmon and Violet, and surprise them with the news. Although Besser suspected him, he did not suppose the scheme was thus laid. He generally expected, with fatal consequences to himself, that human beings would act on motives as good as his own. Yet he was not surprised when Prah! came to him in the forenoon, with a certain menacing look.

“Sir,” said he, “I’m afraid I can’t wait longer.”

“Well, you can go,” said Besser.

“But——” replied Prah!.

“Oh yes, you mean that before you leave all Mulvey will know the truth.”

Prah! hesitated, slightly ashamed. Besser hesitated, too, before he gave the finishing stroke. He appealed to the man’s sense of honor, if not to his pity for the broken old lady, whom a fresh stroke might injure irreparably. Prah! thought that Besser’s speech was a disguised statement of his personal interests. He said the servants were getting unruly, which was true, and that

the "thing" would be out in any case very soon. The truth is, he wished to be the first in the field. He hinted that the situation might still continue, but when Besser looked at him contemptuously he threw up his place and demanded his wages. He got them, but not without the knowledge of the other servants, and he had a race to Rimmon House with the gardener Phil, who had long been wishing to deliver himself of the news. They were followed by three other servants, whom Ruth was unable to restrain, and she came to Besser, with her hands uplifted, saying they had all run. The marvel was, she said, that they had kept it till now. Prah! outstripped them all, and was first at the door. When Lady Rimmon saw them running up the avenue she called Violet to the window, and they both wondered what it meant. By this time Prah! had entered the house, and walked into the presence of Violet and her mother. The others drew back and waited outside.

"Madam," said Prah!, "I have something important to tell you."

"Oh, what is it?" asked Lady Rimmon,

trembling at his abrupt manner, and clinging to Violet. "Is my husband——?"

"No," said Prah! "it's not about him; it's more important."

"Then say what it is!" exclaimed Violet, turning pale.

"Will you repay me for my trouble, madam?" asked Prah! without a blush. "I've been occupied about you longer than you know."

"Yes, yes, anything!" ejaculated Lady Rimmon, handing him her purse.

Prah! took it, and before he had finished his explanatory sentence Violet had almost fainted. But she caught hold of her mother, and as she struggled back to consciousness she heard Prah! say that Besser had been keeping Hubert for months. The double, triple, multiple meaning of it all seemed to overpower her. Lady Rimmon stood as if stunned, and asked the man feebly if he knew what he was saying.

"Yes," said Violet, in a low choking voice, "it's too obvious. Now I understand!"

Prah!, as if there was nothing more to do, took his leave, went to the home farm where Miriam was waiting, and left Mulvey with her forever.

In a few minutes Lady Rimmon, to whom illusion remained a necessity all her life, began to question the man's honesty, and asked Violet if they would not go over to discover the truth. How could it be true?

Violet, receiving for the moment a fictitious strength out of the feeling of indignation and shame that overtook her, said she would go. Unable to discover motives or causes, and full of her own personal humiliation, she covered Besser's name with bitter opprobrium. She ran over to Mulvey House, followed by her mother, and, perhaps on the way, she may have fondly counted herself the dupe of the foreign scoundrel. She had heard Besser complain of him. She stopped on the road, weeping, and hoping ultimate hopes. Everything about her seemed a phantasmagoria. "One is interested," says Burke, "that beings made for suffering should suffer well." She had endured all the strange and sudden alternations of human psychology, but the end was not yet. She had known all the mocks of life, and yet she believed in its essential goodness. Once she had thought it was so short that it seemed hardly worth taking advice about. But she had not yet dis-

covered, amid a hundred renunciations, that we have no fixed goal except death. She seemed never to have found love, only pity, and a worm gets that. Her joy had been like the sleep of the poor, which comes by fits and starts and is cold. Love and sorrow had mingled, but not long, for sorrow had leavened love till the whole was leavened. And the unsummed future!

Her mother came up to her where she was caught as in a horror of dream.

“Violet!” exclaimed Lady Rimmon, “it’s utterly ludicrous—it can’t be! What are we thinking of? He’s a villain, and he’s got my purse for nothing!”

“Let us go on,” cried Violet, “and find out the truth, and bring this awful cruelty to an end. That’s why my mother-in-law hasn’t come back!”

They struggled up to Mulvey House. Besser was waiting them, pale, and with his lips trembling. In a moment Violet knew the truth.

“Oh! Oh! how could you have done it?” she cried; “it’s a crime! You said he was dead!”

“Yes, he is dead!”

Besser shook his head, while Mrs. Proudfoot came out to meet them in the hall.

“Is he really so wicked?” said Lady Rimmon to Mrs. Proudfoot, amid their confusion.

“He’s not wicked at all,” said Mrs. Proudfoot quietly. “Calm yourselves. Violet!”

“Where is he?” cried Violet, covering Besser with abuse which he forgot and forgave.

“You are ill!” he said.

“Yes, yes, I am ill!” she cried, “I am ill with humiliation.”

“No, Violet,” he said firmly, “you will understand some day.”

Her mother implored her not to go up, but although she was afraid, she compelled Besser to take her, while the others followed. He saw the physiognomy of her panic as he led her in. Hubert’s eyes were open, full of a sort of theatric light. He threw out his arms feebly, as if he recognized her, although she hardly recognized him. And certainly it was pity more than love that made her come near him, as he struggled to express with his hands the muffled feeling of his destruction.

## CHAPTER VI

### LIGHT O' THE SUN

HUBERT, then, died late. Violet took him to the dim House of Rimmon and nursed him to the end. And if she was to know only pity, and not love, she would still remain incomplete. Besser, indeed, had loved her, but in the end it had meant for her a great humiliation. There was no wonder if the blinding shock of the truth brought bitter words to her lips. Because she had been at stake all the time without knowing it, the sword of suspicion was for a moment drawn. She had been played with too savagely. Yet she saw dimly through her tears what he must have suffered. She began to know that it was just because he had so wonderfully suppressed his love, and been ashamed of it, that he had been so seductive. She guessed the strength of will by which he had overcome the fascination of error, and how sure-footed had been his wisdom. Long



afterwards they met each other again in their dreams, and each seemed to be covered with the scarred imagery of passion. Years were to pass during which they possessed each other in their dreams, and only in their dreams; but even then they appeared to approach each other as haunted beings; and often, when he seemed to come towards her with the sort of light on his face with which men go to their success, she fled from him as alien to her by all the world's laws. She said she knew he was wiser and purer than she; but her love for him and his love for her had made the past monstrous, and had been a ruinous possession, compared to which martyrs' sufferings might appear gay. She knew, however, in the cruelty of delay, that it was impossible to surrender the love round which her life had revolved, and to pronounce it futile. Her beauty was perhaps sapped and marred. Human beauty is perfect not in its division but in its unity of two, and the individual never knows it till his own is mingled with another's. It looked as if it was getting too late for that conjunction, and the beauty of each was dying apart and hungering. "Not the least of the little tragedies," she wrote,

“that play themselves out among human beings is this mysterious passing of beauty!”

He heard a rumor that she had embraced Catholicism, and he smiled to think that she had ended where he had begun. Since she was, meantime, lost and dead to him, he used to repeat, as appropriate, one of the songs he had heard a boatman sing on the Lake of Garda:—

“ Vago cercando la porta e la mura,  
Vago cercando la mia innamorata ;  
La morte me risponde orrenda-scura :  
No la cercar chè la xè sotterrata.”

But it was impossible for him to believe that he had lost forever all the charity of her lips. And he hardly wondered that she required some heat of worship into which she could put all her ardence.

He went back to Mulvey after she and her mother had withdrawn to Hildesheim. “ We shall go away,” Lady Rimmon had said, “ out of this dark house ! ” Besser meant to sell Mulvey House. He climbed his tower at dawn again, and looked towards the trembling thresholds of the East. He looked across to the old house of Rimmon, sitting, moss-grown, silent in the earth’s

decay, and guarded only by Cubitt. The atmosphere was dim round about it. Besser thought it was the last time he would see it, but something kept him from selling his own place, and he came away. He had wealth in plenty, but if his love was killed how could he be complete? He might spend his life, as he did during the next four years, in writing books into which his own spiritual distortion entered as an unsolved riddle, or in working hard among the miners again, casting on them not the light of a creed but of his own glow. Yet it would not be enough. He had no hand of another to touch. Wisdom, knowledge, charity, still left him void. Doubtless he had taken the road of all the saints (he had never forgotten *Borgo Ogni S. Santi*, as it is written up on the street in Florence) and had found it hard. But the tease and worry of sin had made him ill, and a saint is not typical of this world but of its antithesis. He still longed for beauty, though it might be too late. If he was never to find it in some form, he might as well give his body to be burned. He had struggled well against his few odds and ends of "sin," but the ruinous spiritual conflict had devastated

his face, and left marks upon it that might have been taken for the marks of vice. And he began to understand the depth of meaning of Tintoretto's conception of the physiognomy of Christ. "Genius," said Balzac, "sends a man to the hospital." And so may great spiritual passion. His esthetic fear of ugliness had delivered him, doubtless, from all moral squalor, but he began to wonder whether, what used to be known as "saintliness," did not, by its perpetual crucifixion of the body, degrade and vilify it. One thing he knew that Thomas Aquinas was wrong when he said that in beauty desire is quiet! Yet it was his pride that had taken him safe through the intolerable vulgar tragedy. And if you had asked him why, having broken away from old faiths, he kept their precepts, though not their forms, he might have said it was for auld lang syne, since he never quite delivered himself from sentimentalism. He still spoke their emotions, and heard, as it were, the sound of praise in the Invisible. And as he looked on the vanishing things of the world, and the vanished things of his own life, he seemed to be conscious of a sort of bruit of victory and inward hurrah.

But they could not thus live possessing each other at a distance. The Unknown and the Unpossessed had been torturing them long, and they had been offered up as a twin sacrifice. Yet Violet's conception of the consistency and symmetry of her fate was, happily, to be contradicted. They were driven to each other for a refuge. Edgar still seemed to shout to her across the shores of dream. She caught those dream-echoes. The very polarity of their sorrow brought them at last to a goal. Beauty might be forsaking them, but they were not to disappear in a sort of slow catastrophe of withering. The days were passing at the end of which they were to meet on the outer edges of the long conflict they had left behind. Love was counting it in his deep Book of Hours, and Edgar measured the months by passing a bead of his old rosary. Each seemed to have an inward audition of its coming. So that it was only with a kind of awe and divination realized and perfected that they met, after four years, in the twilight of Milan Cathedral. It was a divine afternoon in May, when the world seemed like a sun-dream. Through the great central door the sun was streaming in a broad

shaft on the pavement, bewildering the darkness of the aisles. And the air above was like subtle dust of gold. It was like a *götterdämmerung*. Violet and her mother were sitting in the left wing where the sun came through the rich glass, like a soft incendiary, setting the pillars and arches on fire, and gathering the darkness out of the roofs. Edgar was walking towards them, unconscious of the double holiness of the place. He would know in a moment that it was big with redemption. And Edgar knew, surely he, that the ground of reconciliation is holy.

“Ah!” whispered Lady Rimmon, who by that time had become widowed, in soft exclamation of her awe, “look, Violet!”

Nay, she could hardly look, for it seemed like the joyous intrigue and compassion of the Invisible to bring them together at last before the altars of their sacrifice and their victory. But a smile, as fine as a smile in sleep, passed over her face. Their souls had fled like fugitives up and down between the gates of birth and death, in terror of both gates, and were to be caught here in the midst. Edgar came forward as if impelled by that thaumaturgy. They seemed to

have, in a moment, a vision into the depth and solemnities of each other's lives. They divined, without use of words, this easing of their destinies. They had been sitting long in the cold places of duty, but this soft glow came like the warmth of fruit that ripens in the sun. Love, troubled and forsaken, had long been laying his foundations in darkness, and these were to be his late upbuildings. What could words do? Tears could not do enough for that silent chorus of their lives.

"O Edgar!" whispered Lady Rimmon, "at last I have not lived in vain!"

And though it was late, there was yet time to gather up Love's precious harvest dust.

THE END.











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